

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope this newsletter finds you well.

This week's newsletter comes with a slight health warning... there are a number of videos that I'm mentioning which are tear jerkers so you might like to have a box of tissues or a clean hanky ready!!

As ever, comments, feedback, suggestions very welcome!

What's On Listings

The stay at home choirs *Global Armed Man* project is now completed and you can watch the finished result here (first tear jerker this week):



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y357pB6_zCw&t=622s

Well done to the members of Winchester City (and maybe Salisbury as well) who took part... and well done if you are able to spot any of them on the video, or if you spotted yourself!



The self-isolation choir are up and running with their "Elijah at Home" project:

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

Do keep an eye on the wealth of singing opportunities going on over at the Self-Isolation choir website. There's bound to be something that I miss which deserves a mention in the newsletter! If you happen to spot something in particular that you feel

deserves a special mention, then drop me an email and I'll try to include it.

A quick reminder about the (possibly a once in a lifetime) chance to participate in a performance of Mahler's wonderful Resurrection Symphony (more emotion):

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/symphony-no-2-mahler>

Ben England is up and running again on the Homechoir YouTube channel, with a real variety of music to join in with. I'll single out his recent video where he works on the anthem "Never weather beaten sail" by the English composer Thomas Campion (1567 - 1620):



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl1-IOrAox8>



Here's a reminder of the very exciting online festival titled "Live from London" featuring some of the very best vocal ensembles. This Saturday (12th), is the turn of Apollo5 with an innovative programme titled "Where all Roses go":

<https://voces8.foundation/apollo5>

Final reminder for the come and sing online event which is happening this Saturday (12th) and hosted by the Vasari Singers. The programme is a work in eight parts and one in sixteen parts!



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

I! London Handel Festival Last weekend I virtually attended the choral leaders' festival organised by the Association of British Choral Directors. One of the sessions that I attended was "Understanding and performing Messiah" with a star studded panel! The come and sing event being organised by the London Handel Orchestra

which I mentioned in last week's newsletter got advertised and I was pleased to say that I'd already plugged it to my two choirs! Full details here:

<https://www.london-handel-festival.com/show/virtual-come-and-sing-messiah/?event=18001>

Finally, for this week, on Wednesday 16th September,  David Hill (conductor of The Bach Choir) will be leading another choral workshop. The chosen work this time is Brahms Requiem. Full details here:

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

Talking of Brahms...

Piece of the week

My featured work this week is the *Geistliches Lied* by the German composer **Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)**. This motet was composed in 1856 as one of a number of compositions that Brahms exchanged with the violinist and composer Joseph Joachim (1831 - 1907; pictured left). These exchanges were designed for each composer to critique the others work, particularly in compositional techniques such as writing canons and fugues. The *Geistliches Lied* was deemed worthy enough of publication by Brahms. It's quite hard to imagine that this piece started life as a compositional exercise!



The piece is based around two themes which work in canon. The soprano and tenors share one theme, with the tenors starting almost the same tune four notes after the sopranos; and starting one note lower (here are the first six bars as an example):

The image shows the first six bars of the Soprano and Tenor parts of the motet. The Soprano part begins with the lyrics "Lass dich nur nichts nicht dau - ren mit Trau - ren". The Tenor part begins four notes later with the lyrics "Lass dich nur nichts nicht dau - ren mit Trau - ren". Both parts are in G major and 4/4 time.

The altos and basses have a different theme, but employing the same method...

The image shows the first six bars of the Alto and Bass parts of the motet. The Alto part begins with the lyrics "Lass dich nur nichts nicht dau-ren mit Trau-ren". The Bass part begins with the lyrics "Lass dich nur nichts nicht dau - ren mit Trau-ren". Both parts are in G major and 4/4 time.

... and both of these themes are happening at the same time!

And so the piece continues in a similar fashion, complemented by a gentle organ prelude and interludes between the three verses of words by the German poet and physician Paul Fleming (1609 - 1640; pictured right):



Laß dich nur nichts nicht dauren mit Trauren,
sei stille, wie Gott es fügt,
so sei vergnügt mein Wille!

Do not be sorrowful or regretful;
Be calm, as God has ordained,
and thus my will shall be content.

Was willst du heute sorgen auf morgen?
Der Eine steht allem für,
der gibt auch dir das Deine.

What do you want to worry about from day to day?
There is One who stands above all
who gives you, too, what is yours.

Sei nur in allem Handel ohn Wandel,
steh feste, was Gott beschleußt,
das ist und heißt das Beste.
Amen.

Only be steadfast in all you do,
stand firm; what God has decided,
that is and must be the best.
Amen

The closing Amen is absolutely beautiful (another tear jerker I'm afraid) and sounds similar to the Amen section of the Evening Hymn by H. Balfour Gardiner (1877 - 1950). I wonder if Balfour Gardiner knew the Brahms?

Here are the Tenebrae Choir to show us how to sing it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IzjHi1NhtM>

Brahms Requiem (part one)

One of the positives of "lockdown rehearsals" (perhaps the only positive) is that we have time to find out more about the music that we sing. So for the next few weeks, I'll be looking at various aspects of Brahms Requiem and also pointing you in the direction of other works by Brahms alongside works that might have given Brahms inspiration for composing the Requiem.



Brahms had been considering composing a Requiem for some time, but it was not until 1866, when he was the age of 33 (see picture left), that he began serious work on the idea. The work was completed (with the exception of what we now know as the fifth movement) by the beginning of 1868 and rehearsals for the first performance began in early February. Brahms took great interest in the rehearsals for the premiere and even offered to come and play the tricky piano reduction in the vocal score! Brahms' own involvement helped to stimulate interest in the work and it received much attention in the press in the days before the premiere.

The first performance took place in Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday 1868, as part of a sacred concert, with the proceeds going to the benefit of the orphans' and widows' fund of Bremen. Brahms conducted the performance and Julius Stockhausen (1826 - 1906; pictured right) was the baritone soloist. There was no soprano soloist, as her "moment of glory" hadn't been composed yet!



It may surprise you to know that the Requiem wasn't the only item on the programme. Between movements four and five (now four and six as the fifth movement didn't exist yet), Joseph Joachim (remember him from the last page?) played the slow movement of Bach's A minor Violin Concerto with orchestra, an Andante by the Italian composer Guiseppe Tartini (1692 - 1770)

and his own arrangement of Robert Schumann's Abendlied, both of these were accompanied by organ.



At the end of the Requiem, Joachim was joined with his wife, singer Amalie Weiss (1839 - 1899; see picture left) to perform the "Erbarme dich" from Bach's St. Matthew Passion and "I know that my Redeemer liveth" from Messiah. The choruses "Behold the Lamb of God and "Hallelujah" from Messiah were also performed. Quite an evening of music!

The performance was a great success and the Cathedral (see picture right) was full, with upwards of 2,500 people in attendance, including many of Brahms's friends and other distinguished musicians from all over Germany and abroad.



The second performance was given eighteen days later at the Bremen Union, conducted by Carl Martin Reinthaler (1822 - 1896). This time, the programme included Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and an aria by Weber.

In the month following the premiere, Brahms completed another movement for soprano solo with chorus and orchestra, which became what we now know as the fifth movement. He composed it in Hamburg, where he had gone to stay with his father and he added some final touches to the original for publication.



The first private performance of the fifth movement was in September 1868, with Ida Suter-Weber as the soprano soloist and conducted by Friedrich Hegar (1841 - 1927; pictured left). The autograph score (from which the full score was made) has an amazing mix of page sizes. This is because (as he told several people): "*at the time, I wrote it I never had enough money to buy a stock [of paper]!*"

Next week, I'll be having a look at why Brahms decided to use verses from the Bible rather than set the usual text from the Requiem mass.

And finally!

Here's something a bit special. Here is a recent full performance of Verdi's Requiem (yes really) by the Choir and Orchestra of La Scala Theatre with an outstanding quartet of soloists, brilliantly conducted by Riccardo Chailly and performed in what sounds like a cavernous acoustic of Milan Cathedral.



It's a bit of a faff to watch it in the first place (you need to sign up to it a la BBC I-player) but once you're there, it's a really excellent performance. The concert is dedicated to those who have died in the Covid-19 pandemic. This is another video that might make you a bit emotional!

<https://www.raiply.it/video/2020/09/Messa-da-Requiem-di-Verdi-4be21178-8910-4a94-b189-cde40e4e332f.html>

That's all for this week folks. I hope your emotions survived this newsletter.

Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham