

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 18TH JUNE 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope these newsletters continue to find you and your nearest and dearest well... and I hope you're still enjoying reading them. To date, I haven't had any complaints about the newsletters, which to be honest is a bit unnerving... perhaps I've just tempted fate!

A quick reminder about the newsletter that I have been producing for my church choir, which is available on the Church website: <http://stfaith.com/566-2/>

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

Online singing opportunities

**home
choir.uk**

Ben England is back to work uploading (almost) daily singing videos on the "Home choir" YouTube channel. Do take the opportunity to sing along to different singing styles (singing daily is good for us!)

I'd like to point you in the direction of one of Ben's recent videos, focusing on a really lovely anthem composed by Sir Edward Bairstow (1874 - 1946) called "I sat down under his shadow". As Ben says, its "one for the choral connoisseur"!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95N_de6JHJY

The first of Ben's virtual summer schools starts next week, with further ones in July and August. Full details are available on the self-isolation choir website:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/summer-school-2020>



The "stay at home" choir have a couple of projects on the go at the moment. You can join in with a performance of movements from Adiemus by Karl Jenkins or you can join "The Global Armed Man" project which is now up and running. Further details here:

<https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects>

If you prefer your Bach to your Jenkins, or if you like both, the Victoria Conservatory of Music, in British Columbia, Canada are running a week long Baroque choral course online, featuring Bach's Magnificat and his motet "Jesu, meine Freude":



<https://vcm.bc.ca/music-programs/vcm-summer-academy>

Both pieces are lovely to perform. [Editor's note: I once attended a come and sing of Jesu, meine freude alongside Stainer's Crucifixion. Hard work, but rewarding!] If you don't know the motet, you might like to have a look at this recent performance by the Czech early music orchestra and choir, Collegium 1704:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jq8yWDHA7g>

A bit closer to home (Alton to be precise) the Luminosa Voices are hosting a virtual Come and Sing Faure Requiem on Saturday 4th July, which sounds like very good value for money. Further details here:

<https://luminosamusic.com/>



Finally, for this section, to point you in the direction of conductor, organist and composer Paul Ayres and "Paul's Informal Choir Practice Online during these Quite Exceptional Times" which becomes the acronym PICPOQET. Some really good information here, especially linking warm up ideas with Music Theory. I particularly liked his "composing by numbers" video and I liked the jokes at the end of it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POTgWwpbYr8>

Music online

More from the video archive of concerts by the Royal College of Music (apologies, I wrote Academy rather than College last week). Here is the RCM Symphony Orchestra and Chorus performing Faure's Requiem in November 2018, under the baton of the Dutch conductor Jac van Steen:



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



I mentioned previously about the wealth of information that The Sixteen are uploading to their webpage. You might to have a listen to their "Choral Chihuahua" podcasts, which are basically Harry Christophers (founder and director of The Sixteen), Eamonn Dougan (associate conductor of The Sixteen) and Robert Hollingworth (director of I Fagiolini) having a good old chinwag about all things choral:

<https://shows.acast.com/choral-chihuahua/episodes/>

Finally, for this section, Richard Cooke (conductor of the Royal Choral Society) continues his blog with two new entries since the last time I wrote a newsletter. One of the them focuses on the importance of a ground bass in music. The other is about a choral work that is obviously very close to his heart, Beethoven's Missa solemnis.



<http://richardcooke.org/blog.htm>

What I hadn't realised until a couple of days ago, is that Richard has been making short video introductions to all of his blog posts. The one on the Beethoven Mass is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iCgC-C8HVU>

Special guest!



As promised, here is part two of my interview with cellist, organist, pianist, theory, instrumental and composition teacher, orchestral and chamber music coach, conductor and arranger, John Chillingworth.

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"Another difficult question. The Dream of Gerontius is definitely in my list along with the Verdi Requiem. They are both works of great power; Italian passion in the Verdi, and depth of feeling in the Elgar. Two great moments of all choral writing: when the choir finally reaches the full power entry of "Praise to The Holiest" in the Dream, and the climax of the Hosannas in the Duruflé Requiem send shivers down my spine. Faure Requiem, which is a masterwork. I thought the Messiah was "just the Messiah" until I first conducted a full performance. Setting about learning the score properly, I realised what a wonderful work it is; the setting of the words and word painting is incredible. The Saint Matthew and

St John Passions have to be there, as does the Chichester Psalms, and the Mozart Requiem is quite untouchable as a work of power and beauty. Then there is all the Renaissance choral music, endless Bach Cantatas, Brahms, The Creation, Jonathan Dove, John Tavener... We are so lucky as choral society members that we have a wealth of great music to sing.

One regret I have, because times are so hard financially, it is very difficult to take a chance and programme something off the mainstream of well-loved choral music. Sometimes you can slip something in amongst an otherwise safe programme, but it would be marvellous to have a strong enough relationship with your audience that they trusted you not to programme something that is not worth hearing. Then you can surprise listeners with unfamiliar gems. Audiences these days are fed a much more conservative diet of music than in the 60's, 70's and 80's".

How can we encourage people to join choirs and maintain membership?

"This is the hardest question to answer and anyone who comes up with the magic wand secret, share it around, please. Everyone has such choice as to what to do with their time, and such demands too, it is very difficult to keep a choir alive. It's all too easy to kill one, however.

I feel the bottom line is that everything you do must be of good quality. Everyone recognises good quality when they find it. How many times when you're looking for clothes do you unerringly pick out the item that is twice the price of all the others? Sing a variety of good music so there is something coming along for everyone. Make sure the performances are good. Lexden Choral, who I conduct, is a very mixed ability choir and the distance they travel over the rehearsal period is remarkable. They get such a thrill from working hard on a challenging programme, getting to the concert and feeling that they have performed to a level they really didn't feel they could achieve. The hard part is getting new members to take a chance and join in. Word of mouth is the best publicity and members must always be telling people about their experiences when singing and trying to persuade people to come and try it out.

Singing, or playing in an ensemble, has been shown to be of huge benefit to young and old alike. It keeps the brain active and involves areas of the brain are not used in any other activity. A brain specialist being interviewed on the radio said that the only brain whose owner you can recognise by sight is a musician's because it is enlarged in certain areas.

Social media is a huge part of the success of any organisation from selling toothpaste to publicising Opera. Members have to like and share any posts to do with their choir constantly to get the name of their choir out to the biggest possible number of people. We are having online rehearsals that are bringing in some new participants and the hope is that they will stay with us when normal life resumes.

I try to think of programmes that young singers will find appealing. We performed the Beethoven Choral Symphony about eighteen months ago and a number of schools provided extra singers. For some of them, it was the first concert they had ever been to and they were bowled over by the experience. If you can keep one or two of them, that is worth it, but you need young singers to be attending as a group or they will not keep coming. Understandably, if they feel the rest of the choir are two generations older, they will drift quietly away.

Make sure the choir has a social life outside rehearsals and concerts. Regular events so members feel they are part of a lively group; too many will try just to turn up, sing, go away and the usual few will do the donkey work.

I make it sound like I've got the answer, but it is two steps forward and one step back all the time. Lexden Choral will have a bigger than normal choir for a particular concert and you hope you've found the answer, but next programme, the extra singers have gone elsewhere. Tireless energy, constant encouraging, cajoling, arm twisting, persuading, publicising, posting on social media - and you might survive. To grow - answers on a postcard, please.

Lastly, if you are reading this, you presumably enjoy singing in your choir. It is a great pastime, pleasure, and hobby. Choral singers are, for the most part, very nice people so rehearsals are good occasions. The music is wonderful and there is nothing quite like that thrill of hearing the piece you have been painstakingly rehearsing for months come to life when the orchestra arrives and you hear the piece as the composer intended. Seeing and feeling an audience being enraptured by a great piece of music and getting the plaudits and compliments afterwards, makes the turning out on a foggy, cold, snowy winters night, when all you really wanted to do was watch the football or EastEnders, or curl up with a good book with the heating turned up and a glass of something warming at your elbow, worthwhile. Keep turning out and keep spreading the word about what a great thing it is to do, to sing in a choir".

Many thanks to John for his very full answers with plenty of food for thought!

Maybe we could do a collaboration with Lexden Choral Society in the future...

Virtual summer school

Following on from the music sent out the last two weeks, here are the links to this week's short piece to have a go at! The aim is to have a "come and sing" You don't need to record yourself, just learn the notes and be ready to sing along with me conducting you on **Wednesday 8th July!** The video will be uploaded on YouTube at **7:45pm** on that day, in the hope that we can all tune in and sing together at the same time! As you know, I've chosen folksong arrangements from the British Isles and we're working our way around the country. This week, we go to Scotland with the well-known folksong, the "Skye Boat song". The link to the score is here: <http://www.adrianoseccomusic.it/arrang/SATB/skyeboat.pdf> The link to a "synth audio" recording is here: http://www.adrianoseccomusic.it/arrang/arrang_audio/skyeboat.mp3

For the benefit of the "performance", don't worry about the pauses or rit. However, we are going to do the pause in bar 43, by adding an extra quaver beat, as on the learning files, which are again available on the members section of the choir website. I hope you enjoy learning it... and watch out for the repeats!

And finally!

It is now fourteen weeks since we last met to rehearse. The WCMF concert weeks have been and gone. We are, I'm sure, all missing our weekly chance to meet and make music together. In the current absence of any Government guidance for musical ensembles or concert venues, the nearest we have is the current status quo for places of worship, which was published last week. It states that any "practices such as choir practice" are not currently permitted. It also states that "activities such as singing and/or playing instruments should be avoided". Which all sounds a bit depressing...

It's not all complete doom and gloom though. From further on in the guidance: "The government is continuing to work on scientific and medical advice around how such activities can best be managed safely and further guidance will follow on this". So I think that there is a light at the end of the tunnel; and with continued patience the time will come when we are able to sing together again. I look forward to that day, but only when its safe! I hope that the newsletters are helping to keep us together as the choir family.

That's all for this week folks. Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham

