

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 25TH JUNE 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!


I hope these newsletters are continuing to find you well... and I hope that they are helping to keep a link with each other. I'm still waiting for a complaint about them, which continues to be unnerving... maybe that's because nobody's reading them!

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 are more than welcome.

Online singing opportunities

 Ben England continues to upload (almost) daily singing videos on the "Home choir" YouTube channel. As I keep mentioning, 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, which features a couple of short pieces by Bach, alongside a Renaissance motet by William Byrd called "Non nobis Domine". This is in three parts, the altos can choose to be honorary sopranos, or honorary tenors (good practice

to read the music at a different octave), or have a go at both parts!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0skwsfK5Js>

Week one of the "self-isolation" choir summer school and the "stay at home" choir projects with Karl Jenkins are up and running at the moment. You can keep an eye on their progress at their websites:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com>

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

On Wednesday 1st July, The Bach Choir are running a free online choral workshop based on the choral sections of Mozart's Requiem. The workshop is running from 6:30pm - 8pm and is being run (I think)



as a Zoom meeting. These choral workshops have been running about once a fortnight for a while now, but this is the first time that I've managed to advertise them in the newsletter!

I recommend joining in with this if you are able (and if you want to use Zoom), as David Hill, who is the Musical Director of the Bach Choir, is conducting the WCMF performance of Handel's Messiah next May. All the details are available here:

<https://www.thebachchoir.org.uk/news/the-bach-choir-choral-workshop-with-david-hill/>



LUMINOSA On Saturday 4th July, the Luminosa Voices are hosting a virtual Come and Sing Faure Requiem. This is an all-day event, with sessions running from 10am - noon and 2pm - 4pm, with a virtual pub lunch in the middle (no I don't know how they're going to do that either).

The day is being led by three professional singers, so there will be a lot of helpful information on vocal technique alongside learning the Faure. Further details here:

<https://luminosamusic.com/>

Last week, I pointed 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 recommended the "composing by numbers" video last time, so this week I'll recommend the video about chromatic scales. Do try and join in, rather than just listening to Paul doing the exercises. They're very clever and inspiring... and the humour is great too!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgs9UjGsvCs>

Music online

As well as Sunday 21st June being the summer solstice, apparently it was also "Make Music Day". As you would expect, quite a few singing videos made an appearance as a result!

Members of the London Philharmonic Choir got together (virtually of course) to sing Awen by the composer Paul Fincham:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OolQuUc3pM

This piece was composed to a commission by the British Museum and premiered in the Great Court of the Museum by the London Philharmonic Choir on the summer solstice, 2018. Here is a short documentary film about the piece:

<https://www.paulfincham.com/video>

Voces8 got in on the act too and put together a virtual performance of a new arrangement of Le Plat Plays by Jacques Brel. If you'd like to sing along and be an honorary member of Voces8 for three and a half minutes, the score is provided at no extra cost:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6EKZI8xjaU>

Voces8 have uploaded quite a few new videos since I last gave them a plug in the newsletter. All of them are worth watching and listening, but I'll restrict myself to one sacred and one secular.

This performance of "Drop, drop slow tears" by Orlando Gibbons is a masterclass in how to blend, breathe and sing together...

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

... and as Dame Vera Lynn passed away last week:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW0EuC_nzJO

Special guest!



This week, I posed my infamous six questions to Peter Gambie. Since 1992, Peter has been the Musical Director of The Renaissance Choir. From 2009 to 2017, Peter was the Musical Director of Southampton Choral Society and during his tenure, the choir performed with Dame Emma Kirkby and scooped a £10,000 Community Arts Award from the BBC which resulted in the commission of a major work about slavery.

Where did you study music?

"I studied for a Music Diploma at Dartington College of Arts, followed by a PGCE in Exmouth and an MA from Reading University".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"My school music teacher occupied the role of Kapellmeister in my early life; he was also choir master and my organ teacher and started me on violin lessons. He also started me conducting the church choir when I was 14 and singing countertenor solos with his community choir and orchestra when I was about 16. Ustad Imrat Khan (second only to Ravi Shankar as a sitarist) was my sitar teacher at Dartington, he had a profound effect on me as a person, as well as training my ear to hear 22 divisions in an octave".

As a conductor, in a performance your back is to the audience. Are you still able to feel a sense of communication with your listeners?

"I'm usually too busy to feel communication *in the moment*, but I try to engage with the audience by commentary before the music begins with the odd lame joke. Hopefully, my singers are trained well enough to do the communication".

How do you persuade your singers to engage with the audience?

"By knowing the language of the composer, so we might work on long phrases for Romantic works and suspensions for Renaissance music. I also expect the music to be very well learnt so that singers can engage in eye contact with the audience. I also expect eye contact between choral neighbours when the music demands it. A smile between two singers goes a long way for a listener".

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"Sleepy Lagoon; South Pacific; Caribbean Dream; - oh! Sorry. I see what you mean..."

Mozart Requiem, Tallis Spem in Alium, Haydn Heiligmesse, Poulenc Gloria, Stimmung (Stockhausen), Bach B minor mass and St Matthew Passion, Lassus motets".

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

"The personality of the MD and the ethos of the Society are important. Grumpy, aloof MDs are hopeless; choirs which are factional or unwelcoming don't work. The repertoire needs to keep the singers moving up a ladder of improving skill level and assisted learning (MIDI files or recordings of the rep) help those who struggle. Inclusiveness is key too. No-one should be disbarred on any grounds (except profound amusia)".

Many thanks to Peter for answering my questions.

I'll let you look up for yourselves what amusia means (it's not contagious, don't worry)!

Recently, Peter did a longer interview for the "Music in Portsmouth" website, which you can read at their website:

<https://musicinportsmouth.co.uk/noticeboard/profile-peter-gambie-conductor/>

When not in lockdown, The Renaissance Choir are a very busy chamber choir, performing regularly in the Petersfield and Portsmouth areas, as well as touring regularly to Europe. Further details about the choir are here: <https://renaissancechoir.org.uk/>

You might also like to have a look at the short singing videos that are being uploaded almost daily by Susan Yarnall Monks who is a soprano in The Renaissance Choir and a singing teacher in her own right. I particularly liked this video encouraging you to extend the vowels when you're singing and leave the consonants as late as you dare:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaru054ssOs>

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!

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 Wales with an arrangement of the well-known folksong, "The Ash Grove".

The link to the score is here:

<http://music.rawson.me.uk/catalogue/choral/freescores/theashgrove.pdf>

The "synth audio" mp3 recording is with the learning files on the member section of the choir website.

For those of you who are missing my conductors notes, the recordings have been made at crotchet = 108. Watch out for the melody which works its way around the four parts (yes basses, you do get to sing the tune in this one) ... and make sure you're only singing the words for verse one when its verse one and the words for verse two when its verse two. I know that sounds obvious, but from experience of when we've tried similar things before that its easier said than done!

This is the final one to make up our set of folksongs from the British Isles. I hope you've enjoyed learning them.

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

Graham