



Hemiola

St George's Singers

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Christmas double act	2
Masterly singing by SGS	3
'Visions of heaven'	4
<i>Spem in alium</i>	5
SGS News	6
New Assistant AMD	
Ancient visions of the heavens	7
On the art of singing	8
The rehearsal police	9
Concert manners	10
Talking of altos ...	11

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Brigit Forsyth

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Marcus Farnsworth
Sue Roper
Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Joseph Judge

ACCOMPANIST:

Jeffrey Makinson

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

FOOTPRINTERS MAKE THEIR MARK

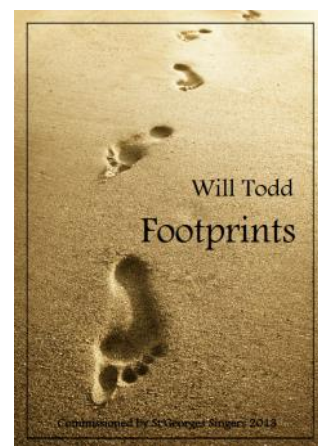
What a great event our Christmas concert turned out to be! Whilst the Bach *Christmas Oratorio* was wonderful (see review on page 3) the highlight for many was the premiere of Will Todd's *Footprints*.

The work had been commissioned by St George's Singers a year ago, in memory of Beryl Pearn, a former member of the choir whose bequest helped fund the commission. We asked Will to provide a piece for SATB choir, with jazz trio or piano accompaniment, and lasting about 15 minutes. The rest we left to him.

About two months after commissioning the piece, we heard from Will that he had found the words

he wanted to set to music, and a title – 'Footprints'. However, to pay for the commission, we needed to raise some additional funds. Around thirty Choir members and Friends were delighted to help, and became (of course) our 'Footprinters'.

Will delivered the finished work to Neil Taylor at the beginning of September, and we eagerly began rehearsing. Switching style from Bach to Todd at every rehearsal took some concentration and not a little versatility, but Neil guided us expertly through both works. Then two weeks before the concert he announced that we would be performing both pieces 'scrambled' – not standing in conventional SATB groups, but



'mixed up' so that we were all standing next to a different part. A few nervous coughs and raised eyebrows from the Choir, but Neil knows his Singers, and assured us it would be all right on the night.

And so it proved: *Footprints* was performed to great applause. We were thrilled that Will Todd came to the premiere, introduced the work to the audience, and happily spent a long time signing each one of the scores for the Footprinters. Thanks Will, for writing such a fabulous piece, which is sure to become an SGS favourite in years to come.



The Footprinters with composer Will Todd



'...your spectacular concert with SGS. Your *Christmas Oratorio* was superb, very well presented and perfect pronunciation. Well done!!! Of course, your world premiere was magic. You made it sound so easy, jazzy, wonderful music, I am certain that many choirs will follow to present the *Footprints*. None will do a world premiere, only you will keep the fame of this special performance!! It was an honour for me to be there and of course very special to meet Will Todd.

*Christian Fröhlich
(an SGS Gold Friend who travelled
from Germany to attend the
concert)*

The highlight for me was the Will Todd. I expected it to be longer so was disappointed when it ended and I have to say it was glorious. Sung with feeling and obvious enjoyment by the choir – and the scrambled choir gave a very seamless and flowing effect to the sound. I thought it would sound disjointed but the complete opposite.

The Bach was great as well and shows that Neil is strict about sounding the words clearly as I could see people making a massive effort.

It's a treat to listen to the choir and it makes me realise that St Georges Singers really do sound very good!

A choir member of the audience

CHRISTMAS DOUBLE ACT

Christmas 2013 will go down in the Choir archives as one of the busiest. On 7 December we gave our annual Carols & Brass by Candlelight concert, then eight days later we were performing Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and giving a world premiere. And both were magical.

The carol concert with VBS Poynton Band and the children of Bradshaw Hall saw a packed audience singing along with old favourites, accompanied by some vigorous banging, scraping and shaking from the young volunteer 'instrumentalists' in the audience. Everyone had a great time, and we were once again amazed at the talent and expertise of the youngsters from Bradshaw Hall. The concert ended with a special arrangement of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, featuring all the per-



Neil Taylor, soloists, choir and orchestra take a bow at the end of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*

formers, plus children in the audience waving pictures of various 'gifts' at the appropriate (and occasionally inappropriate!) point in the music.

A big thank you to everyone who came along to the concert to make it such a special event—and thank you too to all the SGS members (and partners!) who helped clear up St George's Church afterwards, and get it into shape for service the next day.



Neil controls his choral and musical forces with a wave of his hand (well, pretty much)

Fast forward eight days and we're once again on stage, this time at the Royal Northern College of Music for an equally exciting (though rather more sedate) concert.

The afternoon rehearsal started badly when Neil arrived feeling very ill (leading to some hasty contingency planning involving organists, composers and members of the audience, just in case!)

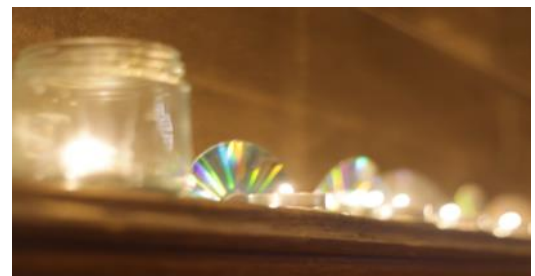
Fortunately, he recovered slightly during the course of the afternoon, and – a true professional – was able to see the performance through.

The concert itself was a triumph. Worries about being 'scrambled' were quickly laid to rest, and we all thoroughly enjoyed

standing next to these vocal 'strangers' whom we otherwise only see and hear from a distance.

The other innovation from Neil – splitting the *Oratorio* in two and interspersing it with the very differently styled *Footprints* – also worked well, particularly when Will Todd, in his introduction to his work, discussed the similarities between Bach and his own compositions (with all due modesty of course!) The Encompass Jazz Trio who accompanied the choir on the Todd piece were fabulous, and the soloists, all young RNCM graduates, sang beautifully together. We surely will be inviting some of them back to sing and play with us again.

This was yet another great concert to round off 2013, sending us all off home for Christmas exhausted but elated.



MASTERLY SINGING BY ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

BY ROBERT FARR

I first heard [St George's Singers] in a performance of *Elijah* and then in a series of Bach's great choral masterpieces, the *St Matthew Passion*, *B Minor Mass*, and *St John Passion*, the latter with the Manchester Camerata conducted by Nicholas Kramer. All were performed at Manchester's premiere concert venue, the Bridgewater Hall, and accompanied by internationally renowned soloists. The venue and those accompanying singers confirmed my early impression that this choir could stand alongside the one supported and performing with the Hallé Orchestra.

In between those great Bach choral works, the choir put on an adventurous programme alongside RNCM's Jazz Collective and Tina May and including Will Todd's jazz *Mass in Blue*. This concert can be seen as a natural evolution in St George's recent history with the capacity to move between significantly different genres.

The choir numbers nearly one hundred, and over eighty were singing in this concert including eleven who have followed the strict discipline of regular attendance at rehearsal for over twenty years, a serious commitment paralleled by their attendance on foreign tours and the like. Unusually, the four parts of the chorus were scattered, that is mixed rather than as distinct sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. I have to say in this hall it worked well. I expressed my appreciation of the superb articulation exhibited by the choir in their performance of *Messiah* in the beautiful, but highly reverberant Gorton Monastery.

With its encompassing brick walls, the RNCM Concert Hall also presents significant acoustic challenges for a large choir. After only a few minutes, they and Neil Taylor, under whose experienced hands and direc-

tion they continue to develop, had mastered the acoustic, with their superb articulation of words coming over as clear as a bell. Impressive too was the control exerted by the conductor in respect of pace and coordination, particularly with his young soloists. Whilst some contemporary international singers are complaining about some of Europe's leading orchestras upping the pitch from the standard A=440 to add brightness to the tone, in this concert the four soloists, including those trained in opera, had to accommodate to a lowering to A=415, the standard for the period and superbly maintained by the Northern Baroque and their leader.

As an opera reviewer mainly I was intrigued as to the effect on the timbre of the soloists' voices. All met any challenges with aplomb, albeit causing me momentarily confusion. I am not a singer and I was particularly intrigued by the timbre of the baritone in his opening recitative. With the true baritone role of Schaunard in Puccini's *La Bohème*, with its operatic tessitura in his CV, Matthew Kellett looked too small for his resonant bass-like tones (basses are usually six foot at least). No matter, his sonority and clarity, along with expressiveness, were a plus in the performance. Outstanding in tone and clarity as well as expressiveness was mezzo Heather Ireson in her opening recitative and aria 'Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam' (Now my dearest bridegroom) and the aria immediately following. She made a notable contribution at every opportunity Bach provided. Eleanor Garside's silvery soprano and smooth legato shone brightly in the opening duet with the Evangelist (No 4) and Chorale (No 7 in Part I), entitled 'Er ist auf kommen arm' (He has come on earth in poverty) and later. As the Evangelist, the tenor Thom-

as Morss was gentle and careful in his approach bringing clarity to his words.

To move from Bach to Will Todd's contemporary *Footprints* hardly seemed a challenge to St George's skills, I guess their previous experience with his *Jazz Mass* helped. Born in 1970, Will Todd is quite prolific in his compositions, often composing for the musical theatre and choral forces. He has worked with the Hallé Orchestra (who have recorded his oratorio *Saint Cuthbert*) and also with The Sixteen, the BBC Singers and smaller opera companies. His opera *The Blackened Man* won first prize at the 2002 International Verdi Competition and was performed at the Buxton Festival in 2004. More recently, his choral anthem *The Call of Wisdom* was sung in St Paul's Cathedral at the Diamond Jubilee Thanksgiving Service. Will plays piano in his own jazz ensemble, which features his wife, singer Bethany Halliday.

The programme notes explain that Todd's three movement choral suite *Footprints* takes its inspiration from Mary Stevenson's poem *Footprints in the Sand*. This piece, in three parts, is very different to his *Jazz Mass* with really only part three, entitled 'Sun and Moon', being the most nearly related to the jazz idiom. The composer writes that he always attempts to write intense moments and beautiful singing lines of music. Interspersed as it was between the second and third parts of the Bach, immediately after the interval, I was amazed at the manner St George's moved between the different challenges of the two works, leaving me more astounded than ever at their skill and versatility. The Encompass Trio, comprising students at RNCM playing piano, double bass and drums accompanied the piece.

'I was amazed at the manner St George's moved between the different challenges of the two works, leaving me more astounded than ever at their skill and versatility.'



