



# Hemiola

St George's Singers

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## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

### PRESIDENT:

Marcus Farnsworth MA ARAM

### VICE PRESIDENTS:

Susan Roper  
Mark Rowlinson  
Stephen Threlfall  
Stephen Williams

### MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

### ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Joseph Judge

### ACCOMPANIST:

Peter Durrant

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[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)

The programme for next season – St George's Singers' 60th – has just been announced, and offers a sparkling array of concerts worthy of a Diamond Celebration.

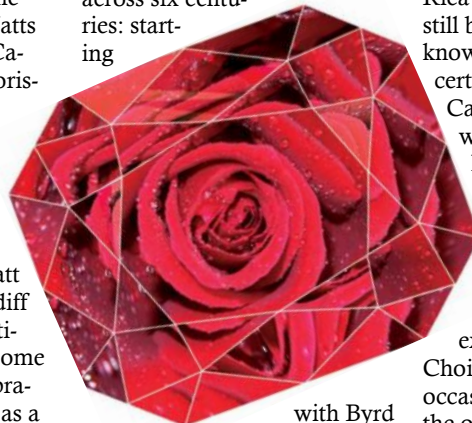
The season begins in November at RNCM with an all-Brahms programme featuring soprano Elizabeth Watts and baritone Marcus Farnsworth. Liz Watts began singing at Norwich Cathedral where she was a chorister and member of the Cathedral Girls Choir, whose director happened to be a certain Mr Neil Taylor. She came to international attention when she won the Rosenblatt Song Prize at the 2007 Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Since then she has become one of the UK's leading sopranos, and is now in demand as a recitalist all over the world. Liz and Marcus will be soloists in Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, and will also perform some Brahms Lieder.

Christmas sees us give our traditional 'Carols and Brass by Candlelight' concert, but this year, for reasons of diary clashes, we will be holding the concert at Norbury Church. It is many years since St George's Singers performed there, and we are looking forward to renewing our acquaintance with this lovely building.

The Singing Day in January sees directing us and our guests

in not one but two Vivaldi works: the *Gloria* and the *Magnificat*.

On to spring 2017, and it's party-time! Our main celebratory concert will be on 22 April at RNCM, and will feature a brilliant combination of choral music from across six centuries: starting



with Byrd and finishing with Whitacre. Along the way there will be opportunities for individuals and sections of the choir, as well as Neil and Pete, to show off their musical talents.

And finally – what better way to round off a very special season than with the most dramatic of all show-stopping choral works: Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* at Gorton Monastery.

The concerts are only part of our special celebrations however. Through the year we're hoping to have some social events to mark our Diamond

Anniversary – so if any Choir members or SGS Friends have suggestions about how we should celebrate, please let the committee know.

Of course, we must not forget that 2017 will also see us going on our most adventurous tour yet, when we head off to Costa Rica in July. The itinerary is still being finalised, but we do know that it will involve concerts with our friends of El Café Chorale, possibly a workshop which we will hold on English choral music, and lots of ocean-to-ocean sightseeing.

2016–17 promises to be a spectacular season. It will also be an expensive one for the Choir, so the celebrations may occasionally be mingled with the odd fund-raising venture, which St George's Singers are always delighted to support.

As you go on your summer holidays, take a copy of next season's brochure with you, and tell your family, friends, and singing acquaintances about the gems in store for them in our Diamond Anniversary year.



Sunday 26 June 2016

Gorton Monastery

Ralph Vaughan Williams

*A Sea Symphony*

Gustav Holst

*Choral Hymns from the Rig*

*Veda, Ave Maria*

with

Alison Rose, soprano

Marcus Farnsworth, baritone

and

Stockport Symphony Orchestra

# A PASSAGE TO INDIA

It is remarkable that our final concert of 2015–16, featuring music by two quintessential ‘English’ composers, should both contain references to or be influenced by themes and images of India.

Vaughan Williams composed *A Sea Symphony* (his very first symphony) in the years 1903–09. He deeply admired the humanistic verses of the American poet Walt Whitman (1819–92), and had previously set one of his poems in the choral work, *Toward the Unknown Region*, which gave the young composer his first great success. For his first symphony he chose a number of extracts from Whitman’s long collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*. The words for the final movement, which Vaughan Williams titled *The Explorers*, were taken from the poem *Passage to India*.

The words concern the sea and sailors, as a metaphor for the voyage through life and beyond. More specifically, Whitman’s *Passage to India* salutes the evolutionary progress of the human race; it celebrates the scientific achievements of the age, looks forward to the imminent dawning of an era in which all divisions and separations between people, and people and nature, will be eliminated, and heralds the spiritual voyage of every human soul into the depths of the inner universe. Whitman himself described the meaning of his poem, saying ‘that the divine efforts of heroes, and their ideas... will finally prevail, and be accomplished, however long deferred.’

The poem celebrates three technological achievements: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the laying of the trans-Atlantic cable, and the growth of the American transcontinental railroad. These achievements outshine the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; however, the poet still hears the call of the ancient past, embodied in the myths and fables of Asia, with their daring reach toward an unfathomable spir-

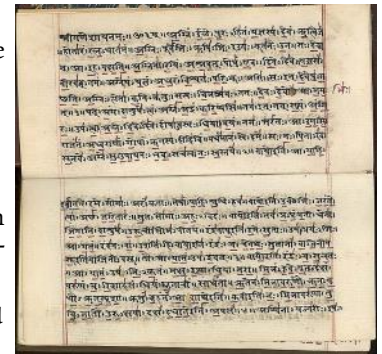
itual truth. Just as the Suez Canal links distant parts of the world, Whitman’s poem links ancient religions and modern technology, God and engineering. In doing so, he encourages us to see a bright future, extending an invitation that is both reverent and hopeful.

Vaughan Williams’ friend and contemporary, Gustav Holst, also drew inspiration from India. Holst’s fascination with the great Indian religious sagas such as the *Baghavad Gita* and the Vedas began as early as 1899, and he even tried to learn Sanskrit so he could read the ancient Hindu texts in the original. His first use of the material was in a symphonic poem, *Indra*, in 1903, and he also composed two operas based on Sanskrit texts.

In 1907–8 he conceived the idea of setting some of his own translations of the Vedas, and between 1908 and 1912 he produced four sets of choral songs from the Rig Veda: for chorus and orchestra, women’s voices and orchestra, women’s voices and harp (which we will be performing on 26 June) and men’s voices, strings and brass.

The Rig Veda (a compound Sanskrit word meaning ‘praise’ plus ‘knowledge’) is an ancient Indian sacred collection of hymns, counted among the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism, known as the ‘Vedas’. Composed roughly between 1700–1100 BC, some of the verses are still recited as Hindu prayers, making them among the world’s oldest religious texts in continued use. The Rig Veda contains several mystical, mythological and poetic accounts of the origin of the world, hymns praising the gods, and ancient prayers for life.

The hymns are all dedicated to various Rigvedic deities. Amongst those individually



An early 19th-century Rigveda manuscript in Sanskrit

invoked by Holst are two of the most important, Indra and Varuna. Indra is a god of storms and war, and appears in the Rig Veda as the king of the gods. He carries a thunderbolt, and rides through the heavens on a chariot or on the elephant Airavata.

Varuna is the god of the sea, and the underwater world. He rides on a Makura – a half-terrestrial, half-aquatic creature. He is also the god of law, surveying all the affairs of men, reading secret thoughts and sending his messengers to oversee their activities. Omnipresent and knowing the past and the future, Varuna is concerned with the moral order.

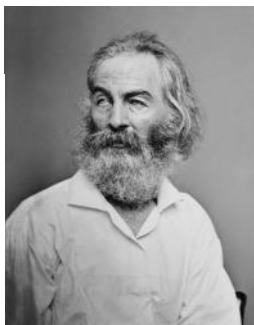
The final hymn in the set does



The god Varuna riding on his Makura

not refer to a named god, but Holst’s superscription over the song reads: ‘The God invoked in this hymn is the Guide of travellers along the roads of the world and along that leading to the next.’

A fitting summary of this concert devoted to journeys, both earthly and spiritual.



(photo: Matthew Brady)

Walt Whitman

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)

After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,

After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,

The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

‘A Passage to India’, Book XXVI, *Leaves of Grass*

Image: OACMA Museum

## MEMORIES OF RVW (1872–1958) BY MARY HOULT

If you happen to find yourself in Surrey with time to spare, you could well decide to explore the popular landmark of Box Hill. And while enjoying the chalk downs and the panoramic views, you may be surprised to see that a considerable swathe of the Surrey hills is devoted to growing vines. Now this vineyard is well worth visiting for several reasons, as a closer inspection will reveal further surprises – it contains a large collection of music, scores and recordings! This is because Denbies Wine Estate, the biggest vineyard in England, also houses the Surrey Performing Arts Library, and what's more, it features an upstairs room devoted to the life and works of Vaughan Williams. It seems that Dorking has finally woken up to the realisation that it was home to a famous composer for many years!

Descended from the Wedgwood and Darwin families, Vaughan Williams grew up at Leith Hill Place on the slopes of another of Surrey's beauty spots, moving on from London to live in Dorking itself from 1929 to 1953. His love of choral singing and his enthusiasm for amateur music-making proved to be a winning combination to the benefit of local musicians,

for in 1905 (while he was composing *A Sea Symphony*) he co-founded The Leith Hill Musical Festival. This annual competitive choral festival is still flourishing today and using much of its original format. Based on the part-song and oratorio repertoire, local choirs compete and are adjudicated across three mornings, then join for collective performances of the same music in the evenings. With Vaughan Williams as its principal conductor until 1953, the festival attracted support from the top tier of London profes-



Vaughan Williams's piano on display at Leith Hill Place, which the composer gifted to the National Trust in 1945

sionals with participants such as Isobel Baillie, Peter Pears, Leon Goossens, Malcolm Sargent and Dr Adrian Boult.

By all accounts RVW was not only a charismatic musician but also a delightful and modest man who clearly inspired a loyal following. Affectionately known as 'The Old Man' by his friends (but 'Uncle Ralph' – pronounced 'Raife' – to his face), his devoted fan club happened to include my parents, both of whom enjoyed the privilege of singing under his baton for many years. I was therefore



Leith Hill Place

brought up with a reverence for both the man and his music, and the stirring sound of those massed choirs singing in the Dorking Halls was a formative part of my childhood. My father was the conductor of one of the Leith Hill Festival's participating choirs, Epsom Choral Society, for some 27 years and Vaughan Williams was the president, succeeded after his death by his second wife, Ursula. Unfortunately, being a small child at the time, I have only hazy recollections of seeing the great man conduct, but I do remember Ursula Vaughan Williams quite clearly, particularly her voice. After one of her phone calls, our family would spend some time talking with 'far-back' accents which involved a semi-dislocated chin and every syllable imbued with Churchillian 'sh' sounds.

If only I could remember more of my parents' anecdotes... but at least I have retained and can treasure this one – RVW's very last visit to Epsom Choral Society happened to coincide with his 85th birthday and so there was a small celebration involving tea and cake. Under the supervision of a strict great aunt, I was allowed to make the birthday cake. Apparently he ate some of my cake, made a favourable comment and then Vaughan Williams kissed my cheek!



Ralph Vaughan Williams



Denbies vineyards near Dorking, home to the Surrey Performing Arts Library

**The Surrey Performing Arts Library is open Tuesday-Saturday, and houses choral and orchestral archives of Vaughan Williams.**

**Denbies Wine Estate,  
London Road, Dorking,  
RH5 6AA,  
[www.surreycc.gov.uk/  
performingartslibrary/](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/performingartslibrary/)**

## MEMORIES OF *RIG VEDA*

For one member of St George's Singers the concert on 26 June at Gorton Monastery will be a trip down memory lane with the inclusion of Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*.

In the autumn of 1962 Gaynor Thomas was an inspiring music teacher at the City of Cardiff High School for Girls. She planned an ambitious concert for the November of that year, to include the piece by Holst, Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* and

Brahms's *Four Songs for Women's Choir*.

Judy Tomlinson remembers the challenges the choir faced and the hard work involved, but also the sense of achievement.

Then, the day before the concert, Ms Thomas fell ill. At short notice a Mr Arwel Hughes (father of Owain Arwel Hughes), a member of the BBC's music staff in Wales and later its Head of Music, stepped in and conducted the concert,

which although 'not quite what he was used to' was a success.

Judy has no recollection of the panic that must have arisen just before the concert, but she does remember a wonderful occasion. It was this experience at school that started her enjoyment and commitment to singing in choirs, something she has done ever since.

And over 53 years later she is now looking forward to singing the Holst for a second time.



The god Indra on his elephant

Image: British Museum

## ... AND MORE MEMORIES OF *RIG VEDA*

The last time St George's Singers' ladies sang the *Choral Hymns of the Rig Veda* was at the RNCM when we were conducted by our (then) Assistant Conductor Marcus Farnsworth. The concert was 'Jubilation', one of the concerts marking our 50th Anniversary, and at which we also sang works by Parry, Leighton, Dove, Rutter and Elgar. Shortly after this concert

Marcus left Manchester to continue his studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Now here he is back again for our *Sea Symphony* concert – and this time he can listen to the Holst from the wings.



## ... PLUS MEMORIES OF DISASTERS CHORAL AND NAUTICAL

*The following story has been anonymised to protect the innocent, the nervous, the under-rehearsed and the superstitious.*



Now, don't forget to breathe in the shape of the vowel

Many years ago, one of St George's Singers' current members was singing with another choir. Choral standards were not as high as they might have been, and performances sometimes drifted a little way from the composer's original conception. The conductor was ambitious however

and determined that the choir would perform *A Sea Symphony*.

Rehearsals did not go particularly well, but concert day dawned, and everyone headed off for the concert hall (the local leisure centre) with its accompanying aromas of rubber and sweat, its appalling acoustics and collapsible chairs.

The conductor was late for rehearsal, a delay explained when he did finally arrive, his leg encased in plaster – an accident had resulted in a broken ankle. A chair and footrest were hastily tracked down, and the conductor was installed in front of his by now rather nervous orchestral and choral mariners.

By tradition, a poor dress rehearsal heralds a scintillating performance. On this occasion, tradition proved a false prophet. The precise details of this choral catastrophe have happily been expunged from long-term memory, but the visceral horrors it evoked remain. In short, the ship foundered on the rhythmical reefs and sank with all hands.

Soon afterwards, our intrepid sailor found safe haven in the welcoming arms, ears and voices of St George's Singers, and has never returned to the nautical nightmare that was RVW's *Sea Symphony*.

Until now...

## REVIEW OF ‘SOUNDS AND SWEET AIRS’

William Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616, and St George’s Singers chose a wonderfully varied programme of Shakespeare settings to mark the four hundredth anniversary of his death.

Entertainingly introduced by conductor Neil Taylor, the evening included music by contemporaries of the Bard, including Orlando Gibbons, John Bennet and Thomas Morley, but the majority of pieces were from the 20th and 21st centuries, many of them unfamiliar. And in the breaks between choral works, there was some fine solo singing from the promising young soprano Ella Taylor, accompanied by lutenist Jamie Akers and the choir’s excellent resident pianist Pete Durrant.

A programme of short and widely contrasting pieces is always a big challenge for a choir. There were no fewer than 25 individual items in this programme, many of them arranged in sets or sequences, but nevertheless requiring a high degree of versatility, and intense concentration.

These qualities were much in evidence: great care and attention to detail was lavished on some of the more ambitious music, such as John Rutter’s *When Icicles Hang* which opened the programme, and Vaughan Williams’ lovely *Three Shakespeare Songs*, which were among the highlights of the evening. The Vaughan Williams was

notable for the excellent balance and tuning of its dense but delicate harmonies – this was highly accomplished choral singing.

Another challenging work, though less well-known, in this country at least, was the *Four Shakespeare Songs* by the Finnish composer Jaako Mäntyjärvi (b 1963), an interesting and colourful set of pieces which deserves to be heard more often. This is not straightforward music, but the choir tackled it well, despite a few moments of uncertainty in the male voices, and the final setting (*Full Fathom Five*) was especially effective.

The most substantial item in the programme – in terms of duration, if not musical weight – was the *Songs and Sonnets from Shakespeare* by George Shearing. Yes, it’s that George Shearing, the great British jazz pianist who lived and worked for much of his life in the USA – a case of ‘coals to Newcastle’ if ever there was one! As one might expect, these short choral pieces have a jazzy piano accompaniment, which pianist Pete Durrant played with evident relish – his playing in the penultimate movement, *Fie on sinful fantasy*, was particularly enjoyable! The choral parts, by contrast, are relatively simple, but they were nevertheless performed with a commitment and intensity which really brought them to life. In fact, this was a recurrent feature throughout the

programme: the choir’s ability to use meaningful diction, warmth of phrasing and expressive dynamics to make unremarkable music sound remarkable. This quality was also evident in the *Three Madrigals* by American composer Emma Lou Diemer, whose second movement, *Take, oh, take these lips away*, could easily have sounded dull and syllabic, but didn’t – far from it – because it was so lovingly shaped and phrased.

Elsewhere in the programme there were lusty performances of John Bennet’s *All Creatures Now* and Thomas Morley’s *Now is the*

*Month of Maying*, a setting by Ward Swingle of *It was a Lover and his Lass*, which appeared to owe something to John Rutter,

and a splendid setting of the same text by Madeleine Dring, beautifully sung by Ella Taylor.

It was a chilly April evening in Poynton – more like ‘blow, blow thou winter wind’ than ‘the only pretty ringtime’ – but those who had come ‘over hill, over dale’ to Poynton were rewarded with some fine singing from this excellent choir.



*David Hoult*

The Most Appropriate Accessory Award for the Shakespeare concert went to Wendy Flavell for her tasteful and beautifully gem-encrusted gold witch pendant. Entries for the *Sea Symphony* Accessory award will be judged on concert day. (Please note: sou'westers will not be deemed acceptable.)



## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



### Goodbye to Jo

We were sorry to say goodbye to Jo Garbutt who has moved to Shrewsbury, and simply can't get to Tuesday rehearsals on time any longer. (And why not Jo!). We wish her good luck in her new life, and hope to see her again at a future concert.

### New members

People go... and people come. A warm welcome to two new Singers: alto Liz Jameson and bass Barry Cheetham. We hope you have a long and enjoyable time singing with us.

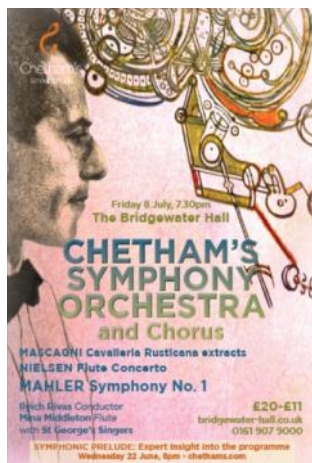
### Buy, buy, buy!

As part of our fund-raising for next season, we're holding regular bring and buy sales on Tuesday evenings. Please bring along anything you think people may want to buy, put a price ticket on it and raise money for choir funds. And yes, people do buy the strangest things for the oddest reasons: – 'That's just the thing to hold down my vegetable netting'. – '*Led Zeppelin reinvent Bach*: that's one I haven't got in my collection!' – 'It's not my colour, but the dog may like it.'

### Listen out for Singers!

On Tuesday 19 July, a few members of St George's Singers will be joining the massed ranks of the Hallé Choir and the Manchester Chamber Choir on stage at the Royal Albert Hall when they take part in the Proms in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. The BBC Philharmonic will be conducted by Gianandrea Noseda. The performance starts at 6.30 pm, and will be broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Good luck to all our Singers!

## CONCERT WITH CHETHAM'S



On Friday 8 July, St George's Singers will be joining the young players of Chetham's symphony orchestra in a concert in Bridgewater Hall. The main work is Mahler's Symphony No. 1, but before that the Singers will be joining forces with Chetham's chorus in a programme of opera choruses.

The concert also features one of Chetham's pupils, flautist Mina Middleton, in a flute concerto by Nielsen. Mina began playing the flute at the age of 9 and started at Chetham's in Septem-

ber 2011. She has taken part in masterclasses with many eminent flautists, has performed in a variety of concerts during her time at Chetham's, undertaken solo engagements at the Oundle International Festival 2014 and the Leeds 2015 International Concert Season, and has played in many major concert halls as a member of the National Youth Orchestra. Along with her guitar partner, she was invited to perform in Ischia, Italy as part of the Sir William Wal-

ton Autumn concert series of 2014. She performed in a wind quintet alongside woodwind players from the Hallé in a 'Chetham's meets Hallé' collaboration concert. She also performed with NYO in live and televised broadcasts as part of the 2014 and 2015 BBC Proms, and played with NYO at the Konzerthaus in Berlin for the Young Euro Classic festival of 2015.

Tickets £11-£20, from BWH box office, tel 0161 907 9000.



Soprano Alison Rose

## LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS

The Last Night of the Proms will be particularly worth watching this year, as it features soloists with St George's connections

One of the works being performed on the Last Night on 10 September is Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*.

Amongst those singing solos in the work are Alison Rose, who is of course our soprano soloist in *A Sea Symphony*; mezzo-soprano Anna Harvey, who should have sung in *Gerontius* but had to pull out at the last moment; and bass-baritone

Bradley Travis. Bradley has not actually sung with St George's Singers, but is well known to Anne Francis, who was his headteacher at Brookside School some 20 years ago!

*Serenade to Music* was written in 1938 for 16 vocal soloists and orchestra, and the text is an adaptation of the discussion about music in Act V of *The Merchant of Venice*. Vaughan Williams wrote it as a tribute to Sir Henry Wood, and the solo parts were composed specifically for the voices of 16 eminent British singers personally cho-

sen by Wood and the composer. The published score even places the initials of each soloist next to his or her lines.

Amongst the soloists taking part in the premiere were sopranos Isobel Baillie and Eva Turner, contraltos Mary Jarred and Margaret Balfour (Elgar's very own 'Angel' in his recording of *Gerontius*), tenors Heddle Nash and Frank Titterton, and baritone Roy Henderson.

Big shoes to fill for this year's young singers, but we look forward to hearing them all.

# ROUND ABOUT LINCOLNSHIRE OR LINCOLNSHIRE ROUNDABOUTS

## Friday, 27 May

Everyone turns up at Poynton car park to be greeted and ticked off by Jo and Rhona. (The first of many tickings-off



over the weekend.) Jo got as far as the As and found that Mary Andrew wasn't on board, but

having discovered Mary had made other arrangements, off we set, with our lovely Greek Cypriot driver, Yiannis, in charge. Yiannis decided he wanted to investigate the nature conservation techniques Britain adopts on busy intersections, so we circumnavigated a number of roundabouts more than once. But, heigh-ho! the scenery was pretty and the toll bridge over the river not something you see every day.

The High Peak gradually gave way to the Lincolnshire countryside so it was something of a shock to see Lincoln Cathedral on a hill, dominating the city. The medieval city planners may have been clued up on cathedral construction, but their



modern-day successors ruined the entrance to the city with a barrier right down the centre of the main road, blocking the entrance to the hotel. So Yiannis kindly took us on an unexpected tour of Lincoln before retracing our route and dropping us off.

## Saturday 28 May

An early start, beginning with an uphill walk to the Minster School, where we began rehearsal with the Psalm we'd be singing on Monday. Then some quick topping and tailing of today's programme, and we were on for our first

tour concert. A small but appreciative audience (mainly groups of locals who managed to get in despite the fact that the front door wouldn't open from the outside!) gave us a round of applause, and we were free to explore Lincoln before getting back on the bus to Boston Stump, aka St Botolph's Church.

Boston is a one-stump town. Of major importance centuries ago, it now boasts little more than an interesting church, a market and a Prezzo's – to which a large contingent of Singers migrated after rehearsal. Then back to the church for a long (very long!) concert, fortunately interspersed by Pete's brilliant piano solos, appreciated by our ears and our feet in equal measure.

Onto the bus and back to Lincoln – with a diversion by Yiannis into a car park as he tried to find a quick way through the one-way system – and into the bar for the usual second-night tour revelries. However, everyone was so exhausted, the merrymaking was rather muted. (A ploy by Neil to keep us in good voice for the next day...?)

## Sunday 29 April

Jo and Rhona gave us an extra half-hour lie-in this morning before we set off for Louth. This time Yiannis took the direct route (almost) but then had to find his way through some dreadfully narrow roads (well, alleys really) before finding somewhere to park safely. Louth belied its name, and was utterly charming. The church of St James offered a beautiful



acoustic, and has the tallest parish church spire in the country. Neil decided we should sing *Totus Tuus* from beneath it (an 'inspired' decision!). Even though we were doing exactly the same programme as the previous day's concert, everything seemed to go much more quickly, and we had warm and rousing applause

from our largest audience of the tour so far.

Then back to Lincoln for the Choir dinner at the Doubletree restaurant down by Lincoln wharf. Jo and Rhona thanked everyone who had helped with the many aspects of the tour organisation, including those such as Gwyneth who couldn't be there. Dave Francis (much to Anne's despair) got us all up dancing and singing *Climb up sunshine mountain*, Jacqui took the photos, and we all went back to the hotel happy.



## Monday 30 May

Finally: a chance to look round Lincoln, its castle and its cathedral – a serious bit of stonework, built to intimidate believers and non-believers alike. (And after Manchester, surely something of a culture shock for Jeff Makinson!) But the Chapter House proved to be a delightful venue for our final recital. Jeff was playing the organ somewhere high above us as we started to assemble, but came down to say hi and give us his news – a little Makinson is on the way! – and stayed for our recital. The Chapter House was packed, and everyone loved our performance, even demanding an encore. Sue and Anne presented thankyou gifts and it was back on the bus for our final engagement: Evensong at Southwell.



Southwell Minster is small in comparison to the mighty Lincoln, but perhaps more homely and welcoming. After a short rehearsal with Canon Jacqui Jones (who got rather flummoxed when Neil asked her to sing a B flat instead of a B) we sang Rachmaninov in the Crossing, processed as instructed two-by-two into the Quire, navigated the Smith Responses and the Psalm without repetition, hesitation or deviation, and finished with *Totus Tuus*.

AND HERE ENDS THE TOUR OF LINCOLNSHIRE.

We've had some fabulous contributions to *Hemiola* from tourists, giving their versions of the three days spent in the wilds (and flats) of Lincolnshire. But in the interests of posterity and the choir archives, this is the official version.



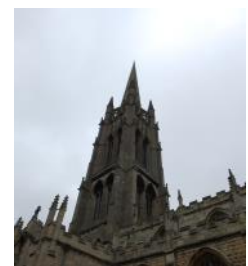
Part of the much larger Poppies Wave from the Tower of London, now on display at Lincoln Castle



Dinner at the Doubletree



Jo giving us our instructions for the day, complete with hand gestures we got to know very well



The spire of St James in Louth



## RANDOM (VERY) THOUGHTS ON THE TOUR OF LINCOLNSHIRE BY ERIC NORTHEY

$$e = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^n$$



Awe inspiring!

Now, I know that most of the choir think that the tenors are just a bunch of pretty faces. And in some cases that's true. But there's also some really deep thinkers amongst us and this was brought out on the Lincolnshire tour in a number of ways. There's obvious things like our ability to assemble that great work of genius, Alan Swain's staging. There are clearly those in our number who can measure, and, not just like myself, within a foot or two either way, but really measure, to within a bit of a millimetre. Either way. Then there's those who know about weight and why the colonnades and pillars of Lincoln cathedral, Boston Stump and Southwell Minster, all lean over slightly at the top. And somebody might just know how and why Pete Durrant's playing of the Liszt Concert Étude No 3 was so grippingly beautiful. I mean, there's only eight real notes in it; the other 3,000 are mere decoration. But it was heart-achingly lovely to listen to, each time. And we, as a choir, did a fair bit of singing and *Totus Tuus* under the dome at Louth and in the transept at Boston – or was it the other way round? – I thought was particularly moving. However arduous that piece is, and however tired we were, Neil brought something special out of us that left a wonderful echoing afterglow floating ethereally around the stonework. Then there's Phil Egerton's maths – but we'll come back to that.

What they all had in common, however different their form, was this idea of awe. And I wish I could define it, or at least describe it. But being a died-in-the-soul atheist, I'm not given

to religious epithets – except when I first come into a cathedral like Lincoln, Louth or Southwell, (or on first seeing Gorton's ruined interior) when I find myself uttering the name of the Lord in vain dumbfoundment that humans can build anything so transcendent. Fifty years ago I would have blamed it all on the bankers of the aristocratic classes who were bent on exploiting the peasants to shift and lift heavy objects about the face of the earth, whilst they salted away all the money. (Couldn't happen today, such a thing, could it?) But these cathedrals often took three or four hundred years to build. Many of the masons, roofers, scaffolders, carpenters, glass painters, etc. would never have lived long enough to see their work completed. They relied, I suppose, on faith and passed on the obligation to complete these enormous structures to their children and grandchildren. And thus we, 600 years later, look along the naves of such churches and slowly lift our gaze heavenwards up the slightly leaning pillars and experience awe at their work. Makes you think, if not believe.

And what about Pete's playing? He kindly showed me the eight notes of the melody, at the back of the bus, using both hands and both knees. (His, not mine.) And immediately, that simple melody is recalled back into the imagination and once again you hear something transcendent, that soars and then declines against a background of arpeggios which would challenge a ten-fingered pianist, one

with the ten fingers on each hand that is. I've looked at the score since the tour and am battered by the savage sadism of Liszt's writing. No wonder it's called *Un Sospiro* – a sigh. That's all us mortals can do when we open the first page. It starts simply enough – I say that, having barely mastered *Chopsticks* – in five flats, but then moves into three sharps, then four sharps, then five flats again which continues to the end, with only a cascade of accidentals to confuse one. By the time I've worked out what keys we're actually moving through, I'm tired. It's time for



a lie down and a glass of Sanatogen. Yet those haunting eight notes, in different pitches and combinations, of octaves, of quavers or crotchets, in the left hand crossing over to the right, and vice versa, threes against fours, fours against fives and one bit of sixes against sevens, in new majors and minors – they float in and out of consciousness throughout the day and are a trouble to my dreams. But what do they *mean*? Anything, everything, something, nothing? 'All art,' says Walter Pater, 'aspires to the condition of music'. I think he means it has form, content, structure, but doesn't refer to anything solid in the world that produces it. It >>>





## HEY NONNY NO-ING IN LINCOLNSHIRE

BY JOE KEANEY

'A fabulous tour, performing in a succession of awesome settings, and singing of great complexity, verve, wit, and, at times, moving intensity.' Well, that's what I would want to post on my Twitter account if I had one.

A sign of a good concert is always how snatches of music and song earworm their way into your head for days after the event – and the five concerts across three days in Lincolnshire and Southwell have certainly done that. Although one such line sung by gents of a certain maturity did somewhat jar. 'Come kiss me sweet and twenty'. Really? Maybe not, fellas.

But the fact that I could pick out words, especially in the linguistically challenging 'witchy' pieces, proves just how clear and focused your diction was throughout – skippy and playful when heigh nonny noing, spiky and cruel around the cauldron. The drama of the pieces came across, helped in no small measure by the extraordinary venues you sang in.

Here are my highlights. At the

Minster School it was the 'witchy' pieces that were spell-binding – concentrated, vengeful, focused. Fabulous diction with crisp, punchy endings.

The Saturday evening concert in St Botolph's in Boston was my absolute highlight of the tour, especially the first half of the concert as the setting sun streamed in through the stained glass, giving everything a luminous orangey glow and *The souls of the righteous* moved movingly, stately, profoundly in the Hand of God. Extraordinarily intense singing with breathtaking silences that visibly moved you singers – it was fascinating to notice the 'apple in the throat' moment, like a ripple, affect different singers at different moments during the piece. You all communicated the emotion of the music so directly and so well.

In Sunday's concert at St James' Louth it was the soaring grandeur of *Totus Tuus* under the tower at the back of the church that moved me most, the rich ringing tones of the men tumbling up the aisle like incense, engulfing a rapt audience.

Monday's Chapter House recital standout for me was the playfulness of the Emma Lou Madrigals, although the bonus track of an encore (some singers performing off copy!) was a joy too and sent a large, appreciative audience away with Finzi ringing in their ears.

In Southwell Minster where a thoughtful evensong was led by a prayerful Canon Jacqui, the *Bogoroditsye* impacted most forcibly, a longing tender lullaby travelling to us in the congregation from what seemed like beyond the city walls.

Throughout the tour Neil 'just watch me' Taylor's conducting was as clear and emphatic as ever and Pete Durrant's playing was exquisite – two brilliantly chosen pieces, elegant, delicate, wistful and brooding in turns – the performance in St Botolph's was spine-tingling. And he was able to join the men in the back row, as required.

So in summary, a wonderful tour with some memorable singing moments. And the tune I haven't been able to get out of my head while composing this? 'Lulla, lulla, lullaby/Lulla, lulla, lullaby'.

►► is signifiers without signifieds. *Of* the universe, but somehow not in it. Yet strong enough to move us frequently 'to thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'.

And talking of tears, there's Phil Egerton's maths. You might think we're just guzzling and gossiping in the tea breaks, but recently, Phil, Jonathan and I have been trying to recall what we once knew – in their cases, well; in mine, vaguely. Like, what are logarithms? What's this 'to the power 10' business? And most basically, what the hell are numbers? I can see where there might be five sharps or five flats in the Liszt, because they're there and fixed on the stave – but what about numbers that go on and on for ever and ever? Gödel tells us there are more of them,

than there are whole numbers. But there's an infinite number of whole numbers. So, where do these extra ones live? Like Liszt's notes, they're *of* the universe, but not in it. The most notorious of these numbers is just called 'e' – probably for Eric. And it just goes on and on and on – just like Eric. But Phil spent the Tuesday after the Lincoln trip deriving 'e' from first principles. Jean said it kept him quiet all day. She seemed pleased. And he brought in a page of workings out that (and, I have to put me glasses on now), lead to this:

$$\frac{d(\log a x)}{dx} = \frac{1}{x} \log_e a$$

But if we use logs to base e, ie Natural logarithms, then,

$$\frac{d(\log_e x)}{dx} = \frac{1}{x}$$

And Phil rightly said, 'And that's beautiful!' It's like the fleeting notes that float out of those Liszt arpeggios, or the soaring columns of the Boston Stump. *Of* the universe, but not in it. So, temporarily, I've given up the lifetime pursuit of trying to figure out what awe is. Perhaps just the sensation of it – in architecture, music and poetry – is more satisfying than actually knowing how it's caused.

'Hope so', I sigh.



Lincoln Cathedral Chapter House



Modern candle holders in Lincoln Cathedral

The poshest loos in the country at Lincoln Castle





It does just what it says on the signpost



Some Choir members managed to get the staging to the church without leaving it in the market



The market outside Lincoln Castle



Boston mermaids and Lincoln swans

## LINCOLN: THE UNCUT VERSION

BY SARAH LIONHEART

Things that need straightening out.

We had the most patient bus driver in the world, who went down far too narrow streets when asked and manoeuvred the massive coach with skill and expertise.

Interesting fact: Choir tour is great for finding out who snores. I now have a list.

The Black Shoe Curse of Lincoln. One of our esteemed organisers discovered she had forgotten her black shoes and so put her socks on over her red shoes, in something that will be known for future tours as The Rhona Trick.

Then she passed the curse on to her roommate. As I walked through Lincoln castle gateway, both my shoes disintegrated beneath me leaving one choir member approaching me with a wedge of shoe sole in their hands saying 'I think this might belong to you, you seem to be shedding.' So I stopped at the market and bought a pair of black shoes for all of £3. I then looked around for my piece of staging that I had leant against the stall. It was gone! How on earth was I going to explain THAT to the choir: 'I lost the staging between the coach and the church'. I asked Alan what I should do (before being shot at dawn). He said he picked it up as he went by. Relief.

Premier Inn had wonderful baths and lashings of hot water. We had baths twice a day, the ideal way to unwind but because they filled so quickly you could turn them on and then make a cup of tea and low and behold you now had a small pond in the bathroom and a swimming pool.

Then there are the Groupie Awards. To be honest, all the people who came with choir on our tour deserve this award. Two people immediately come to mind: Bill for driving 90 minutes through Lincolnshire to attend our concert at Boston Stump

and driving 90 minutes back. I asked him because someone had said it was near Grimsby where Bill was on the boat. A lot of people could be heard saying things like 'where are we in relation to Nottingham? Or Sheffield? Or England even?' Lincoln was not an area a lot of us knew well. When Bill discovered we were singing at Louth the next day he pointed out with slightly clenched teeth that Louth is only 35 minutes from Grimsby. Oooops.

Then I discovered 30 seconds before rehearsal in Lincoln Cathedral that I had left my debit card in the machine at House of Fraser café, at the **bottom** of the hill. It was a long way down and a very, very long haul back up the hill. Vicky went. Heroic. Gold Star.

Then we visited Southwell Minster. One of my forebears got there first in 1194 but I am the first Lionheart to sing there. They will now have to carve THAT on the stones. [Ed: whilst tradition holds that Richard did indeed have a good voice and even composed songs, there is no *prima facie* evidence of him singing in Southwell. We therefore let this comment stand.]

There was the dance at the dinner. I know it is fashionable to look horrified at doing silly things but I was rather heartened that other choir members can be silly too. It was funny and harmless and daft and made most of us smile but we probably shouldn't encourage him too much.

Ah, now then, the psalm. Well, I was baffled from day one. But I was also aware that it was *de*



The small but perfectly formed Southwell Minster

*rigueur* to act like you knew what the hell was going on. So I learned the tune by ear and put in lots of up arrows and down arrows on my sheet and happily sang 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 and 10 up and down and backwards but didn't have a clue why. Then eventually when we had done that, we got to the tune I had learned from memory. I guess it is a secret code known only to Anglican choristers.

Then there was the moment on the way home when one of the first aiders was herding people across a busy road to the petrol station for emergency rations. Cars stopped. In their tracks. In respect. We were obviously a coach of grieving mourners from a funeral, all dressed in black. So members filed out of the coach and across the road. Alison came

out of the coach and in all the bustle of trying to encourage people to get across quickly someone gave her an encouraging nudge forward. Nearly into the path of an unseen car. As Rhona said: 'We didn't do too badly really, we only killed one choir member at the end.'

