

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 16TH JULY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!
We're back to the "new normal" this week with a newsletter.

Thank you to all those who have sent feedback about last week's summer sing. I hope you enjoyed it. Judging from the comments I've received, it seems to have gone down well. Well done to those who managed to be there for the live performance and post in the live chat. As one singer said in their feedback: *"It was good to read the virtual chat as well so at least it felt as if we were all back at choir again"*. My favourite feedback is from a very good non-musical friend of mine who watched the video with his girlfriend: *"I had no idea what was going on but we enjoyed it. Very professional"*.

A quick reminder about the newsletter that I have been producing for my church choir, which is available on the Church website: <http://stfaith.com/566-2/>

So to this week's newsletter... comments, feedback, suggestions always welcome... and it's not too late to send feedback about what you thought about the summer sing!

Online singing opportunities

Here are some reminders of newer singing opportunities that I mentioned two weeks ago, alongside a new one!



During July, Bristol Choral Society are running short online workshops during their normal rehearsal time slot. The sessions are being led by their conductor Hilary Campbell who was responsible for the "stay and sing" sessions earlier in lockdown. The session on Wednesday 22nd July focuses on Benjamin Britten's Hymn to St. Cecilia. Here are the details:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sing-with-bristol-choral-britten-hymn-to-st-cecilia-online-event-tickets-110327001030?aff=ebdssbonlinesearch>

The stay at home choir have stopped receiving submission for their Adiemus project and we await the finished video! Meanwhile, the Global Armed Man project is still going with more than 5000 people signed up. There are lots of supporting materials for these once you sign up, from conductor Tori Longdon.



<https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects/the-armed-man>



Choral conductor Jessica Norton has begun her summer singing sessions. This week her session focuses on breath control. Next week, the focus is on releasing tension when you sing.

These are sessions running via Zoom. Further details here:

<http://jessicanorton.co.uk/>

Finally, if you like your opera, Opera North are running a four-week series of workshops (starting next week) called "From couch to chorus" where you get to sing music by Bizet, Smetana and Verdi.

<https://www.operanorth.co.uk/whats-on/from-couch-to-chorus/>

The workshops are being led by Jennifer Sterling who is Education Choral Delivery Artist for Opera North. If, like me you're wondering what a Choral Delivery Artist actually does, Jennifer was recently interviewed about her role and how it has changed during lockdown:

<https://www.operanorth.co.uk/news/behind-the-scenes-with-education/>

Some old favourites



Conductor, organist and composer Paul Ayres continues his "Paul's Informal Choir Practice Online during these Quite Exceptional Times" (which becomes the acronym PICPOQET) with a session on musical intervals:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rk4WjwT3ot0>

Richard Cooke (conductor of the Royal Choral Society) has added to his blog twice since the last newsletter, where he invites us to explore Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante K364 and the Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings by Britten, which isn't a piece for Tenor Horn:



<http://richardcooke.org/blog.htm>



Ben England continues his excellent work on his Home choir YouTube channel with daily videos

encouraging you to sing in different styles. I'm only going to mention the Quarantine Chorus videos, but please try lots of different ones!

Since the last video, Ben has done videos on Bruckner's Locus iste...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iv89Z3W7aio>

... and "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" from Mendelssohn's Elijah:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=817zm_0AdK8

Next week is week two of Ben's summer school. Full details are on the self-isolation choir website:



<https://www.thselfisolationchoir.com/summer-school-2020>

Finally, a reminder about the very exciting project that Voces8 have lined up:

<https://voces8.foundation/livefromlondon>

BBC Proms



For 2020, the BBC Proms aren't taking place in their usual way. But they are still happening! Starting from Friday 17th July, the season comprises of six weeks of concerts from previous seasons of the BBC Proms with a final two weeks of live performances from London's Royal Albert Hall.

Having had a look at the schedule, it looks like the Proms performances on a Sunday seem to be focused on choral music. This Sunday's prom (19th July) is an archive recording from 1998 of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis performed by the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Arnold Schoenberg Choir, conducted by Nikolous Harnoncourt. 9pm kick off on BBC Radio 3 (not on TV).

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/proms>

Special guest!

I've been posing my infamous six questions again! This week, we hear from conductor and keyboard player **David Gostick**. David is an incredibly busy musician; he is Musical Director of the Bournemouth Sinfonietta Choir, Portsmouth Choral Union and the Medici Choir (based in London). He is also Sub-Organist at St. Bartholomew the Great Church in the City of London. Before his appointment at "Great St. Bart's", David was Director of Music at Wimborne Minster. David tells me that his schedule has been just as busy during lockdown!



Where did you study music?

"I went to Oxford, but I can't really say I studied music there, or much else really. It's been on the job that I have learnt what little I know".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"I generally think of my inspirations as people I have worked or studied with, rather than the great gods of recording. My piano teacher, Peter Crozer, who had such a wonderful ear for colour and genuine passion for a huge range of music, George Hurst who revolutionised my approach to orchestras, John Keys who showed me just how exciting a choir can be, and countless artists in all fields who have informed how I think and feel about music".

As a conductor, in a performance your back is to the audience. Are you still able to feel a sense of communication with your listeners?

"It is a challenge, certainly, but I do think you get a sense of whether the room is with you or not. It can be a little unnerving if you start thinking about it too much, but there's no denying the sensation when you can feel audience and performers all joining together in the thrust of a piece of music".

How do you persuade your singers to engage with the audience?

"This is a real obsession of mine. I can't bear the standoffish, matter of fact way a lot of choirs perform. Perhaps it's English reserve, perhaps it's to do with the quick way we read and learn music, but for me it conveys very little. Working in opera alongside choral music I've picked up a lot about engagement and presentation. My choirs have had to put up with sessions of dancing, trust exercises, even staging of sections of pieces, so that they really have to connect with the drama. That's at the more extreme end, certainly, but there are lots of less radical things that stem from that experience. One enlightening moment I encountered was an opera conductor shouting at the singers 'don't look at me!' Standing in front of a choir us conductors are desperate to be watched, but really singers need to look beyond us to connect with an audience".

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"I'd probably take the Bach cantatas. There's so much variety, all of human life is there, so to speak. I must confess though; I'd probably be more worried about having a book!"

How can we encourage people to join choirs and maintain membership?

"The perpetual challenge. Choirs have to be engaged in evangelism all the time, not just at points of crisis. Thinking about the barriers to people joining is important - how can we support potential members in making the first step, perhaps through open events; then how do we help them over the hurdle of an audition; are we a welcoming, outward facing group of people? The age profile of choral societies often worries people - if it's any reassurance, a look at a photo of a choir from 100 years ago will look very similar to now! But I am concerned about the place of music in schools. Resources are so stretched and it's often luck as to whether a school has an inspirational teacher who can instil a love of choral singing in pupils. That's the long term challenge all classical music faces".

Many thanks to David for answering my questions.

Here are links to some of David's many jobs!

Bournemouth Sinfonietta Choir: <https://www.bschoir.org.uk/>

Portsmouth Choral Union: <https://pcuchoir.org/>

Medici Choir: <https://www.medicichoir.org.uk/>

St. Bartholomew the Great Church: <https://www.greatstbarts.com/worship/music-2/>

In 2017, David conducted Portsmouth Choral Union and Southern Pro Musica orchestra for the world premiere recording of "Confitebor tibi, Domine", an extended setting of psalm 111 by Samuel Wesley (1766 - 1837) who was the son of the hymn writer Charles Wesley and the nephew of John Wesley. More information about the work and the CD is here: <https://pcuchoir.org/product/portsmouth-choral-union-cd-2017/> and you can listen to one of the movements on the homepage of the Portsmouth Choral Union website.

And finally!

I recently posted on the Winchester City Festival Choir Facebook page a choir rehearsal video put together by baritone Luke Thomas. I don't think I've ever conducted a rehearsal like it, but I have to say that this video is astonishingly accurate to rehearsals that I have sat through in the past. I thought the "soprano" and the accompanist were particularly glorious. The soprano is called Eileen and is absolutely nothing like our esteemed chair! The video is also on Luke Thomas' YouTube channel alongside some other videos that Luke has put together during lockdown: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bT6_Hz-mcWc

Which reminds me to remind you that Sarisbury Choral Society also have a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/sarisburychoralsociety/> you might also be surprised to learn that we've had a Facebook page since Saturday 19th September 2015! If you are on Facebook and aren't "signed up" to our page, do think about it. We don't use it as much as we should, but we / I do occasionally post extra videos / information on it.

That's all for this week folks. Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham