



St George's Singers

Hemiola

St George's Singers

CECILIA MCDOWALL *MAGNIFICAT*

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Our first concert of the new season brings together two composers separated by two hundred years. An ideal companion to Mozart's *Requiem*, Cecilia McDowall's *Magnificat* is a sublimely beautiful work. Scored for soprano and mezzo soprano soloists, mixed chorus and a chamber orchestra, the work was commissioned by Finchley Choral Society to mark their centenary. First performed in 2003, the six contrasting movements of the *Magnificat* possess flourishes from the Baroque as well as a modern musical interpretation of this powerful ancient text from Luke's Gospel.

Graceful and reflective, this setting of the *Magnificat* "grows in intensity as the text progresses; by the time of the concluding chorus, Deposit potentes, a genuine sense of exultation... has been achieved." (International Record Review, March 2005)

Magnificat, also known as the *Canticle of Mary*, has inspired composers for centuries to capture the moment when Mary and Elizabeth share their joy at Gabriel's message and prophecy.

The International Record Review describes Cecilia McDowall as having "a communicative gift that is rare in modern music." This gift has been recognised in many accolades. In 2014 she won the British Composer Award for Choral Music. Two years ago,

she was selected for an Honorary Fellow award by the Royal School of Church Music. The list goes on.

Cecilia has taken time out of her very busy working life to answer some questions that will help us get to know her as well as her inspirations and structures for composing.

What have been your ambitions in life?

Composing was always my first love, my first real interest.

When I was young I always enjoyed creating pieces and improvising and had plans to write music from an early age. I read music at Edinburgh and London Universities, gaining a B.Mus. and a Masters degree. I won a number of competitions and awards for composing when I was a student, which all reinforced the direction I wanted to pursue. My father was a professional flautist, playing at the Royal Opera House as principal for many years, and he also ran two chamber music ensembles which meant our house was always full of music and rehearsing musicians. At the stage of leaving university, being a composer didn't seem a realistic way of earning a living. Initially, I taught music instead of writing it, working at the Yehudi Menuhin School



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and at Trinity College of Music up until my son was born.

And if you had not been a composer, what alternative career would you have tried?

Well, my grandfather was an architect and I would have liked to have followed in his impressive footsteps. Architecture is always a source of inspiration for me. Equally, I was interested in medicine, in becoming a doctor; and still now, I'm fascinated by advances in medical research.

What was your inspiration for this setting of *Magnificat*? Can you tell us a little about the emotional response you wanted to elicit from both performers and audience?

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Saturday 23 November 2019
 Royal Northern College of
 Music
MANCHESTER

Mozart Requiem
Cecilia McDowall Magnificat

St George's Singers
Stockport Symphony Orchestra

Conductor Neil Taylor

Soprano Ella Taylor
Contralto Amy Holyland

Tenor Alex Grainger
Baritone Terence Ayebare

Tickets:

£16, £14 concessions,
£7 students/children, group
discounts

Tel : 01663 764012

Email: tickets@st-georges-
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MOZART REQUIEM



FRANCE

‘There’s a seductive, chilling mystery around the story of Mozart’s Requiem...It’s got everything: a genuinely weird commission from a courtly

intermediary who asked Mozart to write a piece for Count von Walsegg, so that the pretentious count could pass off the piece as his own composition to commemorate the death of his wife; a young composer of genius writing his first setting of the Mass for the Dead, and finding an absolutely distinctive musical voice to do so; and his tragically early death at the age of 35 after he had written around two-thirds of the work’s musical material. He died after composing eight bars of the Requiem’s Lacrimosa, the last words he set to music marking “that day of tears and mourning.” (Tom Service, **Guardian, 16 June 2011**).

At 35, Mozart had survived the transition from a child prodigy to a fully-grown superstar. Just

half an hour of internet research reveals a wealth of theories and expositions. They read like the script of a Hollywood yarn, larger than life characters, genius bordering on madness, exploitative aristocracy and the most extraordinary soundtrack.

Moving to musical scrutiny and interpretation revealed both high level interrogation of each note or phrase as well as lower level appreciation for both the mellifluous lilt and haunting dissonance. It was overwhelming.

So I reached across the Atlantic, to **Dale McGowan PhD**, whose blog (*How Music does that*) focusses on the Lacrimosa, the final section of the Sequenz.

MOZART IN EIGHT SOBS BY DALE MCGOWAN

When my brother and I were teenagers, we knew just enough about music to be insufferable. We’d listen to something by Mozart that we hadn’t heard before, and, as the end of each phrase approached, we would sing the last measures, then laugh at how spot-on we had guessed it. Stupid, predictable Mozart.

Once...some education and experience had their way with me, I realized that our spooky predictive powers stemmed from the fact that Mozart had done more than almost anyone in creating those expectations.

Mozart was a composer in the Classical style from his first harpsichord minuets at age four to the Requiem Mass at 35. Instead of destroying the box of the period he was born into, he explored and defined the box, then played every possible game with it before folding it up into an exquisite origami mod-



CYPRUS

el of Vienna. But Mozart’s Requiem [did look forward to the Romantic style] - not just in the music, but in the web of mythology that was spun around it after his death.

Most of what people think they know about Mozart’s Requiem came from the film and play *Amadeus*. In reality, Requiem was commissioned by a minor composer... It is something [that Count] Walsegg was known for - he would commission a piece, then have a private concert for friends, claiming he wrote it. I imagine they humoured him for the pre-concert schnitzel and schnapps.

[After Mozart’s death] Constanze solicited the help of Mozart’s friend Süßmayr [and others], then rushed it to publica-

tion and performance, carefully omitting the fact that Mozart didn’t write the whole thing.

She had good reason for the deception. Remember her line in the film, ‘Money just slips through his fingers, it’s ridiculous’? It was true. He’d left his family in dire financial straits, and she naturally wanted to maximize the income from his last composition. *Mass for the Dead Written by W.A. Mozart on His Deathbed* sells way more tickets than *Mass started by W.A. Mozart and Finished by Some Guys*.

But I have to think close listeners knew something was up when they heard it. The 14 movements of Mozart’s Requiem vary from breathtaking to meh.

Even on the edge of the grave, Mozart would never have phoned in a tediousity like [the Sanctus]... There’s nothing wrong with it, which says it all. It’s just forgettable.

Non-harmonic tones
 For a D minor triad, the chord tones are DFA, and if you play a G, that’s a non-harmonic tone. They usually fit one of 12 rules (patterns with the notes around them) which is how your ear makes sense of the pitch despite it being a chordal immigrant.

Mozart Requiem
McDowall Magnificat
Saturday 23 November 2019
 at 7.30pm
 Royal Northern College of Music

St George's Singers
Stockport Symphony Orchestra

Conductor **Neil Taylor**
 Soloists
 Lesmie Maxwell
 Amy Holyland
 Alex Grainger
 Terence Ayebare

Tickets £16, £14 concession, £7 students/children, group discounts
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MOZART REQUIEM CONT



One of three of the world's very first music stamps, issued by a local post office at Altona, Germany in 1889.

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And sure enough, it's a Süßmayr...

But the Lacrimosa movement was [defined] by a whole different animal, namely Mozart. To see how Mozart mastered the details, I'll focus on just the first eight beats of the Lacrimosa, and only one aspect of that brief passage; the selection of pitches...

Mozart's sobs are full of yearning dissonance, and more often than not, that dissonance comes from non-harmonic tones – pitches foreign to the triad of the moment. I want to show how the skilled use of non-harmonic tones helps to make Mozart 'Mozart'.

SOB ONE

Hear how the C# creates a searing tension before going up to the D? That's a non-harmonic tone. [If it is changed to an A, that is part of the triad, there is not much tension or interest] C# is better - it's a non-harmonic tone called a displaced neighbour, and it aches against the low D before resolving upward.



SOB TWO

This reverses the poles; the first note on the top line is in the chord and the second is the non-harmonic. This time the pattern is called an escape tone – a Bb pops out of the top, knocking boots with the As below.



SOB THREE

The D is an appoggiatura, my favourite non-harmonic, one I definitely do not have to look up every single time I spell it. See how the eight notes in Sob One are *dissonant* to *consonant* and in Sob Two are *consonant* to *dissonant*?



Even if you call both of the eighths in Sob Three 'tones', they are both dissonant against the lower notes, forming a 7th and a tritone respectively, sometimes referenced as 'the Devil in music'. And notice that we've now had three upper notes in a row that are dissonant, which builds the tension.



RWANDA

SOB FOUR

This is the one, this is the beauty. Those bottom two notes form a tritone, G and C#, that's nice. But the corker is the next one, that high C... [in] the melodic minor scale... the 7th note in the scale can be raised or lowered depending on whether the line is going up or down from there. But here you get both forms of the note *at the same time* - C# against C. ... Combined with the tritone, it's just achingly lovely, and the tension that's been ratcheting up for the past two sobs reaches peak density.



SOB FIVE

Then right at the midpoint of the phrase, the tension is released: Sob five is all chord tones and an expressive leap up the peak of the phrase, the high D. Now we'll start tumbling down with the next sob.



SOB SIX

This one's a nice little crunch called a diminished triad. The E and Bb form a tritone, the 'devil in music' again. Looking ahead, you can see we're in a tumbling pattern melodically - after climbing to that high D (Sob 5) we drop down in 6, small reach upward in 7, big fall in 8.



SOB SEVEN

D against E is a 9th, an elegant clash. The E is a non-harmonic called a 'displaced passing tone'. [There are ...] twelve kinds of non-harmonic tones...they are the spice.



SOB EIGHT

We've reached the cadence now, the harmonic punctuation at the end of a phrase, so nothing fancy here. It's a half cadence, meaning it ends on an arrow pointing to our minor home, which is where the choir comes in. The sobs then continue under the entrance of the voices, unifying the emotion like a gound base.



When you realise that this is a light analysis on one aspect of the first 12 seconds of one movement of one piece by Mozart, you can start to see why his music is playing in a hundred places around the world every minute of every day 250 years later.

Mozart's anniversaries are marked in all those countries, often with concerts and frequently with postage stamps.

All are @mozartstamps.blogspot.com

Dale McGowan is a doctor and associate professor of Music. He has 'one foot in arts, the other in sciences'; he double-majored in music and evolutionary anthropology at UC Berkeley, then studied film scoring at UCLA, alma mater of John Williams, France Ford Coppola and Randy Newman. His blog aims to teach just enough theoretical music for readers to understand and be 'blown away' by it rather than to feel swamped

Worth checking out is Dale's perspective on the deathbed scene in *Amadeus* - illustrated with note by note scoring, including a fascinating behind-the-scenes clip. Sir Neville Mariner and his assistant played the parts to prepare the technical team and apparently they were dreadful.



KYRGYZSTAN



AUSTRIA

BROOKS' BARBS

When rehearsing Quia Fecit Mihi Magna, Robert had spent some time with Altos and Tenors rehearsing 'mihi magna, mihi magna', trying to induce a relaxed singing of this gentle flowing and contemplative chorus. Exasperated he exhorted, "For heaven's sake, it sounds as if the chickens need feeding!"

MCDOWALL *MAGNIFICAT* CONT

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I was commissioned, first of all, to write a set of canticles for Evensong at St Martin-in-the-Field and when the Finchley Choral Society offered me a commission to celebrate its centenary, the conductor, George Vass, suggested I expand the canticles to make a substantial concert work. We discussed the scoring, choosing instruments which would work well within the baroque and classical repertoire. Part of the interest, in re-thinking the *Magnificat*, was how to divide the narrative into six sections and how to structure the solo movements. I always have in mind, when writing for choral forces, the need for contrast in both vocal and instrumental textures. This way I feel it can give direction to the work, keep the work moving forward. The final movement is fundamentally a reprise of the opening movement and so the *Magnificat* comes full circle.

What about other sources of inspiration for your works?

Art, literature and historical events provide a great reservoir of inspiration and direction. I

set poems by Sheila Bryer in which she describes the mysterious powers of sea, earth and air to write *Night Flight*, a piece to mark the centenary of Harriet Quimby's remarkable pioneering flight across the English Channel in 1912. Few have heard of her extraordinary feat as she accomplished this the night the Titanic went down. The news of that disaster, understandably, dominated the headlines for weeks. More recently, a commission from The National Children's Choir of Great Britain, *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo*, is based on the powerful story of Nujeen Mustafa, a young Kurdish refugee forced to flee her home in Syria. She co-authored the book, *The Girl from Aleppo*, with BBC journalist and author, Christina Lamb, and the poet, Kevin Crossley-Holland, drew his libretto from their book. The brief for the commission was 'children in conflict'. Nujeen and her sister embarked on a perilous journey in 2015, travelling 3,500 miles through seven different countries eventually, arriving to a warm welcome in Germany. This is all the more astonishing as

Nujeen is confined to a wheelchair; she has cerebral palsy.

Your *Magnificat* is very gratifying to both rehearse and perform. The list of your choral compositions seems endless; what is it you enjoy about writing for choirs?

I enjoy the challenges of writing for both amateur and professional choirs and always like to sing through the vocal lines in all the parts to see how they lie on the voice. And part of the enjoyment is looking for suitable texts for choral music. It does take time to find just the 'right' words and I do feel they must be 'good' words, words which express an idea economically and with beauty. Sometimes I commission poets to write for me, and that kind of collaboration is always stimulating in what can be primarily a solitary pursuit for the life of a composer. And always, when setting texts, I try to get as far into the meaning of the words as I can; I try not to get in the way!

For more information visit Cecilia McDowall's website at www.ceciliamcdowall.co.uk



© www.moviesillsdb.com

The music of Mozart can be heard in a vast number of films from Hollywood to Bollywood and beyond. Who can forget *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* juxtaposing with terror in *Alien*? Or the defiant Andy Dufresne's inner freedom as he broadcasts *Letter Duet* from *Marriage of Figaro* across the public address system in Shawshank prison?

Mozart's *Requiem* has been referenced in a number of films, from popular big screen superheroes (*X-Men 2*) to comedy satire (*Big Lebowski*).

First shown in 1998, Shekar Khapur's *Elizabeth*, is both a sumptuous and visceral film, dramatizing four years before her coronation until 1572, when she extinguishes those who sought to remove her from

the throne and reinstall the Church of Rome.

Elizabeth: I have rid England of her enemies. What do I do now? Am I to be made of stone? Must I be touched by nothing?

Walsingham: Aye, Madam, to reign supreme. All men need something greater than themselves to look up to and worship. They must be able to touch the divine here on earth.

In the final sequence of the film, before her transformation, Elizabeth is seen in a chapel with Walsingham, heartbroken, fearing but knowing the inevitable.

And then, as bassoons and horns open the *Introitus: Requiem*, we see her with Kat, her lady-in-waiting, being

shorn, her long, red hair dropping to the ground. Images from her loves, her life, the betrayals are seen gathering as the choir sing the opening prayer of the *Requiem*. The solo soprano begins to sing, as we hear Kat's muffled sobs whilst Elizabeth utters the immortal words, 'Kat – I have become a virgin.'

We see her be gradually transformed, her make up layered and jewels adorned. As the court turn to face her bright silhouette, we hear the choir plead for perpetual light to shine, and Elizabeth moves through the courtiers, upright, impassive, pausing only to tell Lord Burghley that she is finally married, to England.



© www.moviesillsdb.com

OBITUARY FOR BRIAN MARSDEN BY ERIC NORTHEY

Our concert in November is dedicated to the memory of our friend and choir colleague Brian Marsden.

In June of this year we sadly learned of the unexpected death of our colleague Brian Marsden. Brian was a long-standing and loyal member of St George's Singers, performing in the vast majority of our concerts. Besides our home-grown events, Brian was a serial tourer, travelling, often independently, in his campervan, as well as being a very familiar face on the front row of the tenors in whatever venue we were performing.

He was born in Leeds but spent much of his formative years in Blackpool, which once had a thriving and highly competitive musical tradition. He was a skilled clarinetist and oboe player but chose science as his career and studied physics at

Imperial College. He spent five years in Australia before returning to Manchester. Here, he lectured in what was then the 'pioneering' subject of computer science before retiring to pursue a second career in software design.

However uniquely individual he seemed, Brian was in fact a team player. I sang next to him for several years and quickly appreciated how, like many scientists and mathematicians, he was a very accurate reader of music. If I was uncertain of my note, I could always lean a little towards Brian for vocal support. He had previously been a tenor with the Manchester Cathedral Cantata choir, for which the auditions are pretty stiff, and I expect it was there that he had honed his sight-reading skills to a pretty high level. He still kept up his oboe playing with the High Peak orchestra and was a volunteer

for the National Trust at Styal Mill. And for team St George's, he was always there in the kitchen, at break times, doing the washing up!

He took great care and pride in planning things. He liked doing logical puzzles, but actually *loved* watching old steam trains chugging up and down restored tracks. And he was a lover of the countryside too, taking long walks in the serenity that woods and meadows offers to all of us.

Brian's death is a blow to St George's and our hearts and sincere condolences go out to Anna and their family. It reminds us of why we sing together each week, because we are all valued; and we are all missed.



A BEAUTIFUL SONG



Back in Edition 57, I included a little gem from Canadian blogger, Andrew Moore. Popping back to North America, included here is his modest account of why *Lacrimosa* is 'a beautiful song.'

... Mozart may have died from poison, a streptococcal infection, kidney stones, rheumatic fever, a subdural hematoma, malpractice on the part of his doctor, or self-medicating an illness that didn't exist.

But no matter whether you think it was Salieri on the grassy knoll or simply the common cold, you've got to think he died too young.

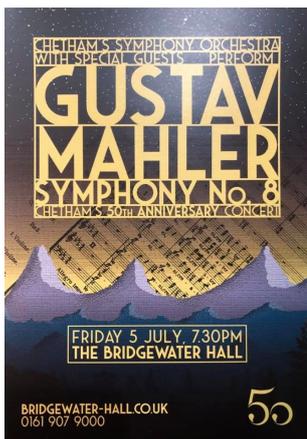
His legendary *Requiem*, which he had barely begun when he died, remains as mysterious as his death.

Lacrimosa - What makes this a beautiful song:

1. The opening bars (which may be the only section actually written by Mozart) give the feeling that something ominous is coming. If there was a soundtrack to the grim reaper tip-toeing, this would be it.
2. There's a quiet, major-key section around 1:40 that's like a fade-out sequence at the end of a horror movie, when it seems like everything is going to be okay. But by 2:10 we're back to the minor key, and the grim reaper is back.
3. It ends with a big, wonderful "Amen" that the orchestra holds for as long as it can before the choir runs out of breath.



The *Lacrimosa* (Latin for 'weeping', also a name that derives from *Our Lady of Sorrows*, a title given to Mary, mother of Jesus) is part of the *Dies Irae* sequence in the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass. Its text comes from the Latin 18th and 19th stanzas of the sequence. Many composers, including Mozart, Berlioz, and Verdi have set the text as a discrete movement of the Requiem.



MAHLER SYMPHONY NO 8 IN E \flat MAJOR

WHAT THE REVIEWERS SAID

Immediately after the recorded performance, reviews of the performance of Mahler's Symphony No 8 were being written. Two reviewers, Robert Beale (RB - *Arts Desk Review*, 6 July) and Matthew Dougal (MD- *No. 9 Reviews*, 8 July) had praise indeed. Here are some of the things they had to say.

'As end-of-term concerts go, Mahler's Eighth Symphony is a biggie. In fact, it's hard to imagine any place of secondary education where they would even contemplate it. But for Chetham's School of Music, the "Symphony of a Thousand" was a doable task, and for Stephen Threlfall's last public appearance for Chetham's as Director of Music it became a thrilling triumph.' **RB**

'If I were asked to describe this evening's concert in only three words, they would be wow, wow and wow!' **MD**

'Recorded for Radio 3, with school Patron HRH The Earl of Wessex present and joining the universal standing ovation at the end, it aptly drew together both the students of today and some alumni and guest players...with Chetham's Chorus augmented by Leeds Festival Chorus and St George's Singers, and Chetham's Children's Choir augmented by Manchester and Hereford Cathedral choristers, there were pretty near to 500 performers (which is about as big a battalion as you ever get for a Mahler 8).' **RB**

'The obvious problem inherent is not how much noise can such a mass of musicians make, but the quality of the noise they make. To put you all out of your misery then I can state with alacrity the noise was unbelievably loud as their voices and orchestral sounds filled this acoustically superb concert hall, but the sweetness and quality of



The final chords of Mahler heralded a standing ovation.

sound was something else altogether. A lush, warm, and engulfing sound which never, not even for one second, felt harsh or jarring.' **MD**

'As a team they would have been the envy of any promoter, and perhaps the greatest excellence of this concert lay in their being together to do it. That in itself was a tribute to Stephen Threlfall and he knew it, giving full rein to those whose top registers could soar above the textures – the two high sopranos and tenor in particular, high Cs and Bs flashing out like shooting stars above the surging sea of sound.' **RB**

'Once again, truly exquisite sounds came from these sections. Considering the choirs were placed on three different levels in the hall and some were so far away from others that there was no way of being able to follow, and had to sing purely on trust and keeping a keen eye on the conductor; also considering that a large percentage of these singers were again young children, one can only praise them even higher. I am a fluent German speaker and there were a few problems with diction and comprehension, but as for the quality of the sound and the beauty of the harmonies, they were indisputably wondrous.' **MD**

'They began with wondrously warm *sotto voce* tone in Britten's setting of *God Save the Queen*, which was actually the first item on the programme – after the heroics of Mahler its calm assurance and unalloyed joys became a distant memory, but it was a remarkable thing in itself. Threlfall had everyone completely on his side, and if beginnings and endings are the key to the impact of a performance, this one was truly awesome.' **RB**

'As a prelude the massed instruments and voices treated us to a spine-tingling rendition of Benjamin Britten's arrangement of our National Anthem, 'God Save The Queen'. Starting pianissimo and building to a huge orchestral and vocal fortissimo climax in just 3 minutes and two verses was an exceedingly powerful and emotive start to the concert.' **MD**

'The choral singers, welded into two full choirs and a children's chorus from their disparate origins for this occasion, made a robust sound *en masse*, even if the occasional lead in the welter of counterpoint came over rather more gently than might have been ideal.' **RB**



HUNGARY

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO 8 IN E \flat MAJOR

WHAT MR THRELFALL SAID

Following our performance of Mahler's 8 Symphony under Stephen Threlfall's baton, he wrote to Neil Taylor and Anne Francis.