There were other hilarious moments but they have been censored. I can reveal in person a select few for a small donation to choir funds.



Sarah 'The Lionheart' sang here

# DRAGONS TAKE ON THE WITCHES

Having brave-hearted the 'Scottish Play' on the heaths of Silverknowes and Braid Hills in Edinburgh some two years ago, the 2014 SGS Dragons trophy winner, Peter 'Fairways' Forshaw asked, 'Where shall we three meet again, in thunder, lightning, or in rain?' 'When there's golfing to be done, where rounds are lost and won' responded Steven 'Blaster' Bluck. John 'Hit and Hope'

Hodgson added reluctantly, 'Is this a driver which I see before me, the handle towards my hand?'

The SGS Dragons (Disciples of Recreational Activity of Golf Open to Non-Singers) recently re-convened in Lincolnshire to enjoy three local courses, Boston West and Gainsborough's Thonock Park and Karsten Lakes, expertly selected by Steve Bluck, who also booked perfect weather for the weekend.

Notwithstanding that Fair-

ways Forshaw finished a marginal winner on the final two days, Blaster Bluck dominated by such a large margin on the first day (because stableford points make prizes) that he earned the Dragons Trophy. (A new trophy this year, the previous one having been mislaid by Fairways in a recent house move.) When interviewed after the event, Peter said he was so relieved to get to Lincoln without incident, after last year's transport debacle, that he over-relaxed and let the trophy slip.

The Dragons are always on the look-out for extra players – but probably not in Costa Rica.



This year's winner of the prestigious (and newly purchased) Dragon's Trophy was Steve Bluck, here seen dragging the trophy from the grasp of last year's winner Peter Forshaw



The Dragons were proud recipients of the Wooden Spoon award from Jo for their support of the Choir on tour – they attended only one concert, and disappeared when staging needed moving, programmes handing out, and missing items retrieving. Still, we're glad they came – tours wouldn't be the same without our groupies!

# LONG-LOST SHEPHERD FOUND IN BOSTON

One of the great joys of going on choir tours is the serendipity factor: discovering facts or artefacts, visiting previously unknown places, or encountering strangers often turns up unlikely St George's connections. Lincolnshire was no different.

Whilst waiting for the concert to start in St Botolph's church in Boston we were told by the vergar that someone at the church had a very special link with Poynton: the church organist, David Shepherd.

David came across St George's

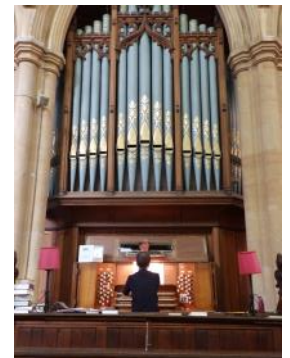
Singers 55 years ago when he was at Stockport Grammar. Geoffrey Verney was the musical director at the time, and he asked David to accompany the choir on occasions. The last time he heard the choir sing was in the Wood *St Mark Passion* [1960] and Bach's *St John Passion* [1961], after which he left the area and moved to Lincolnshire.



David Shepherd – a long-term supporter of St George's Singers

When he heard that a choir called St George's Singers was coming to sing at St Botolph's he wondered if it could possibly be the same choir he had known so long ago, so came along to listen to the concert. He was thrilled to find out it was, and even more delighted to see and hear how the choir has moved on in the intervening period.

In concert at St Botolph's Church, Boston



## 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, 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.

## CHESHIRE CONSORT NEWS

### ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY 2015-16 Season

26 June 106

Vaughan Williams:

*A Sea Symphony*

Holst:

*Hymns from the Rig Veda,*

*Ave Maria*

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012

[tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk](mailto:tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk)

[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)

8 July 2016

Mahler: *Symphony No. 1*

Nielsen: *Flute Concerto*

Mascagni: *Opera Choruses*

Tickets from Bridgewater Hall

0161 807 9000

The Cheshire Consort, the wedding chamber choir formed by St George's Singers, has a busy summer ahead with wedding ceremonies at churches across Cheshire.

Amongst the music we will be performing this summer is one of our favourite works: Eric Whitacre's *This Marriage*. The composer wrote the piece for his wife on the occasion of their seventh wedding anniversary, and he describes it as 'a small and simple gift to my wife'. The words are by Jalal ad-Din Rumi, the renowned 13th-century poet and mystic, and offer up a blessing for the marriage about to be entered into.

The ever popular John Rutter is also on the orders of service, with his *For the beauty of the earth* amongst those selected by

our brides. Another popular favourite is *The Lord is my Shepherd*. The 23rd Psalm has been set by many composers over the centuries, but the version by Howard Goodall, with its gentle waltz rhythm and lyrical soprano solo is the one we are performing most often this summer. You may not immediately recognise it from the description, but it is actually the theme tune to *The Vicar of Dibley*!

Hymns always play a major part in all wedding ceremonies: they engage the guests in the ceremony, give people the chance to enjoy a rousing song, and allow the bride and groom time to catch their breath and prepare for the next part of the service! Wedding couples often choose traditional hymns they have known since childhood; some go for modern hymns; whilst others prefer non-hymns



– songs with a spiritual or moral dimension that speak to them very personally. This summer the Consort is adding a number of previously unknown hymns to our repertoire – thank you to our brides and grooms for introducing us to them.

For more information about The Cheshire Consort, please go to the website [www.cheshireconsort.org.uk](http://www.cheshireconsort.org.uk), or follow us on Facebook.

We wish all our brides and grooms the very best for the future – and cross our fingers for the weather!