

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

Since the last newsletter, we have had the announcement that Lockdown II is about to start. Sadly, this news has put the brakes on having live rehearsals again for the time being. However, we are restarting our zoom coffee time! I'm sorry that I haven't been able to attend one of these yet, but be assured that I'm thinking of you all!

As Eileen said in her email on Monday: *"We nearly got there! Unfortunately, Covid and the Government's new Lockdown means that there will be no rehearsals in November. There may be a possibility of one or two in December but it seems very unlikely, so, it probably means that we will not be able to hold rehearsals until January. Thank you all for your replies and your kind comments about the preparations made by the Committee for the resumption of rehearsals. I suspect that those plans will not go to waste as I think we will still have limits on the number of people able to meet inside in January."*

So to this week's newsletter. Comments, feedback, suggestions welcome!

What's On Listings

In a bid to try and keep the What's On Guide column brief, here are links to sites that I regularly mention (hopefully just click on the links which will take you to the right place online):

[Stay at Home Choir Projects](#)

[Self-Isolation Choir](#)

[Ben England Home choir YouTube Channel](#)

A reminder of the Come and Sing "Spem in Alium" on Saturday 21st November hosted by the **Vasari Singers**. click [here](#) for the full details.

Following the success of the **Voces8** Live from London festival during the summer, a Christmas Festival and "Bach for Christmas" are being planned! Click [here](#) for more details.

Finally, for this week, **Opera North** are running a festive edition of "From Couch to Chorus". Click [here](#) for more information.

Singing during lockdown

Here are some more warm up videos for you to have a look at: [click here for link to YouTube](#)

These videos are courtesy of **Susan Yarnall** who is a former singing teacher at St. Paul's Girls School, London and is currently a singing teacher at Chichester University. There are over 100 warm up videos for you to have a go at on this YouTube channel. Each one lasts about two minutes and will hopefully give you something to think about.



I hope you find these videos helpful. Please let me know if they are or aren't!

Mostly Mendelssohn (part two)

Way back in the newsletter on 2nd September, I had a look at some of the smaller choral works by the composer Jacob Ludwig **Felix Mendelssohn**. At the end of the article, I said that we'll pick up the Mendelssohn story from where we leave it and look at another of his shorter choral works from the 1840s in a future newsletter. That future newsletter is today!



In the last Mendelssohn episode, I mentioned about a very demanding tour of Europe that Mendelssohn undertook. He also visited England many times. On his visit to England between May and July 1844, Mendelssohn conducted six concerts with the Philharmonic Society including acclaimed performances of Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Joseph Joachim and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, with Mendelssohn himself at the piano. He described his time in England as "crazy, absolutely crazy" and no wonder, as he was spending each day with many musical and social engagements and it is claimed that Mendelssohn felt that he got through more music during his time in England than he did in the rest of the year!

Mendelssohn also somehow found time to compose and obviously found a quiet moment to compose the most popular of his small-scale choral works Hör mein Bitten, which is probably better known in its Mendelssohn-approved English version as Hear my prayer (which begs the question, should we sing Hear my prayer in German or English? Maybe I won't go there again this week!)

Hör mein Bitten (Hear my prayer) shows none of the sense of fatigue that must have afflicted Mendelssohn throughout his visit to England. On the contrary, Mendelssohn appears to have taken the opportunity to conjure up the feelings of peace and contentment in the opening section that he so desperately sought in his personal life. His mother had died the previous year and his health had been undermined by his frustrations, his hectic pace of life and easy depressions. As the choir joins the soprano (or treble) soloist, the music moves into a minor key and very different time signature to what precedes it; and the music becomes considerably more agitated. After a brief and dramatic recitative, the contented final section resolves any tension in the flowing melodic lines of the inimitable 'O for the wings, for the wings of a dove'.

For my recommended recordings, I've tried, perhaps controversially, to avoid choosing a version with a treble soloist and Cathedral / church choir. So I'll point you in the direction of this lovely version, sung in German, by the Stuttgarter Kantanten-Ensemble. I like the orchestration (oboe, strings and organ) in this version too: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKXNR8O3-FE>



I'll also point you in the direction of this excellent lockdown performance of "O for the wings of a Dove" by members of Guildford Choral Society:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wXB-TImKfs>

Mendelssohn continued to keep a hectic schedule, composing, conducting and teaching in Germany and England, including the premiere of *Elijah* in Birmingham Town Hall on 26th August 1846. This proved to be the greatest success of any new work of his; no doubt helped that English audiences had been educated in the great oratorios of Handel! As critic for "The Times" wrote: "*Never was there a more complete triumph, never a more thorough and speedy recognition of a great work of art*". Such was the work's popularity, Mendelssohn returned to England in April 1847 to give six more performances in the space of a fortnight, including one (on 23rd April) in the presence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.



Mendelssohn was devastated by the death of his sister Fanny (herself a composer) on 14th May 1847 at the age of 41. In the autumn of 1847, Mendelssohn was due to perform *Elijah* in Berlin. While in Berlin, he was shown the rooms where Fanny had a stroke during a rehearsal and where she had died. Mendelssohn broke down and cancelled the Berlin concert. In spite of his wife and children, Mendelssohn now felt little will to live. At the end of October 1847 he had a fit and suffered great agitation for the next six days before relapsing into unconsciousness. He died on November 4th 1847 at the age of 38.

Mendelssohn was greatly mourned. Leipzig bade him farewell on 7th November 1847 with a great church service. Later that evening, a large number of mourners bearing torches followed his coffin to Leipzig railway station where it was put on a special train to Berlin. Mendelssohn was buried in the family vault in the grounds of Trinity Church and was reunited with his beloved sister Fanny.



On 3rd February 1848 (what would have been Mendelssohn's 39th birthday), *Elijah* was performed for the first time in German. The performance took place in Leipzig and was conducted by the Danish composer, Niels Gade (1817 - 1890).

Live Music Making?

In my capacity as Director of Music at St. Faith's Church, Havant, since September, I have taken over the responsibility of coordinating the Wednesday lunchtime concert series which we have been able to restart. Sadly, we have had to postpone these concerts for the time being, including the concert this week (4th November) which was due to feature guitarist Derek Hasted and flautist and pianist Gilly Slot. Hopefully we will be able to reschedule it for 2021. On Wednesday 11th November (Armistice Day) it was due to be my turn, with members of the church choir. It is possible that I might be able to live stream a concert without a live audience, but at the time of typing, churches are awaiting new guidance for Lockdown II. If you're interested, do have a look at some of the concerts we've managed to host during September and October, including organ music from Cathedral Organists and a very talented violin and flute duo: <https://www.facebook.com/stfaithschurchhavant>



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

Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham