



Hemiola

St George's Singers

STEPHEN THRELFALL VICE PRESIDENT

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Marcus Farnsworth MA ARAM

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Sasha Johnson Manning
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams
Susan Roper

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

The Choir committee were thrilled to hear that Stephen Threlfall, Director of Music at Chetham's School of Music, had accepted their invitation to remain as one of the Vice Presidents of St George's Singers after retirement from his current role in September this year. Stephen gave an interview for Hemiola.

Where did you start your role as music educator and creative project manager?

I left the BBC [as sub-principal cellist] to go to Benenden school [as Director of Music] in 1991, attracted by the Youth orchestra and Music society. One key memory is 8:30am hymn practice on Tuesday mornings, 400 girls yawning, and wondering what on earth I was going to do. I found my way by adopting the policy of broadening their experience; Queen was very useful! Thankfully the Head in post at the time told me that he wanted music to happen throughout the school, not to be an isolated activity. I ran the youth orchestra and had regular concerts. In my last year, we had a Benenden festival weekend which included a visit from Jeff Wynne-Davis and his choir Canzonetta.

When this job came up in 1995, although I was happy down at Benenden, I thought I should try it out. I can remember being very casual at the first interview; I didn't expect to get through. Then when I was called back, I didn't know



© Sara Porter photography

whether to go or not, I was very nervous. But, you know, I had a sense of my dad tapping me on the shoulder and telling me to just get on with it. I started apprehensive but could see straight away how I wanted the department to flourish.

'My first professional work was with Tommy Steele on the Hans Christian Anderson show.

Great fun!'

The first real project I undertook was Antarctica. One of the key aims was to involve the whole school.

Visiting the place is on my bucket list, although my wife is not overly impressed with the idea. I went down to see the British Antarctic Survey which was stunning. As a result of the project, some of the school produced drama, others art and also creative writing. Another significant 'project', was undertaking the premiere of the work *High on the slopes of Terror*, by Peter Maxwell-Davies.

Our president, Marcus Farnsworth, took part in this

premiere. He said that it was 'the most difficult thing I ever tried to play...technically challenging for 17-year old me!' How do you start the process of leading a youth orchestra through such a new and challenging work?

This particular work was a companion piece commissioned up in Scotland. Initially, I expressed an interest in the premiere, but it was already spoken for. However, a few months later, I was approached again – apparently no-one was touching it because it was too hard! The first thing I needed to do was to play every single note of it; I made sure that I knew the score inside out. And then Max[well-Davies] came here to look through the music with me, to confirm that my understanding of each chord was correct. And change it when he considered I was right! Actually, I am very proud of the fact that Boosey & Hawkes, in their acknowledgement on the front page, thank me for my contribution.

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Saturday 8 June 2019
St George's Church, London
Road, Poynton
7:30pm

The Well Conducted Tour
Neil Taylor
Conductor
Pete Durrant
Organ / Accompanist

Tickets:
£12.00, £10 Concessions,
£5 students / children, group
discounts
Tel : 01663 764012

WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR CONCERT PREVIEW



Esztergom Basilica in Hungary

© Wikipedia

St George's Singers generally tour every year, alternating travel to the UK and mainland Europe.

Our tours are voluntary but usually well over half the Choir participate. This give us the opportunity to get to know other members of the Choir socially, often crossing the great divide between vocal sections so rarely bridged in our busy rehearsals.

Another reason for heading on tour with St George's Singers is to have the opportunity to sing glorious and exciting music in splendid, world-famous venues as well as some unusual recital areas.

Over the years we have built up a repertoire of music that fits well into a touring programme but also includes some delights not often heard by our local audiences. Neil Taylor and the committee decided that, after 20 years of the Choir touring, it was time to pull together some of these memorable pieces, as well as adding a few more delectations that will be sung when we are on tour in Bruges, Ghent and Brussels.

Our concert in June will include a wide range of liturgical music that has been performed in chapels, churches and cathedrals across the UK, Europe and Costa Rica. We have often participated in a service of mass.

We have had the opportunity to sing appropriate secular music in such monuments as the recently fire-hit Notre Dame and the magnificent Esztergom Basilica in Hungary. A personal memory from

Notre Dame is of Andrea Millington singing an exquisite and pure soprano solo from Britten's *Te Deum*, which was applauded by tourists who sat down to listen. This audience included an enraptured Japanese tourist who endeared himself to all of us when he applauded vociferously and then hugged an astonished Neil Taylor.

And sometimes there have been the spontaneous moments, when enough of us have been gathered in one place to pull together a rendition of a piece we know well.



Chapel of St Kinga, Wieliczka Salt Mine

© Wikipedia

When visiting Krakow, some of us went to visit the Wieliczka salt mine. Part of the mine includes a vast underground cave, the Chapel of St Kinga.

This chapel is over 100 metres underground and still hosts concerts and services. Over the years, stonemasons and artists have created carvings in the rock salt walls, including the stations of the cross.

Having been split into a number of groups, three of them happened to come together in this extraordinary place. We were all slightly awe-struck, but then one of our number suggested that we sing Bruckner's *Locus Iste*. Someone pitched a note, and, as we had sung the piece many times, we did not need music. We gathered into a round, about 25 of us, underneath the central chandelier. We performed well, focused on each other, and at the end of the rendition were all clearly moved at this intense moment.

Used for the annual celebration of a church's dedication, the first words - 'Locus iste a Deo factus est' - translate to 'This place was made by God'. This may not be a chirpy 'off the cuff' number, nor have a chorus for others to join. But this piece, and the recognition of the importance of place, has become a central part of our tours.

On a less cerebral level, we also have a lot of fun. There are many *Tales from the Tours* that are deemed suitable for a wider audience - for a full account of our tour to Bruges, see pages 4-9.

As part of our June concert, a few Choir members will reveal some of these memories from past tours, incorporating the shared laughter, joy, elation and nervous exhaustion that makes up a Choir tour.



The Choir pausing outside Notre Dame (2013)

The Well-Conducted Tour
 Music from the Choir's tours
 From Messiah to Teddy Bears' Picnic
 and everything in between!

Saturday 8 June 2019
 at 7.30pm
 St George's Church, Poynton

St George's Singers
 Conductor: Neil Taylor
 Accompanist: Pete Durrant

Tickets: £12, £10 concessions, £5 students/children, group discounts
 Tel: 01663 764012. Email: hemiola@stgeorges-singers.org.uk
 Secure online booking: www.stgeorges-singers.org.uk

STEPHEN THRELFALL, CITY FAN

Page 1 ◀◀

From the initial distain that I picked up from the kids, they gradually accepted that this was a piece to be conquered.

How do I engage? Well, you need to split the orchestra, structure the rehearsal. Knowing your score well is key for engagement. It is also your duty. If you make one instrumentalist sit through hours of rehearsal without playing a note, that's unforgivable.

Can you tell us a little about your early childhood, and influences that drew you into music?

Dad was a builder, Mum was a secretary. They were always puzzled as to where one jessie actor and one jessie musician came from. Our kid [the actor David Threlfall] remembers when I heard something at primary school – *The Lord is my Shepherd*, in two parts – and it stuck with me. I played 'cello a tiny bit at primary school. I have a memory of being outside playing football and someone was sent out to get me saying, "Cello teacher wants to know if you're going to play cello or football?". There was no contest. I kept on playing football.

At secondary school there were two particular teachers. One



© Sara Porter photography

Ever whimsical, our Vice President poses in Mancunian drizzle.

was Margaret Campbell-Smith, the other Mavis Bevan. They were the ones that lit the spark - I hold them totally responsible for lighting the fire, introducing me to Kodaly two-part singing.

Group 'cello lessons were 20 minutes a week – worse than useless – but it meant that I got my hands and fingers on one. Over a succession of years, I had six or seven teachers. When I was about 17, I finally had private lessons. Then Victor Fox came in and the Manchester Music Service [now GM Music Hub] and suddenly opportunities were given to me and many others; I started to play music by Tchaikovsky! I think my life's work has been to continue giving those opportunities where they don't exist.

What's the best aspect about the next thing that you plan to do both with and without Chetham's?

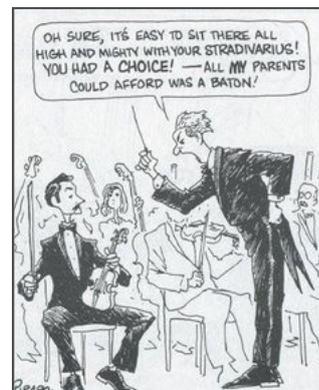
Having a bit more width in the musical world is one of the reasons I made the decision to stop. Also, the freedom to develop and explore, without quite knowing where that journey will take you, when excitement takes over from apprehension. Or without doing it on top of all the other things that this role entails.

But this decision also gives an opportunity to Chetham's for some freshness, to let them have the same chance to develop that I had when I first came here.

Stephen Threlfall, commenting on this photo

When I was a nipper, I used to live very close to where that was taken. It was called Mill Street, in the Manchester Bradford area, where Mum and Dad lived. I think Dave went to Mill Street school.

And not far away is the Etihad Stadium.



STEPHEN THRELFALL ON CONDUCTING

The Choir know Stephen Threlfall for 'keeping it real', for a quirky sense of humour. In interview, he was asked how he approached conducting youth, professional and amateur musicians and singers.

Often it is a matter of signs from the [youth/amateur] orchestra, knowing when you've reached a limit with them or you have just reached their limit. If they have reached a limit technically, then it is about considering what else you can do to make them sound better. In our project for *Wind in the Willows*, with the Greater Manchester Music Hub, I was able to find ways of just slightly changing the sound even if the pitch was marginally out of tune.

A conductor's personality and what they are trying to do with the music is paramount. From

my own playing experience, I've seen it work and not work. From someone who might be screaming at you to no effect, and then to someone like George Solti, who looks as if he's screaming at you but actually it feels as if he is saying, "This is what we've worked on, and what I want you to deliver". I conducted a concert in Europe a few years ago. A great choir, but the orchestra were a complete mixture. There was a 'learned' delay from some of them, the concluding chord in rehearsal and performance was played at fractionally different time. I was glad I did the piece, but I ended up having to rehearse them like a youth orchestra. And it did improve, but during the performance it was as if one side of the orchestra was pushing the other, like squabbling kids.



Stephen Threlfall and brother David recently joined forces with Neil Brand and the GM Music Hub Orchestra for a production of the *Wind in the Willows* at the Stoller Hall.

FLEMISH BEEF STEW

In the UK, there are a number of connotations of the word 'stew'. It can give rise to images of lonely vegetables and a hunk of meat casually floating in a warm lake of oily water; uninspiring school dinners and the like.

But in Flanders there is a whole different take on both the name and the taste. At our tour dinner in the Sint Joris restaurant, we asked for the secret of the thick, sweet and savoury sauce.

Amongst other mouthwatering ingredients is the final addition a slice of bread, spread with mustard, placed on the top and allowed to thicken the sauce.

THE WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR

FIVE HAVE A JOLLY GOOD TIME IN BRUGES



AMICA - in the wrong order ...

Before heading off on Tour, a group of friends was asked to keep a record of their escapades and adventures. Thanks go to *Caroline Elves* for scribing these adventures.

Andrea Millington, Mary Murfin, Irene Gibbons, Caroline Elves and Alison Gunn share a love of singing and a friendship, which started in St George's Singers and has been enriched through many and varied tours. We form AMICA, an appropriate initial-lettered acronym for our amicable sentiments when we get together. Our combined membership of St George's Singers totals 121 years and, having experienced the highs and the lows of previous tours, we agree that this year was both musically and socially one of the best.

Our tour aims are to enjoy the music, partake of good food and drink and to pack in as much sightseeing as possible.

On evening one in Bruges, we met a group of friendly Germans happy to share the raspberry sweets they were eating. They told us, 'They're a little sour, like Tangfastics'. They were definitely more 'tang' than 'fastic', as our faces show in the photograph (above) that they took.

After a pleasant wander through the city, we found a friendly place to eat where

Alison's encounter with Belgium's finest Steak frites nearly resulted in us becoming Four on Tour. The restaurant staff will not forget her in a hurry, narrowly avoiding a serious Heimlich manoeuvre.

Saturday 25 May dawned fine and, after a good rehearsal and much discussion about the best route to the coach park, we departed for Ghent and our first concert in St Michielskerk. We had decided a boat trip post-concert was the best way to get a feel for the city and, knowing the tours finished at 5.00, we quickly headed to the quay to

cream and a stop in a quayside café for coffee before catching the coach back to Bruges. Remarkably everyone was on time with no last-minute panics, having been told by Rhona and Jo a number of times the coach would leave without them if they were not at the appointed place by 9.00pm.

Sunday 26 May was probably the highlight of the tour for most of the choir, with our participation at Mass in the Church of the Holy Blood at the start of their annual festival. Everyone was warm and welcoming, and we had a very receptive audience, exuberant in their applause. An inspirational choice of music from Neil found us singing the *Hallelujah Chorus* and *Zadok the Priest*, alongside the beautiful *Locus Iste* and *Bogoródise Djevo*

It was here that Alison and Caroline met a couple from Knutsford; they had been overjoyed to hear 'a wonderful choir' from home. They also turned up to listen to our open-air recital we gave later in the day in

Burg Square. And then they also came along to our concert in Brussels Cathedral on Monday. They were still heaping praise as we retrieved our left luggage at Brussels station, promising to visit our website and attend the next concert in Poynton.

On Sunday afternoon we took the opportunity to undertake

▶▶ Page 5



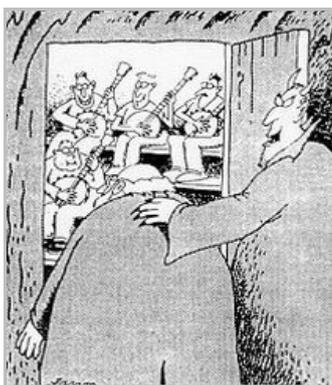
View of Burg Square from the Bell Tower in Bruges

find most of the rest of the choir behind us. Alison, in conversation with a fellow passenger, explained we were a choir on tour, a fact picked up by the tour guide. Once he had established that we made up most of the passengers, he stopped the boat under a low bridge and requested a song, saying that it was reputed to be the best acoustics. We obliged with a lusty rendition of 'Now is the Month of Maying', informally directed by Neil who happened to be on the boat as well.

Sightseeing is hungry and thirsty work, so we rewarded ourselves with more food and drink in the town square followed by ice



Preparing for sightseeing - Part One



"Your room is in here, Maestro"

FIVE HAVE A JOLLY GOOD TIME IN BRUGGE (CONT)

Page 4 ◀◀ some of our tour 'must dos'. Caroline and Alison climbed the 366 steps of the Bruges Belfort, (Bell Tower) to experience the fantastic views over the historic city, not least that of the rooftop of the Church of the Holy Blood and the Burg Square where we were to sing later that afternoon.

In a less vigorous manner, our AMICA group found a quiet tea shop to enjoy tea and cakes.

These tour traditions were instigated by the late Martine Jackson, whose zest for life originally drew us together and we raised a cup to her in friendship (although she would probably prefer red wine!).

Another boat trip and more sightseeing helped to work off the accumulating calories.

That evening the choir dinner gave us all the opportunity to mix together, discuss the events of the weekend and celebrate the success, not least to express our thanks to Jo Bluck and Rhona Ford for their sterling work in organising such an enjoyable few days.

Our final concert was in the huge,



Preparing for sightseeing - Part Two

peaceful space of Brussels Cathedral. An oasis of calm after the noise and bustle of Brussels Midi and the city, but not before we enjoyed another meal in a pavement café and more Belgian beer.

Once again, we sang to a large, warm and appreciative audience before our trip home. Such homeward bound journeys can prove to have a sense of anti-climax, but was instead filled with good memories of lovely places and strengthened friendship.



With 366 steps and 47 bells, the Bruges Belfort (Belfry and Carillon) is one of the most important towers in the city.



All of the SGS team were asked to spread the word about our free concerts, handing out flyers to unsuspecting tourists. Our audience numbers certainly reflected a committed approach to this canvassing and it meant we spoke to both locals and tourists alike.

TRAINS, PLANES, BUSES AND BOATS



Waiting at Bruges for our high speed train to Brussels.

No tour journeys go unscathed; there are always mishaps and adventures as we travel.

Our Belgium tour started with the excitement of a Eurostar ticket left in Manchester. Following multiple phone calls from trains and cafes, contact with Eurostar and our agent, we resolved the outward journey for an essential member of our team. We left not knowing about the return, hoping that they had their passport in order and a good level of French.

Arrival in St Pancras should have been smooth, but we had a lost bass to find before leaving the

country. We did, but with approximately 9 minutes to spare (we laugh at those who need 10) before the gate was closed. In fact it was closed just behind the tour leaders, as they dragged suitcases and themselves along at high speed.

Our return from Bruges to Brussels proved to be Chinese curse style interesting. Initially, getting all the team from our hotel to Bruges station was a tad stressful, having a few unaccounted for until the last few minutes.

But Brussels Midi second time around was a whole different adventure. It involved just shy of 70 people indulging in *The Mysteries of the Left Luggage Lockers and How To Open them*. Looking back it was very funny, to see normally mild mannered, unflappable individuals reduced to being incandescent with rage and issuing multiple expletives as they battled to get lockers opened, ram in suitcases, find enough change, print out receipts etc.

But it lacked all amusement at the time.



'I'm supremely confident that I really do **not** know the way. But I have a First Aid Kit, a notepad, pen and an authoritative look on my face, so nothing can go wrong.'

THE WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR GHENT



The gothic features of Sint Michielskerk (St Michael's church) tower over the view of Sint Michielsplein (St Michael's Bridge) that crosses the River Lys.

Our day trip to Ghent turned out to be the almost perfect mixture of singing and sight-seeing.

After a couple of hours rehearsal in Bruges, we travelled by coach to this medieval city, which, in the last 20 years, has reinvented itself, embracing a 'café lifestyle' and a vivid art scene.

Our rehearsal and concert took place in Sint Michielskerk (St Michael's Church), an imposing gothic-style building. The site itself goes back as far as the late 11th or early 12th century.

What the church lacks in spires it makes up for in sculptures, art work and a stunning pulpit, which seems to be a feature of so many places of worship in Belgium and Flanders.

Despite our early morning practice, we all benefitted from the rehearsal in the church, adjusting to the acoustic and our sight lines to Neil. There were a few issues with sticky organ stops that few of the choir knew about, but alto Wendy Flavell achieved a lifetime's ambition pulling out the stops during Pete's solo performance in the concert.

Our concert had a good sized audience considering the inviting sunshine outside, possibly due to advanced advertising by our agent and also our canvassing of previously men-

tioned unsuspecting tourists and locals. Our performance was very well received. A great start to the singing adventure.

We had the additional luxury of chairs provided by a welcoming and friendly team in the church. This may seem to be a trivial thing to note. However, as the Choir is so used to having to rely solely on much leg bending when rehearsing during a tour, these chairs were a blessing.

Following the concert, prior to being released to make merry, the Choir was threatened (again) with abandonment in case of failure to be back at the coach pick up point by 9.00pm.



Four sopranos and a Portuguese waiter and singing fan.

Well motivated by this time constraint, the team went their way quickly; sightseeing, shopping and quaffing as appropriate. I was impressed with how much activity they managed to fit in to this free time. With the weather becoming sunny and a pleasant Spring temperature, some of us enjoyed simply strolling the streets and river banks, taking in the atmosphere of a Saturday in the city.

Others headed to specific sights and personal 'must do' activities. It seems that a large proportion ended up in a boat together, as reported by AMICA. (see page 4).

Activities also included the temporary acquisition of a young Portuguese waiter who turned out to be a very enthusiastic fan of our choir sound.



"Is that Neil leaving in another boat? Ah, well, at least most of you are still watching him."

Well, that's what I was told by the number of sopranos who acquired him (including visiting Yorkshire Lasses and a tour organiser). Modesty prevents an extensive review but there was a lot of giggling taking place on the return journey.

Amongst the more cultural 'must do' activities was a visit by altos Bridget Dunbar and Ursula Birkett to see the famous *Ghent Altarpiece* in the magnificent Saint Bavo (Sint-Baafs) Cathedral. You can read more on page 7.



Old acquaintance ne'er forgot

SGS soprano Jacqui Burfitt made the most of touring to Ghent. Here she is with her Belgian friend Maria and daughter Valerie.

Dedicated skiing partners in a past life, they met up for the first time since 1995. We are delighted that both Maria and Valerie came to our concert.

Tour Photographs

Many thanks to those who have contributed photographs for this edition.

Alison Gunn
Andrea Millington
Chris Hill
Jean Egerton
Judy Tomlinson
Paul Burfitt
Rhona Ford
Sarah Lionheart

THE WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR GHENT

FOUND IN TRANSLATION - A LOVE OF SINGING



Frans, our programme translator, and his wife, receiving a thank-you gift from Rosemary Broadbent.

Amongst the pre-tour e-mails arriving regularly from Jo came an unexpected appeal:

‘You said you had relatives living in Brussels. Do you know anyone who could translate our programmes into Flemish?’

That seemed unlikely – Ruth works in international aid and has better Swahili than Flemish - but a friend made at a univer-

sity conference was a professional translator living in Amsterdam. I knew that English-Flemish was not in Alison’s portfolio but she offered to look for a colleague who was willing to undertake the job without charging the 100-Euro professional fee. Two days later:

‘I’ve drawn a blank – they are all

too busy. But I could load it onto a translators’ forum online. Let’s throw it out there and see what happens.’

Within an hour she was back in contact.

‘Someone has volunteered. He sings in a choir and says

he would enjoy it.’

Not only did our new-found friend, Frans, complete the translation *gratis* in three days, but he decided to come to our concert, booking an overnight in Ghent with his wife to make this possible. So, we were able to thank him personally and present a gift. Some things can’t be done online.

Rosemary Broadbent



What do you get for someone as a ‘token’ Mancunian gift?
 1. An inscribed wooden coaster shaped into a worker bee,
 2. Four ‘Real Lancashire’ Eccles Cakes and an accompanying description as to why they are relevant.

Overheard from two basses at an ATM, very shortly before they were due to be at St Michael’s church.

“C’mon, we’ve got to be there 15 minutes before the rehearsal starts.”

“I didn’t hear that.”

“Well, I did and I wasn’t even listening.”

ADORATION OF THE MYSTIC LAMB

The painting, also known as the *Ghent Altarpiece*, was completed in 1432, by the brothers Hubert and Jan Van Eyck, and is one of the wonders of world art, to whose doorstep this SGS tour brought us. We never thought we would see it, and now we have; just this alone has justified going on tour.

The painting has a dramatic history of near disasters, including threats by fire, by rioting Protestants during the Reformation, many times by theft actual or threatened – top of the Nazis’ wish list – dismembered and hidden, and still missing one panel stolen for ransom.

The many panels that make up the whole include portraits of the donors, totally individual; an Annunciation with beautiful and very Renaissance idealised Gabriel & Mary; an imposing God the Father; various prophets, and a luminously wonderful picture of Ghent – and that’s just the outside. Inside are thousands of figures of saints, popes, judges, knights, peasantry, angelic hosts etc, adoring the Mystic Lamb, with detail to last a lifetime of close inspection.



Angelic choir from the Ghent Altarpiece

Here are also the angelic choristers, whose expressions could surely be neatly matched to comments from our revered Musical Director: an SGS competition in the offing?

Bridget Dunbar & Ursula Birkett

Our Four Tenors

Mark Warrington, Paul Mummery, Dave Shield and Rhiannon Becque were worthy group winners of the *Singing and Serendipity* award presented at our tour dinner. They received their own personal marzipan Smurf for showing outstanding resilience and cheerfulness in the face of being outnumbered by other sections many times over. Their singing was wonderful; confident, blended and beautiful. Thank you.



THE WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR BRUGES



Tricky to see in this photograph, but right at the top is a note to say 'The Saint George's Singers' will be participating in Mass.

It may only be grammar related, but we like the sense of exclusivity.



After the Mass, the clergy of the basilica offered to take photos of the Choir. Our beaming smiles reflect the exuberance we felt following our rendition of *Zadok the Priest*.

