

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 22ND OCTOBER 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope this newsletter finds you well.

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

What's On Listings

The stay at home choir are inviting you to register for their festive winter project, plus a chance to sing some Beethoven in his anniversary year with conductor Marin Alsop... <https://new.stayathomechoir.com/projects/christmas>



... and there are loads of singing opportunities still available on the self-isolation choir website: <https://www.theseisolationchoir.com/>

Ben England's excellent videos on the Homechoir YouTube channel are well worth joining in with. My recommendations this week are two videos, both using "O nata lux de lumine" by the Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis. Here is a video where you learn the dots... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjPW82Gtv5Q> ...and one on music theory, in particular reading rhythms: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z0w536YX_A



The Bach Choir are holding another of their workshops with their Musical Director David Hill, with a free online choral workshop on the choruses from Messiah. We very much hope that David Hill will be able to conduct the WCMF performance of Messiah in May 2022 (postponed from May 2021), so it would be very useful to hear David Hill's tips. Save the date now: Wednesday 28th May, 6:30pm - 8pm!

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

The Vasari Singers are hosting another come and sing event on Saturday 21st November. The repertoire is "Spem in Alium" by Thomas Tallis (on his second mention this week). For those of you who are unfamiliar with this work, this is written in 40 parts (SSATB x8). If you haven't sung it before, have a go! It's really not as hard as it sounds...



<http://www.vasarisingers.org/event/come-and-sing-spem-in-alium-online-on-zoom-saturday-november-21st-2020-2-30pm-utc/>

Finally, for this week, I know that members have participated in events organised by The Really Big Chorus in the past. Here is their latest update:

<https://www.trbc.co.uk/coronavirus-update/>

Singing during lockdown

Here is a reminder of the four warm up videos for you to try, courtesy of the Royal School of Church Music. Each video takes about 10 - 15 minutes of your busy lives:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nq8gyLDN4qI>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLBIM4srnDk>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBLFrsoErPO>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRWGIvspY4Q>

These exercises are designed to get your minds bodies and voices in shape for doing some singing with others or just to keep your voice ticking over. Don't forget that our voices are musical instruments which need regular practice! So please don't just watch it and think "oh that's a good idea", get involved!!

In the future, I hope to add some resources of mine on the choir website, but at the moment, I need to be careful not to be doing too much work as I am being paid through a Government grant for my self-employed work until Christmas, which I'm only entitled to if I am unable to work!! I hope that makes some sense!

Of course, I don't need to be doing all the work... so have a Google search and see what useful vocal warm ups you can find yourselves... and share it with all of us via the newsletter!

Brahms Requiem (part seven)



In the last exciting episode, we had a look at some secular choral music that Brahms composed for choir and orchestra. As promised, this week we have a look at some of the choral and vocal works dating from the end of Brahms' life.

I make no apologies for referring back to text! As we've previously discovered, all of the texts used in the Requiem are taken from the Bible and it actually offers the most comprehensive selection of such texts in a single work by Brahms. The Requiem also stands at an important point in Brahms' spiritual life. The sacred works that were composed prior to the Requiem were more conventional than the later works. From the 1870s, a more recurrent pessimism creeps in.

Firstly, here are **Two Motets Op. 74** composed by Brahms in 1877. Both motets are based on Biblical texts and chorales but weren't written for a specific liturgical occasion. The two motets were published in 1878 and dedicated to the German historian and musicologist Julius Augustus Philip Spitta (1841 - 1894; pictured right) who wrote a biography of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1873.



Brahms composed the first motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen* in memory of Hermann Göß, who died prematurely from a long illness. Brahms used material from a setting of a Latin mass which he had begun in 1856. Listen out for a canon, a chorale, a fugue... and the repeated calls of *Warum* (why) which reappear throughout the work and help to structure the music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D47_5t00SqY The second motet *O Heiland, reiß die*



Himmel auf is a setting of an Advent text by the German Jesuit priest, professor and poet Friedrich von Spee (1591 - 1635; pictured left). Listen out again for chorale melodies and canons in abundance! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prhNnot2Uc8>

Next, to the **Three Motets Op.110** composed by Brahms in 1889, which were premiered in Cologne in 1890. These motets represent Brahms's final works in this form. Listen out for the influence of Schütz (mentioned in a previous newsletter) in *Ich aber bin elend*, the chorale style writing in *Ach, arme Welt* and the juxtaposition of the two in *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWIX_PB6_80

Finally, I hope you won't mind slightly diverting to something vocal rather than choral. The **Vier ernste Gesänge (Four Serious Songs), Op. 121**, is a cycle of four songs for bass voice and piano. Although written for a bass in mind, the songs have been recorded by both female and male singers. Brahms composed the four songs in Vienna in 1896 (a year before his death) and dedicated them to the German symbolist painter, sculptor, printmaker and writer, Max Klinger (1857 - 1920; pictured right). Like in the Requiem, the texts are compiled from the Luther Bible. The first three songs deal with death and the transience of life, while the fourth has an outlook of faith, hope and love. It is interesting to note again Brahms's choice of text; and it appears that he was more concerned about human love as opposed to contemplating the unknown. The songs were premiered in Vienna on 9th November 1896 in the presence of Brahms. The premiere was given by the Dutch baritone Anton Sistermans (1865 - 1926; pictured left) and the Dutch pianist Coenraad Valentijn Bos (1875 - 1955; pictured right). After the performance, Brahms went backstage and thanked them for their performance, which he said "perfectly realised [his] intentions".



A second performance followed a fortnight later, with Coenraad Bos accompanying the singer Raimund von zur-Mühlen (1854 - 1931; pictured left). Legend has it that zur-Mühlen could not achieve the final diminuendo as marked in the score, so he instructed Bos to continue the crescendo after the vocal line finished and end the work *fff* rather than the *p* that Brahms had indicated. Later, zur-Mühlen spoke to Brahms and said he hoped he didn't mind this diversion from the score. Brahms replied "You sang them magnificently. I did not notice anything wrong". Here are the four songs, recorded live on 9th August 1958



in Salzburg, with the German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (1925 - 2012; pictured right) and the English pianist Gerald Moore (1899 - 1987; pictured left): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exlYpf_E5EM



Stay tuned for the final part (promise) of Brahms Requiem ramblings next week!

Talking of Brahms...

As the Winchester City Festival Choirs forthcoming performance of the Brahms Requiem is cancelled, why not take the opportunity to join with them and rehearse it anyway?

Here is the last in a series of Brahms Requiem rehearsals which were put together earlier in lockdown by Simon Halsey who is chorus master of the London Symphony Chorus and the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus, amongst other work with choirs here and in Europe. In this video, Simon Halsey takes you through the seventh movement of the Brahms (there's a good warm up in this video too).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuqjmkkK6Zw>

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

Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham