

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 26TH 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 2019.

From the Archives: 2019

At the beginning of 2019, Winchester City Festival Choir had their annual concert in **February** (Saturday 2nd February to be precise).

At the end of April 2018, we had some very hot weather, which was followed by a dramatic thunderstorm. Sadly, Thornden Hall was a casualty of the thunderstorm and was closed for a considerable time while repair work took place. So for the first time, WCFC took their concert to Chandler's Ford Methodist Church!

The programme for this concert was a feast of Baroque sacred choral music. The first half focused on Baroque music composed in Italy by four different composers, including a female composer from the period, one Isabella Leonarda (1620 - 1704)! The second half took us to 18th century Germany for one of Bach's famous motets Lobet den herrn before we visit the music of the German composer Handel working in England with one of the Anthems composed for Cannons: O praise the Lord with one consent (Chandos Anthem number 9).



In April 2005, I heard a performance of the oratorio Jephthe by the Italian composer Giacomo Carissimi (1605 - 1674). This was a new work and composer to me and I was keen to find out more about this style; as well as the chance to be involved in a performance in it myself. This miniature oratorio (lasting about 25 minutes) is a choral gem, which deserves to be more widely performed! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsNX0UHv2UO>



Programmed alongside it were various settings of texts from the book of Psalms from the Bible, conveying words of different emotions. Another choral gem within the programme was the setting of the very old hymn Iste confessor by Domenico Scarlatti (1685 - 1757), which is beautiful in its simplicity and also deserves to be better known.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3oi38wkRWk>

The "coincidental link" on this occasion was the year 1685, which was the year that JS Bach, Handel and Scarlatti were all born!

Lots of photos of this concert are on the WCFC members section of their website, listed under "concert photos" and "rehearsal photos".

For **WCMF 2019**, Sarisbury and Winchester City went to **Romsey Abbey** to sing alongside Overton and Itchen Valley. Unusually for the festival, there were more choirs singing at Romsey than at Winchester (normally the split is four at Winchester and three at Romsey), but that's how it turned out in 2019!

The second half of the programme was a very impressive performance of Saint Nicolas by Benjamin Britten. Although eyebrows were raised initially as to why a choral work often performed at Christmas was getting an airing in mid-May, there is only one brief reference to Christmas in the piece, when St. Nicolas goes to church "at Chri-i-iii-stmas tide". It was a privilege and pleasure to preside over this concert, with the WCMF Orchestra at their usual professional best and a group of singers from St. Anne's School, Southampton, who sang the "Gallery Choir" section from behind the main choir. The title role was taken by tenor **Tom Robson** who was excellent, as were the two other soloists who sang in the first half; **Hilary Cronin** (soprano) and **Felicity Turner** (mezzo soprano), who blended beautifully. The first half was short and sweet: a setting of the Beatus Vir (Psalm 112) and Magnificat by Vivaldi.



I don't know if he is a subscriber to our newsletters or not, but I hope that **Derek Beck** will forgive me for quoting an email that I received from him shortly after the concert:

"It was a very musical set of interpretations of both Vivaldi and Britten, beautifully executed by the professionals [players and solo singers] and amazingly robust and committed from the four choirs. You not only controlled their musical efforts but inspired them to sing with conviction and to be attentive to all your signals.

I've twice done the Britten and know how tricky the composer's harmonic language is for our kinds of choirs as well as being demanding in terms of stage-managing the various groups involved. The relatively few men sang as though their lives depended on it and even the exposed seven-part writing was courageously tackled and came off well. The gallery choir was excellent".

Talking of our esteemed WCMF Chairman, you might be interested to know that Derek has stepped down as conductor of the Twyford Singers...

<https://www.hampshirechronicle.co.uk/news/19510311.derek-beck-leaves-twyford-singers-25-years/>

... and his successor is: <https://www.finchcocks.com/profile/david-hall/>

The WCF "Summer Sing" for **June / July 2019** featured Madrigals, mainly in English, apart from Il est bel et bon by Pierre Passereau (1509 - 1547). An enjoyable challenge for the summer singers, madrigals are really not the easiest to sing!



Sarisbury Choral continued to rehearse for about six weeks after the Festival concert and spent nearly all of September and October rehearsing for their 70th anniversary concert which took place on Saturday 26th October. We went for a celebratory programme, the main work was Come ye sons of art by Purcell, alongside other shorter works by Purcell, both sacred and secular. We were joined by a merry band of instrumentalists and four great soloists: **Jocelyn Somerville** (soprano), **Paul du Plessis Smith** (counter tenor), **Simon Irwin** (tenor) and **Jack Comerford** (bass). We also included a couple of items by Daniel Purcell (c.1664 - 1717), who was either the younger brother or cousin of Henry Purcell.

Salisbury and Winchester City had their annual Christmas concerts in **December** at the usual venues. The Salisbury Christmas concert was a particular success, as we only really had six rehearsals to put it all together! We were joined by flautists **Daisy Smith** and **Rebekah Collins** and multi-instrumentalist **Giacomo Casula**, who had already wowed us at the October concert with his recorder playing, joined us on this occasion with his French Horn; also his guitar, which was put to good use when we paired Stille nacht with The first Nowell, alternating the verses between the two carols. Winchester City slotted in a fairly new carol into their programme: Sleep, my Jesu by composer, conductor and singer Jamie W. Hall. The carol was originally composed for Christmas 2016 with the intention of making a brand new Christmas carol available for free and without any limitations to choirs everywhere who will then use their performances to support the amazing work of Macmillan Cancer Support.



A slight foray this week into **2020**. Winchester City had their annual concert (which turned out to be one of the only concerts in 2020!) at Chandler's Ford Methodist Church. The main item in the second half was the Mass in D by Dvorak and the first item featured shorter items from European composers, ranging from JS Bach to Bruckner. We were joined by a brass quintet (on this occasion, two trumpets and three trombones), **Nik Knight** to play timpani and organist **Sachin Gunga**.

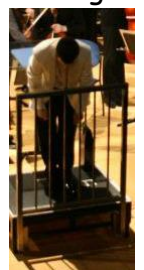
Here's what I had to say the morning after:

"Thank you for a lovely concert last night. I thought we did all the pieces justice and you should rightly be very pleased with pulling off a very "full on" programme containing a lot of singing conveying various moods. Particularly well done in the Bruckner when I decided to let you get on with it! Concerts like this don't just happen, so my thanks go to everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes both on the day and prior to the concert. Thank you to those who put themselves forward to be in the semi chorus, I hope you enjoyed the experience, one which I hope to repeat".

Both choirs spent some time rehearsing Verdi's Requiem in preparation for the Festival in May, but you know what happened next. However, congratulations to those who were involved in the performance of the Verdi at the Cathedral on 31st July 2021, to celebrate the 100th birthday of Compton and Shawford Festival Choir. Winchester City have their 100th birthday on the horizon in 2023 and Salisbury will be 75 years young in 2024, so much to look forward to!

The End

I have decided that this will be the last choir newsletter that I will be sending out. Although the newsletters take at least three hours a week to put together, I have enjoyed being a writer and editor for the last 17 months! I have enjoyed learning more about some of the music that we sing. I have enjoyed making contact again with choral colleagues through the interviews. Most recently, I have enjoyed trawling through the archives and my emails to remind myself what we have achieved over the years. I hope that you have enjoyed reading the newsletters and hope that they have been a useful and an effective way of staying in touch. Stay tuned to updates about restarting rehearsals again in the autumn and until we can all meet again, please keep in contact with your choir and keep in contact with each other... and I look forward to welcoming you back to your choir whenever you are ready!



Stay safe everyone... and keep singing!

Graham