



Hemiola

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

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Marcus Farnsworth MA ARAM

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Susan Roper
Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Joseph Judge

ACCOMPANIST:

Peter Durrant

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A WORD FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT: MARCUS FARNSWORTH

When I was first approached about the role of SGS President I was immensely flattered, though I worried that I wasn't famous enough! I knew I wouldn't be able to offer the kind of celebrity support that St George's has become accustomed to. However, once I'd been assured that the choir was looking for something a little different I gladly accepted the position.

My official association with the choir began approximately 11 years ago when Stephen Williams appointed me as the choir's first Assistant Musical Director during my final year of university. Both Stephen Williams and Neil Taylor taught me a great deal about choir training and I also enjoyed learning about the nuts and bolts of the organisation. So many of the skills I acquired during this period helped to improve my musicianship and to make me a more rounded person.

One very important lesson was the realisation that the choir's social life was as important as its musical one; the fellowship and camaraderie enhance the music making. I learnt a tremendous amount in my three years in the role and I am immensely grateful to St George's for having provided the opportunity.

So, what do I actually do as President? I suppose my first duty is to act as an ambassador for the choir. I have long been somewhat evangelical about the St George's Singers so this is something I'm very happy to continue with.

I am also able to act as an additional link to the UK's professional music scene. The choir is already very well served by its team of professional musicians and I hope that my contacts throughout the UK and abroad will add to this portfolio. I travel a lot with my work (as I write I am working on an opera in Norway) and as a result I meet new musicians on a very regular basis.

As Artistic Director of the Southwell Music Festival I am very much involved in the administration of that organisation and I am constantly thinking of new ways for it to improve and develop. I hope therefore that I can act as a sounding board for the SGS committee when planning new ventures in future seasons.

I perform with lots of talented people around the UK but I often get the impression that they are working in isolation. I would love to see more joined-up thinking from arts organisations. We have to share our



Marcus performing Schubert at this year's Southwell Music Festival

music making with as wide an audience as possible and one way of achieving this is through collaboration. SGS already does this very well through its links with Stockport Symphony Orchestra and Chetham's School of Music, and I hope that this work will continue to thrive. I look forward to playing my part in the development of the choir in its next chapter. I am immensely proud to be associated with this wonderful organisation.

Marcus is currently appearing in Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream at Bergen National Opera in Norway, where he sings the role of Demetrius. On the day of our next concert, 21 November, he will be singing Handel's Messiah in Lincoln Cathedral. You can follow Marcus's career on his website, www.marcusfarnsworth.com.

Saturday 21 November 2015,

7.30 pm

Mozart *Mass in C minor*

Royal Northern College of Music

Tickets: £17, £15 conc,

£5 students

Tel: 01663 764012

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

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

MR AND MRS MOZART PRESENT ...

Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* explores genius (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart) and mediocrity (Antonio Salieri). But there is one person to whom his take on Mozart's life does no favours at all: his wife Constanze, who is portrayed as a vulgar, bubble-headed sex kitten, lacking any appreciation of her husband's phenomenal gifts. Shaffer, however, is merely following early 20th-century biographers, who treated Constanze harshly based on nothing but anti-feminine bias.

The true picture is very different: Wolfgang and Constanze were a 'double act'. Mozart

wrote the Mass in C for her; Constanze took the starring role at its premiere; and throughout their brief time together, and for the rest of Constanze's much longer life, she kept alive her husband's

reputation.

Constanze Weber came from a family of talented musicians. Her father, Fridolin, was a musical all-rounder and an exceptional singing teacher – three of his four daughters were coloratura sopranos of quite remarkable ability. In addition to Constanze, for whom Mozart would write the challenging solos in his Mass in C minor, Fridolin's eldest daughter, Josefa, was to be Mozart's first Queen of the Night, and his second, Aloysia, came to be regarded as one of the greatest singers of her time.

The Weber girls were brought up in Mannheim, a sophisticated centre of musical excellence. Constanze was intelligent, speaking excellent Italian and French as well as German. The 21-year-old Mozart visited Mannheim in 1777 on a job-hunting tour with his mother, met and fell in love with Aloysia, who rejected him. The family moved to Vienna in 1779, but when Mozart arrived in Vienna in 1781 Aloysia had married, and Mozart turned his

attentions to Constanze.

Their marriage finally took place in an atmosphere of crisis: it is possible that Constanze had actually moved in with the young composer before they were married! Mozart wrote to his father on 31 July 1782: 'All the good and well-intentioned advice you have sent fails to address the case of a man who has already gone so far with a maiden.' Her mother threatened to send the police after Constanze and on 4 August, Mozart wrote to Baroness von Waldstätten: 'Can the police here enter anyone's house in this way? Perhaps it is only a ruse of Madame Weber to get her daughter back. If not, I know no better remedy than to marry Constanze tomorrow morning or if possible today.' The marriage did indeed take place that very day.

The marriage was unquestionably a success: they adored each other unreservedly. In addition to her many pregnancies, Constanze suffered an almost fatal illness in the late 1780s, and it was for this reason that Mozart shielded her from the reality of his financial crises. When, in 1790, Constanze became aware of them, she took matters in hand, organising a house move, negotiating loans and publications.

When Mozart died in 1791, Constanze was 29, with a seven-year-old son and a four-month-old baby. Although there were no more threatening debts, she had no financial stability. Her mother, sisters and friends were immensely supportive. Constanze petitioned Emperor Leopold II for a pension, and was awarded a tiny annual sum. But she needed to do much more.

She began to mount memorial concerts in both Vienna and Prague. Aloysia brought in her colleagues who performed without fee so that the takings could go to Constanze and her children. (At one concert, Mozart's

D minor piano concerto was played by a certain Ludwig van Beethoven.) And then Constanze revived her own career, with concerts across the major cities of Germany and Austria, for



Wolfgang and Constanze Mozart

herself and Aloysia together. Enthusiasm for Mozart's music was growing fast. That it was to be performed by his widow and her sister was irresistible.

In her early bereavement, Constanze had paid little attention to the music scores lying around the house. But by the mid-1790s she began to organise and then to publish the music, assisted by Georg Nissen, a Danish diplomat living in the same building. By the turn of the century, Constanze was financially stable, and in 1809 she married Nissen and moved to Copenhagen, where they spent another quiet decade. After he died in 1826, Constanze's last years were spent in Salzburg with her two surviving sisters, Sophie and Aloysia.

Lovers of Mozart's music came from all over Europe to visit his widow. One of them, in 1829, was Vincent Novello, founder of the publishing firm. He described her in her late 60s: 'In her youth her eyes must have been very brilliant and are still fine. She is of a rather small stature, slim figure, and looks much younger than what I expected to find her. Her voice is low and gentle, her manners well-bred and prepossessing ... Nothing could be more kind, friendly and even cordial than her behaviour to me throughout the visit. Altogether this lady is, to me, one of the most interesting persons now in existence.'

Interesting – and an inspiration for one of the great choral works of all time. Constanze died aged 90 in 1842.



Is this an image of Constanze? This daguerreotype from 1840 shows the Bavarian composer Max Keller (centre front) with his wife (seated next to him on the right), and another lady to the left. Some commentators believe this to be the 78-year-old Constanze.

Mozart wrote to his father, Leopold: 'I must make you better acquainted with the character of my dear Constanze. Her whole beauty consists in two little black eyes and a pretty figure. She likes to be neatly and cleanly dressed, but not smartly; and most things that a woman needs she is able to make for herself; and she dresses her own hair every day. I love her and she loves me with all her heart. Tell me whether I could wish for a better wife.'

SOPRANO SHOWCASE

Mozart wrote the Mass in C minor in fulfilment of a vow he made when he wed Constanze. Perhaps more importantly, he wrote it as a soprano showcase, demonstrating the quality and versatility of his wife's voice in the hope that it would reconcile his father Leopold to their marriage.

The two solo soprano roles (one of which was sung by Constanze at the premiere of the work) are amongst some of the most beautiful in the choral repertoire. So we are delighted to have two young rising stars of the soprano world to sing with us at our concert: Alison Rose and Kitty Whately.

Alison Rose is the winner of the 2015 Maggie Teyte Prize and has recently finished her studies on the opera course at the Guildhall School of Music. She studied at the RNCM and then on the Masters programme at the RAM, graduating with First Class Honours and the prestigious DipRAM.

She is a National Opera Studio Young Artist for the 2015/16 season, sponsored by the Glyndebourne New Generation Programme, and is a member of The Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme and an Oxford Lieder Young Artist.

Her operatic roles to date include Frasquita (understudy for

Glyndebourne Festival Opera), Miranda in Arnold's *The Dancing Master*, Bětuška in Dvořák's *The Cunning Peasant* and Rosaura in Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Guildhall Opera), Adele *Die Fledermaus* (Clonter Opera), Servilia *La Clemenza di Tito* (RNCM), and excerpts from *Capriccio*, *La Finta Giardiniera*, *Orlando*, *Fidelio*, *The Rake's Progress* and *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Guildhall Opera).

Recent concert highlights include Bach *St John Passion* at Milton Court, Iain Burnside's musical play *Shining Armour* with Roderick Williams and Victoria Newlyn, Mendelssohn *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Manchester Camerata, Mendelssohn *Elijah* for the Dartington Festival, Haydn *The Creation* for the St Endellion Festival, Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* at the Southwell Music Festival. Alison has also given recitals at the Oxford Lieder Festival, King's Place and the Royal Opera House Crush Room.

Award-winning British mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately sings on concert, opera and recital stages in the UK and internationally. Currently a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist, she is also an HSBC Laureate for the Aix-en-Provence Festival and was the winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award in 2011.

Kitty trained at Chetham's (where she gives a masterclass on 20 November), the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and the Royal College of Music International Opera School where she was awarded the Aldama Scholarship and numerous prizes.

This season Kitty has sung with Opéra National de Lorraine, the Choir of King's College Cambridge, the Britten Sinfonia in UK and on tour in Spain and the Netherlands, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Opera Holland Park, and has debuted at the BBC Proms, Aix-en-Provence Festival, and English National Opera. Currently she is appearing in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Bergen National Opera, Norway. An outstanding interpreter of songs, Kitty has given recitals at the Edinburgh International Festival, Oxford Lieder Festival, Wigmore Hall, the Elgar Room, Leeds Lieder, Buxton Festival and Leighton House, working with internationally renowned accompanists.

Kitty has recently recorded her first CD, *This Other Eden: A Landscape of English Poetry and Song*. Featuring pianist Joseph Middleton and the Navarra Quartet, the recording brings together English song with poetry read by Kitty's parents, actors Kevin Whately and Madelaine Newton.



'Alison Rose is spectacular as Miranda, her soprano smooth and lovely, her stagecraft excellent.'

Bachtrack

'The stand-out performances include Alison Rose's ravishly sung Bathsheba...'

The Guardian

'Kitty Whately is the star of the show ... Vocally, she's a Rosina to die for, with a warm, honeyed mezzo.'

Bachtrack

'Kitty Whately has a lovely creamy rich mezzo-soprano voice ... She is an intensely vivid performer, a natural story teller and each song was projected with great intent.'

Robert Huggill



WELCOME TO CHETHAM'S STARS

We're thrilled that Chetham's Chamber Orchestra will be joining us for our concert on 21 November, where they will be playing an even more important part than usual in the concert.

When Neil Taylor put together the programme for the year, he chose the Mozart Mass in C minor for our November concert, but realised it needed a substantial piece to go with it to create a full performance. Would Chetham's like to do something in the first half, to give their young musicians a

chance to shine? Chetham's Director of Music, Stephen Threlfall (and an SGS Vice-President) was delighted to say yes, and suggested two Mozart pieces to go with the Mass: the Serenade for Orchestra in D major (*Serenata Notturna*) and the Flute Concerto no. 2 in D major.

The soloist in the concerto is to be Chetham's student 17-year-old Lucy Driver. Lucy has taken part in courses with both the National Chamber Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra,

appearing at Snape Maltings and the BBC Proms with Mark Elder, Ilan Volkov and John Wilson. She regularly plays in Chetham's Symphony and Chamber orchestras, but also enjoys solo work, for which she was awarded with Highly Commended in Chetham's 2015 Concerto Competition, playing the very concerto we will be hearing at the concert.

Welcome to all Chetham's incredibly talented young musicians – and stars in the making!



Flautist Lucy Driver



ROBBINS LANDON: EDITOR OF GENIUS

The only time we take much notice of music editors is when we spot blatant mistakes in the scoring. But we are particularly indebted to one editor for his research into Mozart's Mass in C minor: research that made it possible to sing the Mass as a complete work.

Howard Chandler Robbins Landon was born in 1926 in Boston, MA, and educated at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, studying music theory, composition and English literature, the latter under WH Auden. His interest in Haydn had been piqued as a schoolboy, and he went on to become a music critic. Employment by *The Times* gained him admittance to archives in Eastern Europe such as the National Library in Budapest, which housed the papers of Haydn's employers, the princes of Esterházy. In 1949 he instigated the Haydn Society, planned a complete edition of Haydn's works, and made notable recordings of Haydn's works that had been previously unavailable on disc. The first recording of Mozart's C minor Mass and *Idomeneo*

were also made by the Society.

While his reputation was founded on his trailblazing research into Joseph Haydn, which helped to establish the composer's works in the canon, it was his series of books on Mozart, selling in huge numbers in many languages, that brought him global renown.

Thanks to the huge success of Peter Shaffer's 1979 play and 1984 film *Amadeus*, not only was Mozart's music suddenly on the bestseller lists, but a new mythology had grown up around the last months of Mozart's life. Landon cut through the fantasy to present the facts regarding the composer's last year, unveiling new documentary material in the process. He found no grounds for Mozart's having been poisoned by Salieri, or anyone else, taking the most likely cause of Mozart's death to be a combination of medical factors including progressive kidney failure. He also restored the reputation of his wife, Constanze, slandered over decades as a scatterbrained, lascivious woman.

Landon's reputation was somewhat tarnished by a hoax to which he fell prey. In December 1993 he was invited to verify six 'lost' Haydn piano sonatas, supposedly dating from 1766–69, and which had allegedly been discovered in Münster by German flautist, Winfried Michel. Robbins Landon confirmed the importance of the sonatas, but no one had carried out checks on the manuscripts or had even seen the originals, relying solely on photocopies. A few days later the Haydn Institute in Cologne declared the manuscripts to be fakes. A Viennese archivist had noted that the steel-nibbed pen used was not invented until 50 years after Haydn's death, while other experts dated the paper and the handwriting as probably 20th-century.

Robbins Landon, while accepting that he had been conned, avoided giving an apology and treated the whole affair as a great joke, merely explaining how, in the rush of media attention, he had understandably neglected to examine the manuscripts themselves.

SINGING THE NINTH BY BARBARA FORSHAW

When the call came for members of the choir to sing in Beethoven's Choral Symphony with Stockport Symphony Orchestra I decided to sign up. I realised that many choir members had sung it before, but for me it would be the first time. I knew the symphony and had of course enjoyed the well-loved final movement.

first rehearsal with the orchestra was a bit chaotic, and the conductor seemed so far away, but the music did make much more sense as we all performed together. The first time with an orchestra always gives me a tingle and I have usually forgotten how loud they can be!

On the day of the concert we arrived at Stockport Town Hall, found our places on the stage and prepared to begin the final rehearsal. I couldn't fail to notice the spectacularly decorated ceiling and marvelled at the opulent plasterwork. We began to rehearse and worked our way through the movement. The musical jigsaw pieces began to fall into place as we heard the soloists adding their parts to the mix.

In the evening for the first half

of the concert we were able to sit in the audience and enjoy Schubert's lovely Unfinished Symphony and then after the interval we took our places on the stage for the beginning of the Beethoven. I found it mesmerising to be sitting behind the orchestra facing the conductor, watching his movements and facial expressions as he took the musicians through the first three movements. It was a joy to be so close and to hear the little musical anticipations of what was to come.

As we all stood in readiness to sing, the atmosphere was electric. We had been encouraged to sing out loudly by the conductor and so we did – joyously and with great gusto. No prizes for subtlety, but what a roof-raising sound and such a privilege to sing!