Sunday 26 May was a day spent in Bruges, and a profound 'performance' for the Choir. We all knew we would be singing as part of the mass in the Basilica of the Holy Blood (Heilig-Bloedbasiliek)

However, it was when we saw the large poster on the wall outside the basilica that realization dawned; our singing would start the festival.

As we started to rehearse, slightly bleary from Ghentian excess, we began to understand just how special this participation would be.

This was a full service of Mass, spoken in Flemish, but with readings and a generous welcome delivered in English. Listening to the spoken Flemish, many of the Choir were able to hear the similarity of sound to English words used in the Creed and other parts of the service.

Our recessional piece, *Zadok the Priest*, was an extraordinary experience for both the Choir and congregation. As part of the service, the worshippers process to an elevated side altar, where the phial of Holy Blood is on view.



Beneath the trees in Burg Square, the Choir sang from the faintly ridiculous (*Teddy Bear's Picnic*) to the sublime (*Laudibus in Sanctus*).

Alan Swain, who was in the congregation, reported that a lady in front of him was "vigorously" startled as we burst forth with the opening proclamation of the piece.

Following the service, it was back to the business of finding food before resuming sightseeing and other activities, while bringing ourselves back down to earth from a singing high.

Later, as the glorious spring weather started to cool and the wind increase, we gathered under the trees in Burg square for our recital. We were provided with chairs, but, following a suggestion from one of our visiting Yorkshire Lasses, we used the chairs to create seating for an audience, to encourage them to listen

and stay. And that is exactly what they did. They sat, and listened and applauded and smiled. Wonderful.

Not that it went without a few little hiccups in the form of tower bells ringing on the quarter hour, airplanes overhead and a film crew taking footage of those involved in the European election.

The rest of the afternoon was spent with further free time, including visiting art studios and museums.

The Choir has a tradition of a tour dinner, where we all sit together for at least one night to reflect on what had gone before and what might happen in the next 24 hours. This time we met at the appropriately named *St Joris* restaurant on the Markt Square in Bruges. Joris is the Dutch / Flemish name for George, so we felt very much at home. Our dinner included the traditional beef stew of the Flemish country. Goodness, it was delicious!

Zadok the Priest

The music prepares a surprise in its orchestral introduction through the use of static layering of soft string textures followed by a sudden rousing *forte tutti* entrance.

(Wikipedia)



Tour Leaders Rhona Ford & Jo Bluck relax at the end of the tour dinner on Saturday night.



George (Call me Joris) the Elk. It's a tough life being a mascot.

Following food and wine came speeches. Then the 'thank-you's'. And then the dreaded 'Award Ceremony'.

Well, less said, soon forgotten, as my grandmother used to say!

THE WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR BRUSSELS

Monday 27 May, our final day, and travel with luggage to Brussels for our last concert. Previous mention has been made of the slightly stressful luggage debacle at Brussels Midi, but after negotiating the tram and train network, we found our way to the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula.



Pete playing the choir organ, lesser cousin to the Grenzing Great Organ.

This magnificent and imposing building is one of the most important landmarks in Brussels. It sits high at the top of white steps, towering over Brussels. Inside a breathtaking solid wooden pulpit and a 'swallow's nest' organ blend art and function

Although the supporting staff at the cathedral spoke no English, they were kind, helpful and en-

thusiastic about our performance. Communicating via Mark Warrington, we were encouraged to use the space between the upper and lower altars, as the acoustics were meant to be at their best from this point. And indeed it was extraordinary; during rehearsal, Neil occasionally stopped us, to listen to the delay resonating throughout the cathedral's vast and vaulted ceiling.

Brussels Cathedral's most famous organ is the Grenzing organ, perched high up in the middle of the nave.

Pete Durrant, acquainted himself with the choir organ, more modest but still very different from the *Sticky Stops of Ghent* scenario.

It was interesting to perform to an audience that we could not see, and whose delayed applause was due to time lag rather than any lack of appreciation.



Mark Warrington acting as French Liaison Officer in Brussels Cathedral.

Amongst our large audience were both locals and tourists alike. The aunt of 2nd soprano, Philippa Greaves introduced herself and gave me felicitations and chocolates to hand on when back in the UK.

And that was where we were now headed. In a flurry of exhilaration and excitement and packing up, we exchanged hasty farewells to those travelling separately, hustled our way respectfully down the mighty building's aisles and started homeward.

A vibrant and passionate final performance for a tour worthy of St George's Singers.



The pulpit in the Cathedral of St Michael and St Gudula, carved out of wood from 1699.



The sounds of the final concert reverberate through the cathedral. What a wonderful musical ending.

Praise from the Crypt

Chris Hill, husband of soprano Emma, was exploring Brussels Cathedral, taking photos as he toured. When he went into the crypt, he was met and spoke to a woman there.

"You're lucky to be here today," she said, "there's an English choir singing and they're very good."

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

THE BOY IS BACK IN TOWN

Not content with being Founder and Artistic Director of both the Southwell Music Festival and Manchester Vocal Festival, becoming a father and performing at a significant number of musical events, the Choir's President Marcus Farnsworth has now been appointed to a newly established role as **Head of Vocal and Choral department in Chetham's School of Music.**

In a change to policy, the school are now inviting young singers from Year 9 [13-14 year olds] to join the school, when previously they were asked to wait until 6th form. Starting this September, the new role will encompass both leadership of

the School's choirs, and the development of the programme for first study singers, alongside a team of vocal teachers.

A former pupil of Chetham's, Marcus has retained a strong commitment to singing education. He will be part of the school's music department led by Tom Redmond, who also joins the school in September as Director of Music.

We send our best wishes to Marcus for this new venture and hopes for the further development of St George's Singers' close ties with Chethams!



MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN E \flat MAJOR



Ticket for the premiere of Symphony No. 8

Page 10 ◀◀ Yet the story behind this defiantly optimistic symphony's premiere is one of the most pain-racked and pathetic in Mahler's personal life. The piece was composed in 1906 during a time of great happiness. Four years later, he dedicated the symphony to "My dear wife, Alma", the first time he had given any of his pieces a personal inscription. A symbol of marital bliss, the perfect union between Mahler's Faustian creativity and Alma's eternal femininity? Far from it. Mahler's dedication was part of a strategy to rescue his marriage after Alma brought it to the brink of destruction during the summer of 1910 – she was having an affair with the architect Walter Gropius. Mahler had discovered the truth as he composed his 10th Symphony, the same summer that the Eighth was finally being rehearsed for its premiere. The discovery of his wife's infidelity was the greatest psychological and emotional crisis he would ever experience (so much so, that Mahler consulted with Freud in Holland that August). But just a

few weeks after he had confronted his inner demons of jealousy and betrayal, Mahler had to conduct the premiere of the Eighth; his hymn to love was to be premiered by a man whose faith in the central relationship of his life had been shattered.

Whatever Mahler's experience as one of the world's most famous conductors, nothing could properly prepare him for the musical stress and logistical headaches of putting the Eighth together – for the simple reason that no human being had ever attempted to compose and then conduct a new symphony for this number of performers. He had begun rehearsals in May that year, before he knew of Alma's infidelity.

The record of his working sessions in Vienna, Leipzig, and Munich is the most revealing insight we have into Mahler the practical musician and neurotic composer. After the first full rehearsal in June, he wrote to Alma: "It was a veritable purgatory. I don't know what to do when I'm finished here," before outlining the reason for his use of Goethe in the piece. "The most important aspect of it is Goethe's view that all love is generative and creative and that there is a generative force that is both physical and spiritual and the emanation of this 'Eros'. You have a symbolic depiction of it in the final scene of Faust."

By September, and the final week of rehearsals leading up to the first performance at the 3,200-seat Neue Musik-Festhalle in Munich, there was a grim irony to Mahler's words. His Eros-obsessed symphony was no longer a symbol of the earthly paradise he thought his marriage had been. Alma



Mahler was known to enjoy long walks to rid himself of day-to-day worries.

was in Munich, too, publicly supporting her husband, while privately carrying on her affair with Gropius. And yet Mahler threw himself into the symphony, taunting his incompetent pianist, charming the children in the choir, trying and failing to force a new leader on his orchestra, and cajoling his musicians to find the poetry of his music: "Here I want my orchestra to be nothing but a large guitar!"; "My children's choir must enter here like a knife through butter."

The performance was one of the most talked about musical events of the new century, causing a storm of adulation from his supporters and a wave of antisemitic vitriol from his opponents.

But Mahler himself was transformed at these performances. Composer Anton Webern was there, and wrote to Arnold Schoenberg: "I can't tell you how beautiful Mahler's symphony is ... The first movement is unprecedented in its impact. The loudness at the end reaches a high peak ... It's hardly bearable. As a whole, the work is barely conceivable, and I'm still completely bowled over by it."

Courtesy of Guardian News & Media Ltd

Instrumental forces

Woodwinds

2 piccolos (1st doubling 5th flute)
4 flutes
4 oboes
cor anglais
3 B \flat clarinets
E \flat clarinet
bass clarinet
4 bassoons
contrabassoon

Brass

8 horns
8 trumpets (four offstage)
7 trombones (three offstage)
tuba

Percussion

4 timpani
bass drum
cymbals
triangle
tam-tam
2 tuned bells in A and A \flat
glockenspiel

Keyboards

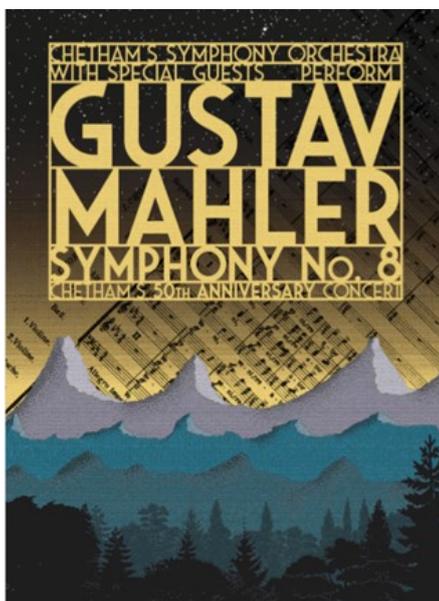
organ
celesta
piano
harmonium

Strings

2 mandolins
2 harps (preferably doubled)
1st violins
2nd violins
violas
cellos
double basses

Choral and Vocal Forces

Three soprano solos
Two alto solos
One tenor solo
One baritone solo
One bass solo
Two SATB choirs
One children's choir



Chetham's 50th Anniversary poster

CHETHAM'S 50 YEARS CELEBRATION

Stephen Threlfall, commenting on celebrations

I wish I'd written what Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla [conductor CBSO] said in interview once. "When you celebrate a birthday, you don't stay at home alone. You invite your friends"

In September 1969, a new intake of students was admitted to Chetham's by musical audition, laying the foundations for the specialist music school in Manchester. Fifty years later, former Chetham's students fill concert halls across the world. Since January this year, the school has been celebrating this anniversary.

As part of these celebrations and to mark Stephen Threlfall's final concert at the school, the Choir is delighted to have been invited to sing in the performance of Mahler's Symphony no. 8. in Eb major. In interview, Stephen Threlfall gave an insight in to the origins of this project.

'I just thought that this was a great piece to celebrate 50 years, as you're not going to do it more than once, if at all. It was also a piece that would

mean you could bring in the school's friends. And so we have done just that, invited our friends, past pupils and teachers and those that have spent even a little time with us as part of the outreach or project work.

Simon Wright, past pupil, is now the chorus master for the Leeds Festival Chorus. He told me that he was up for this but added, 'By the way, we only sing Choir One'; which is why St George's Singers got Choir Two.

David Evans, another old boy, is Head of the Choir at Hereford Cathedral. We had undertaken a number of projects together over the last couple of years and he wanted his name put down on the list for this one. There are 30 voices from Hereford and some of the choristers from Manchester as well.

50
Chetham's
at
fifty

Another recent addition are pupils from a very worthy organisation that connects schools across Europe. We have some pupils from Holland and one or two from Norway. We have links with Melbourne as well, from a previous project. They could not afford to send over two pupils, but their Vice Principal is coming. We are still hoping that we may manage to get two children from Beijing as well.

We have one or two guests in the orchestra. Two of our past pupil oboe players are coming, to play oboe and cor anglaise. It's just all part of that friendship mix that we want to create.

And we've got the added bonus that the performance is being recorded live on Radio Three'.

What could possibly go wrong?



© CBSO

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla conducting CBSO



Mahler



Smahler

MAHLER MEMORIES BY SUSAN HODGSON

First day of rehearsals for the Mahler 8. I'd dug out my old score, used only once before when I sang the work with Stockport

Festival Chorus (SFC), and opened it on the Tuesday evening to find with some relief that all the second-choir lines were already highlighted.

Half-way through rehearsal, something fluttered to the floor: a numbered choir seat ticket for the Bridgewater Hall, given out to all members of the SFC on concert day to ensure we were in the right places, and which I had obviously pushed into the score and forgotten. Then it all came back.



October 1998 (was it really 21 years ago!) The enormous chorus spilling over onto audience seats; dozens of the very noisiest orchestral instruments Mahler could find; the hours spent

with John Huw Davies in Stockport Town Hall council chamber getting to grips with this bonkers music; Ray Lomax on the podium exhorting us to ever greater heights of musical passion; the overwhelming sheer physicality of the 'Gloria' fireworks and the indescribable power of the final chorus.

Second time round, will it be as good?

BRUNDIBÁR IN THERESIENSTADT / TEREZIN

In interview, Stephen Threlfall described a particular outreach project that involved working with Paul Aron Sandfort, a child survivor from the Theresienstadt (Terezin) ghetto outside Prague.

The children's opera *Brundibár* (bumble-bee) was written by Hans Krása in 1938. Rehearsals and the first performance took place at a Jewish orphanage in 1941 or 1942. By 1943 all of the children of the original chorus had been transported, joining Krása in Terezin, who reconstructed the full score based on memory and a partial piano score. The production was shown 55 times in 1943.



Hans Krása (1899-1944) whose opera provided respite to the children of Terezin

Paul Sandfort, who had learned the trumpet as a Tivoli Boys' Guard in Copenhagen, found himself drafted into the ensemble for the productions of *Brundibár*. He was there for a special performance staged for the Red Cross,



The children of Terezin performing *Brundibár*

© Pinterest

who were inspecting living conditions in the camp. They saw a beautified ghetto, sports, a café lifestyle, increased food rations. They did not know that many of the residents had been deported to Auschwitz to reduce crowding during their visit.

Later that year, the production was filmed for a Nazi propaganda film *Theresienstadt: a documentary film from the Jewish settlement area*. As soon as filming finished, nearly all of the participants were herded into trucks and sent to the Auschwitz gas chambers, including Krása. However, Paul Sandfort survived. His mother had remarried a Danish man meaning that he was classed as a Danish Jew. Denmark stood up for its Jewish population, insisting upon the Red Cross visit. It was the Danish king, Christian X, who managed to secure the liberation of Terezin's Danish prisoners on 15 April 1945.

The story of Brundibár

It is not surprising that *Brundibár* was such a hit. The plot of the opera shares elements with fairy tales such as *Hansel and Gretel*. This story concerns a fatherless brother (Pepíček) and sister (Aninka / Annette). Their mother is ill and the doctor tells them she needs milk to recover. But they have no money. They decide to sing in the market place to raise the needed money, but the evil organ grinder, Brundibár, chases them away. However, assisted by a handful of animals, they overcome Brundibár trying to steal the money and are able to buy the milk for their mother.

The children of Terezin would have easily seen and appreciated the story's message; a triumph of justice over evil.

WORKING WITH PAUL SANDFORT STEPHEN THRELFALL



Paul Aron Sandfort, musician, musicologist, teacher, stage director 1930-2007

It is worth remembering that, when Hans Krása took his music into the ghetto, the musicians would perform the pieces in attics and cellars, anywhere away from the German ears. And others, not just Krása, would write parts for the instrumentalists that came in.

Sadly, because of the regular movement of people onward from the ghetto to the camps, they never knew how long that part would be played. Paul played the trumpet and did so in the performances of the opera.

Right up until his death, Paul Sandfort wanted to travel to use *Brundibár* to put his humanitarian message across to children. When he joined us on our tour, he would introduce the opera and the songs. We also performed a composition of his

own, *Nachshub* (Extra Helping) for narrator, string quartet and trumpet.

As part of the project, we taught the opera songs to the children. I can remember a particular moment. A teacher from one of the Stockport schools came up to me and pointed out a young child, a girl who was statemented [with specific learning difficulties]. He was quite astonished. Apparently at the school the girl was almost silent, barely speaking to anyone. And yet there she was in front of us, laughing, singing and just completely free.

This was far beyond other things I had taken on with our outreach work.

© The Independent



A poster for the performance of the opera in 1944

In 2005, we planned a project based around the children's opera. Working with GM Music Hub, we had identified a number of children from around the borough to take part in this 35 minute performance, to join in the chorus.



MASS IN B MINOR LOOKING BACK



Responding to Neil's guidance and baton, the Northern Baroque provided us with a tremendous support, playing with sensitivity and passion.

We were equally delighted to have been performing with outstanding soloists; Rebecca Lea, Joyce Tindsley, Eleanor Gartside, Richard Dowling and Marcus Farnsworth.

Our large audience was made up of loyal followers of the Choir as well as St George's Singers first timers and also individuals who wanted to hear a live performance of this magnificent work in the stunning surroundings of Gorton Monastery.

Choir members were asked to listen to comments from our audience, so that their words could be included in Hemiola. You can read some of these comments on page 15.

One of our visitors, a friend of Mark Warrington, was from Spain. He waxed lyrical about the experience of listening to this work in the surroundings of the monastery.

© Graham North .

It is almost surreal to consider that, in amongst the flurry of two more concerts and a European tour, it was only a few months ago the Choir was singing out the magnificent strains of Bach's Mass in B Minor in the inspiring purple-hued aura of Gorton Monastery. Whilst the acoustic of Pugin's building may not have been totally suited to such a large choral work, the Monastery was in its finest colours, which did much to enhance our performance. And the sell out audience helped to soften the sound delay!



