

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 1ST OCTOBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope this newsletter finds you well. Here is this week's newsletter. As ever, comments, feedback, suggestions welcome!

Have you sung since March?

I've been playing for services again since the end of July; and because of numbers last Sunday, I sang along with the church choir from the organ. This was the first time that I had done some real singing since March... and I have to say that I found it a real struggle; in fact, my voice packed up quite early on during the service! So the moral of this story is: if you haven't done any / much singing since March, please could I encourage you to do so! Our singing voices are musical instruments, which need regular practice if we are to use them. Do use some of the opportunities listed below to help you, plus any other ways that you might find helpful. If you find other ways that I don't mention here, then let me know and I'll promote them here so everyone can benefit!

What's On Listings



The stay at home choir are inviting you to register for their festive winter project: <https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects/christmas>

Many singing opportunities available on the self-isolation choir website:

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

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/requiems-at-home>

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

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/st-john-passion> (NEW LISTING)



Ben England's excellent videos on the Homechoir YouTube channel are well worth joining in with. My recommendations this week are these two videos on Bach Jesu Meine Freude, one to learn the dots and one on tonality and rhythm in the piece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QQlniLauCQ>

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

Here's a final reminder of the very exciting online festival titled "Live from London" featuring some of the very best vocal ensembles. I say final reminder, because this Saturday (3rd October), is the final concert! The grand finale is the vocal ensemble Canticleer who are based in San Francisco:



<https://voces8.foundation/chanticleer>



If you enjoyed the top tips videos by Eamonn Dougan from The Sixteen which I've mentioned previously, here's a new video that he's put together, which focuses on an Ave Regina by Lobo:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qfH1WTsczc>

A reminder of an online workshop for all ages, which will be led by members of Tenebrae and their conductor and artistic director, Nigel Short...



<https://www.tenebrae-choir.com/events/2020/10/18/calling-all-singers>



... and a final reminder to get involved with a come and sing Handel's Messiah with the London Handel Orchestra:

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

Finally, for this week, I'll give another plug to the project being run by the University of Southampton Voices (in association with Vox Holloway) who are running online rehearsals on Harvey Brough's arrangement of "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band". More information available here...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twszSTndMBY> ...and here: <https://voxholloway.com/2019-programme/>

Brahms Requiem (part four)



In the last exciting episode, we had a look at the life of Heinrich Schütz and how some of his works used texts that were used by Brahms in his Requiem setting. This week, I promised you some Bach and Brahms comparisons and examples, so here they come!



Brahms was an avid collector of early music in manuscript and print form. In the 1850s, Brahms studied advanced counterpoint and chorale harmonisation, both compositional techniques from the centuries before. At the same time, the Bach-Gesellschaft (Bach Society) was formed to publish the complete works of JS Bach (1685 - 1750) without any editorial additions; what we might call urtext editions today. The collected works are known as the Bach-Gesellschaft-Ausgabe. Brahms was one of the subscribers of the Bach-Gesellschaft and served as one of the editors of the project.



For Bach comparisons to Brahms Requiem, we turn to the cantatas, starting with cantata 106, known as Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (God's time is the very best time) and also known as Actus tragicus. Scholars believe that this cantata was

composed for the funeral of a former mayor of Mühlhausen in 1708 (a modern day image of the town of Mühlhausen is pictured on the previous page, with the church that Bach worked at in the distance).

Like Brahms Requiem, the text in this cantata is compiled from texts from the Old and New Testament sections of the Bible and is basically a small "German Requiem" in six movements. In typical Bach fashion, we hear funeral hymns (chorales) combined with the biblical texts. Here are the Netherlands Bach Society in action with the whole cantata. Listen out for the solo after the first chorus, which uses a slightly different version of the text from the third movement of Brahms Requiem: "Lord, teach us to know that we must die, so that we may become wise". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXMUpqSyJJo>

Another Bach cantata worthy of comparison is cantata 27 known as Wer weiß, wie nahe mir mein Ende? (Who knows how near my end shall be). This cantata was composed in Leipzig for the 16th Sunday after Trinity and first performed on 6th October 1726. Notice again the use of "Lord let me know mine end" used in Brahms Requiem.

The big comparison here is in the first movement of the cantata, which uses a chorale melody dating from 1641 by the German hymn composer and poet Georg Neumark (1621 - 1681; pictured right), who also wrote the original text, which is about putting trust in God. It was also referred to as a "Trostlied" or a song of consolation. The image on the left shows the melody as published in 1657. Note the use of the soprano clef!



Here is the first choral entry of Bach cantata 27, with a "skeleton score" showing what the orchestra is up to:



Now compare this with the choral entry of the 2nd movement of Brahms Requiem:



And here's the opening phrase of the original chorale...



... now compare that to bars 3 and 4 of the 1st movement of Brahms Requiem:



Here is a recording of cantata 27 in full: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQ9W4Y82Oks>

The translation of the text of cantata 27 is available in full here...

<http://www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach/BWV27.html>

... and the translation of the text of cantata 106 is available in full here:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~classics/faculty/bach/BWV106.html>

You may recognise the chorale melody in a different guise; Mendelssohn uses it just after the stoning of Stephen in the oratorio "St. Paul".

For more about Bach cantatas, I strongly recommend this YouTube video which beautifully explains Bach's working week and how he composed the cantatas (*beginning about three minutes in, but if you have a spare hour, the whole documentary, split into seven parts is well worth a watch*): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsyBN6p_hh0&t=186s

Next week I'll be looking at more music which might have influenced Brahms in writing his Requiem; music that Brahms wrote in the early period of his life.

Talking of Brahms...

As the Winchester City Festival Choirs forthcoming performance of the Brahms Requiem is cancelled, why not join in and rehearse it anyway?

Here is the third in a series of Brahms Requiem rehearsals which were put together earlier in lockdown by Simon Halsey who is chorus master of the London Symphony Chorus and the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus, amongst other work with choirs here and in Europe.



In this video, Simon Halsey takes you through the third movement of the Brahms. I'll point you in the direction of the other videos over the next few weeks.

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

That's all for this week folks. I hope you're still enjoying the newsletters.

Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham

PS. It was good to see some of you briefly at the AGM last week!