Afternoon rehearsals for the Beethoven



The rehearsals were hard-going, as it all felt so fragmented and difficult to sing. Beethoven writes sublime parts for the orchestra, but his choral writing is not always user friendly! Our

GERONTIUS TRIUMPH

EXTRACTS FROM A REVIEW BY DONALD JUDGE

Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* had a famously catastrophic premiere in Birmingham in 1900. Luckily, the next, and much more successful, English performance in 1902 was in Sheffield, so it was very appropriate that the Sheffield Chorale crossed the Pennines to join St George's Singers on Sunday night for a performance of the work in Gorton Monastery.

Gerontius remains a fiendishly difficult piece, but [these two choirs] love the music and know how it should sound. Their chorus master and conductor were one and the same, Neil Taylor.

Under his expert direction the chorus was unfailingly accurate both in pitch and rhythm. They

the important leads and lines coming through strongly.

Part of the difficulty in *The Dream* is in following Elgar's meticulous markings. The great majority of these went exactly to plan. In a work of such passion, all must keep an ice cool nerve, and bar a couple of minor glitches, they did exactly that. All (!) they had to do was follow Neil Taylor's crystal clear beat, and I'm delighted to say the audience did so too, giving us that magical silence between the final bar and the applause.

Elgar is a very fine but challenging orchestrator, and St George's Singers were very fortunate to have the collaboration of a local orchestra –

Stockport Symphony – that matches their quality. Like the choir, members of SSO are amateurs, but one would hardly know it. The band works with conductors and soloists of great standing and presents a substantial programme of its own which includes many challenging works. In

such orchestras it can be the strings that sound below par but this certainly isn't the case with SSO.

Marcus Farnsworth is well known to St George's Singers – indeed, he's now their President – and so an ideal choice. The baritone has two roles to sing: the Priest who consoles the dying Gerontius and sends him on his journey, and the stern but pleading Angel of the Agony. Marcus was excellent and rock solid as both.

Helen Anne Gregory was a (very!) last minute replacement for the original Angel who was indisposed. Helen is still a young singer, having graduated from the RNCM only three years ago. It was her first public performance of the Angel – and I'm sure by no means her last. It's a challenge for the most experienced of singers, but Helen carried it off admirably and



The packed audience at the Monastery

St George's were lucky to find her at such short notice.

Gerontius himself is at the centre of the drama throughout, and it's a challenging and magnificent role. Joshua Ellicott may not look like the old man implied by the name Gerontius (and indeed he isn't) but it's hard to imagine a more perfect performance of the part. The singer has to run the gamut of emotions from despair to elation, and balance the operatic with the spiritual. Joshua is experienced and expert in a remarkable range of music and was a compelling Gerontius.

In many ways, Gorton Monastery is the perfect setting for this work with its text rooted in Roman Catholicism. It's a jewel of a building designed by Pugin and was being built in 1865, the year Cardinal Newman wrote the poem. What it doesn't have is perfect acoustics, and [the choir] had to work very hard to project (and clearly did so). People are used to hearing performances on radio and CD where voices are unnaturally enhanced by electronic wizardry.

Live performance is different and the balance isn't always perfect in purpose-built concert halls with tuneable acoustics and fully professional forces. This makes the achievement by Sunday's performers all the more creditable. They kept the capacity audience engaged throughout in a deeply felt performance which was rewarded with warm appreciation.



Our wonderful Gerontius, Josh Ellicott, and soprano Helen Gregory

have to play grieving friends, snarling demons and soaring angels and did all three with aplomb in a piece fraught with pitfalls that strike terror into the heart. It's every choral singer's nightmare to go *Ha ha!* in the wrong place. No one did. It's the sopranos' nightmare that they will falter on a particular high and exposed moment when they sing *Praise to the holiest*. They were spot on and beautifully ethereal. It's everyone's nightmare that after *Lord, thou hast been my refuge*, the orchestra will begin *Softly and gently* but in a slightly sharper key. They didn't: the choir stayed securely on pitch. Both the full choir and the semi-chorus drawn from it, though not separate as Elgar preferred, were beautifully balanced with plenty of dynamic variety and

Pete Durrant making sure he could make a quick getaway if things didn't go according to plan



Neil at rehearsal with his Angel of the Agony – hopefully with concert gear in his hand luggage



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Star for Mary

Soprano Mary Murfin is the latest St George's Singer to get a long-service recognition. Mary has been with the Choir for 20 years, and gets her star at our concert on 21 November. Congratulations!

Charity fund raising

Various members of the Choir have been busy raising money for charity recently. Bridget Ovey braved the open waters of Loch Lomond on 29

August to swim in aid of Alzheimers Research UK, for which she raised £780.

On Saturday and Sunday 26–27 September, Dave and Anne Francis completed the half-marathon Shine Walk for Cancer Research UK in London. They began at 8.40 pm and finished at 1.45 am the next morning, and raised £973. Mary Hoult also did the walk with members of her own choir, Mellor

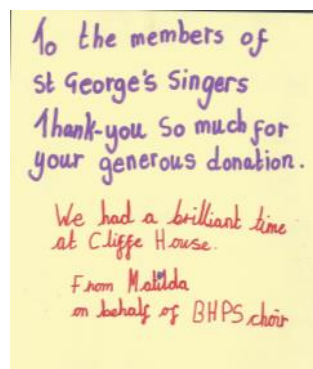


Community Choir, raising £807. And Mary and Anne will be raising even more on 14 November when they take part in the 2015 Festival of Brass and Voices in aid of Cancer Research UK.

Closer to home, on 25 September, Alan and Grace Swain held their annual Coffee Morning in aid of Macmillan Nurses, and raised £630.

Well done to all our big-hearted and generous Singers who give up their time to raise money for others, and to all their friends in the Choir who support them.

THANKS FROM BRADSHAW HALL



The young singers of Bradshaw Hall Primary School choir delight us every year at our annual Christmas concert, and the children and their teachers work hard throughout the year to learn and rehearse the music that we enjoy so much.

To help the choir reach their very high standards, every year the school arranges for them to go on a residential singing coaching weekend coaching. This year, due to unfortunate circumstances, the school found they had a shortfall in the funds required to run the event. The

members of St George's Singers were delighted to help out, donating £200 from Choir funds and a raffle organised in aid of the trip.

Around 30 pupils from years 3 to 6 went on the weekend, which was held at Cliffe House in Shepley near Huddersfield, a large house with dormitories and bunk beds so children could share with friends.

The weekend began on Friday afternoon after school, when they all set off on the coach, and then spent two days work-

ing with singing leaders and activity leaders, who provided a combination of singing workshops, games and activities.

Parents arrived on Sunday, and were treated to a short concert of the songs the children had learned over the weekend, and after lunch everyone went home.

The children all had a brilliant time, and sent us a lovely 'thank-you' card. We look forward to hearing the results of their hard work at the Christmas concert!

MUSICAL DEFINITIONS

Music critic, composer and conductor Constant Lambert would go anywhere and do anything to create intoxicating live performances. He conducted one performance up a ladder, and took rehearsals for another from behind the counter of a Rotterdam post office with choir and orchestra jammed into the front hall.

Bar line Gathering of people, usually among which may be found a musician or two.

Bravo Literally, *How bold!* or *What nerve!* Spontaneous expression of appreciation on the part of the concert goer after a particularly trying performance.

Coloratura soprano Singer who has great trouble finding the proper note, but who has a wild time hunting for it.

Crescendo Reminder to the performer that he has been playing too loudly.

English horn Neither English nor a horn, not to be confused with the French horn, which is German.

Fermata Brand of girdle made especially for opera singers.

Flat What happens to a tonic if it sits too long in the open air.

Hemiola Hereditary blood disease caused by chromatics.

Heroic tenor Singer who gets by on sheer nerve and tight clothing.

Tonic Medicinal liquid to be

consumed with gin before, during, or after a performance.

Transposition Moving the relative pitch of a piece of music that is too low for the basses to a point where it is too high for the sopranos.

Vibrato Used by singers to hide the fact that they are on the wrong pitch.

WEDDINGS OF THE YEAR

Two St George's weddings to report from this summer.

On 19 September soprano Alison McLay finally married Joe Keaney. After years of dithering, they managed to walk the 400 yards down the road to All Saints Church and tie the knot.



The wedding music (as was to be expected from Ali) had been carefully chosen: Rachmaninov *Bogoroditsye Dyevo*, MacMillan

O Radiant Dawn, and Whitacre *This Marriage*, and was performed by a group of Ali and Joe's friends. For the finishing touch, Marcus Farnsworth came up from London to conduct – and Stephen Williams put in a surprise appearance for a glass of champagne at the reception.

A couple of months earlier, Marcus had been involved in another wedding: his own. In July he married soprano Alison Rose at Southwell Minster. (Alison will be singing with us in November in the Mozart Mass in C.) The music was of course sublime: a Bach partita played by violinist Jamie Campbell, a new work by Matthew Martin (*Set me as a seal*) composed as a wedding gift, and the Finale from Symphony no. 6 by Widor were just some of the pieces ringing round the Minster. And the choir wasn't bad either: Mary Bevan, Eleanor Gregory, Amy

Wood, Carris Jones, William Balkwill, David Butt-Philip, Richard Dowling, Martin Bussey, Roderick Williams and Stephen Williams (plus others) were all doing their best – though we suspect that the pache delivered by choir at Ali and Joe's wedding. (We wish!)

Everyone at SGS sends both couples every good wish for the future.

We look forward to hearing Alison sing with us on 21 November, and to singing ourselves in the glorious Southwell Minster on next year's tour.



Ali and Joe's reception finished with a ceilidh – just the thing to end a great day of happiness and celebration



AND TALKING OF WEDDINGS ...

The Cheshire Consort has sung at a number of weddings this year to great acclaim. The first wedding of the year was (almost) a 'family' do: SGS soprano Rhona Ford's son Gareth was getting married and asked if Rhona could provide a choir! The Consort duly obliged, and had a lovely time singing in the most unusual setting of a courtyard. And even though she was a guest, Rhona couldn't help joining in!

In July we performed at a wedding in Higher Walton, singing *I was glad*, *Ave Maria* and Vivaldi *Gloria*. The bride's mother commented that 'her heart leapt when we started singing' and the bride's father later wrote: 'I

had to write to say how magnificent the choir were. Both our vicar and the an incredible number of guests commented to us how fantastic the choir were and that they had never enjoyed a service to much'.

One of the great things a choir brings to a wedding is encouragement for the guests to join in! And this wedding proved particularly successful in this respect. 'The choir proved to be the inspiration for all our guests to raise their voices and the hymns were truly fabulous.'

On a more solemn note, the Consort also provides music for funerals, and we were privileged to be asked to sing at a funeral service for a much loved

lady in the beautiful St Peter's Chapel at Tabley House, near Knutsford, where we performed Tallis *If ye love me*.

The Consort already has a number of engagements booked for the rest of the year. If you are interested in singing with the Consort (and it is open to all SGS members) speak to Alison McLay. A choir of around 16–20 is usually required for a wedding, so not everyone who puts their name forward for a wedding will be asked to sing every time. However, Alison tries to give everyone a chance to sing through the year. Tenors and basses are particularly welcome!



Rhona couldn't resist joining in with the Consort at her son's wedding, but did keep her hat on!

PROM QUEENS PART 1: REACHING THE HOLY CITY BY SUSAN HODGSON



Earlier this year an exciting message came round. The Hallé Choir was looking to recruit Associates to join them for a performance

of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. We were all encouraged by Neil to take advantage of such a great opportunity, and a number of Singers auditioned and were accepted. To cut a long story (and Beethoven's short, the *Missa Solemnis* in the Bridge-water Hall was a marvellous night – but even greater things were in store.

The Hallé was also rehearsing for their appearance at this year's Proms, where they would be performing Vaughan Williams' *Sancta Civitas*. The work was not only unknown to most of us; it had actually never been performed at the Proms before. Strange? A work by such a prominent English composer never having made it to the Royal Albert Hall? It was only later we later realised why.

Vaughan Williams wrote *Sancta Civitas* (The Holy City) in 1926, and said it was his favourite choral work. The words are mostly from St John's Book of Revelation, and describes his vision of a great battle, the fall of Babylon, and the appearance of the Holy City.

Wednesday evening rehearsals were intense, with chorus master Madeleine Venner demanding ever greater precision, clarity of pronunciation, and quality of sound. We learned how Sir Mark Elder likes certain words pronounced ('horses' and 'linen' proving particularly problematic for many).

The day before we were due to head down to London a full orchestral rehearsal was arranged for the entire cast in Manchester. It was then we realised why this work had been performed so rarely. For a

work lasting a mere half an hour, the score requires a large main choir (Hallé plus the London Philharmonic Choir), a semi-chorus (the Hallé Youth choir), and a boys choir (Trinity Boys Choir). Nearly 400 singers in total. Add to that a baritone soloist, a tenor soloist who gets to sing for 30 seconds right at the end, and an enormous orchestra, and the costs involved would have any concert promoter reaching for the Valium.

The Prom concert was on Thursday 30 July. The big day arrived, and after a free morning (time for a quick visit to the Natural History Museum just round the corner), we all assembled for rehearsal in the RAH. We'd all got passes to enter the Hall, but no map, compass or GPS, so after wandering around in the bowels of the building for a while, we all eventually found our places, to find that almost the entire back wall of the hall was taken up by singers. No chance of the audience not hearing us then!

Much of the rehearsal time was spent in getting the balance right between the various choral and orchestral battalions. Madeleine walked up and down the aisles, and from stalls to upper tier, reporting back to Maestro Elder on bars that needed balancing. The youth choir was reorganised twice to get a better blend. The boys' choir, somewhere out of sight

up in the upper balcony, was moved three times, the 30-second tenor soloist four times (by which time he was of course note and word perfect!). Finally, the rehearsal was over, we were allowed to go with instructions to be back by 6.45 for warm-up and last-minute instructions from Madeleine. (Looks of incredulity from the choir – our scores were already almost illegible!)

And so to the performance itself. The RAH was packed, and the audience was clearly anticipating something extraordinary. The first item was Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* which the Hallé Orchestra played divinely. Then it was time for us, and all 400 of us stood silently, eyes glued on Mark Elder. The baritone intoned his opening declaration, and one by one the various parts of the choir joined in: Alleluia!

The piece lasted only 30 minutes (though we were singing pretty continuously throughout) – but there was so much terror, excitement and exhilaration packed into that half an hour. Before we knew it the tenor was singing his 16 words, and it was all over.

Although we all stayed in our seats for the second half of the concert (Elgar's Second Symphony) for many of us the highlight of the evening – the Holy City – had been reached.



Some of the SGS ladies who sang in the Prom. (Dawn was also singing, but sadly the picture of her was particularly fuzzy!)



PROM QUEENS PART 2: A NIGHT WITH JARVIS COCKER BY JO BLUCK

I never thought, in my wildest dreams, that I would be part of a backing group for Jarvis Cocker. A number of reasons why, worthy of bullet points:

- Always misremembering the group that he fronted (no, not Blur, Pulp – Pulp is northern, Blur is southern, as I was told emphatically by a young person I work with who purports to be his greatest fan).
- I could never fit in to one of those dresses that backing groups seem to wear.
- Lacking in ability to harmonise at random, as and when required by the front person.

So having the opportunity to sing ‘Ahhhh’, with music already written was too good an opportunity to miss. And to sing in the Albert Hall – ‘OMG’, as the former young ‘person said when I told them.

A group of SGS female voices joined with those of Manchester Chamber Choir (MCC) to sing for Jarvis’ very own Wireless Night Prom at the Albert Hall on Thursday 8 September. Our first rehearsal was taken by Jonathan Lo, the now new musical director for MCC, and even younger than the former young person at work. Which made his skill, talent and enthusiasm even more astounding. After some confusion surrounding the geography of Debussy’s *Sirènes*, we settled into a good musical relationship with our MCC temporary colleagues, who were a most welcoming and friendly group of singers. The ‘backing group’ pieces were *Aquamarina* (remember Stingray?), *Ocean Rain* (Echo and the Bunnymen) and the Beatles lullaby, *Goodnight*.

Our rehearsal at Media City was an interesting affair – the usual puzzle of getting to the right place – and then being

squiggled into the rear of the massive rehearsal room for the BBC Philharmonic, with few choir members being able to see in front of them, let alone the artistic arms of conductor Maxime Tortelier. And first sight of – ooh – Jarvis – all very exciting. An interesting man, with the practised air of disarray, but actually a clear sense of his own creative wishes. And he let some of us waifs and strays at the end of the rehearsal sneak out of the turnstiles on his pass – another ooh.

The following morning we were off to the Albert Hall, for rehearsal and

concert. The theme of the Prom was an intriguing mix of the ‘slip into unconsciousness’ and ‘dwelling under the sea’. The hall had a series of lighting effects, the ceiling mimicking the surface of the sea – looking up – and at various times blurred images of sea creatures were projected along the wall behind the choir’s heads. And Henry Wood had the potential indignity of snorkel and goggles attached to his impressive head.

The Prom itself was glorious. Starting at 10:15 pm (and on a school night) it gave an extra sense of being out on the town, for someone who doesn’t get out much. The programme was varied, with many familiar pieces, but when played with a full symphony orchestra takes you to a higher level of enjoyment.

Sailing By – although we’re probably attuned to thinking of it crackling through our radios when tucked up in bed, the BBC Phil allowed us to soar rather than sink! The theme from *Jaws* by John Williams – who knew it could be so much

more exciting without the visuals. A premiere of music for a forthcoming radio play of *The Kraken Wakes* and an improvisation from the organ were two pieces that made an impression on me – a sense of confused dreams and ‘a thousand natural shocks’. And hearing Jarvis sing Tim Buckley’s *Song to the Siren* with just the strings of the orchestra and a rapt audience was poignant – completely suited to his voice. Our own pieces went well – *Aquamarina* in bossa nova

style (such fun) went down a treat with Jarvis adopting the Rex Harrison approach to singing – with the *Sirènes* receiving a welcome and enthusiastic response from the Prom audience.

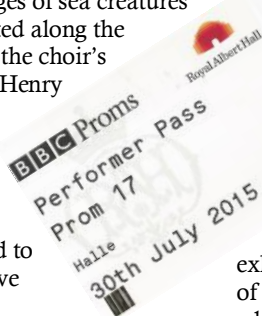
By bedtime, a very excited, exhausted and exuberant group of SGS Singers were all delighted to have been given the opportunity to participate – and went to the hotel bar instead!



A disarrayed Jarvis Cocker



The pit in the Royal Albert Hall before the audience arrives



MATTHEW TAKES ON THE HALLÉ

Photo: Pedro Malinowski



St George's Singers' former Assistant Conductor, Matthew Hamilton, has been appointed as the new Choral Director of the Hallé Choir.

Matthew was with St George's from 2007 to 2010, taking over the role from Marcus Farnsworth. In addition to working with Neil Taylor to prepare the Choir in rehearsals, Matthew conducted at a number of con-

certs, and helped start up The Cheshire Consort. He is also a talented composer, and we were delighted to premiere his work *The Overhanging Day* at Gorton Monastery in 2009.

Matthew read music at Oxford, before studying composition at the University of Manchester and choral conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. He participated in masterclasses with some of Europe's finest professional choirs, including Berlin Radio Choir and Netherlands Chamber Choir, and in 2010 won the Bramstrup Conducting Award (Denmark).

He is a regular collaborator with leading choirs across a broad repertoire. In addition to his post with the Hallé, he is also Associate Director of London Symphony Chorus, and Musical Director of New London Chamber Choir and Read-

ing Bach Choir. As a result of his new job with the Hallé however he has had to relinquish his conductorship of Salford Choral Society, and Keele Bach Choir.

Matthew will prepare the Hallé Choir for all major choral events in the forthcoming seasons, including Handel's *Messiah* and the Hallé Christmas Carol concerts in 2015. His first concert is on Thursday 26 November, in which he prepares the Hallé Choir for Poulenc's *Gloria* featuring Louise Alder.

We all wish Matthew enormous success in his new job – but hope he remembers how Mark Elder likes his words pronounced!

You can see an interview with Matthew on the Hallé's YouTube website at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jggLdBET0e0>.

THE TWELVE BARS OF CHRISTMAS

If you'd like a bit of a change this Christmas concert, here is an alternative version of one particular carol.

In the twelve bars of Christmas, our conductor made us sing:

12 Fugues by Handel
11 Oratorios
10 Stanford anthems
9 Tallis motets
8 Requiems
7 Allelulias
6 Britten folk songs
5 Bach chorales
4 Estonian lullabies
3 French songs
2 Madrigals
and another carol by John Rutter!

[It is not clear from the manuscript of this oeuvre if the author meant 'bars' as in musical or 'bars' as in places in which to consume alcoholic refreshments. Suspect either would be appropriate. Anyone want to produce suitable arrangements to fit the words? ... Ed.]



For those who can never remember the words to the 'Laudamus te' here is a handy visual mnemonic

A reminder that our Christmas concert this year is on Saturday 5 December. Spread the word!

SURVIVAL TIPS FOR CHORAL SINGERS

1. WARM UP, ENERGIZE

Most choral singers arrive at evening rehearsals exhausted after a long day's work, so it's important to begin with an overall physical warm up. Stretching, 'loosening' exercises and calisthenics 'wake up' the body, while 'yawning' and relaxed humming gradually get the voice going before more extensive vocalizing. Warming up should begin in the car, en route to the rehearsal.

2. THINK POSTURE

A 'collapsed' posture limits breathing capacity and puts stress on laryngeal muscles. Most choral singers rehearse sitting down, with music in hand – a position that often becomes inefficient, through 'slumping' back in the chair, crossing the legs etc. 'Sitting up' may seem to require effort, but in fact, an erect, well-balanced sitting posture is less tiring in the long run. A good concept is to imagine the head 'floating' directly above the pelvis, and the rib cage expanded. The music should be raised to eye

level; however, the shoulders must remain relaxed. Both feet should be 'flat on the floor'. When standing during a performance, be careful not to 'lock' the legs. Always wear comfortable shoes – no high heels (basses and tenors take note). A rigid stance, combined with nervous tension and inadequate ventilation can cause choir members to feel faint, and occasionally lose consciousness!



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3. BREATHE

This may seem obvious, but many choral singers simply do not allow themselves an ade-

4. SING THE RIGHT PART

Singers may be incorrectly classified in order to accommodate the needs of the choral group. Tenors are often scarce, so baritones may be induced to sing the tenor part, which can strain the voice. It is possible to use certain vocal techniques, such as singing falsetto in the upper register, to render the voice more versatile. If you are uncomfortable singing in the required range, and suspect that you are 'mis-placed', request a change of part or help with vocal technique. It is hoped that choral conductors will guide singers in the best possible use of their voice.

5. DON'T OVER-SING

Singing loudly in order to hear oneself over other singers usually stresses the voice. 'Showing off' one's voice is inappropriate in group singing – it doesn't contribute well to a choral 'blend,' and it is usually resented by fellow singers. If you need to check the accuracy of your pitch, simply put a finger in one ear. Even when fortissimo singing is required, it is wise not to push the voice – always sing on the 'interest' not the 'principal'.

6. ARTICULATE WISELY

Discomfort in singing is often caused by tension in the articulation of consonants and vowels.

Choral singers are generally encouraged to enunciate clearly, but care should be taken that the jaw, tongue, and lips remain as relaxed as possible. Furthermore, it is necessary to modify pronunciation for efficiency and ease of vocal production; for example, sopranos need to 'open' vowels on high notes.

7. PREPARE YOUR MUSIC

Whenever possible, try to learn your part before coming to the rehearsal. If you are insecure about pitch, it is unlikely that you will sing well. Hesitation impedes good vocal technique!

8. AVOID TALKING

Not only is chatting disruptive to others (especially the conductor), but it tires the voice.

9. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

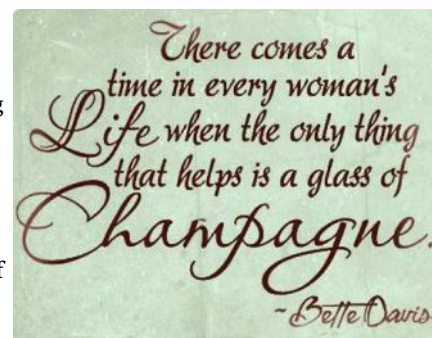
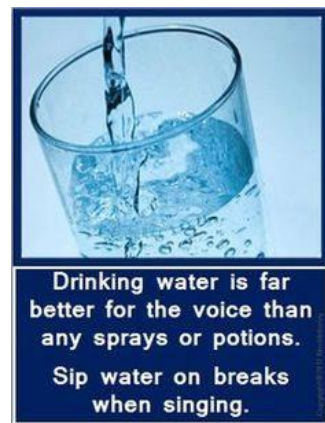
Being a choir member is the same as being a member of a sports team, and you have a responsibility to safeguard your health. Avoid smoke and alcohol – partying should be postponed until after the final performance! Get plenty of sleep and aerobic exercise. Hydrate -- drink plenty of fluids in order to reduce irritating

phlegm. Use common sense when you're sick -- if possible, miss a rehearsal rather than sing over a cold or flu, and avoid exposing other choir members to your germs

10. TAKE VOICE LESSONS

If you really want to maximize your enjoyment of choral singing, a few voice lessons can provide valuable insight. Ideally, your teacher should understand and appreciate both choral and solo singing techniques.

Based on an article by Professor Teresa Radomski, Wake Forest University, NC



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 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 CONCERT DIARY 2015-16 Season

21 November 2015

Mozart: Mass in C minor

5 December 2015

Carols and Brass by Candlelight

16 January 2016

Singing Day : *Elijah*

23 April 2016

Sounds and Sweet Airs

26 April 2016

Come and Sing evening

26 June 106

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*

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

CHRISTMAS QUIZ

- On what different dates has Christmas been celebrated throughout history?
A. 25 December.
B. 25 March.
C. 25 January.
D. Each of the 12 months have had a turn.
- When was Christmas first celebrated?
A. The year after Christ was crucified.
B. Around 100 AD.
C. In the 4th century.
D. In the 7th century.
- Why was 25 December chosen as Christmas Day?
A. The date of Jesus' birth.
B. To compete with a pagan celebration.
C. Christmas trees are in season.
D. That's when the Bible says to celebrate it.
- How did the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe start?
A. Eating it makes your mouth pucker.
B. It was associated with the Scandinavian love goddess.
C. The Druids used it in marriage ceremonies.
D. It was used to make love potions in ancient times.
- What significance does holly have in Christmas celebrations?
A. The pointed leaves represent the Star of Bethlehem.
B. It was mistaken for mistletoe.
C. The red berries are Christmas colour.
D. The early church banned mistletoe, so holly was substituted.
- St Nicholas was born in ... ?
A. Iceland.
B. Holland.
C. Germany.
D. Turkey.
- Celebrating Christmas was once against the law in ... ?
A. Holland.
B. Armenia.
C. America.
D. Japan.
- How long was a Yule Log supposed to burn?
A. All night.
B. All day.
C. Twelve hours.
D. 24 hours.



Send your answers by email to enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk, subject line 'Christmas Quiz'. First correct set of answers received may (or may not) result in a prize, but the winner will feel enormously smug either way. Editor's decision is final!