

# Sarisbury Choral Society

# NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope this newsletter finds you well. Here is this week's edition... comments, feedback, suggestions welcome!

## What's On Listings

Choral conductor Jessica Norton is leading the last of summer singing sessions this week. The focus is on singing fast passages. These are sessions running via Zoom.



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



I haven't given Roger Hale a plug for a while, so here is his latest vocal warm up video, for whatever style you happen to be singing in:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SATr\\_jGLpQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SATr_jGLpQ)

The self-isolation choir are gearing themselves up for their "Elijah at Home" project that begins next Monday:



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

As I've said before, there's a wealth of singing opportunities going on over at the Self-Isolation choir website. Well done and thank you to Mark Strachan and his ever expanding team for their excellent work during lockdown, which I know continues to be appreciated by many.

I will draw your attention again to your (possibly a once in a lifetime) chance to participate in a performance of Mahler's wonderful Resurrection Symphony:

<https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/symphony-no-2-mahler>



The stay at home choir projects are continuing to be popular, the Caledonia project in collaboration with Voces8 which I've mentioned previously is now full. The Global Armed Man project reaches its conclusion on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September and the completed project is being aired via Classic FM. A "teaser" video is here:

<https://www.facebook.com/stayathomechoir/videos/766902144109257>

As I've just mentioned Voces8, here's a reminder of their very exciting online festival titled "Live from London" featuring some of the very best vocal ensembles. This Saturday (5<sup>th</sup>), is the turn of Voces8 themselves with an innovative programme titled "Choral Dances":



<https://voces8.foundation/voces8-5-9-20>



On the subject of online music festivals, St. Martin-in-the-fields in London are also doing the same. The virtual concert on Thursday (3<sup>rd</sup>) is "The Glories of Venice" and sounds a superb programme:

<https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/whatson-event/the-glories-of-venice/>

If you still fancy a challenge, the Vasari Singers are hosting a come and sing online event on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September. The programme is a work in eight parts and one in sixteen parts!



<http://www.vasarisingers.org/event/come-and-singonline/>



New for this week, is another chance to sing choruses from Messiah.

Appropriately, the hosts are the London Handel Orchestra and the workshops will be led by their Musical Director and leading conductor of baroque music, Laurence Cummings:

<https://www.london-handel-festival.com/show/virtual-come-and-sing-messiah/?event=18001>

Finally, for this week, on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September, David Hill (conductor of The Bach Choir) will be leading another choral workshop. The chosen work this time is Brahms Requiem. Full details here:



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

If you are a fan of Brahms Requiem, stick around, because it will be mentioned a lot in the next few newsletters!

## Mostly Mendelssohn (part one)



Following on from last week's exploration of some of the many motets composed by Bruckner, I'm skipping back fifteen years from the birth of Bruckner to the birth of Jacob Ludwig **Felix Mendelssohn**, who was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1809. By the age of seven, Mendelssohn was making rapid progress on the piano and had his first formal composition lessons at the age of eight. His compositions were first published aged 12 (see picture opposite of a young Mendelssohn)!

In 1823, Mendelssohn's grandmother (who was a pupil of Carl Friedmann Bach) gave him one of only two copies of Johann Sebastian Bach's St. Matthew Passion, which had not been performed since the death of JS Bach in 1750. In 1827, a small group of singers met at the Mendelssohn home on several occasions to sing through some of the movements. One of the singers was so taken by the music that he persuaded Mendelssohn that it needed a full public performance. And so, on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1829, the St. Matthew Passion was performed one again with resounding success. The performance was conducted by Mendelssohn and the King was present. Apparently hundreds of people had to be turned away, which meant that a repeat performance was necessary. The repeat performance was given ten days later on what would have been JS Bach's birthday. The picture opposite shows a "performance part" from Mendelssohn's revival of the work.



Many of us are familiar with the oratorio Elijah and many of us know the oratorio St. Paul very well, having sung it in the 2017 Festival. So rather than talk about those two works, I thought I would look at two of Mendelssohn's shorter choral works from his quite substantial output of choral music.

Between May 1830 and October 1831, Mendelssohn went on a very demanding tour, visiting Munich, Salzburg, Linz, Vienna, Pressburg, Graz, Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Genoa, Milan and Geneva (I'm exhausted just reading it). Mendelssohn stayed in Rome between November 1830 and April 1831; and it was here that the Viennese singer and Bach enthusiast



Franz Hauser (pictured left) sent a Lutheran hymnal to Mendelssohn. This hymnal inspired Mendelssohn to compose six chorale cantatas, two motets and a setting of the hymn Verleih uns Frieden which was completed in February 1831. Although the text is from Martin Luther, the music is entirely Mendelssohn's own. Listen out for the reference to the second "big tune" from the Hebrides Overture, which Mendelssohn had composed in 1830. The words for this hymn setting act as a prayer for peace:

Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich, Herr Gott, zu unsern Zeiten. Es ist doch ja kein andrer nicht, der für uns könnte streiten, denn du, unser Gott, alleine.

In these our days so perilous, Lord, peace in mercy send us; No God but thee can fight for us, No God but thee defend us; Thou our only God and Saviour.

I rather like this version with piano accompaniment (the original is for chamber orchestra), sung by the Como Conservatory Chamber Choir: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICdXBWHpape>

In 1840, Friedrich Wilhelm IV (pictured right) became King of Prussia and invited Mendelssohn to be the director of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. One of Mendelssohn's duties was to conduct a newly formed cathedral choir and during his short tenure in the job (as a result of disputes and frustrations) he wrote a number of sacred pieces for the choir, including three psalm settings for unaccompanied choir, composed in January 1844. The setting of Psalm 43 is regarded as the finest of the three. Listen out for the changes in tonality to fit the changing moods of the text; and the final chorale like section, expressing hope in the Lord.



Richte mich, Gott, und führe meine Sache wider das unheilige Volk und errette mich von den falschen und bösen Leuten. Denn du bist der Gott meiner Stärke; Warum verstößest du mich? Warum lässest du mich so traurig geh'n, wenn mein Feind mich drängt? Sende dein Licht und deine Wahrheit, daß sie mich leiten zu deinem heiligen Berge, und zu deiner Wohnung. Daß ich hineingehe zum Altar Gottes, zu dem Gott, der meine Freude und Wonne ist, und dir, Gott, auf der Harfe danke, mein Gott. Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele, und bist so unruhig in mir? Harre auf Gott! Denn ich werde ihm noch danken,

Do me justice, O God, and fight my fight against a faithless people; from the deceitful and impious man rescue me. For you, O God, are my strength. Why do you keep me so far away? Why must I go about in mourning, With the enemy oppressing me? Send forth your light and your fidelity; they shall lead me on and bring me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling place. Then will I go in to the altar of God, the God of my gladness and joy; Then will I give you thanks upon the harp, my God Why are you so downcast, O my soul? And why do you sigh within me? Hope in God! Then I will again give him thanks, In the presence of my Saviour and my God.

Here are the Windsbacher Knabenchor in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuHT7jtPdBg>

In a future newsletter, we'll pick up the Mendelssohn story from where we leave it today and look at another of his shorter choral works from the 1840s.

## And finally!

To see if you're still awake (and to see if you've read the above article), here's a little Mendelssohn quiz for you to try! <https://www.funtrivia.com/playquiz/quiz22385019a16b8.html>

That's all for this week folks. I hope you're still enjoying the newsletters.

Stay safe and keep singing!

*Graham*