

Salisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 30TH JULY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope this newsletter continues to find you well.

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

Here is this week's newsletter... comments, feedback, suggestions warmly welcomed!

Music Online

The "Global Armed Man" project is still up and running and you can still join in weekly events with Sir Karl Jenkins, and the Live Sings in July and August.



<https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects/the-armed-man>

The stay at home choir are now advertising their next project titled "Caledonia" which is in collaboration with Voces8:

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

As I've just mentioned Voces8, here's a reminder of their very exciting online festival titled "live from London":

<https://voces8.foundation/livefromlondon>



Choral conductor Jessica Norton continues her summer singing sessions. This week her session focuses on singing higher more comfortably. Next week, the focus is on dealing with text. In a fortnights time, the focus is using your core muscles for vocal support. These are sessions running via Zoom.

<http://jessicanorton.co.uk/>

Facebook tells me that these sessions have been very popular so Jessica has added another four sessions! Feedback from a WCFC member to me says that "I have attended one of Jessica Norton's singing lessons and intend attending more of them. I find Jessica really excellent and would highly recommend her to others". So if you have 45 minutes to spare on either a Tuesday or Thursday, get involved!

Opera North are continuing with their series of workshops, cleverly called **OPERA NORTH** "From couch to chorus". You can still sign up and participate and there is a wealth of resources on the website:

<https://www.operanorth.co.uk/whats-on/from-couch-to-chorus/>



Eamonn Dougan (Associate Conductor of the Sixteen) gives us his top tips to create space inside your mouth to improve resonance and quality of sound:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moOE0fPfIiw&t=138s>

Ben England was busy last week with his week two of the self-isolation choir's summer school. Week three begins in the middle of August with Vivaldi Gloria as the featured work:



<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/vivaldi-gloria>

Advance warning for September, following on from the success of the self-isolation Messiah, Ben is running an "Elijah at Home" project:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/elijah>

The Home choir YouTube channel was a bit quieter last week for obvious reasons! But Ben still had time to present a live "Sacred Sing Sunday":

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

Well done and thank you to Ben for his excellent work during lockdown, which I know has been appreciated by many. I have no idea when he has time to see his family... and I hope he manages to have a holiday sometime soon!

Finally, composer Eric Whitacre has been busy during lockdown with virtual choir videos. Here is the latest one, titled "Sing gently":

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



Next Monday, Eric Whitacre is running the first of a series of three workshops on movements of his work "The Scared Veil". The workshops will be available on his YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/EricWhitacresVrtlChr>

BBC Proms

I mentioned last week about the prom last Sunday night which featured Monteverdi's Vespers performed by the French Baroque ensemble Pygmalion. If you'd like to listen again, it's available here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000172d>



A quick round up of upcoming proms performances featuring choral music:

Sunday 2nd August: Belshazzar's Feast

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08k9gxy>

Sunday 9th August: Mozart Requiem

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08k9p0m>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/proms>

Featured Composers!

Two for the price of one this week! I've decided to go right back in time to the year 1570 (450 years ago) when the English composers **John Bennet** and **John Farmer** were born, who were both composers of the English Madrigal School, which is the name given to the outpouring of madrigals in England.



John Bennet was born into a wealthy family and began his musical career as a chorister. By his early twenties, he had produced a volume of madrigals. Around the same time, Bennet was composing psalm settings and prayers. Being born into a prosperous family, it is highly probable that John Bennet was strongly connected within high places of English society. This is reflected in many of his madrigals being composed for festive occasions held at court or in private residencies of wealthy patrons in London. Bennet wrote a madrigal for Queen Elizabeth I called "Eliza, her Name Gives Honour": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIIzIeei8U4>

Amongst John Bennet's better known madrigals are "All creatures now are merry minded"... <https://www.facebook.com/esprimoconsort/videos/839539426556749/> ... and "Weep, O mine eyes" which was composed as an homage to his fellow composer John Dowland who died in 1626 (I'm sorry if these Johns are confusing you): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJOjxu93Px0>

We know very little about the life of John Farmer. However, we do know that in 1595, Farmer was appointed organist at Christ Church Cathedral Dublin and was also organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin at the same time! In 1599, John Farmer moved to London and published his only collection of madrigals. Farmer dedicated the collection to Edward de Vere, who was the 17th Earl of Oxford and a sought-after patron of the arts. The best known madrigal by John Farmer is "Fair Phyllis" which has probably remained popular due to the clever use of "word painting", which is the technical musical term to describe the way the composer has written the music to reflect the literal meaning of the text. Here are the King's Singers searching for Phyllis: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cE_7aqtgquo



Special guest!



This week, my interview questions were sent to Essex to be answered by **Ian Ray** who is conductor of Colchester Choral Society. Colchester Choral Society was founded after world war two by their first conductor, Dr WH Swinburne OBE who in 1975 founded the Association of Teachers for Singing. Since 1976, Ian Ray has been the conductor. I'm sure that there aren't many choirs that have had only two conductors during such a long period of time!

Where did you study music?

"I studied music firstly with Douglas Mews (organ), Allan Granville (piano) and Norman Tattersall (voice) at the North East Essex Technical College and School of Art (subsequently renamed Colchester Institute), followed by studying piano and organ at the Royal Academy of Music with Virginia Mclean and Douglas Hawkridge respectively".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"The pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy, organist Simon Preston, the soprano Barbara Bonney (soprano), and conductor Phillippe Herreweghe".

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?

"Yes, I do feel a sense of communication, so long as I direct allowing the music to speak".

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

"I encourage the choir to look at the audience, to get their heads out of the copies and sing expressively with real emotional involvement in the text as well as just singing the notes".

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"A hard question as there are so many precious works! Jephthe (Carissimi), B minor Mass (Bach), Jephthah (Handel), Missa Solemnis (Beethoven), Requiem (Verdi), Hymn to St Cecilia (Britten), Images of Peace (Alan Bullard)".

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

"Work hard to achieve the highest possible performance standards in a variety of styles and maintain a good sense of community within the choir".

Many thanks to Ian for his time in answering my questions. It was a great privilege and pleasure to have Ian as one of my lecturers at University. I'm pleased that Ian mentions Jephthe by Carissimi in his favourite choral works! Ian also mentions "Images of Peace" by Alan Bullard, who was another of my University lecturers. This piece is a choral suite in five movements for unaccompanied choir and was commissioned by Colchester Choral. You can hear them singing the work here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_r6ibk8pPO

This is probably the last interview for the newsletters. My grateful thanks to everyone who has contributed to them, it's been great to hear from other conductors' viewpoints!

When's the next rehearsal?

Well, the quick answer to that is, not yet!

The current Government guidance for amateur music groups such as ours is: *"Non-professionals should currently not engage in singing or playing wind and brass instruments with other people given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission and whilst research is ongoing. DCMS has commissioned further scientific studies to be carried out to develop robust scientific data for these activities. Existing and emerging evidence will be analysed to assist the development of policy and guidelines"*.

The paragraph above this in the guidance says: *"Non-professionals (meaning those participating in performing arts other than for work purposes), or groups which include non-professionals, may refer to this guidance for their activities, but must at all times do so in line with government legislation and guidance on meeting people outside your household"*.

The guidance on meeting people says: *"only socialise indoors with members of up to 2 households" and "socialise outdoors in a group of up to 6 people from different households or up to 2 households (anyone in your support bubble counts as one household)"*.

So although slightly frustrating, we continue to be patient and I hope the newsletters are helping to keep us together as a choir. Personally, I'd rather be patient than restart early (too soon) and then have to suspend rehearsals / concerts due to a second spike or a local lockdown.

And finally!

You may remember a fortnight ago that I gave you a link to a rehearsal of part of Mozart's Requiem. Here is the video of the next rehearsal, where the singers spend quite some time on two and a quarter bars of the Mozart. I think the conductor is trying to make a point, but you need to watch the video carefully to know what it is...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b16_7vIsaQs

I am now taking two weeks off from writing the newsletter, so the next edition will be sent to you on **Thursday 20th August**. Until then, stay safe and keep singing!

Graham