Dear Neil and Anne

Forgive the delay in my sending you this accolade, but I think you know we were preparing to take a chamber orchestra to Ischia immediately following the Mahler.

Please, please will you send my sincere thanks to everyone in the Choir for their enthusiasm and dedication towards the Project. I have had some lovely individual notes from one or two of them, but to say I couldn't have done it without you seems like an

understatement!

I was so taken by the warmth and commitment that everyone showed to being part of what was a momentous evening. I hope you have seen the reviews which came out almost immediately, and glowing ones too! I hope, too, that everyone can feed of the "glow" which obviously came across to everyone in the Hall.

It was a privilege to make music with everyone and I am delighted that so many young people experienced a performance that I hope they will long remember. I will ensure that Chet's keep in touch – there is no reason to do otherwise, and I am currently [in discussion with a number of

people about choral pieces we might work on together in the future].

I hope you are all now on a very much deserved summer break, but do feel free to pass on some, or all, of this message to the Choir. I take great pride in my association with



'The most distinctive quality of the whole performance was created by Stephen Threlfall: his skills as a conductor have long been clear to all who have seen him in action over the years here, and the geniality, cheerfulness and energy of the man shone through every bar of this concert.'

Robert Beale, Arts Desk Review, 6 July 2019

St George's Singers and it was so special that we were able to make music together on this special and indeed personal occasion.

But don't worry. The Complete Ring Cycle isn't on mind at the moment!

Stephen Threlfall



The view from on high (there were others higher still) during rehearsal in the Bridgewater Hall.

Threlfall's Thoughts

During his rehearsal with St George's prior to the Mahler performance, Stephen Threlfall was in fine form.

Take the necessary action to prepare for this next entry - breath.

Take this phrase like Man City - leave it until very late.

Remember bar 66, basses - that's our hemia bar.

Oh, that's good, you seem to be watching me - must be nothing on the telly tonight!

Stephen told us of a conversation with one of the Yorkshire choirs' members (CM) who was in charge of uniforms.

Stephen - Both men and women , they're going to be in black?

CM - Yes.

Stephen - Would the women be able to wear, um, something like, maybe a red rose?

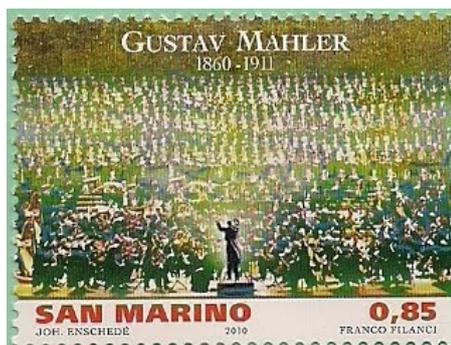
CM - No.

PHILATELISTS' CORNER

This extraordinary stamp is from San Marino, with an artist's representation of a staged 'Symphony of a Thousand'; orchestra and singers stretch into the far distance whilst the silhouetted maestro hopes that they are all watching and have good vision.

The inscription 'Joh. Enschedé' sits in the bottom left-hand corner. Royal Joh. Enschedé is a printer of security documents, stamps and banknotes based in Haarlem, Netherlands. Founded in 1703, the company has long been associated with the printing of banknotes. In 1866, the company began printing stamps.

This stamp was one of four produced in 2010 entitled *Great Artists*. The other three feature Mark Twain, Fryderyk Chopin and Akira Kurosawa.



'Designs in connection with postage stamps and coinage may be described, I think, as the silent ambassadors on national taste.'

William Butler Yeats
Irish poet

'The President of today is just the postage stamp of tomorrow.'

Gracie Allen,
US Comedienne

Before our concert in the Bridgewater Hall with the European Doctors Orchestra, 14 Cheshire Consort singers gave a short recital in the Barbirolli Room for the St Ann's Hospice VIP reception.

Sometimes when singing at such occasions, guests are milling around, drinking their fizz, chatting and not really listening to the singing. But not on this occasion.

We had a wonderfully attentive audience for our 15-minute slot expertly conducted, as always, by Neil who couldn't resist singing the odd note or two.

We sang six pieces from our tour repertoire:

My Spirit Sang all Day (Finzi)

Locus Iste (Buckner)

Bogoroditsye Devo
(Rachmaninov - some nifty breath control needed there)

Now is the Month of Maying
(Morley)

As Torrents in Summer (Elgar)

All Creatures Now (Bennett).

It was great fun and, judging by the applause, our audience seemed to enjoy it too.

Ali McLay

Cheshire Consort Coordinator

EUROPEAN DOCTORS ORCHESTRA BY IAN BANKS

The European Doctors Orchestra (EDO) perform at least two public charity concerts a year, aiming to promote the public's understanding in the performance and appreciation of music and at the same time benefiting charity projects. Past concert locations have included France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia and Switzerland. The Choir were invited to join the orchestra's performance in the Manchester.

In these times of never-ending Brexit gloom, it's heart-warming to come across a fine example of pan-European co-operation. That's exactly what happened at the Bridgewater Hall on 20 October, with a rare appearance by the EDO.



The EDO is a large symphony orchestra comprising medics from throughout Europe, with a strong weighting to the UK. Indeed, the astute might recognise a number of local players, one or two with dubious medical credentials (David Lund, described in the programme as a 'professional patient').

SGS was privileged to be invited to join the Orchestra for Brahms's *Song of Destiny*, a potent masterpiece full of lyricism and sublime harmonies. Under the baton of conductor, Peter Stark, the Choir produced a rich, warm and superbly-integrated sound, while the Orchestra accompanied with sensitivity and subtlety.

Too soon was this over, and the second half of the programme featured Shostakovich's immense Symphony No 7 'Leningrad'. Here, the massed ranks of the EDO came into their own, creating an evocative portrayal of the siege of the city. Menacing military rhythms alternated with plaintive,

soaring melodies to re-create the sense of suffering of the local people. Fortunately, the audience did not suffer, and could only admire the huge achievement of the many talented medical musicians who came together to rehearse only three days before the concert.

Ian Banks

Husband of Gillian, Soprano.

(Ian plays violin, first desk of the first violins in Stockport Symphony Orchestra. We look forward to working together in November in the RNCM.)

Rohan Shotton, the organiser of the EDO tour to Manchester and percussionist sent this message to us after the concert.

"Thank you for the really moving contribution from St George's Singers. Sitting directly in front of the choir, behind the timpani for *Schicksalslied*, I had the best seat in the house. You collectively moved a number of people close to tears with your singing. (In the best possible sense!) It really was wonderful to have you there."

MANCHESTER AND LENINGRAD

Many of the Choir stayed to listen to the *Leningrad* symphony. The EDO had chosen this piece for performance in Manchester to recognise the links between Leningrad (St Petersburg) and our city.

Manchester has a long history of links with the USSR before World War II. For socialists and some trade unionists the Bolshevik revolution and the new Soviet state offered the possibility of a new, better world. Manchester and Russia had their own "Hands off Russia" committee (1919) and the British Soviet Friendship Society was founded in 1927.

September 2016, the Manchester Central Library marked the



1st September 1942 - All men aged 16-55 years and women aged 16-45 years were required to take part in an operation to glean fuel, using wood from any source. Each person could keep two cubic metres of wood for themselves for every two cubic meters they provided for the city's fuel fund.

75th anniversary of the start of the Leningrad blockade with an exhibition of the horrific reality of life under siege. This anniversary also recognised the first civic-level contact between Manchester and Leningrad that ultimately led to the signing of a Friendship Agreement in

1962, at the height of the Cold War.

In 1955, Manchester received an invitation from the Leningrad City Soviet to send a delegation to Leningrad. In 1956, a mixed delegation of Labour,

Conservative and Liberal councillors visited Leningrad and this link developed in the signing of the agreement six years later. This came at a significant time - the Berlin Wall went up the year before, and the Cuban Missile Crisis was a year away.

A commemoration of the end of the great siege of Leningrad was marked this year in January at the Russian orthodox church in Manchester.

COPLAND
Fanfare for the Common Man
BRAHMS
Song of Destiny
SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphony No. 7

European Doctors Orchestra
St George's Singers
Peter Stark (conductor)
20 October 2019, 7.30pm
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

LENINGRAD

1942. Manchester's twin city, Leningrad, lies in ruins under heavy siege. Starving musicians assemble to perform a new symphony, blasted out at invaders via loudspeakers on the city walls. This monumental act of defiance is Shostakovich's Leningrad symphony: heart-wrenching, terrifying, utterly epic.

EUROPEAN DOCTORS ORCHESTRA
in aid of St George's Singers
Registered charity number 24805

WELL-CONDUCTED TOUR CONCERT

Following our tour to Bruges, the Choir was delighted to have the opportunity to sing some of our 'taken on tour' music to our home-grown audience. Two weeks after singing in the spectacular St Michielskerk in Ghent, the Choir returned to the welcoming audience in St George's Church, Poynton.

The concert was very successful, well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by both choir and audience who, following the lead of the audience in St Michielskerk, gave us a standing ovation and also earned an encore. That's a frequent experience on tour abroad but a rare occurrence and therefore very gratifying one at home. Thank you to our Poynton audience!

As well as music from choir tours over the years we had anecdotes about stand out moments on tour, some very nostalgic, some



Photos taken by Andrea Millington

extremely amusing and others poignant. A number of individuals contributed to these anecdotes and memories, some reading what had been written by others.

It was gratifying to see a number of the local community in the audience. Following the concert, one member of the audience commented that Poynton is very lucky to have such a fantastic choir and the choir is lucky to have such a brilliant conductor as Neil. Modesty forbids comment on the first proposal, but we heartily concur with the second. We are also very fortunate to have Pete Durrant as our accompanist. Pete was less busy than usual for this evening since many pieces were a capella, but he has contributed enormously to our success through his unfailing and expert support in rehearsals.

We have included below a poem written by one of our number in memory of events in Lincoln Cathedral back in 2016.

Chapter House

Lincoln Cathedral: May 30th 2016

An odd design for a concert,
Constructed for speech, and not song;
For debate in the round, and devotion
To a rule of austerity gone.

The stage too small and the piano flat,
Our bags in a heap by the wall.
Small welcome, no help, too chilly to sit
On the limestone slab of a stall.

But the audience grew, and kept growing,
Enticed by chords echoing round,
And a hint of jazz in the Shearing
And Vaughan Williams' cathedral of sound.

We could see the delight in the faces
Behind our conductor's back.
He was mostly aware of false tuning
And his efforts to get us on track.

Was it Diemer or Lindberg or Swingle
Who melted our worries away?
Or the shining faces before us
Which said more than clapping could say?

We scrambled to find them an encore,
Unprepared, shuffling copies until
We were launched into Finzi from memory;
My spirit is singing it still.

TAYLOR'S TAGS

Requiem rehearsals

Just before moving to ...

...Dies Irae

'Right. Are we all strapped in?
Let's go!'

