

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

A couple of days ago, I was struggling to find enough material to put in this week's newsletter... at the time of writing, I'm worried that I might not fit it all in... So, let's get on with it!

What's On Listings

In a bid to try and keep the What's On Guide column brief, here are links to sites that have had a regular plug in the newsletters (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](#)

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.

The Bach Choir continue their choral workshops, led by their musical director, David Hill. Their next session takes place on Wednesday 2nd December. Further details available [here](#).

The Sixteen are inviting you to join them in A Choral Odyssey, which explores some of the UK's most fascinating buildings and the unique stories that bind them to our choral heritage. All the details are [here](#).

You might also like to have a look at the various free online courses offered on the **Koor** website, including Handel's Messiah and Beethoven's Mass in C. [Click here for more details](#).

Quite a while ago, I advertised the **Stay and Sing** sessions led by Hilary Campbell. Hilary is leading a Christmas "Stay and Sing" on 6th December. [Click here for more information](#).

This weeks "something a bit different" is the chance to sing some film music by John Williams with the **Showcase Music School** based in Southampton. [Click here for all the details!](#)

Singing during lockdown

Voces8 get their second mention already this week! They have been very busy recently, setting up a Digital Academy with a vast array of singing opportunities, including some vocal warm ups.

I haven't had a look at these yet, but knowing the usual high standards that Voces8 maintain, I'm sure that all the content will be enjoyable and rewarding. [Click here and enjoy!](#)

I have mentioned these [warm ups](#) in a previous newsletter, but here's a reminder of them. They have been put together by professional singer **Deborah Miles-Johnson** who has led workshops on (I think) two occasions for WCMF. [Click here for more details.](#)

Finally, some further [warm up activities](#) in a number of sessions, courtesy of well-known singing teacher and vocal coach **Hilary Llystyn Jones**. These sessions are available on the Royal School of Church Music website [Click here to go straight to the link.](#)

Recent Live Music Making



If you happen to be interested and haven't yet watched the lunchtime concert that I "live streamed" from St. Faith's Church, Havant, it's still available [here](#). The church organ decided to play up halfway through, which hopefully won't spoil your enjoyment!

This week (25th November), we welcome Dr David Price to live stream a concert. David is Organist and Master of the Choristers at Portsmouth Anglican Cathedral, so it should be good!

I expect lots of you watched it, but just in case, the BBC broadcast a performance of Mozart's Requiem from the London Coliseum featuring the chorus and orchestra of English National Opera. If you haven't yet watched it, it's still available at this link: [BBC iPlayer - Mozarts Requiem from ENO.](#)



Following the broadcast, I was very sad to read quite a lot of negative comments online about the performance (I enjoyed it). I also found it sad that, even with nearly nine months without live music making, people still found reason to criticise the performance. Whatever you think / thought of performance, let's hold on to the fact that music such as Mozart Requiem is actually being performed live again... and that some people who work in the performing arts are back in employment. For many in the sector, they are currently facing a year of being on furlough (like me). Some have left the profession as a result of COVID, others are actively looking for a way out of the profession...

Anyway, rant over, my point is for us all to try to remain positive (not always easy, I've found this year very hard for various reasons, but I know that others have been hit much harder) and think about the bigger picture when we're quick to criticise!

Christmas is coming (part one)

With Christmas only a month away now, I thought I'd gently start writing something about Christmas music. This week I thought I'd veer off the beaten track and mention a couple of pieces that aren't often performed that often.



Firstly, to Germany to hear the music of **Max Bruch** who was born in 1838 and wrote his first composition (a song for his mother's birthday) at the age of nine! Bruch had a long career as a composer, conductor and teacher, holding musical posts across Germany including Berlin and Mannheim. From 1880 to 1883, Bruch was conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. Bruch died on 2nd October 1920 (100 years ago this year) and is buried at the Old St. Matthäus churchyard at



Berlin-Schöneberg. His daughter later had carved on the gravestone the words, "Music is the language of God".

Although Max Bruch is probably best known for composing three works (his first violin concerto, the Scottish Fantasy for violin and orchestra and Kol Nidrei for cello and orchestra), Bruch leaves us with quite a large oeuvre of music for various instrumental and vocal combinations [click here for a list of compositions](#). My directory of choral music has a very large section of sacred and secular music by Bruch, including a few oratorios which are seldom heard.

My "Bruch listening choice" is this rather lovely Christmas hymn called Gruss an die heilige Nacht" (greeting to the holy night) Op. 62, for alto solo, choir and orchestra. Sadly, I have been unable to find out much about it other than it was first published in 1892, but had to wait until December 1996 for its UK Premiere, which was given by Romsey Choral Society.

Here is a version on YouTube, filmed in 2008 at the Neubaukirche Würzburg (click on the links in blue, the piece is recorded over two videos): [Max Bruch: Gruss an die heilige Nacht part 1](#) [Max Bruch: Gruss an die heilige Nacht part 2](#). If you'd like to know what they're singing about, the German text and an English translation are available on page three of the vocal score available here: [MBruch Gruss an die heilige Nacht, Op.62.pdf](#)



From Germany we travel to France, to hear music by composer, conductor, pianist and organist **Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835 - 1921, so not quite 100 years since he died). My "Saint-Saëns listening choice" is his Oratorio de Noël, Op. 12, for five soloists (soprano, mezzo, alto, tenor, baritone), chorus, organ, strings and harp.

In early 1858, Saint-Saëns became organist at La Madeleine in Paris. The composer Franz Liszt heard him playing the organ there and declared him the greatest organist in the world. Quite an accolade! Saint-Saëns composed the Oratorio de Noël in less than a fortnight, completing it ten days before its premiere on Christmas Eve 1858. Saint-Saëns divided the work into 10 movements, beginning with a lovely pastoral prelude, which features the organ prominently, followed by various solos and choruses.

Saint-Saëns chose several verses from the Bible for the text of the Oratorio de Noël, which is set in Latin. The narrative portion of the text, taken from the second chapter of St. Luke, appears in the second movement and tells the part of the traditional Christmas story involving the shepherds. The remainder of the texts, taken from John, Isaiah, Lamentations, and the Psalms, reflect upon the meaning and significance of the event.

Here is a 2008 performance of the work; the forces being the Konzertchor Darmstadt and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, recorded in the Kongreßhalle at Saarbrücken in Germany (click on the link in blue). [Saint-Saëns: Weihnachtsoratorium / Christoph Poppen / DRP - YouTube](#)

Talking of Christmas...

Save the date! Wednesday 16th December will be a Zoom Carolling session for you all to take part in! Further details in next week's newsletter!

Until then, stay safe and keep singing!

Graham