

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 20TH AUGUST 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope you've had a good couple of weeks since the last newsletter. Here is this week's newsletter... as ever, comments, feedback, suggestions very welcome!

What's On

The "Global Armed Man" project is still up and running and 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>

The stay at home choir are now advertising their next project titled "Caledonia" which is in collaboration with Voces8:

<https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects/caledonia>

As I've just mentioned Voces8, here's a reminder of their very exciting online festival titled "live from London":

<https://voces8.foundation/livefromlondon>



Choral conductor Jessica Norton continues her summer singing sessions. This week her session focuses on humming and singing quietly. Next week, the focus is on dealing with text. In a fortnights time, the focus is using your head and chest voices. These are sessions running via Zoom.

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

Feedback from a WCFC member to me says that "I have attended one of Jessica

Norton's singing lessons and intend attending more of them. I find Jessica really excellent and would highly recommend her to others". So if you have 45 minutes to spare on either a Tuesday or Thursday, get involved!

Eamonn Dougan (Associate Conductor of the Sixteen) discusses the ins and outs and the vast importance of the soft palate when you are singing:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvfXsbMiN5o>



Ben England is as busy as ever this week with week three of the self-isolation choir's summer school. Vivaldi Gloria is the featured work:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/vivaldi-gloria>

Advance warning for September, following on from the success of the self-isolation Messiah, Ben is running an "Elijah at Home" project:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/elijah>

Do have a look at the whole of the Self-Isolation choir website, there's a lot of music making to get involved with, far too much to mention here! Well done and thank you to Ben and his ever expanding team for

their excellent work during lockdown, which I know has been appreciated by many.

The Voces8 "Live from London" online festival featuring some of the very best vocal ensembles is now up and running. This Saturday (22nd), is the turn of "The Swingles" with an innovative programme titled "Horizons":



<https://voces8.foundation/the-swingles>



On the subject of online music festivals, St. Martin-in-the-fields in London are also doing the same. Although not a vocal offering, you might be interested to tune in to their virtual concert on Thursday (20th) titled "A London Sketchbook":

<https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/whatson-event/a-london-sketchbook/>

The Bach Choir and David Hill are hosting a free online choral workshop on Wednesday

26th August. The menu is Handel's Coronation Anthems:



<https://www.thebachchoir.org.uk/news/the-bach-choir-choral-workshop-with-david-hill/>



If you fancy a challenge, the Vasari Singers are hosting a come and sing online event on Saturday 12th September. The programme is a work in eight parts and one in sixteen parts!

<http://www.vasarisingers.org/event/come-and-singonline/>

Finally, (pew) a mention for recent and upcoming proms performances that feature choral music:



Sunday 16th August: Handel's oratorio Saul

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08kd6qm>

Sunday 23rd August: St. Matthew Passion

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08kvsbr>

Piece of the week

Rather than a featured composer this week, I thought I would write briefly about a particular piece of choral music. I have chosen the lovely *Abendlied* by **Josef Rheinberger** (1839 - 1901) who was born in Liechtenstein, which I guess makes him Liechtenstein's most famous composer!



Rheinberger lived and worked in Munich and became a teacher at the conservatory, a church organist, conductor of the Munich Choral Society and composed a large number of works in many genres, including sacred choral music. In 1877, he became Kapellmeister to the Munich court, a position which was once held by the 16th century composer, Orlando de Lassus.

Abendlied is the third of a set of three sacred pieces for unaccompanied choir which were published in 1873. They are dedicated to a choral society in Berlin. The work is composed for six voice parts (SSATTB) and sets words from the Gospel of St. Luke: "*Bide with us, for evening shadows darken, and the day will soon be over*". It is one of those pieces where you need to just be still and listen to! Here are the Cambridge Singers in action, the video has the score so you can sing along: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGc_HGwdxk

If you like this motet, you might like to listen to the other two from the set:

Morgenlied (for SSATTB)... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPsQJg8Ms_8

... and Hymne (for SSATB): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbV9kQiidXQ>

For a comparison to these motets, you might like to listen to the three motets by the Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 - 1924). Here is my personal favourite of the three, "Beati Quorum Via" (here's that lovely six part writing again), which I would love to have at my wedding if I ever get married: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4htlGNb-pY>



Piano feature

During August, I thought it might be nice for someone else to write something in the newsletter. So I am delighted that **Gilly Slot** (accompanist for Winchester City Festival Choir) has put a couple of articles together to share with us. Here is the first one.

I would like to introduce you to three very contrasting piano pieces which I have enjoyed learning. I discovered them all by chance, and liked them so much I decided to learn them and try and find an opportunity to perform them somewhere locally. The Southampton Music Festival usually provides a good opportunity for that sort of thing, as do little local concerts. At these events I also quite often hear other pieces played which I later decide to learn. There is so much music out there!



The first piano piece I would like to tell you about is actually a group of pieces by Federico Mompou - his Canciones y Danzas. Mompou was born in Barcelona in 1893 and died there in 1987 at the age of 94. He was a shy, retiring individual who enjoyed solitude, and these qualities are somehow reflected in his music which often has a contemplative and very personal feel about it. I first noticed Mompou's piano music when I heard some of the Canciones y Danzas arranged for 2 guitars, and that inspired me to explore them (there are 13 of them for piano solo). Each cancion is slow and often melancholic, contrasting well with the livelier dance which follows. The harmony, particularly in the canciones, is very rich and colourful, with a strong Spanish flavour throughout. If you would like to listen to some Mompou, there are several recordings on YouTube, including some played by Mompou himself. Here are links to nos. 5 and 6. In number five, I love how the dance enters in a very tentative way before establishing a livelier beat. The cancion for number six is full of pathos and yearning.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD6yG58BZmA> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=souxkKCDh94>

Sometimes when I turn on the radio, I might hear just the end of a piece, but hear enough to know that I'd like to find out more about it. This was the case with Graceful Ghost Rag by William Bolcom, which I caught the end of very late one night as I drove down the M3. It had a melancholy mood (I like melancholy music), and I liked the relaxed, jazzy/ragtime feel about it. I had not heard of Bolcom, but have since discovered that he is a living American composer, with a prolific output. I was so taken with Graceful Ghost Rag that I ordered the music the very next day and started to learn it immediately. I also ordered a book of the complete rags by Bolcom which I am constantly dipping into. They have all the rhythmic and structural features of ragtime, but differ to Scott Joplin rags in that the harmony is more contemporary, with many "scrunchy" chords. This feature makes them much harder to read, but I don't mind that if I like something enough!



This is the recording I heard on the radio that evening. It is a "swung" performance, but it can also be played straight. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jftAt4mXFk>



Lastly, I would like to mention the piano music of CPE Bach. Born in 1714 in Weimar in Germany, CPE Bach was a prolific composer. To give you an idea of the volume of his piano music, in 2014 a recording of his complete piano output was released as a 26-CD box set!

His music is a delightful mix of Baroque and early Classical styles, and is full of surprises. While I was searching on YouTube for something a bit different to learn, I stumbled across one of his Piano sonatas – Wq. 55 no. 4 in A major. This is a technically challenging piece, but it is so full of energy and excitement, it was still really fun to learn. I loved the Baroque style sequences and descending bass line which featured early on in the piece, and the numerous little unexpected turns and original features. The ending of the first movement is just one example of the unexpected. I have played the first movement on its own, and the audience has been left hanging in mid-air, wondering what is coming next! Here is a link to a rather rapid performance by Marc-Andre Hamelin:

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

I am now planning to learn another of his sonatas – there seems to be thousands to choose from...

I hope you have enjoyed reading about these three pieces of piano music!

Many thanks to Gilly for her time in researching about a few of her favourite piano music. We all look forward to next week's article!

Since the last newsletter...

Just after the last newsletter was sent out, we received the news that the WCMF performance of Handel's Messiah has been postponed until May 2022. This is a shame, but I respect and support the decision made by the trustees with the backing of the WCMF executive committee. The decision to postpone was an easy one when the following points were taken into account:

- current (let alone future) health developments
- the scientific focus on aerosol transmissions by any singing voices
- the sheer scale of our projected concert with up to 350 choristers placed shoulder to shoulder, an orchestra and an audience big enough to make it economically viable
- a similar pressure on indoor spaces for the joint rehearsals
- the fact that the virus is said to favour cool/cold conditions which we haven't yet experienced
- the average age of our singers plus their typical audience followers. Any withdrawal by anxious singers from rehearsals or the final performance, together with a similarly poor, anxious audience turnout would impact massively on our finances as well as the musical quality of the end-product

The trustees had been in communication with David Hill (who was due to conduct the concert) and he recommended that *"my advice... would be to move Messiah to 2022 and we can then be more certain it will work"*.

It's not all bad news!

Revised guidance for the Performing Arts was published by the government on 14 August. The good news is that the guidelines now confirm that non-professionals can now take part in singing activity, whilst keeping to the current social distancing guidelines. This leaves room for some interpretation; and national bodies for singing groups are currently trying to get clarification on this. The officers and committee are watching with interest!

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

Graham