



Hemiola Online

MONDAY 6 JULY 2020

St George's Singers

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, has thrown a £1.5bn lifeline to Britain's struggling theatres, music venues and museums, as he prepares to set out plans to avert a Covid-19 unemployment crisis.

Mr Sunak accepted the argument made by Britain's artistic leaders that the need for social distancing for the foreseeable future could devastate the cultural life of the country.

The settlement, secured by culture secretary Oliver Dowden after weeks of detailed study of the problems facing the arts sector, includes £880m of grants for the financial year to April 2021.

For analysis of and comment on the significance of this...please see Issue 65!

OH, BRAVE NEW WORLD

Welcome to our July edition of Hemiola, an intermediate version of a future web-based newsletter. Whilst the layout reflects most aspects of our print version, it is structured to be more easily read as a PDF on iPads, Tabs, laptops and other devices.

Since the start of the lockdown, St George's Singers' community has been learning how to adapt to life without our weekly face-to-face rehearsals. On Sunday 22 March, the day before the formal lockdown was announced by the Prime Minister, all choir members received an email from Neil Taylor. This was the first of our weekly rehearsal emails and we have been continuing to study unfamiliar works from our new choir book, *English Church Music*. Generously donated to St George's Singers, this anthology had been given out to choir members a few weeks prior to lockdown and so was available for study at home. Neil's guidance, accompanied, albeit distantly, by Pete Durrant, used both audio and video recordings to introduce, practise and refine a number of works. We will be using these at future concerts when we finally meet again in whatever form that might be.

Many of our members have told us that this weekly contact has been a lifeline; a reminder of our community spirit, keeping us in touch with our Musical Director, monitoring his changing hair style and highlighting his constant leadership with always entertaining wit.

In recent weeks we have been embracing the marvels of Zoom, giving our choir members the opportunity to have sectional socials, as well as being able to hold our end of term social. You can read more of these events on pages seven and eight.



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Marcus Farnsworth MA ARAM

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Sasha Johnson Manning
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Robert Brooks

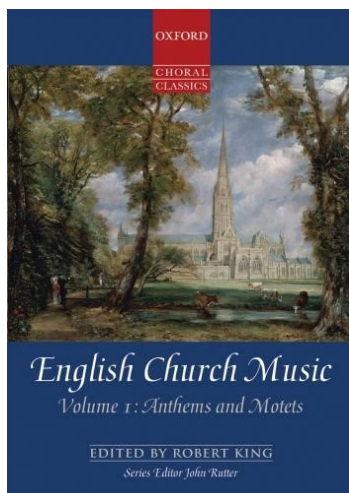
ACCOMPANIST:

Peter Durrant

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



It has been hard to forgo what for many is the highpoint of the working week; an opportunity to put our voices together and enjoy each others' company. We are aware that our much loved pastime is currently classed as one of the more infectious activities whilst the Coronavirus is still with us and likely to last into the autumn and winter. However, we have recently been delighted to learn that Neil Taylor and Pete Durrant will be able to extend the use of Zoom to facilitate the return of St George's Singers' Tuesday rehearsal night.

It may not be quite as we know it of old, but it will be ours again.





In love with his own reflection, this little Narcissus keeps asking to be let in!

Jenny Limond (alto) sent photographs of a chirpy little visitor, one who has spent some time trying to avoid social distancing rules and meet her inside her house.

Weighing the same as a 20p coin, the goldcrest is Britain's smallest bird, which builds its hammock shaped nests suspended at the end of the branches of a conifer tree.

If you think you have seen one flitting between tree branches, listen carefully; so high not everyone is able to hear it, the goldcrest has a high-pitched 'zee' call and thin, flourishing song.



Crest raised and ready for a bit of avian flirting.

SOUNDS AND SWEET AIRS

It has become a soundtrack to lockdown: not the wailing sirens or the helicopters overhead – but the melody of birdsong at sunrise, now sounding clearer than it has been for decades, in a world that had ground to a halt.

With reduced air traffic and fewer vehicles on the roads to muffle its sound, birdsong has been heard louder and clearer for some time.

The UK is now easing into a less restricted lockdown following many weeks of reduced air and land travel. During this time, the deep joy of listening to birds and the interest in identifying them has increased significantly, with the RSPB seeing a spike in the appetite to learn about garden birdsong. Norfolk Wildlife Trust's online guides to identifying birdsong are positively poetic and worth reading at norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk.

The Common Scoter is usually silent. However, the male is more vocal during courtship displays and on spring migration, uttering high, mellow piping whistles 'pew, pew, pew'. The produces harsh, rasping notes. While migrating at night, male and female scoters give 'gyu' calls. Males' wings produce a sharp whistling sounds on take-off.



Migrating scoters heard across the UK this year

© Carrusley Books

One night in April this year, birdwatchers from around Britain stepped outside their doors and listened intently to the fluting, mysterious and melancholy cry or call of the common scoter on the wing. Flocks of these sea ducks were beating their way over Britain on their long migratory journey towards their Arctic breeding grounds, easily audible to the naked ear. The first wave was heard on the Wirral before being picked up in the Peak District, and at last by the Humber. A second wave flew along Hadrian's wall and a third wave were heard from the Severn estuary to the Wash, in urban Blackburn, Stalybridge, Bristol and London.

Birdsong and calls have played a role in Western Classical music since at least the 14th century, when composers such as Jean Valliant quoted birdsong in their compositions. Among the birds whose song is most often used in music are the nightingale and the cuckoo.

Composers and musicians have made use of birds in their music in different ways: they can be inspired by birdsong; they can intentionally imitate bird song in a composition; they can incorporate recordings of birds into their works.

Ottorino Respighi was the first to introduce recordings into composition. The bird that flutters into the third section of his 1924 23-minute tone poem *Pines of the Janiculum* really is a bird. Well, a recording of a bird anyway. It's the very same recording, supplied by the publisher, that has accompanied the piece since its premiere in 1924. Some believe that Respighi recorded it himself. His introduction of electronic techniques with orchestral music sparked a controversy that lasted well into the 1950s.

The cellist Beatrice Harrison became well known through her performances broadcast in the early days of BBC sound radio and especially those recordings of her playing in her garden, accompanied by the songs of the nightingales. Harrison had become aware that, when she

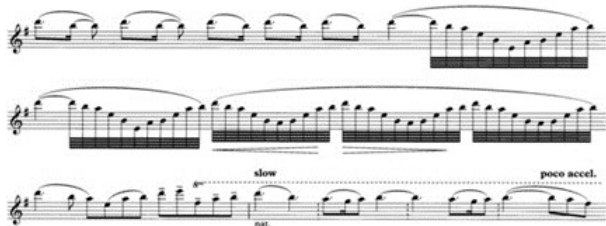
The distinction between **bird songs** and **calls** is based upon complexity, length and context. **Songs** are longer and more complex and are associated with territory and courtship and mating, whilst **calls** tend to serve such functions as alarms or keeping members of a flock **in** contact.

SOUNDS AND SWEET AIRS *CONT*

<< Page 2

practised in her garden, she would hear a nightingale answer and then echo the notes of the 'cello. This was repeated night after night. She eventually persuaded the BBC to try to record this interaction in a live broadcast. A Saturday evening performance from the Savoy was interrupted to go to Harrison playing Elgar, Dvorak and the Londonderry Air. For most of the performance no birds sang. It was a tense moment; this was the first outside broadcast ever made by the BBC from a natural location, using the Marconi-Sykes magnetophone. Then finally, 15 minutes before the end of the broadcast, the nightingale started chirping. The public reaction was phenomenal and the experiment was repeated the next month and then every spring for the following 12 years.

The composer Oliver Messiaen is well known for incorporating the patterns of bird song in his work. After capture by enemy forces in May 1940, he was sent to a prisoner of war camp where he wrote one of his most famous pieces, *Quartet for the End of Time*. Numerous influences can be identified but crucially it contained music that imitated the songs of a blackbird and a nightingale. After his release in 1941, he returned to Paris, resuming his life as musician and educator. Over the next 50 years, Messiaen would go on to write music ranging from vast operatic, choral and orchestral works through to miniatures for piano—all of it based on birdsong.



The swooping notes of the violin in *The Lark Ascending*

calming, wistful, evoking the essence of nature. Vaughan Williams was highly interested in British folk music which tends to use modes and pentatonic scales (five notes rather than the usual seven). Modal and pentatonic scales permeate his writing. *The Lark Ascending* took its inspiration from a poem written in 1881 by George Meredith, the music perfectly capturing the lark's 'chirrup, whistle, slur, and shake', and reflects the spirit of the subject. The violin swoops in fits starts up and down the pentatonic scale in a way that you can see the tiny lark in your imagination, catching the thermals over English cornfields, a glorious evocation of the freedom of movement.

Three hundred years prior to Vaughan Williams' ascending lark, the French composer Clément Janequin was enjoying great popularity largely due to his prolific output of well-loved chansons. His fame and popularity benefitted enormously from the concurrent development of music printing. The chansons for which Janequin is famous cleverly imitated natural or man-made sounds. Along with *Le chant des oiseaux*



Beatrice Harrison rehearsing in her garden

© British Broadcasting Corporation

One of my favourite bird songs is from the skylark. I'm fortunate to live on the edge of Werneth Low Country Park and often hear them while out walking the dogs. It takes me back to my teenage years, walking in the Shropshire hills when the sun always seemed to be shining!



The song sounds to me like a mountain stream, burbling over the stones.

Did you know that the Skylark can sing over 300 syllables and each bird's song is slightly different?

Jonathan Wright (tenor)

What's in a name?

Every morning, I am greeted by a hidden bird singing the same repeated phrase.

The reason this phrase has stuck in my head is that it replicates the opening five notes of the theme tune from the film *Schindler's List*. I've asked many people if they can identify it, but so far there has been no joy.



If there is anyone out there who thinks they may be able to help, please get in touch!

I suspect that it is playing mind games with me!

Mark Warrington (tenor)

SOUNDS AND SWEET AIRS CONT**<< Page 3**

(*The song of birds*), imitating bird calls in a lively piece for four voices, Janequin also wrote *La chasse* referencing the sounds of a hunt.

Like Janequin, many choral composers have imitated the sounds of birds in their works. For other choral composers, the music reflects powerful metaphors for their texts. *The Bluebird*, Charles Villiers Stanford's tribute to Mary Coleridge and a setting of her poem *L'oiseau bleu*, is rich in musical metaphor. Set in the key signature of G-flat, Stanford appears to avoid any functional harmonic progressions other than at cadences. The chords are found in positions other than root position, giving a sense of weightlessness and adding to images of sky and flight. The text 'below the hill' is marked with sustained staccatos for subtle, grounding emphasis. The haunting repeated use of the word 'blue' illustrates the timelessness of the moment, and the blue suspended sky.



A bird is three things:

Feathers, flight and song,

And feathers are the least of these. *Marjorie Allen Seiffert*

The lake lay blue below the hill,
O'er it, as I looked, there flew
Across the waters, cold and still,
A bird whose wings were palest blue.
The sky above was blue at last,
The sky beneath me blue in blue,
A moment, ere the bird had passed,
It caught his image as he flew.

At our choir social, **Mel Rimmer (alto)** reminded us of an extraordinary moment during one rehearsal.

The choir was rehearsing the *In Paradisum* from Faure's *Requiem*. The evening was very warm so the rehearsal room doors were open to the outside.



As the sopranos were asked to stand and perform their opening lines, a blackbird singing outside added a coloratura improvisation over the top.

At the end of the final phrase, we waited in silence, just for a breath.

SOUNDS OF THE EARTH

Every Sunday morning at 8:15am, Radio Three broadcasts *Sounds of the Earth*, recordings made by professionals and amateurs around the world, interspersed with associated music; the sounds have included a Tasmanian lyrebird, Thai gibbons, rivers in Argentina and Malawian hippos.

On Sunday 14 June, Martin Handley played a recording made by a listener in the suburbs of a UK town. A blackbird acts as an early wake up call and the listener has come to love and anticipate the blackbirds subtle changes of song during the sunrise.

The sound quality of the recording was 'brilliant'; fresh, clear, insistent and tuneful. And the music chosen to intersperse this thrilling trilling was delightful and comforting.

Diego Ortiz was a Spanish composer and music theorist about whom little is known. The *Trattado de Glosas* is considered 'a masterpiece of literature for the viola da gamba' (Wikipedia) and the *Recercada segunda de tenore* is a 'hold on to your hats' performance; fast, light and charming.

Gershwin's *Little Jazz Bird* was given a jaunty swing by Rodney Bennett, with repeated clashing chords mimicking the call of the blackbird.

Completing this 15 minutes of delight was an arrangement for string quartet of McCartney's *Blackbird*. The words of McCartney's song are well known to have been inspired by the racial tensions that exploded in spring 1968. The original guitar accompaniment was influenced by JS Bach's *Bourée in E minor*. This version of the song was fresh, cheerful and a most perfect start to the day.

**Sounds of the Earth
Playlist (14 06 20)**

**Trattado de Glosas:
Recercada segunda de
tenore**
Diego Ortiz
Pamela Thorby (recorder)
and Andrew Laurence-
King (harp)

Little Jazz Bird
George Gershwin
(Arr Richard Rodney
Bennett)
Richard Rodney Bennett
(Piano)

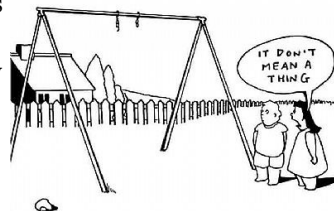
Blackbird
Paul McCartney
Cattus String Quartet
Arranged for string
quartet by Lubos Krτικά

CAPTIVATING STORIES

KEEPING IN TOUCH

During lockdown, we have been keeping in touch with our members and have held section socials (meetings) via Zoom, to find out how our friends and colleagues have been faring during the lockdown. For some it has been very hard, for a wide range of reasons; learning new technology quickly to keep working, preparing for new ways of teaching, supporting children or teenagers in their learning, going into a workplace with all the associated complications that poses and dealing with the effects of living alone and self isolating.

However, in amongst these challenges, we have seen examples of choir members embracing positives that the lockdown has created; exploring local areas, discovering walks, learning new skills or returning to those once lost, joining online music groups. Dotted through this edition are snippets and articles about some of these lockdown activities. Enjoy.

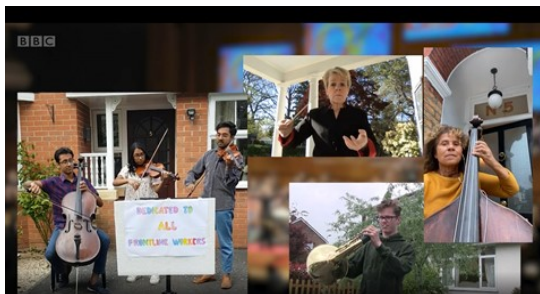


KATE FUGGLE (ALTO)

I have been really enjoying singing with Gareth Malone every night, songs from Elton John and Duran Duran. This has been a change for me and challenging in its own way. Gareth also included a week in which the music was the *Gloria* by Vivaldi, so a little more in my world. I also took part in Eric Whitacre's virtual choir 6 project, joining in the sessions learning *Sing Gently*. I was quietly proud to have been able to deal with all the technology needed to upload the music. I have to say that this is one of the most beautiful songs I have sung and would recommend choir members looking online to see the finished result.

A friend of mine set me a challenge to; to learn a treble recorder duet, an arrangement of a Brandenburg concerto. I subsequently discovered notes I did not know existed on the recorder. Practice sessions took place in the garden, so I hope that the neighbours have enjoyed it!

At one of the Thursday evening gatherings in recognition of front-line NHS and other key workers, I played *Over the Rainbow*, with a friend playing violin. I've continued this over the weeks and was so pleased to have recently received a lovely note from neighbours I hardly know saying how moving they found it. I held on to that note and added it to the journal I'm keeping.



National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain under the virtual baton of Marion Alsop from her home in America (www.bbc.co.uk)

instructions about downloading music and recording, as well as inviting us to consider to whom we would like to dedicate our performance.

I do find it interesting to realise just how much more confident I am in using technology. Almost everyday I am teaching flute, piano or clarinet on Zoom and Whatsapp. I've even been playing piano and flute duets and trios with myself, messing around with the computer and phone. Fortunately, my garden cherries have now ripened so I am making jam instead of spending too long playing on the computer!

Go-to Music

Choir members were asked whether there was certain music that they reached for when they needed solace or inspiration.

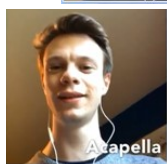
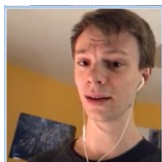
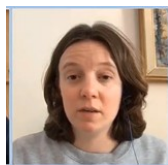
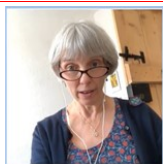
In the early stages of the pandemic and in reaction to relentlessly bad news, I worked my way through all the recordings of requiem masses in my collection - everything from Pizzetti to Berlioz. Thankfully, I soon got that out of my system.

My go-to music while working at my desk is, of course, Bach. Last year I bought John Eliot Gardiner's complete cycle of sacred cantatas and am now on my second time through in liturgical calendar order. Away from choral music, my new favourite recording is Kim Kashkashian's CD of the 'cello suites arranged for viola.

I have also been listening to a lot of podcasts. A new one that might interest others is 'Learning How to Be at Home' by two RNCM alumnae, Catriona Price and Esther Swift, who write and perform as **Twelfth Day**.

Each episode has reflections by professional musicians from around the world on how they have had to adapt as performers and teachers during lockdown. Twelfth Day's latest album, *Face to Face* (2019), was nominated in the 'Innovation in New Traditional Music' category of the Scottish Awards for New Music.

Andrew Horner (bass)



Virginia, Alice, Will and Will stacked to make form a homogenous whole!

CAPTIVATING STORIES *CONT*

THE SINGING FOXES *VIRGINIA FOX (SOPRANO)*

Some of you might remember my daughter, Alice, who sang with St George's Singers for a year after leaving University. She is now living in Bath and singing with the Bath Choral Society. My son, Will, is in his final year as a music student at Durham University.

After signing up for Gareth Malone's Great British Home Chorus, I quickly realised that, much though I admire what he does, his material was not for me. I was delighted, therefore, when Neil's weekly rehearsals came online. After working through the first few rehearsal emails, I wrote to Neil asking his permission to share them with Alice, as a former SGS member, under the proviso that they would not be shared further.

Alice, Will and I have now 'met' several times to sing together - she at her kitchen table singing soprano 2 or alto, and Will and me at mine, singing soprano 1 or 2, and bass respectively. Trying to co-ordinate this with Neil on screen and Pete on sound proved too complicated, but we have enjoyed busking it on our own with the help of Zoom.

There was one week when Alice was mysteriously one beat behind for the whole practice—definitely a technical not a musical problem—but Will drew on his choral conducting experience to somehow shepherd us through.

When Will's degree finals were completed and Alice's teaching commitments allowed, we set about recording the *Byrd Ave Verum*. Using the Acappella app sourced by Alice, we recorded one vocal part at a time, relying on our musical skills rather than a 'click track'. Did you spot the moment where they let us down? After that, each recording was 'stacked' on top of one another to form a homogenous whole. We hope you enjoyed the recorded performance at the social! Much musical merriment in the Fox household—thank you, Neil!

In the middle of a Zoom meeting with her grandchildren, Sue Mason (alto) suddenly realised that an apparently random goat had joined them.



But it was all arranged! Starting as a bit of a joke, farmer Dot McCarthy from Cronkshaw Fold farm in Lancashire has never been busier renting out her goats to appear in Zoom meetings!

Baa-rmy!

SNIPPETS FROM THE SECTION SOCIALS

In our soprano section social, Rhona Ford began to tell us that she was spending a lot of her time sewing scrubs to supply the medical staff at Stepping Hill and Wythenshawe hospitals, which was certainly keeping her busy. Also present in the meeting was Miranda Thewlis, who had been telling us how much she was enjoying playing the viola now that there were fewer distractions. In the middle of Rhona's account, Miranda's husband, John, suddenly appeared on screen and said, 'Rhona, Mr Potts would be proud of you!'

'I've just realised that my left ear is larger than my right!'

Announced by Chris Shelley (bass) at the start of the section meeting.

Initially non-plussed, Rhona took a moment to put things together and then the penny dropped. John and Rhona were in the same class in both primary and junior school; Mr Potts was the head master. They were fortunate to have a full time music teacher called Mrs Dean. She started a school orchestra and choir; John began to play the 'cello and Rhona the viola, both of them also playing in the Ashton youth orchestra. Rhona told me, 'We were so fortunate to go to a school that had a full time music teacher who was so dedicated and talented; I think most of her pupils continued with music into later life.'

At the bass section social in the middle of June, shortly after a government announcement about easing the lockdown, Michael Calam told us, 'My god-daughter has just invited me to be part of their bubble, to come around and share a dinner with them. After so long being alone, it was so nice to be part of that event.'

OUR REVELS NOW ARE ENDED



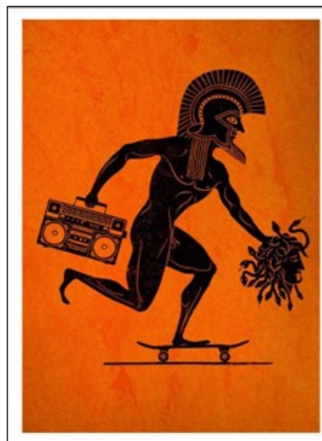
The power of Zoom took St George's Singers to an end of year social like never before. Sincere thanks go to the dedication of chairman John Smith in making this social event possible in lockdown. 75 members of the choir were able to come together in a virtual space to mark the end of a most extraordinary time for us.

Choir members had already tried out the facilities on Zoom when we held our

recent sectional socials; break-out rooms, chat facility, muting, applauding and voting. But the excitement of being suddenly gathered together was a wonderful revelation. In break-out rooms, a significant number of people realised that they were speaking to choir colleagues they rarely met in the usual rush of face to face rehearsal breaks in the church hall.

We were so pleased to have some extra guests at the social. Stephen Threlfall joined us and led the muted massed ranks in a glorious 'cello rendition of the song of our time, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. (The alto section was clearly delighted to have this set comfortably in their range for a change!) It was such a treat to see him especially after so many of us were recently reminded of our collaboration last year, having watched the streamed recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Chetham's Symphony Orchestra and a cast of hundreds.

Along with spouses and partners, we also had offspring. At the start of the social, as we were tuning in and waking up to the joy of seeing each other, David Morris and family appeared, causing a ripple of 'chat' debate about an appropriate collective noun. (See the slightly blurry screenshot to the right) Virginia Fox appeared with daughter and son (featuring twice) in a pre-recorded performance of Byrd's *Ave Verum*. Neil Taylor's son, Jamie, is now 13 and a chorister, attending (virtually) Ripon Cathedral School. Jamie performed the jazzy *Foreign Correspondent* with youthful and smiley flair.

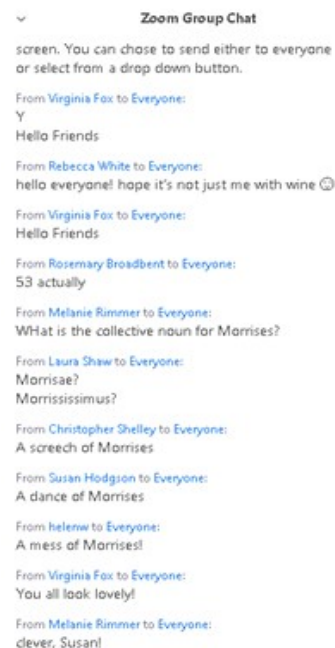


Perseus with the Gorgon's head and a ghetto blaster setting a historical context to Beatbox

The range of entertainment did not disappoint, and special mention goes to Gillian and Ian Banks for taking the first slot; this can sometimes create added pressure but Gillian's singing set the tone for a high standard. Kate Fuggle performed a trio on her own; pre-recorded piano and flutes behaved and we were entertained by Kate's introduction and running dialogue as well.

Something very new to the social evening and benefitting from the technology of Zoom, was an introduction and teaching session via a Powerpoint from Mel Rimmer; How to Beatbox. Well, dear reader, I laughed a lot and out loud at both our attempts to get down with the young folk, as well as Mel's witty potted and alternative reference to the foundations of Beatbox; this certainly gave her audience a significant clue as to what might be heading their way. Cleverly using deleted vowels to ease her audience into syllabic percussion, Mel showed great

Our usual joshing and quick badinage was not lost in our virtual world. We quickly got the hang of the 'chat' facility.



And this was before the evening had really got going.

Order of the Evening

Gillian and Ian Banks:

Take All Those Lips Away

Lorraine Lighton: Gershwin

- The Man I Love

Michael Calam:

McGonagall Story (1)

Anne Francis: A Story!

Jamie Taylor: Foreign Correspondent

INTERVAL Held in Break Out Rooms

Rosemary Broadbent:

Ground - Orlando Gibbons

Stephen Threlfall:

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

Virginia Fox: Schubert

Moment Musicaux

Pete Durrant and

Christina Knox:

Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody*

Mel Rimmer: Beatbox

INTERVAL

Held in Break Out Rooms

Kate Fuggle: Trio for three Flutes

Michael Calam: McGonagall Story (2)

Neil Taylor: Information

about next season's

rehearsals

Jean Egerton: Quiz

demonstration and invitation

INTERVAL

Held in Break Out Rooms

Chris Shelley: Flanders and Swann

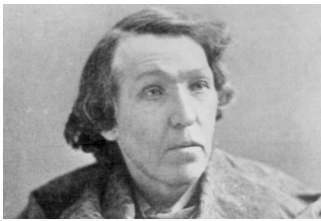
Virginia, Kate and Will

Fox: Byrd - *Ave Verum*

Neil Taylor and Vicky

Sunderland: Mozart *Flute*

Concerto #1 in G Major (K 313)



William Topaz McGonagall
1825–1902
Weaver, actor and poet

OUR REVELS NOW ARE ENDED *CONT (!)*

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savoir faire in dealing with mind boggling technology and an array of nodding faces, lips contorted and much spitting. Great fun.

How to beatbox Rimmer style

Boots and cats
Baboons and cats
B_ts _nd c_ts
B_b_ns _nd c_ts

is a variant of the Rachmaninov *Rhapsody*. Who knew?

A social would not be complete without a rendition of a poem by the poet least able to scan, William McGonagall. Michael Calam did not disappoint; not one but two! Anne Francis told us a tale of Bob the Builder and the villainous Mrs Johnson which led, circuitously, to a connection with a neighbour, trombone playing Andy who joined Anne in playing on VE Day. You had to be there, but it was most entertaining!

After hearing the exciting news of next term's rehearsal structure and trialling the option of a choir quiz, we moved to our last section. Just before we listened to the ethereal sounds of Byrd and Mozart, we heard from Flanders and Swann. We were treated to the honeyed tones of Chris Shelley, accompanied by his own confident guitar playing, singing *The Gas Man Cometh*. And we all instinctively joined in the joining bits. It felt as if a warm and comforting blanket was surrounding us, to help us weather this constant sea-change



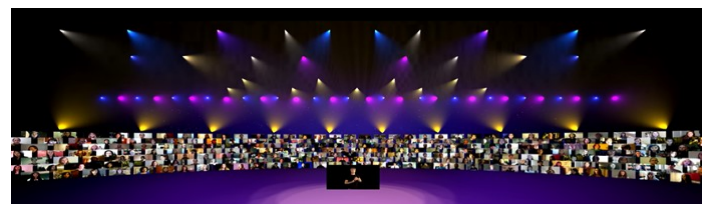
Rosemary Broadbent (Alto) at home and ready to educate and entertain.

Bridget Ovey (alto) noted the dilemmas associated with the 'click and collect' version of internet shopping which has made her diet quite interesting. She recently ordered 25 lemons and 10 packets of green chillis; a swift lemon posset sorted out one of the problems.



MORE SNIPPETS FROM THE SECTIONALS

Felicity Tucker (alto) described the fitting for her daughter's wedding dress after a lengthy visit to a store that had opened. Chairs and sofas were marked and separated. The bride-to-be was allowed to try on a certain number of dresses only. After one had been tried on, it would immediately be taken away to be steam cleaned. All present knew that if there was even one case of infection traced to the store it would be closed down.



Screen shot from Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir performing *Lux Aeterna* in March 2010

Both Rebecca White (soprano) and Kate Fuggle (alto) took part in Eric Whitacre's international song *Sing Gently*, due to be broadcast Sunday 19 July on You Tube.

Geoff Taylor (bass) told us that on his lockdown list was listening to all of Bach's cantatas. He started, listened to one, and then gave up. But he has transferred allegiance to the online recordings by VOCES8 which are proving to be quite magnificent.

BEST COMPANIONS IN THE WORLD

During our sectional Zoom get togethers we heard of international music events, live streamed concerts, recordings and other sources of musical inspiration that have provided our cultural and musical fix during the lockdown. Recently, many of us watched the live streaming of our combined concert at the Bridgewater Hall last year, the extraordinary and exhilarating performance of Mahler with Chetham's students and others. And our own Pete Durrant gave two choirs the opportunity to sing Mozart's *Requiem* a few weeks ago, which was greeted with absolute delight by St George's Singers and Stafford Choral Society as a welcome but brief return to singing a full choral work.

Throughout June, Radio Three has been broadcasting live lunchtime concerts from the Wigmore Hall, with soloists and duos performing to an empty house save for a sound engineer and a BBC broadcaster. The festival was launched by Stephen Hough's solo performance. 'Listeners were in tears; they had their radios on while making lunch, and found themselves transfixed. Comparisons with Myra Hess' wartime concerts at the National Gallery did not seem absurd, once you discounted the possibility of aerial bombardment,' stated Richard Bratby in *The Spectator*. (13 June 2020)

The real art is to have that sixth sense, knowing when they are going to have a memory lapse, when they're going to come in a bar early or even skip a whole verse. You have to be able to cover all that in your playing, so smoothly that no one notices.

Anna Tillbrook

Catching up on some of the concerts via You Tube, without the distraction of an audience, it was exhilarating to watch the performances and notably the intensity of focus from the accompanists. 'These unsung heroes of music condemned to sit in the shadows of the great voices and even greater egos of today's singers,' wrote Tom Service in 2012, when interviewing Roger Vignoles. 'The singers couldn't do it without them, but it's the ... sopranos and ... tenors who get all the glory, as well as most of the cash and applause...'

We accompanists have our minds above such mundane things as fees. But I would like people to realise what extremely important people we accompanists are.

Gerald Moore

The next few articles focus on our own accompanists, to remind ourselves of their musical pedigree and admirable work ethic.

WHAT IS A RÉPÉTITEUR?

The word comes from the French verb *répéter*; to repeat, to go over, to learn. Most definitions emphasise the individual's role in coaching opera singers to refine and improve their voice and the pronunciation of words.

Jenna Simeon, Canadian pianist and vocal coach, writing in a humorous article in *schmopera.com*, described a répétiteur as 'a special breed of pianist, with an insanely focused set of skills.

Being a répétiteur is one of those jobs that can feel

thankless, where people only notice you're playing when you mess up. It's about checking [in] your pianist ego at the door, and facilitating a rehearsal for others: singers, conductors, and directors. It takes a thick skin and a knowledge of the score that rivals that of the top-billed creative staff...I'm not saying répétiteurs need to be telepathic...but it's important for the pianist to keep these checkpoints in mind and anticipate when they'll be used again.'

Singer Beware

During the course of assembling this edition, I was given this little piece of musical received wisdom.

Don't shoot the messenger but it might be time to formally start singing in the shower.

After **one day** of not singing, you will notice the difference.

After **two days**, your teachers and musical friends will notice the difference.

After only **three days**, an untrained audience might well notice.

You build up a kind of musical radar. You become attuned to a singer's breathing, you get a sense of what their breath span is, and when they're likely to be heading for trouble. It's quite a private, sensual thing, listening to someone's breath that intently.

Iain Burnside



Living near Salford Quays, the immediate effect of the lockdown was quite startling for Tim; usually packed with cars, cyclists and workers, he experienced the empty spaces of industrial sites, a perfect setting for some of his training runs, with no interruption from other runners, cyclists or joggers. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Tim's capacity to run very fast, he completes marathons in about two and half hours.

"Well, it's all relative, really," he self-deprecatingly commented to me, "there are others much, much faster."

Perhaps, but I'm still impressed.

BEST COMPANIONS IN THE WORLD *CONT*

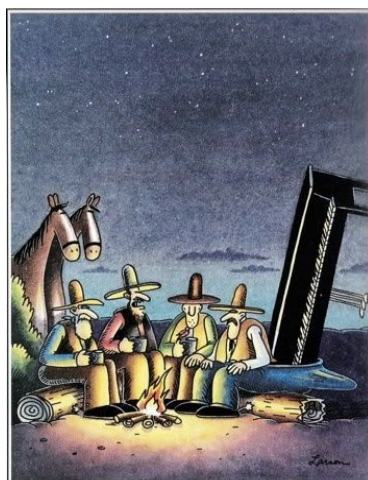
TIM KENNEDY *ASSISTANT ACCOMPANIST*

For those relatively new to the choir, Tim Kennedy has been a part of the St George's Singers community for many years. Acting as accompanist for a term in 2006, Tim also supported some of our first forays with our Cheshire Consort, the wedding choir that lifts enthusiasm in a wedding as well as choir funds.

Tim began his musical career singing for the Queen, as a treble at St George's Chapel, Windsor. He was then a music scholar at Winchester College, then moving on to study music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Tim is now a freelance musician working and based in Manchester. As well as being a piano accompanist, he also works as a professional singer, vocal coach and organist. He is a staff répétiteur for the School of Vocal and Opera Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), playing for singing classes, assessments and recitals. Tim often accompanies musicians at Manchester University, and plays for auditions for the National Youth Choir. Tim's singing work is mainly as a freelance lyric tenor soloist, specialising in recitals and oratorio. There is further information on his website, which can be found at www.tim-kennedy.co.uk.

Soon after the lockdown started, a significant number of RNCM students wanted to continue their studies, to complete course work or simply to maintain their voice progression. One of the problems that many music teachers and students have found during lockdown is the sound / vision delay and freezing when using Zoom, Skype and other audio-visual media for lessons and tutorials. In order to work on their repertoire, many of them turned to Tim to provide recorded accompaniment. As such, he was very busy in the earlier days of lockdown, recording music accompaniment to provide students with the resources they needed to keep learning and developing.

Tim and I also spoke about the approach that choral groups are taking to remain actively in contact both internally, with choir members, but also externally, liaising with other choirs as well as musical organisations leading the thinking on resumption of rehearsals and concerts.



'Say, Will—why don't you pull that thing out and play us tune?'

Tim is the regular rehearsal pianist for The Tatton Singers, so has been part of that choir's journey through these times of pandemic.

Tim still has a number of students that he is tutoring as well as working on some of his own projects. Within recent weeks he has been recording some songs and arias that can be found on his Facebook site. Tim has recently joined the SGS In Touch site, so why not get in touch?

If you did not get the chance to watch and listen to Tim's piano recital online for **Flat Pack Music**, you can still find this on their Facebook pages.

Roger Vignoles, the veteran British accompanist, has worked with the most famous singers of our time, dealing with powerful voices and strong egos. He also accompanies instrumentalists such as Joshua Bell and Heinrich Schiff and gives masterclasses around the world.

He often worked with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and has strong memories of those times.

One night in Japan, when Dame Kiri was singing a Mozart concert aria, she jumped a page. He not only had to catch up, but also to transpose the rest of the aria, as by that point the music had moved to a lower key. Dame Kiri said to him afterwards, 'I knew immediately what I had done, but I thought it was better to leave it to you to sort out.'

BEST COMPANIONS IN THE WORLD *CONT*

JULIA MAYALL *ASSISTANT ACCOMPANIST*

Julia's links with the **Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD)** have given her many opportunities. Currently on the Board of Trustees, Julia was first introduced to the association when she was asked to stand in at the last minute to support a singing day led by Bob Chilcott. She subsequently played for a north west ABCD initiative, an annual series of workshops and concert with the Honour Choir, made up from local primary aged children which continued for ten years.

From this start, Julia has acted as accompanist at many ABCD annual conferences for some well-known choral characters such as John Rutter and David Wilcox and has both accompanied and sung at the St Endellion Music Festival in Cornwall.

As Trustee, she has been at the forefront of the reaction to the Coronavirus; weekly meetings that lead the thinking, decision making and response to government on behalf of choral directors.

invited to participate at the inaugural 'Manchester Sings' festival at Manchester University. Julia has collaborated with the Northern Chamber Orchestra and the Halle at AGGS with outreach projects. In addition, working with composer Sasha Johnson-Manning, led to Altrincham Girls' choirs performing her acclaimed *Manchester Carols* as part of a Radio Four broadcast. In 2018, Julia was asked to direct a choir formed from Altrincham Girls' and Boys' Grammar Schools, including actors who had no previous singing experience, for the Netflix series *Safe*, based on the Harlan Coben novel of the same title. (The opening of episode four)

'Teaching in lockdown has provided all teachers and educators with significant challenges,' Julia told me, 'but also some unexpected joys. Like so many, it has forced me to get to grips with the supporting technology; it now feels very natural, although preparation, marking and follow up is excessively time-consuming. After my first online lesson, it felt worthwhile; all the students were so pleased to be there via a screen, desperate to get back to the classroom and seeing their enthusiasm was such an encouragement. I did, however, spend a lot of my time 'chasing engagement', but have loved introducing new avenues for pupils to listen to music more deeply via the extremely rich and innovative online music projects and concerts from which we have all been benefitting.'

Away from the part of her house which is the workplace, Julia has enjoyed taking up running (watch out, Tim) as well as enjoying jigsaw puzzles, gardening, clearing out lots of cupboards, but also listening to and playing a huge amount of music.

'Lockdown has actually given me some space to realise how much I love my job but also how much I thrive on engaging with our musical community and making live music—playing the piano and singing. Following the lunchtime Wigmore Hall recitals, I've been completely inspired to learn something new and have recently bought the Busoni arrangement of Bach's *Violin Chaconne*, played in the inaugural June 1st concert by Stephen Hough; I'm loving learning this!'

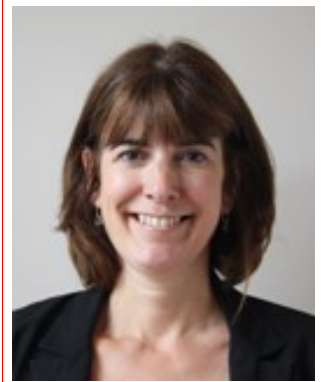
Julia Mayall joined St George's Singers under the baton of musical director Stephen Williams, after settling back in the Manchester area. Born and raised in south Manchester, Julia headed to Nottingham University after school where she studied for a music degree.

'I enjoyed all aspects of the course,' Julia told me, 'but it was the area of Performance that I loved most of all. I can still vividly remember my final recital, playing Chopin and Rachmaninov.'

Julia currently balances a teaching career with freelance accompanying, conducting and outreach music projects. She was appointed Head of Music at Altrincham Girls' Grammar School (AGGS) in 2007, having taught in several other state and independent schools, and has taught music during this time from Key Stage One to A' level. She has also been a music examiner (AQA) is currently a Specialist Leader in Education in Music and loved heading up the Music stream as part of the national teacher training initiative, led by the Princes' Teaching Institute. Julia has also adjudicated at school music festivals including The Manchester Grammar School and Giggleswick School. Her close harmony ensemble, *Mayall Voices*, were



Weep o mine eyes



Julia joined St George's Singers as a first alto.

'I was desperately missing choir singing, so I researched choirs in the area. St George's Singers completely fitted the bill; a friendly, active choir that had an adventurous repertoire. I was also very impressed with Stephen Williams' experience. Initially I sang in my preferred part, first alto, as I relished singing in harmony, along with my then fellow alto, Sue Taylor. The harmony continued post rehearsal as I was urged to join those heading towards the pub!

At the next set of auditions, I was moved into the second soprano section (along with Sue Taylor and Ali McClay) and was delighted to find harmony there as well!



Later, Steven Williams encouraged me to deputise for the accompanist, which I really enjoyed.

St George's Singers will always be held in my heart as the choir that gave me a first taste of musical solace, friendship and opportunity in the Northwest.

REVIEW of Williams and Glynn (*Winterreise*)

'The standing ovation which acclaimed the end of this amazing recital was genuinely well-deserved, and this grizzled, grumpy old critic happily joined in.

Roderick Williams and pianist ('accompanist' is too diminishing a word to use in such a context) Christopher Glynn had just delivered a mesmerising, totally involving account of Schubert's *Winterreise*.

[Williams has]... a wonderful display of the body-language in which he is unsurpassable. 'What a voice!' someone commented to me as I left. 'It's far more than that,' I muttered.

Williams...is remarkable. I have heard him in French repertoire bringing an airy lightness to his baritone; here...he cultivated mellifluous tenor timbres (impossible to tell where the head-notes began) as well as revealing darker depths...

Glynn's pianism was equally as gripping. He coloured the ... piano... sympathetically, his timings ... allowed all the drama and implications to tell, and the result of his partnership with Roderick Williams was very far removed from the stand-and-deliver, take-it-or-leave-it performances of even such greats as Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore, and Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten.'

Christopher Morley
Midlands Music Reviews
September 2019

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

MANCHESTER SONG FESTIVAL REVIEW



Marcus Farnsworth

It seems like an age ago, another time and space, but at the start of March several of our choir enjoyed an exceptional day of song in Manchester. Initiated by Marcus Farnsworth in his role as Head of the Vocal and Choral studies, the second Chetham's Song Festival took place on Sunday 1st March. Featuring tenor Nicky Spence and baritone Roderick Williams this was an outstanding afternoon and evening of vocal mastery from both professionals and students.

Following a recital from four students at the Royal Northern College of Music, all ex-students from Chetham's, the audience knew this was to be a day of excellence. A performance of Britten's *St Nicholas*, combining the forces of instrumentalists and singers throughout the age range of the school as well as the Greater Manchester Music Hubs was exhilarating and exceptional; from the conductor's podium Marcus appeared to take no prisoners! Tenor Nicky Spence's portrayal of St Nicholas embraced all the fervour, humanity and vision that Eric Crozier's libretto and Britten's music demand.



Nicky Spence, Tenor

© David Bebbler



Roderick Williams, Baritone

© Benjamin Ealovega

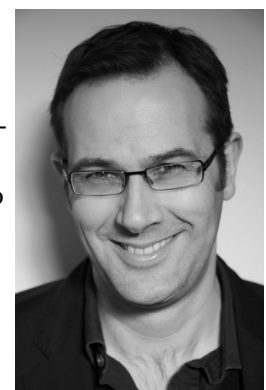
After his portrayal of the great saint, the audience welcomed Spence's vibrant and humorous enthusiasm at his masterclass with four Chetham's students, but it took a little while for the students to realise what was about to happen to them! Full of charm and vivacity, it is no surprise that he recently trod the boards of the Royal Opera House as the White Rabbit and Mad Hatter from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Spence cajoled and eased these already talented students into significantly improved performances, at times (with permission) shifting their arms and shoulders into a different stances and urging

them to repeat phrases multiple times in subtly different ways, all the while giving an unspoken reassurance of support.

The day of song eased into evening and both students and audience were witness to a captivating and sensitive recital from Roderick Williams, accompanied by Christopher Glynn. Engaging with the younger members of his audience, Williams was so generous in his advice and encouragement, given in between the performances of Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel*. It is safe to state that every member of St George's Singers who was present that evening will remember for some time the emotional response to the performance of both Williams and Glynn.

I will struggle to put that response into words, so have referenced (on the side panel) a review of a concert by Williams and Glynn performing Schubert's *Winterreise* in September last year.

A dream team of professionals leading and inspiring the aspiring musicians of the future.



Christopher Glynn, Pianist

© Joanna Bergin

JESS AND ELLA'S PLAYLIST

Prokofiev - Symphony no. 1 (Op.25) in D major "Classical", 4th movement; Molto vivace

tUnE-yArDs - *Water Fountain*

Gordon, Lang and Wolfe - *Shelter: Before I Enter*

Ella Fitzgerald - *Misty*

George Benjamin - *Written on Skin - Part one, scene 6*

Marvin Gaye - *Abraham, Martin and John*

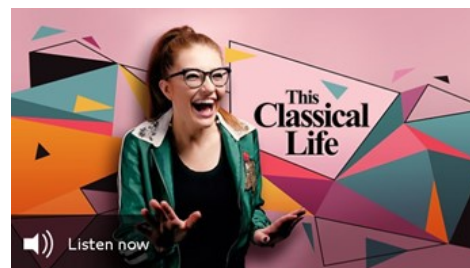
Bach - Double Violin concerto in D minor - 3. Allegro

Beethoven - Last string quartet, version for String orchestra; III. Lento assai - cantante e tranquillo

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS CONT

REV-ELLA-TIONS(!)

We were delighted to hear that Neil's daughter, Ella Taylor, was to appear on Radio Three's *This Classical Life*, presented each week by saxophonist Jess Gillam. For those not familiar with this 30-minute programme, each week Jess Gillam and guest, another successful young professional musician, select and discuss music that inspires them. The format is made up of quick-fire questions from Gillam that allow time for her guest to give a flavour of their life and the music that has and continues to shape them.



Jess Gillam with... Ella Taylor

Jess and Ella's choice of music was distinctly eclectic—from Ella Fitzgerald's *Misty* to a Beethoven quartet. Although I have previously heard *Abraham, Martin and John*, I have not listened closely. Those familiar with its lyrics will know the reference to Lincoln, Luther-King and Kennedy, and their roles in the equal rights movement. On listening to this version for the first time, three quarters of the way through and then at the end there is a sudden swell from the orchestra playing *Simple Gifts*, one of the most recognisable folk tunes from America and firmly in our corporate memory.

If you get the chance to search them out, all of these choices are worth hunting down, either for the first time or some welcome nostalgia.

AND FINALLY...

Near the start of lockdown, members were asked what was their go-to music in times like these, the melodies that lifted or calmed their spirits. One person responded (see page five) so here are two of your editor's choices of music that lighten and soothe her soul.

Herb Albert & the Tijuana Brass Band - *Going Places*

12 cracking tracks that flow from one to the other, summarising cool, retro, easy listening music. Allegedly outselling the Beatles by 2:1 in 1966, Herb's music combined surf rock, West Coast cool jazz and Mexican mariachi to create a new pop sound. Every track is fabulous, but my favourite is *Mae*, written for the film *The Yellow Rolls Royce*, to emphasise the vamp in Shirley Maclaine's walk! You cannot help but strut your stuff. Mainly listened to in hot countries of childhood, the whole album conjures sunshine, family and happiness.

Mahler's 5th Symphony Movement 4 Adagietto

I was 11 years old when *Death in Venice* was released with a certification of 12 so I know I did not see it for many years and I cannot remember when I finally did. But my parents bought the soundtrack LP. When I was 16, we moved to Cyprus. I had my own bedroom with wide windows looking onto the back garden. My siblings were at university so I had quite a bit of domestic freedom. I also used to struggle to get to sleep (teenage angst, A' Levels etc) so had a record player by my bed for suitable music. I had not heard much Mahler; I think it was my mother who suggested it. Whenever I hear this music now, I still have that sense of calm descending and can almost feel the dry heat of the Cypriot summer nights and the accompanying percussion of crickets—although that might simply be tinnitus. My aim was to be asleep before the rather stark *Lullaby* by Modest Mussorgsky and the sound of the record player arm clicking back into place.



The band was made up of four Italians, two second generation Jewish immigrants and one American. Not a Mexican in sight!



Based on the novella by Thomas Mann, director Luciano Visconti made his protagonist a composer rather than a writer.

THE INTERNET SINGS!

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE UK AND THE USA

VOCES8 Foundation

Live from London

Online festival featuring vocal ensembles The Sixteen, VOCES8, The Gesualdo Six and The Swingles.

Broadcast weekly in August (Saturday 1st August onward) concerts are filmed at St Anne & St Agnes Church, London, online in HD. 'Tickets' for the event are not free; the festival aims to raise money for music education initiatives.

Voces8.foundation/ livefromlondon

Season passes £80 (£8 per concert, per household) or single concert tickets are £12.50 plus concessions.

Virtually Shrewsbury Folk Festival

Saturday 29 & Sunday 30 August

Two days of music, dance, workshops, this event has received funding from Arts Council England's Emergency Response Fund.

The line up for events is still being finalised, but you can keep up to date (and order your festival beer / T-shirt) at their website

[https://
shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk/
savethedate/](https://shrewsburyfolkfestival.co.uk/savethedate/)

Leimart Park Jazz Festival

Saturday 8th August 2020

8:00pm—10:00pm BST

Direct from the USA, the Leimart Park Jazz Festival is one of Los Angeles' premier summertime events, serving a culturally diverse and family-friendly community.

More details and registration can be found at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) or from their Facebook page.

St George's Singers

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Hemiola is sent to all Friends of St George's Singers, and a digital version

goes to those on our Mailing List. To receive a regular copy, 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 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, The Stoller Hall, 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. Contact our secretary for details of how to join us.