... Rex tremendae

"Ok, let's move on to the dog
chorus."

... Confutatis

"Voca me. Make sure the 'v' is the
same pitch - avoid the Bass
scoop." [Some laughter] "Basses,
that's not a compliment. It's not
next year's aims and objectives."

... Sanctus

"Bases, you need to think
Melchett from *Blackadder*."

...Agnus Dei

"All of you, when saying 'agnus
dei', imagine a distant relative
living in Yorkshire".

...Communio : Lux Aertem

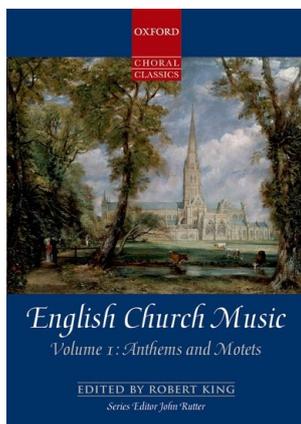
"When singing 'cum (sancto)...'
imagine your favourite holiday
cottage in Devon; Coombe. And
make sure 'sanctis' is not too
short, not too harsh - no Liam
Gallagher"

MUSICAL SUPPORT FOR THE CHOIR

A few weeks ago, we were delighted and grateful to learn that a friend of the Choir had donated a set of 105 new books for our music library.

This volume of *English Church Music* includes some of our concert and touring favourites as well as some unfamiliar pieces that we look forward to sampling in the future.

This compilation includes work that we have often had to source from countrywide libraries.



Complementing our other stalwart editions (*English Madrigals and Part Songs* as well as *European Sacred Music*) this extremely generous donation will help all members of the Choir.

As well as broadening our repertoire, our librarian, Gwynneth Pailin, who is tireless in her sourcing, collating, gathering and accounting for music will now have so many more pieces in one place!

Thank you, friend.



Saturday 7 December 2019

St George's Church,
Buxton Road, Stockport

Carols and Brass by Candlelight

Conductor Neil Taylor

Organist Peter Durrant

**with Chetham's Brass Ensemble
and**

**Bradshaw Hall Primary School
Choir**

Tickets £13,

£11 concessions,

£4 students/children

Tel : 01663 764012

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

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

CAROLS AND BRASS BY CANDLELIGHT

There will be plenty of goodwill to all men and abundant good cheer in St George's Church, Stockport, as we kick start celebrations for Christmas with our Advent concert of Carols and Brass.

Whether the weather be hot, cold, dry, wet or snowy, we are already looking forward to welcoming our audience, Chetham's Brass Ensemble and the Bradshaw Hall Primary School Choir to join us in singing in the Christmas season. There will, of course, be some well-ripened traditional favourites in addition to some



carols and songs that are fresh for St George's Singers.

**Green for the ivy that's grown by the wall,
White for the mistletoe that hangs in the hall,
Red for the berries that shine in the snow,
Orange and yellow for mornings first glow,
These are the colours of Christmas.**

As well as our own carols and songs, we will be joining forces with Bradshaw Hall students to perform a John Rutter Christmas song *The Colours of Christmas*. This tender Christmas song will appeal to all fans of John Rutter's music. With a simple, appealing melody and a flowing accompaniment, *The Colours of Christmas* evokes a touching sense of longing for the joys of the festive season.



We are also delighted that, once again, Chetham's Brass Ensemble will be joining us. It seems only a few weeks ago that some of these impressive young players were performing with us on the stage at the Bridgewater Hall.



Oh, and in case you have forgotten, there will be mulled wine, mince pies, Christmas cakes, candlelight, communal carols and that Advent air of expectation and anticipation.

Saturday 18 January 2020

St George's Church,
London Road, Poynton

Singing Day

John Rutter Requiem

9:30am registration

6.00pm concert

SINGING DAY 2020

Although he is perhaps best known for his carols and other short pieces, John Rutter also has a number of large-scale works for chorus and orchestra to his name.

Most of these received their first performances in the USA, where Rutter is a frequent visitor. The *Requiem*, completed in 1985, does not adhere strictly to the conventional Catholic liturgy, but combines texts from the Requiem Mass and the Book of Common Prayer. This is by no means unusual; Fauré, Brahms and Durufle all followed their own individual preferences when selecting appropriate verses to set.

As a Requiem Mass, there are darker moments. However, the piece was chosen for many memorial services in the USA and internationally following the 9/11 attacks, reflecting its unmistakably optimistic message of hope and comfort.

On Saturday 18 January, St George's Singers will be holding its annual Singing Day. Led by our brilliant musical director, Neil Taylor, and

with our one-man-orchestra at the piano, Pete Durrant, this is always a sell out event.

As always, good food, good company and great singing will be in plentiful supply. Finishing with a concert performance, this year's Singing Day is already proving to be popular, so do not leave it too late before booking your place.

You can apply by phone on **01925 213949**, by email to **stgeorgessingingday@gmail.com**, or online at **www.st-georges-singer.org.uk**



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS NEWS

CORPORATE CHOIR BY JENNIE NICHOL

In 2012, Gareth Malone began to bring music into the work-place; *Sing while you Work*, introduced colleagues to the power of song during a working day. Working in BASF (the world's largest chemical company) our own Jennie Nichol (Soprano) tells us how she came to initiate a corporate choir in Manchester.

About four years ago the company asked me if I would put together a few people who might be willing to sing carols during our Christmas lunch at our UK headquarters in Cheadle. I found about ten people who were interested, (although most didn't read music or sing regularly) and we started learning some familiar carols. We then sang once a year for colleagues going into the lunch and collected money for the company charity.

Last year our Corporate Affairs Director was at a business event and happened to be speaking to Juergen Maier, CEO of Siemens UK. Mr. Maier mentioned that his Corporate Choir were just finishing rehearsing for the Halle Corporate Choir competition 2018. "What Corporate Choir Competition?" asked my director, who happens to be a keen singer.

Once he had found out more, he approached me and asked if I would be willing to start a choir for BASF UK. Well, I love singing but I cannot read the bass clef, do not play piano, and have certainly never conducted anything in my life.

But it sounded like fun, so I

said yes! Our senior leadership team agreed that it would be very beneficial for employees to have the opportunity to sing and network.

I arranged for the Halle to come in to run some introductory sessions with BASF employees in January this year. About 40 people turned up to the two sessions we held and thoroughly enjoyed them.



Good luck to our @BASF Corporate Choir in their first performance in front of friends and family @RNCMvoice summer singing event this Friday. Thanks to Christina @hallechoir for some last-minute tips! #wellbeing #feelgoodfriday



7:46 am - 19 Jun 2019

We managed to form a choir of about 12-16 and started meeting every fortnight. Most did not read music, some had never sung before and only two had sung with a community-style choir since their school days. But we made a start, learning some easy South African chants to begin with; I taught by ear until everyone could join in.

In June we sang 'California Dreaming' at the Halle Corporate Choirs Summer Event at the RNCM. This was the first time any of the choir had sung in public or in a space like the RNCM so there were a lot of nerves, but everyone loved the experience. Following publicity



Performing in the RNCM

via BASF Twitter, we recruited more members. We now number about 26 and rehearse weekly, with people giving up lunch hours to attend. We range from directors to receptionists and everything else in-between and is 100% inclusive. Singing is a great leveller.

We are now working hard to learn two pieces for the competition on 29 November. Excited to be taking part for the first time, we have been invited to join the massed choir for the Halle's Christmas Cracker concert on 19 December.

I sometimes take for granted that I am lucky enough to be able to regularly sing wonderful repertoire in incredible venues with a choir of SGS' standard. But for *my* little group of singers, this will be a first and unique opportunity to experience the thrill of performing like that - an experience they would never have had without the corporate choir and support of the company. It's extremely rewarding to have been able to support my colleagues and introduce them to the joy of choral singing.

ADVICE FOR POTENTIAL CORPORATE CHOIR ORGANISERS (from Jennie)

Get ready to hear these statements a lot when recruiting and have your come-back ready.

I can't sing - Everyone can sing - if you can speak you can sing.

I'm tone deaf - There is no such thing.

You wouldn't want me in your choir, believe me - Have you ever tried being in a choir? Why not have a go with no obligation?

I can't read music - That's not necessary. We learn by ear and a lot of people pick up the idea of how the notes move (up or down) once they start.

I've never sung before - Well, now is a good time to start.

I'd rather eat hay! - To be fair, I haven't come up with a good response to that one!

TOP TEN TIPS from Jennie

1 Secure management support (funds for sheet music, using work hours etc)

2 Be very inclusive; if intonation is not quite right, scout for more experienced singers to be section leads.

3 Find a keyboard player ...

4 Call in your contacts; beg other conductors or musicians in your network to come in for free!

5 Choose repertoire that is easy to learn; there will be time to reach for the high brow numbers.

6 Have a very fun warm-up to break down inhibitions.

7 Stay connected with the organization; arrange a concert for other employees.

8 Encourage singers to go to choral concerts.

9 Shake things up every now and then; go outside to rehearse, sing in a round, move while you sing.

10 Thank your singers and celebrate successes and achievements.

St George's Singers

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Find us on the web at:

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

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

Saturday 7 December 2019

Carols and Brass by Candlelight
St George's Church, Stockport

Saturday 18 January 2020

Singing Day: John Rutter *Requiem*
St George's Church, Poynton

Saturday 28 March 2020

Simple Gifts; Britten, Brahms,
Copland and Tormis
St Michael's Church, Bramhall

Sunday 28 June 2020

Gretchaninov *Vespers*, Vaughan
Williams *Mass in G minor*
Vaughan Williams / Drayton *The
Lark Ascending*

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

MANCHESTER SINGS!

Kate Rusby at Christmas

Lyric Theatre, The Lowry,
Salford Quays M50 3AZ

1 December 2019 19:30

Brimming with goodwill and joy, one of our finest interpreters of traditional folk song, Kate Rusby, will be performing festive Yorkshire songs and carols from her forthcoming Christmas album alongside old favourites. Her expressive vocals will be joined by a brass quintet to celebrate yuletide magic

Tickets £21-£30 available from
www.quaytickets.com or 0843
208 0500

Apollo 5 (Vocal Quintet)

Holmes Chapel Music Society

Holmes Chapel Leisure Centre,
Selkirk Drive, CW4 7DZ

7 December 2019 20:00

The international award-winning British vocal ensemble delights audiences with a repertoire ranging from renaissance, classical and contemporary choral music to folk, jazz and pop. Programme includes

O Radiant Dawn

Vigilate William Byrd

A Nightingale Sang Sherwin

Tickets £17 + concessions
available on the door or via
www.themusicsociety.org.uk

Manchester Chamber Choir

Opferlied Beethoven.

Bridgewater Hall

6 February 2020 19:30

The Song of Sacrifice (Friedrich von Matthisson) was a poem written in 1790 and much admired by Beethoven. In the first of five concerts celebrating the 250 anniversary of Beethoven's birth, this rare piece of writing, performed by the choir and soprano soloist, is nestled in between the incredible *Eroica* Symphony and extracts from his only ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*.

Details of tickets from
www.manchesterchamberchoir.co.uk or Bridgewater Hall
0161 907 9000