



Hemiola

S t G e o r g e ' s S i n g e r s

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

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ST GEORGE'S TO PREMIERE *FOOTPRINTS*

A new choral work by Will Todd will be premiered at St George's Singers' next concert on 15th December at the RNCM, alongside Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. Entitled *Footprints*, the work was commissioned by the Choir in memory of Beryl Pearn, whose bequest, together with donations from a number of choir members (the 'Footprinters') has given us the opportunity to work again with one of the UK's most exciting modern composers.

Will Todd, who comes from County Durham, started composing at an early age. His output includes opera, musicals and orchestral works, but he is best known for his choral music. His work encompasses a wide range of musical styles and genres, from jazz to contemporary liturgical, and his flagship work, the

2003 jazz mass setting *Mass in Blue*, has been performed numerous times in the UK, USA and Europe—including a critically acclaimed performance by St George's Singers in 2009. Most recently his choral anthem *The Call of Wisdom* was sung in St Paul's Cathedral at the Diamond Jubilee Thanksgiving Service. An accomplished jazz musician, Will also plays piano with his own ensemble, featuring his wife, jazz singer Bethany Halliday, and recent appearances have included a performance at President Obama's inauguration ceremony in 2013.

Will said about his new work: 'When St George's Singers performed my jazz oratorio *Mass in Blue* with soloist Tina May some years ago they gave a thrilling performance under Neil Taylor, and I had a thoroughly great time sitting the audience and hearing the choir's joyous singing. I was delighted therefore when, a little while later, the choir expressed an interest in my writing a new work especially for them. *Footprints* is the result of that commission – another work, like *Mass in Blue* which blends

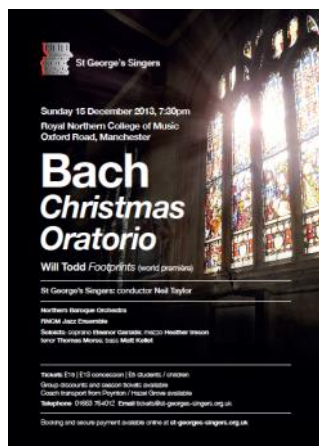
Will Todd at St George's Singers' performance of *Mass in Blue*, 2009



Composer Will Todd

choral music with jazz trio. This three movement choral suite takes its title and inspiration from the Mary Stevenson poem *Footprints in the Sand*. My own original lyrics for the three songs explore the ideas of love and friendship amidst the vastness, power and timelessness of the universe. It is a smaller scale work than *Mass in Blue* but I have loved working on it, as always attempting to create intense moments and beautiful singing lines of music. I'm really looking forward to hearing it come to life as I once more sit in the audience with my fingers crossed. Many thanks St George's Singers, and the best of luck.'





As well as Bach's wonderful *Christmas Oratorio*, we will also be giving the first performance of Will Todd's *Footprints*. A work for choir and jazz trio, for which we'll be joined by The Encompass Trio, the theme and tone of this modern work reflects and complements the sentiments of Bach's masterpiece.

Sunday 15th December, 2013, 7.30pm
Royal Northern College of Music
Tickets: £15, £13 conc, £5 students
Tel: 01663 764012

Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk
Online: www.st-georges-singers.org.uk
Coach transport from Poynton/Hazel Grove

AN ORATORIO IS NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

Bach's joyous *Christmas Oratorio*, to be performed by St George's Singers on 15th December at RNCM, was composed in Leipzig for the Christmas season of 1734–35.

Written in six parts, or cantatas, each part was intended for performance on one of the major feast days of the Christmas period. The first performance was given in two churches:

- 25 December 1734: Part I – early in the morning at St Nicholas; in the afternoon at St Thomas
- 26 December 1734: Part II – morning at St Thomas; afternoon at St Nicholas
- 27 December 1734: Part III – morning at St Nicholas
- 1 January 1735: Part IV – morning at St Thomas; afternoon at St Nicholas
- 2 January 1735: Part V – morning at St Nicholas
- 6 January 1735: Part VI – morning at St Thomas; afternoon at St Nicholas

Bach's usual practice when writing church cantatas was to base the content upon the Gospel reading for that day. Had he followed the Lutheran calendar strictly, however, the Holy Family would have fled into Egypt before the Three Wise Men arrived. So in the interests of coherent narrative, Bach reworked the timetable, and sensibly left the flight into Egypt until after the Magi had delivered their gifts.

Although a work of brilliance, the *Christmas Oratorio* is remarkable for the amount of recycled material Bach used in its creation. By the time he came to compose it in 1734 the flood of creativity that had marked his early years in Leipzig had slowed. The pressure of work and the limited opportunities for repeat performances led

Bach to borrow extensively from earlier compositions, both sacred and secular, to generate new works. This practice, known as 'parody', was standard for the period. Bach frequently adapted previous compositions to suit a new purpose, not only saving time and effort, but also allowing him to salvage music that would otherwise have gone to waste after its first (and only) performance.

Whilst there is much in the Oratorio that was newly composed for the occasion, two works in particular provided Bach with great tunes that could easily (for him) be adapted from secular into sacred use.

Tönet, ihr Pauken! Erschallet, Trompeten! (Resound, ye drums! Ring out, ye trumpets!) was originally composed by Bach to honour the birthday of Maria Josepha, Queen of Poland and Electress of Saxony. With new words by the poet Picander and clever but subtle changes in orchestration, Bach transforms this celebration of an earthly ruler's birthday into a joyous song of praise for the birth of the King of Heaven, and it becomes the opening chorus: 'Jauchzet, frohlocket' ('Rejoice, exult, rise, glorify the day, praise what today the Highest has done!')

The second work to be ransacked was the secular cantata *Hercules at the Crossroads*. Composed in 1733 for the 11th birthday of Crown Prince Friedrich Christian of Saxony, it tells the story of how Hercules has to decide between Pleasure (aka Vice), who tries to lure him into a life of luxury, and

Virtue, who describes the moral satisfaction gained by hardship and gallantry. Needless to say, Hercules wisely opts for Virtue (as, it is hoped, the 11-year-old Friedrich also did). Bach ingeniously revised the aria *Schlafe, mein Liebster* from this cantata, transforming it from a siren song by Vice into a beautiful cradle song for the baby Jesus.

Nowadays the *Oratorio* is usually only performed in part and our concert on 15th December features only the first three parts of the Oratorio, covering the birth of Jesus, the annunciation by the Angel to the shepherds, and their adoration of the Holy Child.

We will be joined by the fabulous Northern Baroque orchestra, who played so brilliantly at our 'Gloria' concert in June,



Hercules looking pretty bored as Virtue lectures him on the dangers of giving in to Vice (sung of course by the soprano)

and we're delighted to welcome four young soloists, all recent graduates from RNCM, and who are taking the first steps in their professional careers.

If you know Handel's *Messiah*, but haven't heard the *Christmas Oratorio*, then do come along to the college on 15 December, and find out how Bach celebrated the wonder of Christmas, with beautiful melody, dancing rhythms and chorales that would fit easily into any Christmas carol concert.



Soloists Eleanor Garside (soprano), Heather Ireson (mezzo), Thomas Morss (tenor) and Matthew Kellett (baritone)

REVEALING THE FACE OF GENIUS

For centuries the image we have of Johann Sebastian has been informed by the 1746 portrait of him by Haussmann—the only painting of Bach known to have been done from life. But how realistic a portrait was it? Thanks to forensic artists from the University of Dundee we can now gaze on—and touch—the face of genius.

The Centre for Forensic and Medical Art at Dundee was commissioned by the Bachhaus Museum in Germany to recreate the face of Bach. The scientists were provided with a bronze cast of Bach's skull, made in the 1800s. This was scanned into their computer system, and a 3D computer portrait created, built up muscle by muscle and layer by layer. The next step was to make a rubber mould of the bronze skull casting, from which they cast a new replica of the composer's skull. A sculptor then formed a layer of clay 'flesh'



over the replica skull, using the 3D computer portrait as a guide.

Finally, using the authentic portrait of Bach from the



Bachhaus Museum to help with colour and texture, as well as written contemporary documents that described Bach's eye problems which had caused swollen eyelids. The team created a resin bust of the composer with eyes, painted eyebrows and lips, a wig, and other realistic touches.

The result is the most complete face that can be built from the available reliable information—and as far as can be ascertained, this is how Bach would have looked.

The newly-created face of Bach is on display at the Bachhaus museum in the eastern German town of Eisenach, Bach's birth-place.

You can see a video of the project at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzVUIscYTCY, Or visit the Bachhaus Eisenach Museum website www.bachhaus.de.



The new likeness of JSB. (Thanks to Peter M for loan of the wig.)

Bach—the medical notes

- Bach died on 28 July 1750 from complications arising from an eye operation
- He suffered from 'organists' disease—ossification of the tendon inserts at the pelvis and heels caused by early playing of the organ
- Analysis of Bach's skull showed his temple bones, responsible for acoustical cognition, were extraordinarily well developed

THE SILENCE OF THE WORLD BEFORE BACH

There must have been a world before
the Trio Sonata in D,
a world before the A minor Partita,
but what kind of a world?

A Europe of vast empty spaces, unresounding,
everywhere unawakened instruments
where the Musical Offering,
the Well-tempered Clavier
never passed across the keys.

Isolated churches
where the soprano-line of the Passion
never in helpless love twined round
the gentler movements of the flute,
broad soft landscapes
where nothing breaks the stillness
but old woodcutters' axes,
the healthy barking of strong dogs in winter

and, like a bell, skates biting into fresh ice;
the swallows whirring through summer air,
the shell resounding at the child's ear
and nowhere Bach nowhere Bach
the world in a skater's silence before Bach.

Lars Gustafson



COME AND JOIN OUR HANDS-ON CAROL CONCERT!

Christmas is coming—so we're getting ready to celebrate this year's festivities with our annual Carols & Brass by Candlelight concert.

This year the big day is Saturday 7 December, when once again we invite everyone (and we mean everyone!) to come and join us at St George's Church, Stockport for an evening of music, song and seasonal readings.

Last year we invited the children of Bradshaw Hall Primary School Choir to get involved in the fun, and they proved so popular with audience and St George's Singers alike that we asked them to come back again this year.

This wonderful choir of young voices shows us all what it means to celebrate Christmas in song—with joy, enthusiasm and passion—and amazing professionalism!

Another innovation last year was asking children in the audience to join in the music-making, and we'll be doing the same thing this year. No prior musical experience is necessary—and we'll provide the triangles, drums,

bells and other instruments to bash, blow and shake, as well as a conductor to keep everyone in time!

Another big hit last year was the refreshments. As well as the usual mulled wine and mince pies, members of the Choir made a delicious array of special Christmas biscuits just for the children. This year the Choir's baking skills will once more be put to the test in our very own Great St George's Bake-Off!

Other treats in store will be musical entertainment from VBS Poynton Brass Band, and Christmas readings.

The one thing that makes this such a magical evening however is the atmosphere created in St George's Church when the candles are lit, the lights are extinguished and the choir begins to sing, ushering in the Christmas spirit.

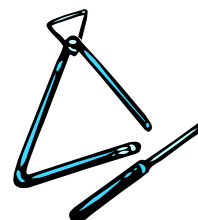
So, tune up your vocal chords, and bring the whole family along to join in the musical festivities.



The children of Bradshaw Hall Primary School Choir



**Saturday 7 December 2013,
7pm (note early start)
St George's Church, Stockport
Tickets: £12, £10 conc,
£2 children
Tel: 01663 764012
Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk
Online: www.st-georges-singers.org.uk**




St George's Singers

Saturday 7 December 2013, 7:00pm
St George's Church, Buxton Road, Stockport

Carols & Brass by Candlelight

A musical celebration for all the family

St George's Singers
Conductor Neil Taylor
Organist Graham Eccles

Vernon Building Society
Poynton Band

Bradshaw Hall
Primary School Choir

Tickets £12 | £10 concession | £2 students / children
Group discounts and season tickets available
Telephone 01663 764012 Email tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk
Booking and secure payment available online at st-georges-singers.org.uk

ALL-ENCOMPASSING TALENT

The new work commissioned by St George's Singers from Will Todd has been written for choir and jazz trio. And we're thrilled that one of Manchester's newest jazz ensembles will be playing with us at the premiere on 15 December.

The Encompass Trio has been playing together in various ensembles for more than two years, performing a combination of jazz, Latin and blues-influenced music.

Their main focus is creating music that both sounds, and

feels, good and they are at home both on the concert platform and when providing background music at high profile events.

The members of the trio are Liam Waddle (piano), Paul Wheatley (bass) and Phil Stevenon (drums).

All students of RNCM, their collective and individual experience to date includes appearances at Manchester Jazz Festival, playing with BBC Philharmonic, concerts with Clare Teal and Harry Harris, appearances

in front of HRH Prince of Wales, and finalists in the Yamaha Jazz Competition.

We look forward to working with this talented group of young musicians at our concert on 15 December – and they assuredly will enjoy taking part in a premiere of a work by one of the UK's leading jazz composers.



THE MYTH OF THE MAGI

One of the readings at this year's carol concert features the journey of the Magi, or Wise Men. The Christmas story of the Magi has been popular amongst Christians for centuries. These mysterious Eastern gift-bearers have been depicted in countless works of art, and inspired poems, stories and songs.

In the earliest depictions from the 4th century, the Magi are shown wearing Persian dress of trousers and caps, advancing in step with their gifts held out before them: typical poses for barbarians submitting to an Emperor and offering tribute.

Crowns are first seen in the 10th century, mostly in the West, where the magi's dress had lost any Oriental flavour. The three are usually shown as the same age until this period, but then the idea of depicting the three ages of man and known parts of the world is introduced: Balthasar is commonly cast as a young African, old Caspar is given Oriental

features or dress, whilst Melchior represents Europe and middle age. From the 14th century onwards, large retinues appear, the gifts are contained in spectacular pieces of goldsmith work, and by the 15th century, the *Adoration of the Magi* has become a bravura piece in which artists display their handling of complex scenes with horses and camels, rich silks, furs, jewels and gold set against the wood, straw and rough clothing of Joseph and the shepherds.

On what is this based? The only reference to the Magi in the Bible is in Matthew's gospel. But there is no mention of three visitors—only three gifts (gold, frankincense and myrrh). There may have been a dozen visitors, as Eastern tradition claims. The 'star of Bethlehem' is just 'the star' and hovers not over the stable, but over the 'house' of Jesus. As the Magi probably travelled from Iran or Iraq, a trip of at least 30 days (at 25km per day), they couldn't have arrived until Jesus was 2–9

months old, so probably saw him at Joseph's house in Nazareth, not Bethlehem at all.



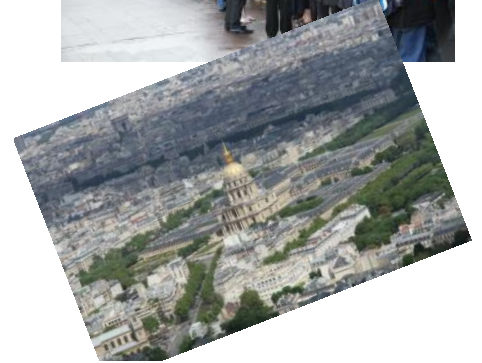
And finally, who were they? Priests? Matthew calls them 'magi' from the Greek/Persian word 'magus' referring to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. Wise men or proto-scientists perhaps? Zoroastrian priests were renowned for their astrological knowledge. Kings? Probably not: their identification as kings in later Christian writings is probably linked to a prophecy in Psalms 72:11, 'May all kings fall down before him'.

Whoever they were, one thing is often forgotten in the story of the Three Wise Men. By refusing to report back to Herod on Jesus's whereabouts, they not only brought precious gifts, they saved the life of a child. And all else follows from there.

PARIS—THE TOUR IN PICTURES



Friday: George gets comfy for the Eurostar trip from St Pancras to Gare du Nord, and on to Hotel Ibis Alesia in Montparnasse, just in time for dinner

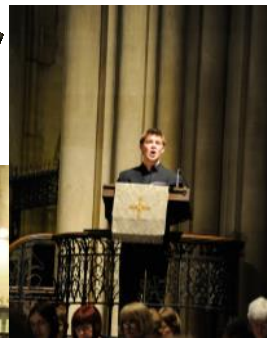
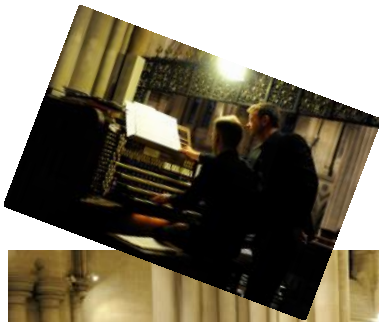


Saturday am: rain doesn't stop British tourists queuing—here to go up the Montparnasse Tower for spectacular views over Paris.

Saturday pm: The rain eases a little, so it's on to the bateau mouche for a ride along the Seine



Sunday am: whilst Neil and Jeff get a private tour of Notre Dame to look adoringly at (but not touch!) the organ, the rest of us enjoy a guided tour of the opera house



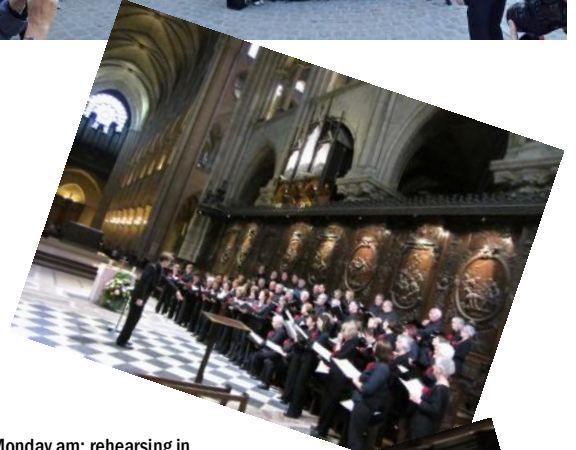
NOTE: Calum in 'the jacket'



Saturday evening: our first concert in the American Cathedral. Jeff had to enlist Neil's help to pull out all the stops for this one!



Sunday evening: tour dinner at the Brasserie Zeyer



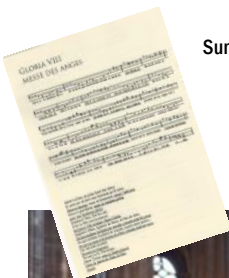
Monday am: rehearsing in Notre Dame before our recital where we sang to a huge and enthusiastic audience



Monday pm: last concert at La Madeleine, presentations to Pam and Geoff, then it's a dash back to Gare du Nord—and Poynton!



Sunday pm: singing mass at St Eustache church.





GLITTERING ‘GEORGIES’ AWARDS

As usual, the tour ended with the presentation of the ‘Georgies’, the awards for outstanding achievement on tour, presented by tour organiser, Pam Craig. Winners this year received exquisite antique gold awards, sourced from famous stores on the Left Bank. The list of winners:

Best piano playing at St Pancras station: Rhiannon Becque, who managed to collect enough money to pay for her lunch.

Most flamboyant use of the French language: Peter Marcus (though there were suspicions his efforts had been fortified by some of the local vin ordinaire).

Best haggler: Lorraine Lighton, for masterful mugging of a 6ft hawker, during which she managed to acquire no fewer than seven solid gold Eiffel Towers for €1.



Most forgetful tourist: Andrew Charlton, who left his music at the American Cathedral – *and didn’t even realise*. (His penance – erasing pencil marks from scores – will continue until Gwyneth deems he has atoned fully for his misdemeanours.)

Most grumpy remark: Geoff (‘there are some very old people on this tour’) Taylor. (Geoff also wins an award for stoicism, coming on tour so soon after knee surgery. A big thank you, Geoff, for everything you did to make the tour a success.)

Most complimentary remark: Neil Taylor for his sincere words of praise – ‘62 very odd people sang beautifully together’. Neil’s award was a priceless gold pen, which projected a brilliant multi-coloured display whilst playing *La Marseillaise*. He was, understandably, lost for words.

Supreme sartorial elegance: Calum Fraser, whose striped jacket, the height of sophistication, had women all over Paris swooning.

Best mascot carer: Helen Rollison, who not only provided George with a comfortable and convenient mode of transport (patent pending), but looked after his every need during this particularly hectic tour.

Cooliest organist in Paris: Jeff Makinson, who once again demonstrated his supreme ability to coax music out of the crankiest of organs.

British bulldog spirit: Mary and David Holt, for sheer grit and determination to join the tour despite everything BA threw at them, and for finally arriving on the Sunday afternoon and not giving up even though they had missed half the tour!

Vernon Duke (1903-1969), born Vladimir Dukelsky in Russia, was an American composer whose most famous song is *April in Paris*. Inspired by Duke’s song, a friend of his decided to spend three weeks in Paris one April. The weather was appalling, and when he returned he told Duke so. ‘Whatever possessed you to go to Paris in April’ asked the composer. ‘The weather in Paris is always horrible in April.’ The astonished friend said, ‘But, I went there because of your song!’ ‘Oh,’ said the composer apologetically. ‘We really meant May, but the rhythm required two syllables.’

TOUR DE FRANCE—UN TRIOMPHE!

May 2013 tour to Paris—an unforgettable experience, and one of the best St George’s tours ever!

The organisation was first-class, as was to be expected from our tour organisers *sans pareil*: Pam Craig and Geoff Taylor. The venues were sublime. The American Cathedral (just down the road from the world-famous Hotel Georges V) was rather short on heat and audience, but big on atmosphere. St Eustache, one of the most famous of all Paris churches, allowed us to sing Mass—a rare and much appreciated treat for us (and we think for the congregation, who had probably never heard Britten before!) The less said about

the organ the better (and Jeff has finally recovered we think!)

On our last day we gave a recital in Notre Dame that was enthusiastically welcomed by the audience—will we ever see Neil hugged by a Japanese gentleman again?—but the best was saved for last. The concert in La Madeleine will long live in our memories. The church where Fauré was organist and gave the premiere of his *Requiem* saw us perform this very work there. Not a few of us were rather bright-eyed at the conclusion of the concert, and the audience loved it. For the rest of the tour—the

trip down the Seine, the guided tour of the Opéra Garnier, the long wait to get up the Montparnasse tour in the rain (a wait that rewarded us with spectacular views across Paris)—we enjoyed them all. Not to mention the traditional tour dinner!

Thanks to Neil for creating a brilliant programme for us to sing and for inspiring some great performances; to Jeff for his super-human efforts on some dreadful instruments; to Calum for his beautiful solos and sensitive conducting—and to everyone who made this tour such a wonderful and happy experience.

And so—to Edinburgh 2014! Over to you Dave!

MUSIC AT HIGHGROVE

BY SUE TAYLOR

Every summer several high profile charities in the south and west benefit from a fund-raising opportunity under the auspices of Prince Charles at Highgrove. This year one of the chosen charities was Maggie's, the cancer family support charity, who are developing centres in Gloucester and Cheltenham. Following a very successful event in Bath a few years ago Maggie's were delighted to be offered an evening at Highgrove and hoped to raise a significant amount of money. A soiree at Highgrove including canapés and champagne with tickets at £120 would surely raise thousands of pounds.

Plans went ahead and a prominent local chamber choir was booked. A medley of music reflecting the midsummer theme (and Prince Charles' favourite music from Bruckner to the *Teddy Bears Picnic!*) was programmed, Giles Brandreth agreed to compete the evening and catering organised.

What has this to do with SGS? Well, last year the same chamber choir spent a weekend in Liverpool as guests of Ian Tracey and the Cathedral, singing the services and performing

a lunchtime concert. Unfortunately three sopranos dropped out at the last moment and SGS provided two augmenters which saved the day!! Four weeks before the Highgrove concert, the same soprano gremlin struck, and the chamber choir was short of a sop. The director remembered Liverpool and asked if one soprano could augment on two rehearsals and the dress rehearsal. (A trip to Highgrove, canapés and champagne? What's not to like?) So I did and joined my sister who is an alto.

On the day, in glorious sunshine, the security passes were allocated, mobile phones and cameras confiscated and the run through began at 5.30pm. Iced water in crested jugs appeared in the Orangery where we were rehearsing, brought in on silver trays, and we hurried through the items so as to have time for the canapés. None appeared, even though we could see the audience wining and dining on the lawns. The first half of the concert went wonderfully even though the royal couple were not present. We were told we were video recorded to the royal apartments, and we returned to the

Orangery for the break. No canapés or champagne appeared and the choir began searching through music bags for anything to eat. Perhaps after the second half? The rest of the programme went without a hitch, the audience (full of champagne) clapped wildly and we encored with *The Ash Grove* – verse 2 in pidgin Welsh as only two singers could do the words!!

Effusive thanks from the organisers were appreciated by the choir and we returned to the Orangery for the expected canapés and champagne. No: the iced water jugs were empty, the paper cups had been cleared and the place was deserted. Out of £120 per ticket Highgrove takes 60 per cent, so perhaps they couldn't afford it!

Still, it was a great treat to sing with a chamber choir in such a prestigious venue and for such a good cause.

At least we didn't have to pay to get in.



MAGGIE'S VISION

"Maggie's unique model of psychosocial support transforms the way that people live with cancer. We want everyone in the UK who is affected by cancer to have access to our high quality, evidence based psychological, emotional and informational support."

"We are working to create a network of cancer caring centres across the UK to deliver our community based cancer support programme."

HRH The Duchess of Cornwall is the President of Maggie's. There are twelve centres now open around the UK, with a number of others planned or under construction. Sir Norman Foster is designing the new Maggie's Centre in Manchester.

www.maggiescentres.org

The first Maggie's Centre in Edinburgh



SLOW SINGERS HAVE A WHALE OF A TIME

SING and attract females, or keep quiet and eat? It's a tricky dilemma for a male, but one that humpback whales must wrestle with as they migrate to their summer feeding grounds.

Males that sing swim more slowly than non-singers, resulting in less time in the feeding grounds to fatten up for the next winter. On the other hand, singers may attract more mates.

Australian researchers tracked a population of humpback whales during the annual migration

from low-latitude breeding areas to Antarctic feeding grounds. Using hydrophones to capture the whales' song, the team calculated the swimming speed and singing status of each whale. While non-singing whales averaged 4 km/h, singers (which are always male) moseyed along at 2.5 km/h.

A few singers were clocked at around 15 km/h, showing that it's not impossible to sing and swim fast. So why slow down? Well, slowing down lets the

singer be heard by a procession of passing females, effectively giving them a larger audience – and squeezing a bit more breeding into the season. (But for heaven's sake, don't tell the basses!)

From New Scientist magazine



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Arrivals ...

Welcome to St George's Singers to alto Philippa Greaves. We hope you have a great time with us over the coming years.

... and departures

We're sorry that Don Sanders, who sang with the Choir for 16 years, has had to resign for health reasons. Good luck Don, and we do hope to see you at a future concert—and many thanks for donating a number of books of choral music for us to sell or hire out in aid of choir funds. And a much valued tenor, David Crossfield has left as he is moving away from the area soon to settle near Ashbourne. Good luck in the future.

Get well wishes

A big 'get well' from the Choir to Eric Adshead. Eric was a

member of the choir for many years, along with his wife Margaret. After a stay in hospital, Eric is now home and we wish him all the very best.

Our new Vice President

We're delighted to announce that Marcus Farnsworth has agreed to become one of our Vice Presidents. Marcus was our Assistant MD for a number of years whilst he was based in Manchester, and sang with and conducted us on many memorable occasions. Since then he's gone on to become one of the rising stars of the opera and concert world, but still has time to come back and lend support to his favourite choral society!

Fund-raising

At the Choir's AGM in October, we were all bowled over by the Treasurer's glossy pie

charts, which showed how important all the various fund-raising activities are to the Choir. Special mention must go to our Friends, who continue to be a major source of support; Cheshire Consort, whose members give up so much of their free time; and our Librarian, Gwyneth Pailin, who brilliantly masterminds the hiring out of scores. But the star fund-raisers this year proved to be the altos, who extracted enormous sums of money from any poor sap who happened to be in range of their collection jars. Well done to section rep Anthea and her cohort of chuggers.

New Friends' friend

Barbara Forshaw has taken over as Friends' Coordinator from Jean Egerton. You can contact Barbara on friends@st-georges-singers.org.uk.

The summer holidays brought sad news of the deaths of two long-standing members of St George's.

SAD FAREWELLS

Douglas Whalley (1932–2013) is remembered here by his daughter Alison Gunn.

'Singing and music were a much loved and valued part of Dad's life and brought him great pleasure both in participating and listening, although it has to be said that since retiring from St George's Singers and

continuing to support us in the audience, he always said to me after every concert, "I've enjoyed listening but it isn't the same as singing with the choir".

'Dad joined St George's in 1968 and

was a loyal member of the basses until 2007 when he sang with us for the last time in the Christmas concert, retiring for health reasons. During all that time I don't think he missed a concert and as part of his legacy he leaves every concert programme neatly filed in chronological order – a fitting tribute to the organised gentleman he was! St George's brought him great pleasure and he was extremely proud to be a member.

'He met Eileen (mum!) in 1956 through singing together in the same church choir in Barrowford and they shared their love of music through Nelson Glee and Madrigal Society, and then, on moving to Cheadle Hulme, Dad joined St George's and Mum joined Hazel Grove Ladybrook Singers, and they enjoyed supporting each other's choir concerts. It feels appropriate that they will both continue to be Gold Rose Friends of St George's in memoriam.

'Dad also loved holidays in Switzerland, as some members of the choir will remember from a slide show he gave of his photos of the beautiful scenery of the Bernese Oberland. He was also a loyal supporter of Lancashire County Cricket Club, regularly attending their Sunday matches at Old Trafford and more recently watching them on television.

'By profession Dad was a civil engineer and retired as Principal Engineer for highways to Stockport MBC in 1991. He was very proud of his family, and especially his grandchildren Rachel and Peter.

'Dad had a strong faith and Psalm 121 was read at this thanksgiving service, reflecting the closeness to God he felt amidst the majesty of the mountains. Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was a great favourite of his, and he chose that music to be played at Mum's thanksgiving

... /cont

Alison with her Dad, Doug, at his final St George's concert



COOL COSI ON THE FRINGE

Our Assistant MD, Calum Fraser, spent his summer as musical director of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The production by Opera'r Ddraig (a company Calum co-founded while at the Welsh School of Music and Drama in Cardiff) played three performances to sizeable audiences at the Lauriston Halls. Your reviewers report:

This was a *Così* 'on the fringe' in more senses than one. With a cast of young (and very capa-

ble) actor-singers, it was Mozart for right now: sexy, rude and very up-to-date. Dorabella and Fiordiligi spent much of the time glued to their iPads and iPhones. Ferrando and Guglielmo were trendy young guys with large laddish egos, only too happy to accept Don Alfonso's bet that he can expose the fickleness of their girlfriends. Would their girls even look at other guys when they have such fit, switched-on boyfriends? Of course not! They re-appear wear-

ing hoodies and bearing placards, to announce that they are joining an anti-capitalist occupation and will be gone for some time.

But D and F are knowing, modern girls. When the famous trick is played they decide, encouraged by Despina's promptings, that no harm will come from 'having a bit of fun' with the two handsome strangers. Innocence is in short supply in this *Così*! We were treated to some pretty realistic on-stage

nookie by Alexandra Cowell and Robert Garland, as Fiordiligi and Guglielmo.

The singing was uniformly excellent and the cast obviously were having a great time throughout. A most enjoyable evening and great credit to all involved, especially since the company had only a couple of weeks to rehearse. Well done Calum!



service. A favourite hymn they both shared is *How great Thou art* – “When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze, Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee: How great Thou art, How great Thou art.”

‘Dad would want me to thank you all for the privilege of sharing the gift of singing and friendships with St George’s Singers and for the pleasure that brought him over many years. Thank you too for the support I have received from St George’s and grateful thanks to members of the choir who attended his thanksgiving service.’

Elfed Hughes (1937–2013) had been a stalwart of the basses for 20 years—and had just been awarded his 20 years’ ‘star’ at our ‘Gloria’ concert in June. His funeral at Norbury Church in July saw the church packed with Elfed’s family and many friends, including members of St George’s Singers and other choirs with whom Elfed sang.

Moving tributes from family members and close friends reminded us of Elfed’s kindness, gentleness and generosity, and also described his passion for designing and building things. A development engineer by profession, Elfed was always busy mending something, and particu-

larly enjoyed making balsa wood planes for his grandchildren, to whom he was clearly devoted, mending cycles and putting right family members’ DIY efforts!

Never overly demonstrative, Elfed always clearly took great joy from singing with St George’s, and was looking forward to the coming season immensely. His unexpected and sudden death was a shock to us all, and he will be greatly missed. We also greatly appreciate the books of choral music which Elfed’s widow has kindly donated to us, and which we will put to good use for the benefit of the Choir.



DESERT ISLAND DISCS



The latest in our irregular series of *Desert Island Discs* castaways is our Assistant MD, and Cheshire Consort Director, Calum Fraser. Bet his list doesn't include *Ave Maria* or *Jesu Joy...*

The Beatles – McCartney *Let It Be*: The best band and songwriters that have ever lived. It combines beautiful melodies with some pertinent lyrics to get you through the tough times.

La Scala/Gheorghiu/Alagna/Chailly – Puccini *La Bohème*: A fantastic recording of one of the great Romantic operas. The lush orchestration coupled with heartfelt singing from the two leading artists makes this a must!

Munich Philharmonic/Thielmann – Mozart *Requiem*: A piece very close to my heart as I have studied it at great length and performed it numerous times. A fantastic recording – what odds on Thielmann performing a rather large version early on if he gets the Berlin Philharmonic job in 2018?!

St Paul's Cathedral Choir – Holst *I Vow to Thee, My Country*: Though I am a Scot, this hymn makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Chilling performances at funerals of some of the great Britons.

Vienna Philharmonic/Maazel – Mahler *1st Symphony*: The first piece I ever played with a full symphony orchestra. A beautifully understated work with a pastoral quality not seen in his later, more epic, works. Possibly not the best recording, but one I have owned since the age of 13.

Carly Simon/Hamlisch – *No-body Does It Better*: As a massive Bond fan, I wish I could pick them all, but this track from the Roger Moore era combines a great deal of subtlety with the traditional power ballad.

Vangelis – *Chariots of Fire*: Again, an unashamedly British choice. Who could forget Lon-

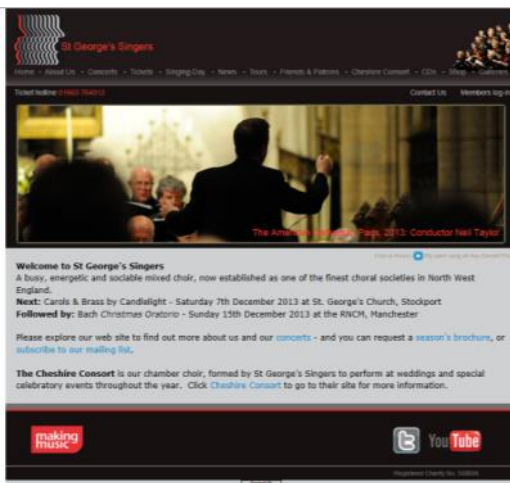
don 2012 and Simon Rattle's greatest triumph?! A fantastic film and also the ringtone on my phone!

Caledonian Voices – Vaughan Williams *Loch Lomond*: Recorded by my Scottish choir, it combines a traditional Scottish melody with an archetypal English arrangement. A track I always play with pride when re-entering the homeland!

Luxury: *The Daily Telegraph* – I can't go for more than a minute without checking the news, even if I read my daily newspaper from back to front! This would help to keep me in tune and relaxed on my island.

Book: Clive Woodward *Winning* – As someone that cannot bear to lose, this book ticks all the boxes. I have read it many times since its release in 2004 and has given my many leadership pointers in my career.

NEW WEBSITE NOW ONLINE



Our website has had a make-over during the summer, with lots of new features and easier navigation.

The main choir website at **www.st-georges-singers.org.uk** now includes more pictures and slide shows of concerts and tours, information about previous seasons, and links to audio files of the choir performing in concert.

Our wedding choir, The Cheshire Consort, also now has its own dedicated website, **www.cheshireconsort.org.uk**, to provide brides and their fam-

ilies with more information and advice on wedding music, and to spread the word about the chamber choir and its services more widely. (Look out for the Cheshire Consort Facebook page—coming soon!)

A big thank you to John Smith, whose company Intuitive Media Ltd provide all the software and hardware for the website, and who has masterminded the new site, and to Peter Giles, our website manager.

The upgrades will be continuing for a little while yet, so you can expect to see more changes and improvements over the next few weeks.

There is also a new Members' area on the website, accessible only by members of the Choir, with up-to-date information on formal choir business, concert arrangements, music, rehearsals, and (most important) Neil's items for practice before next rehearsal. So—log on regularly, or risk the consequences!



AN ELEMENTAL PETER GRIMES BY DAVE FRANCIS

On 2nd September Elemental Opera, a small opera company based in Manchester, sent out an invitation to singers to take part as chorus members in a concert performance of Britten's *Peter Grimes*. The orchestra was to be the Nottingham Philharmonic and the concert would be held in Nottingham on Saturday, 12th October. We received the invite thanks to Ali McLay and thought what a great opportunity it was to sing this magnificent work, arguably the greatest of all English operas. Not easy music. And only five weeks of rehearsals! Let's hope we are good enough. It would mean at least a couple of trips to Nottingham plus an overnight stay on the weekend of the performance. We con-

tacted organiser Janet Fischer, and asked if we could take part.

The Manchester rehearsals were held in St Augustine's Church at All Saints. We turned up for the first one at the appointed time, to discover there were only five other singers in the Manchester contingent, all ex-music students from Manchester University and the RNCM. Needless to say, all excellent sight readers with very good voices. Oh dear – have we bitten off a bit too much?

But chorus master Marco Belasi, a Junior Conducting Fellow at the RNCM, was very reassuring. We realised why when we went to a Nottingham rehearsal the following week.

Many more singers here, about 40, but quite a few who really struggled with the music. Some were from a community choir and unused to singing from scores! We felt relieved but also slightly disap-

pointed. Could the chorus reach an adequate standard from such a low starting point? In *Peter Grimes* the chorus is a vital part of the drama, representing the people of the 'Borough' who turn against Grimes and persecute him. A below-par chorus could bring down the entire project.

We missed a couple of rehearsals whilst on holiday, but found on our return that the standard of the singing had improved dramatically in our absence. Some people had dropped out, presumably realising it was beyond their capabilities. Marco had worked hard on the trickiest sections of the score and the chorus was getting to grips with it. By the time of the performance weekend, when the Nottingham choir was joined by the singers from Manchester, we began to feel confident that we would not let the soloists and orchestra down.

The performance was to be semi-staged. The soloists would dress up and act out their roles

insofar as the concert platform allowed. The chorus was also encouraged to 'dress appropriately', ie look like 'people of the Borough'.

In the event, the concert was a huge success, musically at least. A small audience, but they were treated to fine singing by twelve excellent soloists, most of whom were former students of the RNCM and the Royal Academy of Music. Brian Smith Walters as Grimes, Janet Fischer as Ellen and Adam Marsden as Balstrode were especially impressive. The Nottingham Phil, under the baton of Mark Heron, were terrific. They played the 'Sea Interludes' as though their lives (as well as Grimes's) were at stake. And the chorus, that bunch of Borough nasties? Almost stole the show.



WE DON'T REALLY MEAN IT CHAPS ...

How many tenors does it take to change a light bulb? None. They just steal somebody else's light.

How many singers does it take to change a light bulb? Six. one to change it, and the other five to fight off the tenor who is hogging it.

How many tenors does it take to change a light bulb? Four. One to change the bulb and three to bitch that they could have done it if they had the high notes.

How do you tell if a tenor is dead? The wine bottle is still full and the comics haven't been touched.

How do you put a sparkle in a tenor's eye? Shine a flashlight in his ear.

Where is a tenor's resonance? Where his brain should be.

Ever hear the one about the tenor who was so off-key that even the other tenors could tell?

What's the definition of a male quartet? Three men and a tenor.

If you took all the tenors in the world and laid them end to end, it would be a good idea.

A soprano died and went to Heaven. St Peter stopped her at the gate asking, 'Well, how many false notes did you sing in your life?'

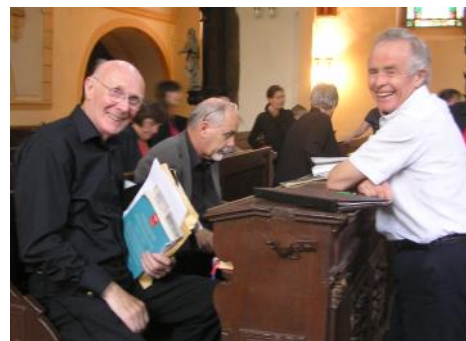
The soprano answers, 'Three.' 'Three times, fellows!' says

Pete, and along comes an angel and sticks the soprano three times with a needle.

'Ow! What was that for?' asks the soprano. Pete explains, 'Here in heaven, we stick you with a needle once for each false note you've sung down on Earth.'

'Oh,' says the soprano, and is just about to step through the gates when she suddenly hears a horrible screaming from behind a door. 'Oh my goodness, what is that?' asks the soprano, horrified.

'Oh,' says Pete, 'that's a tenor we got some time back. He's just about to start his third week in the sewing machine.'



The slightly different three tenors



'Congratulations on Sunday's performance! It was truly fantastic. Full of energy and power. I'm going straight out to purchase *Dixit Dominus*! I hope everyone is feeling very proud and no doubt exhilarated.'

A GLORIOUS END TO THE SEASON

23 June 2013, Gorton Monastery. Final concert of the 2012–13 season: the 'Gloria!' concert. And what a glorious finale!

Eighteen months earlier, Neil had determined he wanted to do Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. (murmurs of delight tinged with terror from the committee). Difficult piece, especially for a large choir. And not very well known by the general public. What to team it with? Vivaldi's *Gloria* sprang to mind. Almost contemporaneous with the Handel, better known than the *Dixit*—and not quite as tricky for the Choir! So it began ...

Concert day dawned. We'd been rehearsing for weeks. We'd practised our Italian/Latin ('deexit') till the men were sounding like Vatican flunkies. Neil and Calum had drilled us in the phrasing and breathing; we'd got into the minds of the psalmist – blood and thunder, power and destruction, torrents and dramatic dissonance. We were prepared!

The concert opened with Vivaldi's *Gloria*, a joyful work that always entrances and delights choir and audience. We followed this with *Nisi Dominus*, a short work by Handel, jolly enough on its own, but tonight a bit of a warm-up act. It was at this point that we all became

surely? Then we realised. The wind had been gusting hard all day, but was now howling atmospherically round the tallest building in east Manchester—the Monastery! Perfect atmospherics for the *Dixit*.

After the interval, the Northern Baroque Orchestra treated us to one of Vivaldi's concertos from *L'estro Armonico*. Then—show-time! Quite simply, the *Dixit Dominus* was amazing. Neil was totally in control of us; we watched, followed and responded to his every gesture, twitch, eyebrow and grimace.

After the first chorus, when we'd safely negotiated the 'dominus/domino' trap, and the altos had set the tone with the power and authority of their 'scabellums' the nerves settled—and we just simply had a ball. 'Te secundum' taken faster than normal? No problem. More drama in the 'Juravit'? We're up for it. Neil wants the heads of our enemies on a plate in the 'Conquassabit'? Bring it on!

The orchestra and the soloists were sensational. How did the tiny contralto produce that deep, rich, mellow sound? The sopranos soared angelically above us, the bass (our very own VP, Mark Rowlinson) struck terror in us, and tenor Richard Dowling moved us with the beauty of his singing.

When the final chorus arrived, the spectacular closing 'Gloria Patri' with its waves of sound crashing over us, the 'Amen' came too soon—we all just wanted it not to end.

Thrilling, unforgettable, one of the most exciting concerts St George's has given in recent years. Thanks Neil! This is what choral singing is all about.

'Words almost fail me in my admiration of your performance of the *Dixit Dominus*. I know this is one mountain of a piece. St George's Singers climbed it without apparent effort.

'Right from the off you were obviously in complete control. Every section of your choir is so, so sure and strong. (Oh, the pangs of envy! no less than 13 male tenors! Not that I have any sexist objection to female tenors but the sheer firepower of 13 XY larynxes is awesome. And the basses, especially in the quiet bits...and then those strong, strong women...). I've enough experience to see and anticipate the difficult bits of a piece like this... your sforzandi, crescendos and diminuendos were nothing less than breath-taking.

'Your ensemble was just staggeringly good. I could hear every word you sang (despite having bilateral hearing aids) from 2/3rds of the way down the auditorium. The choir's complete authority was evident throughout. Two words will stick in my mind for good after last night; 'Juravit' and 'Conquassabit'. They were the most thrilling live choral sound I have ever heard.

'This was choral singing as good as it gets. Heaven only knows how much effort you all must have put in to achieve your result, but believe me, it was worth every minute. I will be very happy to travel any reasonable distance if you are singing it again.'



'What a wonderful concert. To be in the audience was such an experience, I can't imagine what it must be like to be making the music, all the layers and waves of voices, tremendous. I expect you eventually float back down to earth. It must be really hard work but what an achievement.'



aware of an alarming and extremely loud rumbling from the rafters. Initial thoughts turned to large JCBs trundling down the road past the Monastery. But not on a Sunday evening



THE LAMENT OF THE SECOND SOPRANOS BY JO GARBUTT

I first joined a choir many decades ago
When my voice was exceedingly high,
And the tone was much purer as a coloratura –
when I think of it now I could cry.
For alas, as my vocal chords lengthened
The top notes grew vexingly thin
And the bottom weren't as low as a real contralto
But I wasn't about to give in ...

So now I'm a second soprano (though they say that it's not second-best).
Still I'd like to be up there with those primas and divas
An octave above all the rest.
Yes, I'm just a second soprano,
And though two is better than three,
My competitive streak still compels me to seek
That elusive, earth-shattering top C.

But I still live in hope; there is plenty of scope
in the seconds – I shouldn't complain.
Though I may not be first, I'm content to rehearse
'til another gig comes round again.
But as we build the staging, a hope begins raging

I'll be down with the divas, and Jo,
For there's nothing forlornier than the top left-hand corner
At the back, on the very last row.

Oh, I'm just a second soprano. However much practice I do I know, as I strain, my ambition is vain
For I'll never be Jacqui or Sue. But I'm part of 'Team Second Soprano'

And when you've got your backs to the wall
Our underlay's pliable, strong and reliable
Though you may not hear us at all ...

For we are the second sopranos.
In our own way we're really quite good.
We've sung more 'ruinas' than you've had hot dinners,
And we always (nearly always) come in when we should.
So let's hear it for the second sopranos;
Throw your coins in the virtual hat.
But maestro, have a care when you give us a stare:
it's them and not us who are flat!

Coda

So while they may stun you



The back row were determined not to be pushed about by the first sops any more

with their brilliant chromatics,
And we're awed with the chords from their strange acrobatics,
When the firsts lose their top notes (and the altos their bottoms),
we'll still have the middle ones and be proud that we've got 'em.
We're the glue on the Handel, in Bach we're the bite.
The Vivat in Vivaldi (though in Samuel we're Scheidt).
So give it up for the second sopranos.
It's time for our place in the sun.
As we lead from behind, we don't need to remind you,
We're seconds and second to none!

SONNARTERS

(13-year-old's essay on Beethoven)

A snarter is a composition written for one or more muscal insturments. When it is written for three insturments it is called a Thero when it is written for a hole compny is is called a Shmpne. The great snarter writer was Betethoven. He wrote 42 pages of snarters.

The Phathque op is 13 has three movements. The first is in snarter form. It has expisition, development and decapitulation.

LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS

A surprise guest on the BBC's 'Last Night of the Proms' this year—Chris Hazell, brother of alto Connie Jones, and known to SGS from the article he wrote for *Hemiola* a few months ago.

Chris had been commissioned to write a special arrangement of *Danny Boy* for mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, who was the soloist for the even-

ing—and what a beautiful, touching arrangement it was.

The evening also featured a few pieces dear to SGS hearts amongst them the Britten arrangement of the *National Anthem*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, and a number of opera choruses that we have sung at the New Year's Eve Opera Gala at Bridgewater Hall, including 'Make our Garden

Grow' from Bernstein's *Candide*, and 'Va, pensiero' from Verdi's *Nabucco*.



THE ENGLISH CHORAL EXPERIENCE

BY RICHARD TAYLOR



La Maison Verte

On a damp Monday afternoon in April seven intrepid travellers from St George's Singers (Cath Bryant, Anne and Dave Francis, Stephen Graham, Alison McLay and Joe Keaney, David Robson and me)

on the way to attend the week-long 'English Choral Experience' course in Roujan arrived at the small Béziers Airport courtesy of Ryanair. We had left a snow-covered England behind and successfully survived the flight without any excess charges and next we set about the important business of getting to our accommodation, and finding somewhere to eat and drink, in any order. On a cool, wet Monday evening in the centre of Béziers this proved harder than expected, as nearly all restaurants seemed to be closed. However, salvation was eventually achieved as we settled down to a morale-boosting meal accompanied by the mandatory wine, and looked forward to the week of music awaiting us.

Eventually sated, we headed for a good night's sleep, which in my case meant driving in the dark and rain to Roujan. I was well prepared for this 13.5 mile drive, and had even looked at crucial junctions on Google Earth's StreetView, but the journey seemed so much further. All would have been well if it were not for the fact that a glimpse of a sign that seemed to indicate Roujan led to a 2 -mile detour to Boujan. Suffice to say I managed to reach my B&B destination and after sharing a bottle of red with my host, retired for the night. Tuesday was a dry and bright day, a bit on the cool side but pleasant in the sun. The seven of us

lunched al fresco in Béziers on a fine selection of breads, cheeses and meats. It was then off to the seaside, namely Valras-Plage, hurrah! A bracing walk along the beach with a view of the little harbour was followed by a fruitless search along the seafront for a bar. This was not looking good for vocal lubrication for the coming week. So, to Roujan.

Signs to the course venue, La Maison Verte, existed, which were really helpful if one was prepared to stop and hold up traffic to find them. Most of the course members were to be resident in La Maison Verte, a large building with a wonderful rehearsal room arranged around a private courtyard.

Having settled in, we went for a brief walk to the centre of Roujan, a small, somewhat sleepy town, ending up sitting outside a bar called Le Chat Noir for a little liquid refreshment. After this, all course attendees assembled in the rehearsal room to meet each other over drinks from the honesty bar and to be welcomed by choral conductor Paul Spicer who presented the itinerary for the week ahead. It promised to be a great week of singing and also, as we were about to find out, a great week for food. After Paul's introduction, long tables were arranged in the rehearsal room and set for dinner. It was at this point we were given another introduction, this time to the food, by the chef. All the food for the course was prepared by a couple who hailed from the USA and what wonderful fare it was. It wasn't only the food of this first dinner that was described by the chef; each and every dinner was introduced in the same manner which could have left lesser mortals overexcited with gastronomic expectation.

After dinner there was only one thing left to do. No, not go to

bed, but go to a bar. It did not take long to discover that Roujan was effectively a one-bar town. The aforementioned Le Chat Noir, which would see our presence several times (well, probably every evening) over the coming week was fortunately just a couple of minutes' walk from La Maison Verte. We immediately saw that the bar had music in its soul, with a piano taking centre stage on the floor, a stage strangely 8ft above the floor and a cello hanging off the ceiling. The bar also had other things in its soul, but more of this later. We never saw the cello bowed, but the piano was played on most evenings.

Wednesday was our first intro-



The courtyard at La Maison Verte

duction to the music we were to sing, or at least it was to those who had not looked at it beforehand, and what a splendid set of pieces it proved to be: *Senex Pueram Portabat* (Byrd), *Out of the Deep* (Morley), *Plorate Filii Israel* (Carissimi), *Hear, Jacob's God* (from Handel's *Samson*), *A Short Requiem in D major* (Davies), *The Souls of the Righteous* (Joubert), *A Hymn for St Cecilia* and *O Salutaris Hostia* (Howells).

The rehearsal room was a light and airy space and everyone engaged with Paul and the music from the outset. There were opportunities for solos which were open to volunteers during the week and Paul selected the successful soloists after listening to all that had volunteered. Thus David Robson was chosen to sing the bass solo in the



Dave during his pharaoh phase



The harbour at Valras-Plage

Al fresco lunch in Béziers



Walford Davies piece and Anne was chosen to sing an alto solo.

After the first enjoyable rehearsal it was time for a coffee break in the sun-bathed courtyard after which it was straight on with the second rehearsal. This concluded with a marvellous buffet lunch laid out in the old vinery building on one side of the courtyard and eaten in the sunny

courtyard itself. For additional vitamin D therapy a few of us spent the afternoon wandering round and discovering Roujan

before assembling for the third rehearsal of the day. Another wonderful dinner and a visit to Le Chat Noir where a local pianist was playing jazz on the piano completed an excellent first rehearsal day.

The rehearsals on Thursday built on the previous day's singing. In the afternoon the St



Paul Spicer

Georges contingent went on a car journey into the hills with the aim of going for a walk. The walk was about to begin, but then immediately aborted when rain started. A trip to a vinery was similarly thwarted when it was found to be shut so the afternoon was finally spent at Le Chat Noir.

Friday's rehearsals saw our

singing of the music progress well. We spent the afternoon in Pézenas, a larger and more vibrant town than Roujan. It was here that we sat at the outside tables of Le Chat Botté tea room soaking up the sun after a wander round the town and reconnaissance of the shops. It was in one of these shops that the town's gastronomic speciality was found and bought, namely 'Le Petit Pâté de



Eating—again

Pézenas'. These are little, sweet, spiced mutton pies approximately the size and shape of a cotton reel. The evening's customary visit to Le Chat noir was notable for the fact that an intellectual gave a lecture on psychology. Throughout the lecture, in French of course, which covered frigidity and how it is influenced by family upbringing, those in the bar respectfully listened apart from one young girl who was engrossed with her iPad all the way through.

Saturday was a grey rainy day on the weather front, but it contained another set of excellent rehearsals. In the afternoon we decided to travel to the town of Agde, some 10 miles east of Béziers and near the Mediterranean coast. The rain was unrelenting so it was a relief to be able to park in the centre of the town close to a restaurant called La Belle Agathoise where we celebrated David's birthday. After dinner, Le Chat Noir hosted a band playing on the high stage, followed by the totally unexpected appearance of a stripper who presented a couple of undressing shows. The second time she started out dressed as a bee, complete with antennae and, as we discovered and as disrobement progressed, pollen



sacs. Roujan may only have one bar, but what a place!

Sunday was the day of our concert. After the morning rehearsals there was a chance to wander round the street markets that had appeared overnight in Roujan transforming the town into a hive of bustle and activity. Musicians played on the street outside a very busy Le Chat Noir, and a wide variety of foods, clothes and crafts were being sold from the stalls.

And so the time had come to travel a couple of miles or so to the small village of Fontès where we arrived at the venue for our concert, the church of Saint-Hippolyte, built between 1299 and 1340. This was a wonderful building of golden stone approached by a narrow road. The stone interior had a fine vaulted ceiling and was pierced by colourful stained glass windows. It also contained a bat

which fluttered round our heads during the rehearsal, but that fortunately did not appear during the actual performance. We sang together for the last time, and what a well-received performance it was! David and Anne produced marvellous solos and the whole concert was a fitting culmination of the week's work.

We all enjoyed the course so much that we resolved to attend the 2014 course. And so to next year's course at Bédouer!

As a postscript, we all met up again at David Robson's house in May along with Bridget and John Ovey, Mark Lonsborough and his wife for dinner. One of the delights on offer on the dining table was a plate full of Petit Pâté de Pézenas, lovingly made to perfection by Stephen after several trial runs!



The rehearsal room



Music night at Le Chat Noir
(Richard's picture of the stripper was out of focus, so fortunately could not be used—Ed)

Pézenas





STONE FLOWERS: THE POWER OF MUSIC TO HEAL BY JUDY TOMLINSON

Stone Flowers is a music group whose members have experienced torture in their lives. Members are clients of Freedom from Torture North West and the group is led by Musicians without Borders.

It was created in 2011 in response to a campaign by the Musicians' Union, drawing attention to the use of music as a form of torture. Aidan Jolly brought the two organisations together to develop a project in Manchester which would build on the positives of music-making, supporting those who had survived torture and were now living in the UK.

21 September 2013 was this year's International Day of Peace. To mark this, the Imperial War Museum North in Salford hosted a special event. They invited Stone Flowers to perform two concerts in the exhibition area.

Stone Flowers first sang at the Imperial War Museum North two years ago. They have also performed at the Manchester Peace Festival and Food & Drink Festival in Manchester and at St Giles in London. Each song performed has reflected both the consequences

of war and the way in which music and singing can help people cope with them.

The name 'Stone Flowers' is the English translation of the song 'Gole Sangam', a popular Iranian song sung in Farsi. The group felt that the song connected everyone involved, symbolising a balance of beauty and strength, resilience and fragility.

So how does the group work? It meets weekly in a room at the Manchester office of Freedom from Torture, somewhere that is familiar and safe. At first they do not know each other, and many communicate through interpreters. The interpreters play a full part in the group, along with musicians and therapists. Stone Flowers include



Membership of the group is open to anyone who is a client of Freedom from Torture. No knowledge of music is required.

All who come to Freedom from Torture have suffered torture and many do not speak English.

They may have lost contact with their families and have few friends. Applying for asylum they face the daily risk of removal from the UK and have to survive on very limited means. (Asylum seekers are not allowed to take on work.)

But they have also demonstrated a will to survive by getting here.

speakers of Tamil, French, Lingala, Arabic, Kikongo and Farsi. They come from Cameroon, Iran, New Guinea, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other countries.

This is the third year of the project, with membership changing each year. Initially the members split into small groups with a common interest or language. From these come ideas for the lyrics, and suggestions for music which has significance for them. Gradually these grow into pieces which the whole group learns.

Lis Murphy from Musicians without Borders provides inspirational leadership as she conducts and motivates the group. The main aim of the project is to restore the mental health of torture survivors with the additional aim that the public per-

September's concert



Photo: Chris Bull

performances would show a different perspective on refugees' and asylum-seekers' circumstances.

The project also aims to provide opportunities for the participants to develop their musical skills: Musicians without Borders employ refugee musicians to help with the artistic development of the songs. The nature of torture is that it dehumanises people. Music brings them back into contact with feelings that have long been missing from their lives. Members of Stone Flowers have said:

'This year, music has been the best medicine for me.'

'I didn't know anything about the cello or music before the project.'

'We went every Thursday to change our mood because we've been upset during the week.'

'This is a BIG gift to me in my life up to now – thank you.'

It was exhilarating and moving to hear the performance this September. At first everyone looked anxious, singing tentatively but gradually they gained in confidence. By the end of the afternoon performance they willingly stood up to sing, swaying to the music, with smiles on their faces.

The audience loved it – responding to the quality of the singing, the feelings expressed through the lyrics and the demonstration of the strength of character of each of the participants.

For many, being able to attend a group regularly is itself therapeutic. Beginning to build up relationships again is also positive. Realising that they have skills they can use brings an increase in confidence.

Singing or playing to an audience can take away thoughts and fears that they have lived with for years. For a few it has opened a door to a future in music – the offer of free lessons has enabled one member to start playing the cello and oth-

ers have also taken up an instrument.

During the first six months of 2011 the group wrote, learnt and performed nine songs, which were later recorded. Proceeds from the sales of the CD* go towards continuing the work of the group. The repertoire now includes enough new songs for a second CD – if the money can be found to do this.

All their songs reflect the experiences of the members. For example:

Ngunda azali mutu

Ngunda azali avocat
Ngunda azali docteur
Ngunda azali musicien
Ngunda azali mutu eh
Ngunda asengi liberte
Ngunda asengi asile
Ngunda asengi bomutu
Ngunda azali mutu eh
Nakimi mboka mosika
Pona kobikisa bomoi
nangayi
Pona kobikisa bomoi
nangayi
Nabelileli nzambe na
nguya
Yelele Yelele Yelele eh

A refugee is a human being

A refugee is a lawyer
A refugee is a doctor
A refugee is a musician
A refugee is a human being
Refugees ask for freedom
Refugees ask for protection
Refugees ask for respect
A refugee is a human being



Photo: Chris Bull



September's concert

*I fled my far country
To save my life, To save my life
I call the almighty God for help.*

This is the third year of the project and there is no guarantee of continued funding,

though everyone involved hopes that it will survive.

Both sponsoring organisations would welcome additional support. Musicians without Borders uses the

power of music to reduce the devastating effects of war trauma. It has projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Rwanda and Palestine, as well as the UK.

Freedom from Torture works with torture survivors. It provides medical consultation and medico-legal reports for courts on applications for asylum. It offers psychological support, art and drama therapy and practical help for people who have survived the most horrific abuses of human rights.

For more information about these organisations visit their websites:
www.musicianswithoutborders.org.uk and
www.freedomfromtorture.org.

*** Judy can supply copies of the Stone Flowers CD for £10, or you can obtain them direct from either organisation.**

St George's Singers

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St George's Singers was formed in 1956 by Rev Eric Chapman and Geoffrey Verney, organist and choirmaster of St George's Church, Poynton in Cheshire, where the Choir still rehearses every Tuesday night. Geoffrey's dream was to build a community choir, capable of performing major choral works to a high standard and which would attract singers and audiences from neighbouring towns. Geoffrey died in 1964, but his legacy was nurtured by his successors Duncan Eyre, Ray Lomax and Stephen Williams, and is continued by our present Musical Director, Neil Taylor. St George's Singers is now recognised as one of the leading and most innovative choirs in the North West of England, performing an astonishingly varied repertoire, and with around 100 members drawn from an area far beyond the community of Poynton. We present at least four major concerts a year, in venues including The Bridgewater Hall, Gorton Monastery, Manchester Cathedral and Royal Northern College of Music, hold annual Singing Days, and tour regularly in the UK and abroad. St George's Singers continues to explore and expand the boundaries of choral music, and communicating the sheer enjoyment of singing together. Entry to the Choir is via audition, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

ST GEORGE'S 2013-2014 SEASON

Saturday 7 December 2013
Carols and Brass by Candlelight
St George's Church, Stockport

Sunday 15 December 2013
Bach Christmas Oratorio,
Todd Footprints
Royal Northern College of Music

Saturday 18 January 2014
Singing Day—Beethoven *Mass in C*
St George's Church, Poynton

Saturday 22 March 2014
'Visions of Heaven' - a celebration of
English church music
St George's Church, Stockport

Sunday 22 June 2014
Zimbe!
Gorton Monastery

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012
tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

MANCHESTER SINGS

CLIC Sargent *War Requiem*

SGS alto Penny Anson is once more organizing the CLIC Sargent charity concert, which this year will take place on Sunday 9 February 2014. This year they will be performing Britten's *War Requiem*, directed by Robert Carey, and all are welcome to join the chorus—particularly men! There is a workshop on 16th November, with more rehearsals throughout January. Penny has been organizing this concert for CLIC Sargent, the leading Children's Cancer Charity, for over ten years, and last year's *Dream of Gerontius* raised over £6,000. Everyone gives their services free of charge. If you are interested in singing, contact Penny on penny.cssingers@gmail.com. Costs £35.

Southwell Festival

It's not really in Manchester, but thought you might like to hear about the Southwell Music Festival, the brainchild of Marcus Farnsworth. Marcus used to be a chorister at Southwell, and has launched this festival to encourage more people to share an enjoyment of classical music, to bring the best young professional musicians to the festival, and provide opportunities for local musicians to participate. The festival is being held over August Bank Holiday weekend, 22–25 August 2014. The full programme will be launched early next year. Keep informed at www.southwell-musicfestival.com.

Singing Day

Don't forget our Singing Day, which this year takes place on **Saturday 18 January**, when we will be rehearsing and performing Beethoven's *Mass in C*. As usual the event takes place in St George's Church in Poynton. Don't delay—get your application in now, as this is sure to be a sell-out. (PS—we are assured that both the lighting and the heating in the church have been attended to after last year's problem. So no excuses for any duff notes this year!)

