

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 23RD JULY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope this newsletter continues to find you well, even if you're reading it in the hairdressers or the pub! In case you were wondering, yes I have had my hair cut since the summer sing video, but the beard currently remains.

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/>

Here is this week's newsletter... as ever, comments, feedback, suggestions welcome!

Online singing opportunities

Normally at this time of the year, we tend to take a break for the summer; and some singers might head off to national music festivals or singing courses. Here are some reminders of singing opportunities that you can join in with from your own home!

You can still participate in the stay at home choirs "Global Armed Man" project. Although the deadline has passed to be included in the virtual choir video, you can still join in weekly events with Sir Karl Jenkins, and the Live Sings in July and August.



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



Choral conductor Jessica Norton continues her summer singing sessions. This week her session focuses on releasing tension when you sing. Next week, the focus is on singing higher more comfortably. These are sessions running via Zoom. Further details here:

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

Opera North are now up and running with their series of workshops, which are cleverly called "From couch to chorus". You can still sign up and participate and there is a wealth of resources on the website:

**OPERA
NORTH**

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

 So far I've "covered" vocal technique to Karl Jenkins to Opera choruses, so now for something Baroque! This is another reminder that the Victoria Conservatory of Music are running a Summer Baroque Choral Academy titled "Come, sing Magnificat!" If you're a Bach fan, this one is definitely for you, as the course concentrates on Bach's Magnificat and his motet "Jesu. meine Freude". The course starts on Saturday (25th) and runs for a week. All the details are here:

<https://vcm.bc.ca/music-programs/vcm-summer-academy/>

Lots of opportunities to stay singing over the summer, perhaps even more than there are in a normal summer... and such a wonderful range of styles too!

Some old favourites

Richard Cooke (conductor of the Royal Choral Society) has only added to his blog once since the last newsletter, although the work in question that he invites us to explore this time is Mahler's Third Symphony.



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

In his blog, Richard talks about working on this piece with the conductor Claudio Abbado and the LSO about 40 years ago. The first night of the 2020 proms, broadcast on Radio 3 last Friday, was an archive broadcast from 2007 of the symphony conducted by Abbado:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000kx6f>



Eamonn Dougan (Associate Conductor of the Sixteen) invites you to have a go at his

"Steady Freddie" exercise which helps with singing breathing and stamina:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQK3fALae_k&t=54s

Ben England is busy this week with his with week two of the self-isolation choir's summer school. Somehow, Ben is continuing 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! Here is some Bach... and as an added bonus, you get to sing it in German!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2syJQCjyw2I>



Roger Hale has been busy since the last time he had a mention, with a discussion about vocal health with Dr Tyler Nelson who is Director of Vocal Studies at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ly5MQYZUrKw>

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

<https://voces8.foundation/livefromlondon>

BBC Proms



I've mentioned already in this newsletter about the opening night and I mentioned last week about the prom last Sunday night which featured Beethoven's Missa solemnis. If you'd like to listen (listen again) to the Beethoven, its available here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000l1yp>

This Sundays prom (26th July) is a performance from 2017 of Monteverdi's Vespers performed by the French Baroque ensemble Pygmalion. 9pm kick off on BBC Radio 3 (not on TV).

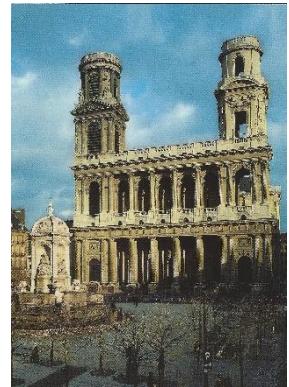
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/proms>

Featured Composer!



A few weeks ago, our featured composer was Mascagni, who died 75 years ago this year. Continuing the theme of composer anniversaries, our featured composer this week is the French organist and composer **Louis Vierne** (or to give him his full name, Louis Victor Jules Vierne) who was born on the 8th October 1870, which means that 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of his birth.

Louis Vierne was born in Poitiers, a city on the Clain river in west central France. He was born nearly blind, but showed a natural gift for music from an early age. Vierne played the piano for the first time at the age of two; apparently a pianist played him a Schubert lullaby and after hearing it, he managed to find the right notes of the lullaby on the piano! Upon completing school, Vierne studied at the Paris Conservatoire (a college of music and dance). From 1892, Louis Vierne served as an assistant to the organist and composer Charles-Marie Widor (composer of the "Widor Toccata") at the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris (pictured).



In 1900, Vierne became principal organist at the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. He remained the principal organist at the Cathedral until his death. Although holding one of the most prestigious organ posts in France, the organ at Notre-Dame was in need of repair for much of Vierne's tenure. In order to raise money for the organ restoration, Vierne went on a successful tour to play organ recitals in North America.

Louis Vierne didn't have the best of luck in life. He wasn't completely blind, but he was what would be known today as "legally blind". Early in his career, Vierne composed on huge manuscript paper. Later in life, as Vierne's sight continued to worsen, he composed by Braille. Vierne was affected by a separation and divorce from his wife and he lost both his brother and son to the battlefields of World War One. A street accident in Paris caused Vierne to badly fracture one of his legs and it was thought that it might need amputating. The leg was saved, but Vierne had to completely re-learn how to play the pedals on the organ.

Despite all this, organ students of Louis Vierne described him as an encouraging, kind and patient teacher. Among his students were the organist and composer Marcel Dupré (pictured) and the two female composers Lili and Nadia Boulanger.



Today, Louis Vierne is probably best known for how he died! He suffered either a heart attack or a stroke while giving his 1,750th organ recital (not a misprint) at Notre-Dame on the evening of 2nd June 1937. Vierne had completed the main recital and was about



to end with two improvisations on themes chosen by the audience. Before starting to play them, he suddenly fell off the organ bench as his foot hit a low pedal note on the organ. He lost consciousness as the note echoed around the church. Louis Vierne fulfilled his lifelong dream; to die at the console of the great organ of Notre-Dame. The organist and composer Maurice Durufle (composer of the greatest choral work ever written) was at his side at the time of his death.

Louis Vierne leaves us with a legacy of compositions, ranging from works for chamber ensemble to a symphony. As you would expect, Vierne wrote extensively for the organ, including six organ symphonies and 24 pieces de Fantasie (Fantasy Pieces).

The best known of the fantasy pieces is probably the Carillon de Westminster, which is based on the chimes of Big Ben, with a slight twist. The story goes that the organ builder Henry Willis hummed the chimes for Vierne upon his request; it is thought that either Henry Willis hummed the tune incorrectly or Vierne misheard when transcribing. You can hear the piece here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVRaMNbnkVc>



Louis Vierne also composed vocal and choral music, including his Messe Solennelle, which was composed in 1899. When composing it, Vierne imagined a mass with orchestra accompaniment, but for practical reasons, he was advised to compose it for two organs. The mass was first performed at Saint-Sulpice on 8th December 1901 with two organs! At

Saint-Sulpice, there is a great organ (pictured) and a choir organ; and Vierne composed for this acoustic.

A little bit of random organist trivia for you: in the last 300 years, Saint-Sulpice have only had 12 different organists. Between 1870 and 1970 there were only two different organists (Widor 1870 - 1934, Dupre 1934 - 1971)!

Here is a link to a recording which was apparently recorded in Notre-Dame before the tragic fire: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zjIRHPotjk> Maybe try experimenting having your speakers at different ends of the room! Or just close your eyes and imagine yourself in the Notre-Dame or Saint-Sulpice and maybe burn some incense for good measure...

If you'd like to sing along, here is a link to a score:

[http://www1.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Messe_solemnelle,_Op._16_\(Louis_Vierne\)](http://www1.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Messe_solemnelle,_Op._16_(Louis_Vierne))

If you like Vierne's Messe Solennelle, you might also like to listen to what must have almost certainly been his inspiration, the Mass for two choirs and two organs composed in 1878 by Widor (pictured).



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

Graham