The Choir and Northern Baroque



Rebecca Lea, Joyce Tindsley, and Eleanor Gartside

A SWINGLE REVIEW

One member of the audience was Alan Byers, a former professional singer. Alan wrote some words to review what he had heard. You can read more about him on page 15.

Candles flickered around statues as the once deserted Monastery awoke to the strains of Bach's solemn procession. The St George's Singers managed their long polyphonic phrases seemingly without effort. Hard consonants sparkled in the texture and the whole was under the masterful control of Maestro Neil Taylor.

Northern Baroque provided a lively setting when joined in French and Italian style hemiolas and similar rhythmic devices that were never overdone. Tempi were well judged, intonation secure in its baroque pitch and early instruments.

The soloists were all outstanding with clear articulation. Perhaps more weight and articulation could have been displayed in the lower parts in this difficult acoustic. The experienced Marcus Farnsworth provided some lovely legato singing.



Richard Dowling and Marcus Farnsworth

MASS IN B MINOR AUDIENCE VIEWS

I was really excited about going to this concert, and I was not disappointed. From the first Kyrie on, it was pure pleasure. The choir was so clear and the MD drew out the distinct 'voices' of each part to create such a layered, textured dynamic yet cohesive sound. It's a privilege to have live music - it was a treat to watch as well as listen to the orchestra and instrumentalists play together (the timpani and all the glorious horns!) as well as performing their virtuoso bits. The vocal soloists were so accomplished. What a pleasure! Many thanks to everyone involved.

Audience member

Margaret Biddle

I am still on cloud nine and have sections of the Osanna whizzing around my head!

JW, Audience member

Quando entras en el Monasterio de Gorton, la luz penetra tamizada por las cristalerías y te prepara para dejar que las voces del coro te transporten a un mundo diferente. ¡Qué maravilla!

TRANSLATION

When you enter Gorton Monastery, the light flooding in through the windows prepares you to be transported by the voices of the choir to another world. Simply marvellous!

Spanish audience member



Neil Taylor, The Choir and Northern Baroque take a final curtain call.

It was a wonderful concert.

The chorus, soloists and orchestra were all fantastic. A superb venue which heightened the experience. Like me, you are probably only half-way back down to earth from that experience. This is the first St George's Singers concert that I have been to, and I obviously should go to more.

Audience member

Fabulous - I've run out of superlatives!

BL, Audience member

The concert on Sunday was superb. [From the third front row] I had the privilege of a fantastic sound and view of all the participants. It all seemed to fit perfectly together. Fantastic soloists, singers and orchestra. It was very much perfect.

Audience member

Lia Menascie

IN MEMORIAM

Returning from our tour to Bruges, the Choir were both deeply shocked and saddened to hear of the unexpected and untimely death of our friend and fellow St George's Singer,

BRIAN MARSDEN.

Brian was a member of St George's Singers for many years, a stalwart supporter of our tours. He had been looking forward to joining us in Bruges, as well as later performing in Mahler's Symphony No. 8 in the Bridgewater Hall.

The B Minor Mass was Brian's last concert with the choir; we know that he thoroughly enjoyed singing in it and experiencing the excitement of performance.

Our concert on Saturday 23 November 2019, which includes Mozart's *Requiem*, will be dedicated to his memory. An obituary for Brian will be included in the next edition of *Hemiola*.

ALAN BYERS, SWINGLE SINGER

Alan Byers, has had a long, prestigious and varied career in the singing world. His voice can be heard on recordings as diverse as the cast recording of *CHESSE* in 1984 (alongside Barbara Dickson) and Puccini's *La Bohème* in 2005 (alongside Plácido Domingo and Montserrat Caballé).

A choral scholar at King's College, Cambridge, Alan was under the tutelage of David Wilcocks.

His first professional years were spent with the BBC singers, then he joined the

Swingle Singers, performing alongside Ward Swingle in the late '70s and early '80s. Alan recorded both the *Folio* and *Skyline* LPs as a member of the Swingle Singers. In this image of the *Folio* LP, Alan can be seen sporting a beard and standing tall on the back row.



Alan's tenor voice can also be heard in recordings alongside other famous names such as Luciano Pavarotti, James Bowman and Emma Kirkby. Alan also sang with Kiri Te Kanawa and Jose Carreras in a 1986 recording of *South Pacific*.

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, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY

MANCHESTER SINGS!

Saturday 8 June 2019

The Well-Conducted Tour
St George's Church, Poynton

Lymm Festival, Lymm,
Warrington, Cheshire

20 - 29 June 2019

Friday 5 July 2019

Mahler Symphony No 8
Chetham's Chorus and Symphony
Orchestra and others
Bridgewater Hall

Various venues in Lymm

Celebrating the visual and performing arts, and drawing on local talent, this year's line up includes family art and literature events as well as local choirs and musicians. Music performances range from the sound of cinema to a Latin twist from guitarist Craig Ogden and leading cellist Helen Thatcher. Also appearing is the choir Altèri, in *Sea and Stars*; one or two familiar faces in amongst them.

Saturday 20 October 2019

Brahms *Schicksalslied: Song of Destiny*
By invitation - European Doctor's
Orchestra
Bridgewater Hall

Saturday 23 November 2019

Mozart *Requiem* and McDowell
Magnificat
Royal Northern College of Music

Details of events and ticket
prices from:

www.lymmfestival.org.uk

**She loves me, she loves me
not; Songs of Love with the
Chorus of Opera North**

Salts Mill, Saltaire

21 June 2019 7:30pm

An evening of seductive, romantic song from the Chorus of Opera North accompanied by a piano duet. From Palestrina's sensuous motets and Brahms' romantic waltzes, to the exuberant jazz standards of Fats Waller and Cole Porter and much more, this is a chance to see the acclaimed ensemble perform in an intimate setting.

Tickets £15

01132 233600

Mon-Sat 10am-8pm

New Voices

Buxton International Festival

**Cape Town Opera &
Northern Chamber Orchestra**

Buxton Opera House

5 July 2019 7:30pm

Marking the opening of the Buxton International Festival 40th Anniversary, singers from Buxton Festival Company combine with visiting young artists from Cape Town as well as rising stars from the RNCM for a celebratory concert. They will present works from well-loved works by Mozart, Rossini, Bizet and Beethoven.

Tickets £15 - £65

01298 72190

