

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 12TH AUGUST 2021

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

We continue our reminiscing through the archive; and find ourselves at the year **2017**.

From the Archives: 2017

At the beginning of 2017, Winchester City Festival Choir had their annual concert in **January** (or it might have been the beginning of **February**). For the second time, it was held at Thornden Hall in Chandler's Ford, which, when open, is an excellent venue for choral concerts!



The programme for this concert was virtually made up of a single item: the Petite Messe Solennelle by Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868, pictured left). For readers who are unfamiliar to the piece, The Petite Messe Solennelle is one of the last works Rossini wrote and he composed it in Paris where he had been living in fashionable retirement almost 20 years after he produced his last major work; describing the mass as "a little composition which is, alas, the final sin of my old age". Well if those words conjure up images of an elderly composer quietly committing to paper a modest piece of gentle spirituality and devotion, the reality is rather a different kettle of fish. The Petite Messe Solennelle may be a mass, but short and solemn it certainly isn't. For a start, the music is laid out on a gigantic scale; and Rossini's own description of the piece conceived as he put it: "for 12 singers of three sexes; men, women and castrati" suggests that his tongue was fairly firmly in his cheek as he wrote it. Not that the music is in any way intended as a joke. In composing it, Rossini drew on a lifetime's experience of writing for the stage; and it is passionate, dramatic and witty by turns. It certainly bowled over the listeners at its first performances which took place privately and then for a hugely enthusiastic public audience in March 1864.

As the work isn't quite long enough to make up a whole programme, we slotted in two opera choruses, one by Rossini (the "Prayer" from the opera "Moise") and one by Verdi (the "Slaves Chorus" from "Nabucco"). We also included a Galop-Marche by the French composer Albert Lavignac (1846 - 1916, pictured right) who, at the age of 18, conducted from the harmonium the private premiere of Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle. Don't you just love coincidences?



Talking of harmoniums, yes we did have on, which was played by Iestyn Evans who is director of music at two churches in Central London. Our four soloists were **Tamsin Stevens** (soprano) who within the last fortnight got married and is now Tamsin Judd, **Lillian Sediles** (mezzo) who hails from the US, **Andrew Hayman** (tenor), known to many of you as a regular guest accompanist and conductor with Sarisbury and Winchester City; and **Ciaran Yeo** (bass baritone) who is a lay clerk at St. Albans

Cathedral. I'm sure that Gilly remembers this concert well, as she had a LOT of notes to play. If I remember correctly, she commented at the rehearsal after the concert that she'd only just recovered from the concert... as had I, as yours truly completely lost my voice the day after...



For **WCMF 2017**, Sarisbury went to **Romsey Abbey** for a secular programme (The Rio Grande by Constant Lambert and Carmina Burana by Carl Orff) alongside Itchen Valley and Compton and Shawford. The conductor was **John Sutton**. A deceptively challenging programme, especially The Rio Grande, which is a great piece and I remember that Sarisbury really rose to the challenge of learning this piece, as readily acknowledged by John Sutton and Andrew Hayman when they attended Thursday rehearsals!

Winchester City went to **Winchester Cathedral** to join forces with Botley, Overton and Twyford, for a rare performance of the oratorio St. Paul by Mendelssohn. The soloists were WCMF regulars **Helen Bailey** (soprano) and **Adrian Green** (tenor), alongside **Ed Saddington** (bass baritone) who was making his WCMF debut and was, in fact a late replacement as the booked soloist (Ed Hawkins) who couldn't get out of a full rehearsal of La Traviata at Glyndebourne. The conductor was a late replacement too, **David Burgess** sadly lost his mother about six weeks before the concert, so yours truly was drafted in to take over. A memorable concert for many reasons!



The WCF "Summer Sing" for **June / July 2017** took the theme of "The American Connection". The summer singers spent six sessions (try saying that quickly) learning a medley of songs from West Side Story by Leonard Bernstein and a slightly unusual work called Alleluia by Randall Thompson (1899 - 1984), pictured left.

"Alleluia" was written on a commission from Serge Koussevitzky (pictured right), who was director of the Tanglewood Festival. Koussevitzky wanted a "fanfare" for voices to be performed at the opening of the new Berkshire Music Center. Instead of the joyous work expected of him, the composer produced a quiet and introspective piece. Thompson was inspired by the war in Europe, and the recent fall of France; given these events, he felt that to write a festive piece would be inappropriate. The text of the work consists of the word "Alleluia", with the exception of "Amen" at the very end.



In **September** and **October**, Sarisbury Choral jumped on the Mendelssohn bandwagon for two performances of Elijah. The first was the fourth (and final) in an annual series of "come and sing" events at **St. James' Church, West End, Southampton**. The second was a more formal performance where we joined forces with **Lee Choral Society** for a performance at **Holy Trinity Church, Gosport**. The "Gosport" performance was conducted by **Richard Dewland** who is conductor of Lee Choral Society and featured **Ciaran Yeo** (mentioned above) in the title role, alongside other local soloists and instrumentalists (see photo below).



In **December**, it was a blue carol book year for Sarisbury, so we sang items from Carols for Choirs 3, alongside chorales from the Christmas Oratorio by JS Bach. The recitatives in between the chorales were narrated (spoken rather than sung) by members of the choir. **Sophie Aynsley** played piano and violin (but not at the same time) and in the organ loft for the 2017 Christmas concert was **Andrew Cleary**. Our soloist for the evening was mezzo soprano **Fiona Jeppsson** who recently made a guest appearance at our last zoom singing session in July and gave us an excellent vocal workout session with lots of helpful tips. Winchester City had a carol concert again at Littleton, which was kept fairly simple, but it did include a little taster for what was to appear in their annual concert in early 2018... but that's for next time!

That's all for this week folks, apologies that I've run to three pages this time, but I thought you would like to spot yourselves in the photos!

Stay safe and keep singing,

Graham