Neil and Will after their premiere league success

This extract is from Robert Farr's longer review which can be found at <http://seenandheard-international.com/2013/12/masterly-singing-by-st-georges-singers-in-bach-and-will-todd-premiere/>



Visions of Heaven

22 March 2014, St George's Church, Stockport

Tallis *Spem in alium*

Goodall *The Lord is my Shepherd*

Howells *O, pray for the peace of Jerusalem*

Dove *Seek him that maketh the seven stars*

Harris *Faire is the Heaven*

Wood *O thou the central orb*

Purcell *Remember not, Lord, our offences*

Stanford *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*

Parry *I was glad*

Tickets: 01663 764012

Online: www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

£12, £10 conc, £2 students

VISIONS OF HEAVEN – THE SOUNDS OF ENGLAND'S CHURCHES

Our next concert on 22 March is a celebration of the glorious music that for centuries has adorned the English church. For over a thousand years cathedrals and college chapel choirs have performed *Opus Dei*, the daily pattern of prayer and music in praise of God, in choral services.

Beginning with Catholic monastic chants, through early polyphony, by the time of the Reformation composers were beginning to set the words of the Liturgy in English. Since the 16th century these words have been sung to extraordinarily beautiful music performed to a very high standard by exceptional choirs of professional men, lay clerks and talented treble choristers, led by dedicated directors of music. This cathedral heritage is unique to this country, and should be cherished – yet we take it for granted. Few sounds on earth are more glorious than that of a cathedral choir singing the daily office; yet at Evensong on a cold, dark winter evening there are sometimes more people in the choir than in the congregation. However, the *Opus Dei* continues despite financial pres-

ures and recruitment difficulties. In the last fifty years or so this repertoire has been taken from cathedrals into concert halls, and many more people now hear music composed for divine services outside churches than in them.

We wanted to sing some of this music ourselves, and give our audience the experience of hearing this wonderful repertoire – hence this concert, which we have entitled 'Visions of Heaven'. The music to be performed spans nearly six centuries, and features many of England's greatest composers. From the sixteenth century we will hear Tallis's unique *Spem in alium*, that choral *tour de force* of eight choirs, each divided into five parts. Beginning with a single solo voice from the first choir, voices enter in imitation then fall silent as the music moves round all eight choirs, and is then reversed. It promises to be a truly magical experience for choir and audience alike.

The seventeenth century is represented by another genius, Henry Purcell, with his short but electrifying *Remember not, Lord, our offences*. Moving on

through the nineteenth century the Choir will perform works by those three giants of the great English choral revival, Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry and Charles Wood. We enter the twentieth century with William Harris's *Faire is the Heaven*, a beautifully intricate and totally satisfying eight-part motet, and Herbert Howells' *O pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. And, to bring us up to date, we will be singing works by contemporary composers Jonathan Dove and Howard Goodall.

Whilst Goodall's *The Lord is my Shepherd* is probably well known to most people (it was used as the theme music to *The Vicar of Dibley*) and is frequently sung by The Cheshire Consort at weddings, Dove's *Seek Him that maketh the seven stars* is probably much less known. But we are certain you will be enthralled by its shimmering serenity and ethereal otherworldliness.

Whatever your own vision of heaven, this concert offers something to resonate with everyone.

MEMORIES OF OUR LAST *SPEM*

The first (and only) time St George's Singers has previously performed *Spem in Alium* was in 2002 under the direction of Stephen Williams. One of the audience members at that concert still holds vivid and very fond memories of the performance.

'I have followed St George's Singers for thirteen years. They have given me much pleasure. Their recitals are always enjoyable. Some stand out in the memory. Just a few examples follow.

'The Gretchaninov *Vespers* in the Holy Name church in Manchester were wonderfully rich. *Elijah* with Willard White and the Manchester Camerata in the sold-out Bridgewater Hall had the audience gripped and

ended with an eruption of applause.

'St George's church in Stockport is large and has a high, smooth wooden ceiling. Its acoustics suit the choir's music exceedingly well. This reached its peak when they performed Thomas Tallis' *Spem in alium*. The audience sat in the middle aisles with a great circle of singers in eight choirs of five voices each, more than a hundred singers, surrounding us. The

forty threads of music came from all sides. It came down from the ceiling as though from heaven. We were immersed in the heavenly music. It was the musical experience of a lifetime.'

John Russell

'(PS I look forward to being present when they perform *Spem in alium* again on Saturday 22 March 2014 at St George's, Stockport.)'

SPEM IN ALIUM – ‘A SONG OF FORTIE PARTES, MADE BY MR TALLYS’

Thomas Tallis (1505–1585) lived through some of the stormiest and most dangerous years of the sixteenth century. By the time of his death in 1585 he had been required to write music for Catholic rites under Henry VIII, for English vernacular services under Edward VI, for the reinstated Latin liturgy under Mary, and both Latin and English works for Elizabeth I's highly idiosyncratic approach to all matters liturgical. Although he remained an unreformed Roman Catholic throughout his life, as organist and composer to successive monarchs he kept his head (literally) and managed to avoid all the religious controversies that raged throughout the century, changing styles to match the very different musical demands of his royal masters.

It was this very versatility which allowed Tallis to experiment, and *Spem in alium* is a perfect example of this experimentation, in which he overlooked the actual function of the text as part of the Catholic rite in the interests of creating a through-composed motet of the most extraordinary kind, which represents the epitome of choral writing in England in the sixteenth century—and possibly subsequent centuries as well.

When and for whom was *Spem in alium* written? The early history of the work is obscure, but it is listed in the catalogue of the library of Nonsuch Palace in 1596 as ‘a song of fortie partes, made by Mr Tallys’. It may have been written for the fortieth birthday of either Queen Mary in 1556 or of Queen Elizabeth in 1573,

though there is no direct evidence for either. We do know that Italian composer Alessandro Striggio, composer of a 40-part motet *Ecce beatam lucem*, visited London in 1567, and that the Duke of Norfolk asked whether ‘none of our Englishmen could sett as good a songe’. As Norfolk was executed in 1572, that would be the latest date for the composition, and makes Elizabeth the intended recipient.

However, others believe that Mary Tudor is the more likely muse. First, the Latin text of the work is drawn from the Book of Judith as used in the Sarum Breviary, the pre-Reformation English liturgy used during Mary's reign. Mary was associated at the time with the Biblical Judith, having saved her people from Protestantism. Secondly, Tallis had a habit of modelling compositions on numeric frameworks,



which abound in *Spem*: the name ‘Tallis’ spelled according to numerological principles is 69, as is the name ‘Judith’, the two together equalling 138 – the number of bars in the work; and the name ‘Maria’ spells 40; the first time all forty voices sound together occurs in the 40th bar.

So, was the piece commissioned for Mary as a gesture of gratitude from one of the great Catholic families of England, Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, an ardent supporter of Mary's claim to the throne, and to whom Mary sold Nonsuch Palace in 1556?

There is a compelling argument that the piece was originally intended to be performed at Nonsuch. Commissioned by Henry VIII in 1538 to rival Fontainebleau, Nonsuch Palace in south London was a splendid construction, whose most distinctive feature was its south face, framed by two large octagonal towers. It is thought that the eight choirs needed for *Spem* would have been positioned in a circle in the balconies of the upper tower rooms, surrounding a seated audience below.

Weighing up all the evidence, many historians now believe that the work was planned for a premiere at Nonsuch Palace in 1556, but was postponed due to the death of Fitzalan's son and daughter that year and his wife in 1557. Mary died in 1558 without having heard the piece, and Elizabeth came to the throne. The work would therefore have first been heard by Elizabeth at Arundel House (Fitzalan's London home), and only later performed at Nonsuch.

We shall probably never know the true story of when and why the genius that was Tallis composed this miraculous work.

Suffice to say it remains one of the most dazzling displays of choral writing to have been produced by any composer in any country, and is one of the glories of the English choral tradition.



Thomas Tallis

Librarian Gwyneth Pailin still has the list of singers who took part in our previous performance of *Spem*, divided into the eight individual choirs and five separate parts. Of the group that sang in 2002, 32 choir members are singing again in the forthcoming performance—though most of them are singing in different choirs, and some even singing different parts! So, no prizes for remembering the notes from last time—but then, that's the fun of singing!

Think you've heard *Spem in alium* recently but can't remember where? Then you've been watching either *The Tudors*, where it accompanied Anne Boleyn's execution, or *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Of course, you may just be an incredibly cultured individual with a great interest in Renaissance music ...



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

Musical Chairs

We're delighted to announce that SGS has a new Chair. Peter Marcus has had to stand down due to work commitments and (given that he travels from York to rehearsal in Poynton every Tuesday) excessive petrol consumption. Many thanks to Peter for all his hard work over the last couple of years. Andrea Millington has agreed to take on the role, which (we all tell her!) is challenging, exciting and rewarding in equal measure. Andrea has been a member of St George's for many years, and was soprano rep before taking over the chairmanship. Good luck to Andrea from everyone in the Choir –and we promise to read your emails very carefully!

Stamp of Approval

Our 'chef de thé' Peter Farrington has been urging choir members to save and pass on any used stamps they come across in aid of the Macular Society. The society sends them to Stamps for Charity, who sell

them to collectors around the world. The income generated helps the Macular Society give aid to people suffering from macular disease. Peter recently sent a batch of stamps to the society and received a letter expressing their appreciation and thanks to all who helped collect them.

New member

Just one new member this term—soprano Rhona Ford joins us. Hope you enjoy your time with St George's. And a welcome back to Cynthia Wood (soprano) who returns after a break.

PM's question answered

Another wedding to celebrate as our former Chair, Peter Marcus, was married on 4 January at the Merchant Adventurers' Hall in York. His bride Pushpa wore a gorgeous peacock blue and green dress and looked stunning. Peter had his hair cut, and wore a big grin. We don't think they went on honey-



moon, as Peter was back at choir the following Tuesday. (Now that's what we call commitment!) Many congratulations to them both, and everyone in the Choir wishes them every happiness for the future.

Golfer needed

A reminder to any partners and Friends travelling with us on tour to Edinburgh in May that the Dragons (St George's unofficial golf society) still need one person to make up a four-ball. Singing and golf in Scotland all in one package –what could be better!



SGS' new assistant MD, Joseph Judge

INTRODUCING OUR NEW ASSISTANT MD

We were very sad to say farewell to our Assistant Musical Director, Calum Fraser, who has left St George's Singers to take up the post of Conductor with Nottingham University Choir. Unfortunately his new choir rehearses on a Tuesday evening—clashing with St George's rehearsals, and making his departure unavoidable.

During his three and a half years with us, Calum has played a crucial role in many of our concerts, as a performer and assistant conductor, and particularly as conductor for Cheshire Consort – as well as vocal coach to those of us who had auditions! However, like all assistant conductors, Calum has had to move on, and we're

delighted that we've been able to help and encourage him during the early stage of his career, and provide valuable conducting experience. We shall miss his enthusiasm and friendship (not to mention his sartorial flair!), but wish him good luck with his new choir and his future operatic ambitions.

Stepping into Calum's shoes as our new assistant MD is Joseph Judge. Joe is an experienced singer – and our first counter-tenor conductor! Originally from Loughborough, Joe was a choral scholar at Truro Cathedral and is currently Lay Clerk at Manchester Cathedral. Joe was also a finalist in BBC Radio 2's Young Chorister of the Year competition in 2004. He

graduates from Manchester University this year, where he is student choral conductor of the university music society, and co-director of the university's two chamber choirs, Ad Solem and The Cosmo Singers. Currently Joe is also Director of Music and Master of the Choristers at Bury Parish Church, where he has recently supervised a week-long visit by the choristers to Canterbury Cathedral. He also assists Matthew Hamilton at Salford Choral Society – Matthew of course himself a former Assistant MD of St George's.

A very warm welcome to Joe from everyone at St George's.

ANCIENT VISIONS OF THE HEAVENS

Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

One of the most beautiful pieces we shall be singing in our 'Visions of Heaven' concert is by modern composer, Jonathan Dove. *Seek Him that maketh the seven stars* was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Arts and first performed in May 1995.

The title refers to the most famous star cluster in the sky, the Pleiades. Also known as the Seven Sisters, the Pleiades are thought to have formed around 100 million years ago, and lie some 425 light years from earth. From our perspective the cluster appears in the constellation of Taurus, above and to the right of Orion, and reaches its highest point in the sky around 4am in September, midnight in November, and 8pm in January. The Pleiades are a physically related group of stars rather than the result of a chance alignment: they are all moving in the same direction across the sky, at the same rate, heading in the direction of Orion's feet.

According to Greek myth, the Pleiades were the daughters of the Titan Atlas and the Oceanid Pleione. The girls had troubled lives: Alcyone and Celaeno were seduced by Poseidon, Asterope ravished by Aries, whilst Zeus had his evil (albeit godly) way with Electra, Maia and Taygete. Only Merope avoided the attentions of the gods, marrying the mortal Sisyphus instead. (And we all

know what happened to him.) Things got even worse for the girls when the great hunter Orion took a fancy to them, pursuing them for seven years, until they were rescued by the gods, transformed into doves, then placed among the stars – where they are still chased across the sky by the constellation Orion.

Although traditionally called the 'seven' sisters, the Pleiades cluster actually contains around 500 stars, of which only nine bright ones are commonly visible to the naked eye: the seven sisters plus their parents, Atlas and Pleione. And of the seven, only six are easily visible. Legend has it that one of the sisters, Merope, was so ashamed of her marriage to a mortal that she hides her face behind a veil. More prosaically, one of the brighter stars has probably just faded since the cluster was named.

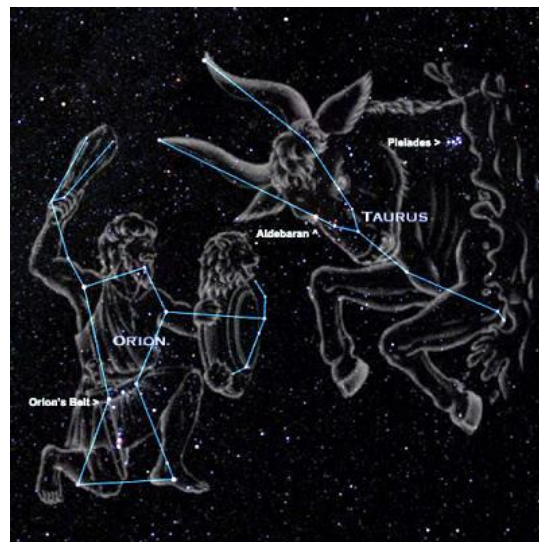
The derivation of the name is uncertain. Some think it comes from the word *plein*, 'to sail', making Pleione 'sailing queen' and her daughters 'sailing ones.' Others believe that the cluster's conjunction with the sun in spring and opposition in autumn marked the start and end of the summer sailing season in ancient Greece, during which the Pleiades was visible. Others favour derivation from the word *pleos*, 'full' or 'many', or from *peleiaides*, 'flock of doves', consistent with the sisters' transformation.

The cluster has a prominent place in ancient mythology and cultural traditions all around the world: the rising of the Pleiades before daybreak heralded the arrival of spring and the rising of Orion after sunset signalled the

onset of winter. They were the first stars mentioned in astronomical literature, appearing in Chinese annals of 2357 BC, and were mentioned by Homer. They feature in the cultures of the Maori, Aboriginal Australians, Persians, Indians, Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, Maya, Inca and Aztec, and the Sioux, Cheyenne and Cherokee. Andean farmers still use the appearance of the Pleiades as a seasonal forecasting guide for rainfall; cirrus clouds associated with the El Niño weather cycle obscure the fainter stars. In Africa the Pleiades designate the beginning of the agricultural year, and in many Bantu languages the verb *kulima* ('to hoe') furnishes the basis for the name 'kilimia', the Pleiades. In Japan, the constellation is known as Subaru ('unite') and is depicted in the logo of the Subaru automobile company.

They also feature more than once in the Old Testament, in which Jonathan Dove found the words in the Book of Amos to set to music. Amos, a herdsman and prophet, names the stars well known to shepherds: Orion as the precursor of the tempests, and the Pleiades, heralds of spring.

Ancient visions of the heavens that still inspire wonderful music.



'The theme of light, and star-light in particular, is an endless source of inspiration for composers. I came across these words about light and stars while looking for a text to set as an anthem for the Royal Academy of Arts' annual Service for Artists: I thought these images would have a special meaning for visual artists. The anthem begins with a musical image of the night sky, a repeated organ motif of twinkling stars that sets the choir wondering who made them. The refrain 'Seek him' starts in devotional longing but is eventually released into a joyful dance, finally coming to rest in serenity.'

Jonathan Dove



In 1921, a collection of interviews with famous singers of the day was published, entitled *Great Singers on the Art of Singing*. Here are just a few of their thoughts: some we may find outdated; others may trigger ideas about our own singing.

The publication is available for free download on the Project Gutenberg website: www.gutenberg.org.



Marcella Sembrich



Nellie Melba



Enrico Caruso

ON THE ART OF SINGING

I am told that many people in America have the impression that my vocal ability is kind of a 'God-given' gift; that is, something that has come to me without effort. This is so very absurd that I can hardly believe that sensible people would give it a moment's credence. Every voice is in a sense the result of a development, and this is particularly so in my own case. The marble that comes from the quarries of Carrara may be very beautiful and white and flawless, but it does not shape itself into a work of art without the hand, the heart, and the intellect of the sculptor.

Enrico Caruso

If I were to teach a young girl right at this moment I would simply ask her to take a deep breath and note the expansion at the waist just above the diaphragm. Then I would ask her to say as many words as possible upon that breath, at the same time having the muscles adjacent to the diaphragm to support the breath; that is, to sustain it and not collapse or try to push it up. The trick is to get the most tone, not with the most breath but with the least breath, and especially the very least possible strain at the throat, which must be kept in a floating, gossamer-like condition all the time.

Julia Claussen

My daily work simply consists of scales, arpeggios and the simplest kind of exercises, the simpler the better. I always make it a point to commence practising very softly, slowly and surely. I never sing notes outside my most comfortable range at the start. Taking notes too high or too low is an ex-

tremely bad plan at first. Many young students make this fault. They also sing much too loud.

Emilio de Gogorza

I think that everybody should sing ... When one sings properly one exercises nearly all of the important muscles of the torso. The circulation of the blood is improved, the digestion bettered, the heart promoted to healthy action—in fact, everything is bettered. Singers as a rule are notoriously healthy and often very long lived. The new movement for community singing in the open air is a magnificent one. Let everybody sing

Ernestine Schumann-Heinck

One has only to watch people who are under the magic spell of beautiful music to understand what a power it has for the good. I believe that good vocal music should be a part of all progressive educational work. The more music we have, the more beautiful this world will be, the more kindly people will feel toward each other and the more life will be worth living.

Marcella Sembrich

The teacher must be one who has actually realized the great truths which underlie the best, simplest and most natural methods of securing results and who must possess the wonderful power of exactly communicating these principles to the pupil. A good teacher is far rarer than a good singer. Singers are often poor teachers, as they destroy the individuality of the pupil by demanding arbitrary imitation.

Emma Thursby

I remember an incident in my youth. I went to a concert and heard a much lauded singer

render an aria that was in turn vociferously applauded by the audience. This singer possessed a most wonderful tremolo. Every tone went up and down like the teeth of a saw. It was impossible for her to sing a pure even tone without wobbling up and down. But the untrained audience, hungry to applaud anything musical, had cheered the singer despite the tremolo. Consequently I went home and after a few minutes' work I found that it was possible for me to produce a very wonderful tremolo. I went proudly to my teacher and gave an exhibition of my new acquirement. 'Who on earth have you been listening to?' exclaimed my teacher. I confessed and was admonished not to imitate.

Nellie Melba

Probably more voices are ruined by strain than through any other cause. The singer must relax all the time. This does not mean flabbiness. It does not mean that the singer should collapse before singing. Relaxation in the singer's sense is a delicious condition of buoyancy, of lightness, of freedom, of ease and entire lack of tightening in any part. When I relax I feel as though every atom in my body were floating in space. There is not one single little nerve on tension.

Ernestine Schumann-Heinck

For me the most difficult vowel is 'ah.' The throat then is most open and the breath stream most difficult to control properly. Therefore I make it a habit to begin my practice with 'oo, oh, ah, ay, ee' in succession. I never start with sustained tones. This would give my throat time to stiffen.

Julia Claussen

THE REHEARSAL POLICE GET TOUGH

Vocal Offences

Obtrusive vocal technique	£20
Unsuccessful pitch approximation	£10
Snoring	£20
Snoring while singing	£50
Ungodly noises (musical)	£25

Impersonating a professional

Stupid questions	£10
Really stupid questions	£20
Really stupid questions which increase rehearsal length	£50

Presumptuous newcomer behaviour

Flaunting musical knowledge	£25
Historical nit-picking	£50
Endless diction questions	£100
Raising hand after neighbour's mistake	£25
Obtrusive foot tapping	£10
Uninvited conducting	£15

General toadying

Insane cackling at conductor's bad jokes	£50
Unwarranted beatific smiling while singing	£40
Stultifyingly minute vocal technique questions	£75
Violent nodding	£25
Singing full voice in the front row	£30
Pretending to understand conductor's metaphors	£25
Actually understanding conductor's metaphors	£50

Annoying behaviour

Singing high notes louder than possible	£25
Holding high notes a crotchet longer than everyone else	£200
Singing unassigned solo parts (sotto voce)	£25
Singing unassigned solo parts (fortissimo)	£200
Discussing vocal technique during rehearsal	£25
Discussing vocal technique during break	£500
Bringing the full score	£100
Naming yourself or your children after an opera	£1,000

It has been suggested to the committee that, instead of raffles and other small-scale fund-raising initiatives, a far quicker way to raise money for the Choir will be to instigate a series of fines for inappropriate or annoying behaviour at rehearsals. A draft proposal has therefore been prepared (see box) for discussion at the next committee meeting.



Inspector Morse was determined to hunt down the unruly elements in the basses, so decided to go undercover

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING ARCH

BY GWYNETH PAILIN

Ever since we began to use the hall at Hillcrest School for rehearsals I had been puzzled. There was something wrong! I stared repeatedly at the row of arches in the wall, I noticed the flat featureless wall above and I peered to see what was behind the curtains. At times it felt like that Agatha Christie book where someone finds themselves in their childhood home and tries to go through a door that isn't there.

Between the ages of six and ten I was a pupil in the Junior department of what was then Stockport High School and though our classrooms were in an annexe we were at special times allowed in to the main school assembly where we sat in little alcoves watching through railings and looking down – I was sure it was down – on what was going on. But maybe my memory was playing tricks and I'd got it all wrong!

Then recently I had an opportunity to mention this to the caretaker. 'Yes' he said, 'we had a visit from an American lady who told me the same thing' and then he added, 'They're still there you know – it's just that they've been bricked up on one side.' Still there! I hadn't imagined it after all. Up I went to see for myself: a long corridor with a wall with alcoves in it not serving any particular purpose – but they did have once and I hadn't dreamt it!





Things that get in the way

- Mobile phones, pagers and beeper watches (turn them off!)
- Talking—you'd be surprised how many people get so excited that they forget they're not watching TV
- Unwrapping anything
- Coughing (bring cough drops—unwrap them beforehand!—or take cough medicine)
- Squeaking a chair
- Opening a purse
- Jangling coins
- Rustling the programme
- Saying 'shhh'
- Texting
- Fidgeting
- Passing notes
- Adding or subtracting clothes
- Messing around with belongings
- Eating
- Entering or leaving
- Walking around

CONCERT MANNERS—OR HOW NOT TO ANNOY THE CONDUCTOR

There's nothing mysterious or difficult about how to act at a concert. It's just common sense: the music needs silence, so the audience contributes silence; both the musicians and the audience want to concentrate on the music, so listeners stay put during a performance.

One thing can be a bit confusing: knowing when to clap. At most other kinds of concerts, people clap whenever the music stops, but in classical music you wait to clap until the very end of a piece. You don't have to sit like a statue. You can breathe; you can shift your body in your chair. You can respond to the music but your response will be inward. You might experience intense feelings while outwardly sitting quite still. This inwardness is part of the style and vibe of classical music: it's an inner experience—emotion without motion.

The basic idea is to help each other focus on the music. Making noise, fidgeting, or walking around can distract other listeners, and it may interfere with the musicians' concentration. We're all used to talking and moving around while the TV is on—it's easy to forget that at a concert the performers can see and hear the audience! Your attention and silence will help the musicians to perform a better concert. They can feel your involvement, and it inspires them to give their best.

A common concern of listeners at classical concerts is the dreaded Fear of Clapping in the Wrong Place. It's no wonder the audience is afraid: classical musicians don't usually make clear what they expect of the audience. In other kinds of

music, the audience claps whenever there's an ending—if the music stops, people applaud. But in classical music, one piece may have several parts, each with its own ending. You are supposed to wait to the very end of the very last ending before you clap.

This can be tough. Sometimes you can't tell if the piece is over. Sometimes you get so carried away by the music that you really want to clap. Sometimes you're so enthusiastic after a section ends that you've just got to clap for the musicians.



Don't do it. It seems cruel to squelch that urge to applaud, but please wait for the very end of the whole piece. How do you tell when a piece of music is really over? Quite often a classical piece has several sections, each with its own ending, and it can be hard to tell which ending is the final ending, the one you're supposed to clap for. How do you know when it's really the end of the whole thing? When in doubt, simply wait until lots of other people are clapping.

By the way, this tradition of waiting to applaud until the very end of a piece is relatively new. In other times and places, audiences clapped throughout

the music. Mozart reported in a letter to his father that there had been wild applause during his latest symphony. So if you feel an urge to clap before the very end of a piece, you're in tune with an authentic historical tradition.

You don't have to be tense or uptight through the concert. You don't have to hold your breath! But do help to create a silence in which the music can thrive, and a stillness that helps everyone focus on that music.

In some situations you can clap whenever you like something. This is often the case at opera and ballet. The audience may applaud the lights dimming, the curtain opening, the first appearance of a major star, an impressive dance move, a lovely song, or a beautifully designed backdrop. If you get confused, just imitate the rest of the audience. The performers are supposed to help you know when to clap, but they don't always make it clear.

Musicians hate to tell people not to clap. They love applause. If somebody gets carried away and claps in the 'wrong' place, most musicians don't mind. They're happy to accept approval in any form. But they like the audience to wait until the very end of a piece so that everyone hears the complete piece as a total experience. Long pieces may involve several mood changes, and it's lovely not to disrupt these with applause.

Article reproduced by kind permission of Naxos: http://www.naxos.com/education/enjoy2_concertmanners.asp



THE BALLAD OF THE SECOND ALTOS

BY SYLVIA JOHNSON

The second sops may whinge,
The first sops like to trill,
The first contraltos – lots of
them! –
But the second altos are brill.

We're big and bold and beefy,
And that's before we sing.
We may be few, and a motley
crew,
But Hark! The second altos
sing.

We sometimes help the tenors,
We like to sing down low.
We'd like to help the basses
too,
But they'd tell us where to go.

We've got Bridget to keep our
notes right,

And Connie to save our souls.
With Anne and Sue to run the
joint –
We're very important you
know.

You couldn't do without us,
But sometimes you like to try.
We keep the choir grounded,
But we'll never reach the sky.

We're totally committed,
And we turn up rain or snow.
We keep to our little section –
But we really run the show.

So don't write off the seconds.
We're few but we are strong.
We're altos, seconds and
proud,
And we're very rarely wrong.



Neil quickly realised his mistake in asking the second altos to sing more quietly

AND TALKING OF ALTOS ...

There are many ways (most of them polite) to refer to these most blessed of singers, the altos, along with a broad array of classifications between various mezzos, altos and contraltos.

In the opera house, they're called mezzo-sopranos, in the middle (*mezzo*, in Italian) of the soprano and the contralto – roughly singing from the A below middle C and up at least two octaves. Although the distinction between the two began in the mid-1700s, it wasn't until the 19th century that composers began thinking of the mezzo in terms of specific types of roles.

Mezzos, because of their naturally lower, often darker-hued voices, were often cast as older characters: maids and confidants (Amelia in Verdi's *Otello*), nurses (Filippevna in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*), rivals (Amneris in Verdi's *Aida*), or sometimes even young men ('pants roles' like Cherubino in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*).

The terms alto and contralto are sometimes used inter-

changeably but it's not that simple. Alto, strictly speaking, refers to the vocal range one rung higher than a tenor. The term goes back to the 16th century, when alto parts in church music were sung only by men – either high tenors, falsetto singers (counter-tenors), boys, or castrati.

Alto was the more common term until contralto (meaning 'against,' or *contra* alto) gave it some competition. Contraltos, range-wise, fall between the mezzo and the tenor. They are the lowest of the female voices – but not always female, as the word could also refer to a male castrato back in the early 18th century. They can sing usually down to the F below middle C up to at least the second E above middle C.

Mezzos can be subdivided further, depending on the size and timbre of the voice. The Germans, lovers of classification, have developed a system for doing this formally. The 'Fach' system is a method of classifying singers, primarily opera singers, according to the range,

size, weight, and colour of their voices, as well as physical appearance. ('Fach' means 'compartment' or 'subject', and here is used in the sense of '(vocal) specialization'.) The system is used worldwide, but primarily in Europe, especially in German-speaking countries and by repertory opera houses. It prevents a singer from being asked to sing roles which he or she is incapable of performing. Opera companies keep lists of available singers by *Fach* so that when they are casting roles for an upcoming production, they do not inadvertently contact performers who would be inappropriate for the part.

So, under the Fach system, low female voices are divided up into five types: coloratura mezzo (such as Joyce DiDonato), lyric mezzo (Janet Baker), dramatic mezzo (Dolora Zajick), dramatic contralto (Marian Anderson), and low contralto (Kathleen Ferrier).

Which of these best describes our altos? We leave that to our Musical Director!

From *The Fountain Overflows* by
Rebecca West:

(Gifted sister complaining about
the excruciating noises being
made on the violin by her
ungifted sibling)

'There are homes for the deaf and
blind ...but there are no homes for
bad violinists.'

'Homes for bad musicians, what a
terrible idea', said Mamma. 'The
home for bad contraltos would be
the worst. People would be afraid
to go near it at night, the sounds
coming from it would be so
terrible, particularly when the
moon was full.'

Spotted by our very own
Ursula Birkett (alto).

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

Andrea Millington (Chair), 01924 694668
chair@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Jacqui Smith (Secretary), 01625 533779
enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Hemiola Editor: Susan Hodgson
susan.hodgson28@btinternet.com



Find us on the web at:

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



To receive a regular copy of *Hemiola*, complete the Mailing List registration on the website, or contact the Publicity Officer.

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 22 March 2014

**'Visions of Heaven' - a celebration
of English church music
St George's Church, Stockport**

Sunday 22 June 2014

**Zimbe!
with
Bradshaw Hall Primary School
Choir and
the Call Me Al Quintet
Gorton Monastery**

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

MANCHESTER SINGS

Stainer's *Crucifixion*

'Come and Sing' Stainer's *Crucifixion* on Sunday 6th April at St Michael's Church, Ashton-u-Lyne. Rehearsal starting at 2.30pm, followed by break for refreshments and performance at 5pm. £5, with proceeds going to the Church Tower Fund. Plenty of singers are needed, preferably with a nucleus of people who are reasonably familiar with the music but also with people who are new to it. Scores provided. Contact John Miles, 01457 763701.

Walton *Belshazzar's Feast / Delius Sea Drift*

Stockport Festival Chorus Sunday 6th April 2014, Stockport Town Hall. Rehearsals 7-8 March, and 4-5 April.

£75 (all rehearsals), £65 (concert weekend only). Score hire £5.
Contact: Janet Elwin, The Old Plough, Buckland, Aylesbury HP22 5HX
Tel: 01296 630454,
email: janet@elwins.net

Singing Day with Will Todd

Saturday 12 April, Woodley Methodist Church, Hyde Road, Stockport.
Music will include Todd's 'Sanctus' and 'Benedictus' from *Mass In Blue*, *The Call of Wisdom*, *My Lord has come*, *Amazing Grace*, *A Boy was born* and *Angel Song*. Music by John Rutter and Bob Chilcott will complete the selection. Music will be provided for use during the workshop. £18, £14 ABCD members, £10 students.

Tel: 0151 632 0466

Email:
d.morley52@btinternet.com

Solo Singing Masterclass Stanley Palace, Chester 3-5 October 2014 with John Huw Davies

Suitable for a wide variety of vocal abilities, with a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere. Participants should prepare four pieces to perform during the weekend. Begins on Friday afternoon and ends Sunday afternoon at 5pm after a short informal concert. Course fee £175 includes all tuition fees, lunch, tea and coffee.
Information: www.singing-courses.com