

# Salisbury Choral Society

# NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope this newsletter finds you well.

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## Have you been singing during lockdown?

Further to my column last week about singing during lockdown, I have had an email from a soprano in Winchester City Festival Choir about this very subject! She writes...

Hi Graham. I am just responding to your mention in the newsletter of how your voice has suffered in lockdown and am sharing your pain. Mine has seized up and refuses to go above an F, so in a desperate attempt not to come back to my choirs as an Alto 1, I have started fortnightly Zoom singing lessons with Jessica Norton <http://jessicanorton.co.uk/>. She is working on all sorts of bad habits I have to improve technique and open things up so that I can hopefully get back up to those Gs and As in time. I know that private singing lessons are not within everyone's reach financially and that I am very privileged to be able to afford them. However, if you wanted to pass on that I have found them really confidence boosting and voice improving then maybe that might help others secretly dreading coming back to rehearsals with rusty top notes. The other priceless thing they give me is the physical well-being feeling of singing out loud that I didn't realise I was missing until I found it again.



So there you have it folks, some food for thought for you! I'm glad that I was able to link the singer above with Jessica (pictured left) via the newsletter, even though I've never met or spoken to Jessica in my life!

I would reiterate that our singing voices are musical instruments, which need regular practice if we are to use them! If you haven't done any / much singing since March, please try to do some, without pushing your voice. Do use some of the opportunities listed on the next page 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!

Here is this week's newsletter. As ever, comments, feedback, suggestions welcome! As you've just seen, people do sometimes!

# 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>



... and there are loads of singing opportunities still available on the self-isolation choir website: <https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/>

Ben England's excellent videos on the Homechoir YouTube channel are well worth joining in with. My recommendations this week are three videos, one on "The Silver Swan" by Orlando Gibbons... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3GFOfAG-H4> ...and two on a quartet from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Iolanthe". The first one teaches you the dots... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5T-M-INVK8w> ...and the second one deals with some music theory (in particular chords) using the quartet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIxqalQ3Vpw>



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>

New for this week, is an opportunity from "Run by Singers" who organise singing trips abroad for singers. This is an opportunity to sing Mozart's



Requiem online. Not only can you rehearse and perform it, you can record yourself singing all or part of the work for inclusion on the CD with full Baroque Orchestra and soloists, with the proceeds of the CD going to a UK cancer charity set up by singers called "Requiem to Cancer" <https://www.requiemtocancer.org/>. This opportunity also includes recipes for Viennese punch and cookies. Sounds good to me! <https://www.runbysingers.org/virtual-vienna>

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## Brahms Requiem (part five)



In the last exciting episode, we had a look at how Brahms was influenced by the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. This week, I'm having a look at music that Brahms himself composed prior to the Requiem in 1869.

Another quick word at this point about the text of Ein Deutsches Requiem, which, as I wrote about in a previous newsletter, uses a variety of texts from the whole Bible; Old and New Testaments as well as the Apocrypha. Interestingly, most of the texts that Brahms set before the Requiem are more orthodox than the later ones. Brahms uses complete texts from the Old and New Testaments or hymn texts from the Lutheran tradition.

This week, I'm pointing you in the direction of two choral works that were composed in the autumn of 1858; a decade before the Requiem. Both of these works are Brahms' first attempts at composing for choir and orchestra and both were first performed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1859 in Hamburg under Brahms' direction.

Firstly, Brahms' setting of the [Ave Maria \(Op.12\)](#) for four-part female voices and orchestra (strings and wind) or organ. The Ave Maria was first performed by Brahms' Frauenchor (Women's Chorus).

Here is a lovely performance by members of the choir of Trinity College Cambridge:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2kA\\_w8XeRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2kA_w8XeRc)

Next, a real find! Here is Brahms' Begräbnisgesang (Burial Song) Op.13. For his choice of text, Brahms chooses to set a poem from the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Michael Weiße (c.1488 - 1534), which focuses on death and resurrection. Brahms writes for mixed voices this time, but chooses an unusual instrumental combination of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trombones, tuba and timpani. As a slight aside, the composer Anton Bruckner uses a very similar instrumentation for his Mass in E minor, which was composed at about the same time that Brahms was writing his Requiem. I also spotted a slight Bach influence about 60 seconds in, where the orchestra writing bears a resemblance to JS Bach's Motet BWV118.

Here is a great recording from the Collegium Vocale Gent and members of the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, conducted by Philippe Herreweghe:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmMRD5Ysd2g>

Finally, as an encore and in a secular vein, a quick glance to the Vier Gesänge (four songs) Op.17 composed by Brahms in 1860 and composed for female choir, two horns and harp. Interestingly, Brahms rarely wrote for the harp, which only appears in these songs, the Requiem and one other choral work.

Here are the Kansas City Chorale conducted by Charles Bruffy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDOa0Eu1API>

Next week I'll be continuing the secular theme, with an overview of some of Brahms' choral music that draws its text from German classical or Romantic poetry.

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## Talking of Brahms...

As the Winchester City Festival Choirs forthcoming performance of the Brahms Requiem is cancelled, why not take the opportunity to join with them and rehearse it anyway?

Here is the fourth 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 fourth and fifth movements 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=XxT-qghqw2M>

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

Stay safe and keep singing!

*Graham*