



60th Anniversary Season

Hemiola

St George's Singers

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

60 years of song	2
All things Brahms	3
Brahms: a messy life	4
Elizabeth Watts	5
The social evening	6
Accompanist or Ironman?	6
Review of <i>Sea Symphony</i>	7
Alison at the Proms	7
St George's Singers news	8
George needs a home!	8
Phil Egerton remembered	9
Meet our new Chair	9
A year with the Fellowship	10
Carols from Norbury	11

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

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National
Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

THREE REWARDING YEARS

I am writing this having just stepped down from being Chair of St George's Singers for the last three years.

It has been a busy and fulfilling period and a privilege and pleasure to work with such a dedicated committee of the choir which plays such a significant part in my life.

I am looking forward to the Brahms concert in November when my sole responsibility will be to focus on the music and give all my attention to singing. So it is something of a treat to be anticipating singing Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* at the RNCM with such wonderful soloists, Elizabeth Watts and Marcus Farnsworth. It is particularly meaningful as in some ways I feel I have come full circle.

I was fortunate to attend a girls' school in Westminster which had a strong music department and benefitted from opportunities to sing regularly in Westminster Abbey. This included annually singing a major choral work with the boys from

Westminster School and Brahms' *Requiem* was one of the most memorable. Following the performance, Movement IV, 'Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen' (How lovely are thy dwellings) arranged for sopranos and altos, became one of the school choir's favourites and in nostalgic moments I am back there falling in love with choral music and singing all over again.

My school introduced me to church music which has also played a large part in my life. I met my husband Rob through church music and it was something we shared for many years in a church choir, particularly enjoying our cathedral singing weeks.

In 1996 Rob met Stephen Williams through church music. He had just become Musical Director of St George's Singers and encouraged Rob to join.

That was twenty years ago and apart from a few years absence when Rob was asked to 'look after' the two Severn bridges, St George's Singers has been our choral home and its members our extended family. Sadly Rob never got to meet our current excellent MD Neil Taylor and I am now singing for both of us! I



think my friends would say my enthusiasm for St George's singers makes up in part for Rob's absence but not his lovely voice.

I am looking forward to a great 60th anniversary season of concerts and a tour to Costa Rica next summer. I am truly grateful for being part of Team St Georges and thank Neil Taylor, Joe Judge and Pete Durrant for their direction and all my fellow choir members for their music and their company.

Andrea Millington



DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY: 60 YEARS OF SINGING TOGETHER



St George's Singers at rehearsal in the church hall in 1971, with conductor Duncan Eyre

In this very special year for St George's Singers, our 60th anniversary season, we take a look back over the last 60 years and recall some of the highlights (and a few lowlights!) for the Choir over that time. You can read more about the Choir's history in our Anniversary Season Brochure – available at our next concert or on the Choir website www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

Over a period of 60 years, any organisation will change dramatically – some evolve out of all recognition, and many move away from their fundamental *raison d'être* and the ethos on which they were founded. St George's Singers is one of those rare organisations that has successfully combined change and innovation with adherence to its founding principles.

The Choir was formed in 1956 by the vicar and the choirmaster of St George's Church in Poynton, who wanted to build a choir from the local community to perform major choral works. The first rehearsal was attended by 35 people, and the first performance at Christmas 1956 was the Christmas music from *Messiah*. Within two years, the choir had grown sufficiently to perform Bach's *St John Passion*, and soon after it reached 100 members, retaining this level of membership ever since.

Over the six decades since then, the Choir has had its ups and downs. 1984–6 was a particularly difficult period. In 1984 (the year of the notorious 'green' tunics – probably the most serious fashion mistake the Choir ever made!) the longstanding conductor Duncan Eyre retired. Two conductors were appointed – and soon left – in quick succession but things steadied in 1987 with the appointment of Ray Lomax. Ray was principal timpanist with the BBC Philharmonic (and something of a force of nature) and he ushered in a period of great adventure: overseas tours, concerts in G-

Mex, and premieres of works by new composers were just some of his innovations.

A founder member of the Choir, Margaret Adshead, who sang with her husband Eric in the Choir for over 50 years, recalls this period. 'Duncan Eyre was very popular and respected by the Choir, and we did some wonderful concerts with him. But I always had the feeling that the choir could have achieved more if we had had a professional conductor earlier. Things really only took off with Ray, and we realised then what we had been missing all those years.'

When Ray left the Choir in 1996, he handed the baton to Stephen Williams, another dynamic and inspirational leader, who expanded the Choir's repertoire and reputation. Highlights included Bach's *B minor Mass*, a moving *St John Passion*, challenging works by Russian and Estonian composers Schnittke, Karai, Tormis and Gretchaninov. His most ambitious ventures were *Elijah* in 2004 with Sir Willard White and Mark Padmore, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in 2006 with James Gilchrist as the Evangelist, and Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert*. Highly controversially, Stephen also introduced regular re-auditions for all Singers, leading to disagreement amongst some of the members, and even letters to the local press! It cannot be denied however that the move led to a much greater focus on vocal technique and choral excellence, and has been of benefit to Choir members and (we hope!) our audiences.

In 2006, Stephen left Manchester to become Director of Music at Uppingham School, but once again the Singers were fortunate to find an outstanding conductor in

Neil Taylor. Neil has continued taking the Choir down previously uncharted choral tracks, balanced against the music of the Anglican liturgy, works by Renaissance or modern American, Spanish or French composers, as well as the major choral works: Bach's *B minor Mass* in the Bridgewater Hall, Rachmaninov's *Vespers* and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*. With Neil we've also appeared on Radio 3's *In Tune* and Radio 4's *Daily Service*.

Through six decades, St George's Singers has kept true to its roots. We still take members from the local community



St George's Singers 'green' period

(though we also welcome those from further afield!) and our aim is to perform and promote major choral works. But above all we keep developing and innovating. New music, new composers, the forgotten and the neglected, the barnstormers and the jewel-like miniatures – if it can be sung in 4 to 40 parts, St George's Singers will tackle it.

Margaret Adshead sums it up: 'St George's Singers has been a huge part of my and Eric's life. We've been on tours and to all sorts of social events, but really – it's all about the singing.' Exactly.

With Stephen Williams on tour in Finland and Estonia – and the bright but untamable red scarves



With Ray Lomax in 1987, sporting red roses

Looking back over the old committee minute books of the Choir, one thing immediately stands out. After finances, the issue that has generated more discussion than any other over the last 60 years is – choir dress. *Plus ça change.*

ALL THINGS BRAHMS

It was a wild and stormy night (!) in the winter of 2014, and the SGS Committee had gathered in an obliging committee member's house. It was already 9pm, the cakes hadn't arrived yet, and we'd only reached agenda item 4: the 2016–17 season – our 60th anniversary year. Surely, an occasion calling for something a bit special!

All eyes turned to the MD. Any thoughts Neil? Well, yes. Brahms' *German Requiem* in the RNCM to start the season and Verdi's *Requiem* at Gorton to finish. And Liz Watts as soloist in the Brahms.

The Treasurer went pale. Everyone else said 'Wow!' And here we are, two years later and ready to perform the magnificent *German Requiem* at the RNCM – with soprano Elizabeth Watts and baritone Marcus Farnsworth.

Since that initial meeting, the programme for the first concert of our 60th Anniversary Season has developed into an all-Brahms feast.

It begins with the Northern Chamber Orchestra playing Brahms' *Tragic Overture*. Written in 1880 whilst Brahms was on holiday in his favourite vacation spot in the spa town of Bad Ischl, the *Tragic* is a companion piece to the *Academic Festival Overture*. But whilst the latter is ebullient, jolly and full of student songs, the *Tragic* is its emotional antithesis. 'One weeps, the other laughs' Brahms said of the two compositions. An emotional and dramatic roller-coaster, the work has become one of the most popular of all concert overtures.

Following the overture, we are extremely fortunate that Elizabeth Watts and her fellow soloist, Marcus Farnsworth, will be giving a recital of Brahms' songs. Drawn from

different periods of Brahms' life, the songs display the com-

poser's astonishing ear for poetry, and his ability to blend sensuousness with academic rigour. Both Liz and Marcus are renowned recitalists, and it will be a real privilege to hear these two master Lieder singers, accompanied by our own Pete Durrant.

The first half of the programme ends with the Choir's first appearance, when we perform Brahms' *Geistliches Lied*. This is Brahms' earliest accompanied



The Lutheran Bible, dated 1559

choral work, and was written in 1856 at the age of 23 as one of a number of compositions which he and his friend Joseph Joachim exchanged for mutual criticism as an exercise in counterpoint. It's an amazingly accomplished piece of writing that combines a mastery of counterpoint with a sense of delicacy to remarkable effect. Set as a double canon with organ accompaniment, two different lines are imitated between the soprano/tenor and alto/bass parts, before these pairs intertwine. All of the compositional complexities somehow come together in a piece of exceptional beauty, most notably in the final 'Amen', where the canon is reversed, the basses leading the altos and the tenors following the sopranos, and the music projects a mood of gentle, lyric serenity, clearly foreshadowing the *Requiem*. This little work, the smallest of Brahms' numbered works in terms of musical content, is nothing less than a tour de force.

The main item of the evening however is Brahms' magnificent *German Requiem*. *Ein deutsches Requiem* was written between 1865 and 1867, approximately half-way through his career. Some would say it is Brahms' greatest work; its huge, yet tender emotional impact affects all who experience it. It is undeniably one of the great choral masterpieces.

The *Requiem* was not conceived in memory of a particular person, nor does it take the shape and form of the traditional requiem mass. Indeed, it is not a liturgical composition at all. Brahms himself, an agnostic, said the work could just as easily have been called a 'Human' as a 'German' requiem. The text is key. Brahms acquired a deep knowledge

and love for biblical texts as found in the Lutheran Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and had a great appreciation of their poetic and literary value. He chose the texts himself from the Lutheran Bible, drawing on the Old and New Testament as well as the Apocrypha to find exactly the right words he wanted to convey. Perhaps he chose more in order to comfort and console the living whilst commemorating those who have been taken from us. We visualise the ephemeral brevity of life, acknowledge loss, and comfort those who remain, giving thanks for the blessed memory of those who have departed.

In Neil Taylor's words from the concert programme, 'Brahms stands as a colossus in Western art music. A genius with melody and counterpoint'.

A fitting opening to our Diamond Anniversary season.

Saturday 26 November, 2016
7.30pm

Royal Northern College of Music
BRAHMS

Ein deutsches Requiem

Tragic Overture

Geistliches Lied

and

a Lieder recital by

Elizabeth Watts, soprano and

Marcus Farnsworth, baritone

with

Northern Chamber Orchestra

Tickets £18, 16 conc,

£6 students/children

Tel 01663 764012



One of the songs in the recital we will hear comes from a collection Brahms entitled *Lieder und Gesänge*. The English translation for 'Lieder' is 'songs' (or more usually 'art songs') whilst, strangely enough, 'Gesänge' also means songs, or singing. So what's the difference? Pure art songs or 'Lieder', are simpler and stanzaic in form, with each verse the same or with slight variations; 'Gesänge' are more complex, through-composed and freer in composition. So, next audition time, should you decide to sing a German song, you'll know exactly what you're singing!



The story of Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann formed the inspiration for a 1959 novel by Francoise Sagan. Entitled *Aimez-vous Brahms?*, it told the story of a love affair between a woman and a much younger man. It was made into a film in 1961 with Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Perkins, though the title was changed to *Goodbye Again*, as it was thought the American audience wouldn't understand the original title. Brahms of course provided the film score.



Clara died after a prolonged illness on 20 May 1896, but Brahms nearly missed her funeral. The news reached him a day late, as his landlady in Vienna had forwarded the telegram to him in Bad Ischl by letter. Brahms caught the first train to Frankfurt, but fell asleep and missed his connection. He arrived in Frankfurt, only to learn that the funeral was not taking place there, but at Bonn. When he finally reached the cemetery, he was too late for the service at the chapel; he met the funeral procession on its way to the grave. But he could not bear to remain among the mourners: he took refuge behind a bush and wept at the side of his friend, Rudolf von der Leyen. Brahms himself died of liver cancer eleven months later.

BRAHMS: THE MESSY LIFE OF A GENIUS

Born in Hamburg in 1833 into a Lutheran family, Johannes Brahms is often considered both a traditionalist and an innovator. Above all he was an uncompromising perfectionist. He was a master of counterpoint, the complex art for which Bach is famous, and of development, a compositional ethos pioneered by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Brahms aimed to honour the 'purity' of these venerable 'German' structures and advance them into a Romantic idiom, in the process creating bold new approaches to harmony and melody. While many contemporaries found his music too academic, the diligent, highly constructed nature of Brahms' works was a starting point and an inspiration for a generation of composers. Within his meticulous structures is embedded, however, a highly romantic nature. So it is no surprise to discover that Brahms' life showed a similar dual personality.

Brahms' father, Johann Jakob, was from an inn-keeping family. Against the family's will, he pursued a career in music, and moved to Hamburg, where he found work playing dance music, at first in dubious taverns near the docks, then as a horn player in the Hamburg militia, ultimately becoming a member of the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1830, he married a seamstress seventeen years older than he was and Johannes was born three years later.

The young Brahms studied piano from the age of 7, and by the age of 10 was regarded as a prodigy. Owing to the family's poverty, at age 13 Brahms had to begin contributing to the family's income by playing the piano in 'taverns, restaurants, and other places of amusement'.

In 1853 at the age of 20 Brahms em-

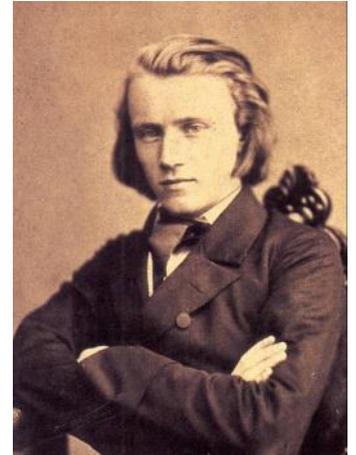
barked on a tour of Germany. By September he was in Düsseldorf, and plucked up courage to call on Robert Schumann. The 43-year-old Schumann welcomed the young composer and invited him to play something. Brahms played him his Sonata No. 1, and Robert called for his wife Clara, then aged 35, to come and listen. Clara later wrote in her diary: 'Here is one who comes as if sent from God!'

Two months after this meeting Schumann attempted suicide by leaping into the Rhine, and was committed to an asylum. Brahms hurried back to Düsseldorf to be by Clara's side, and subsequently he moved into rooms in the Schumann's house, spending his time consoling her and helping with the seven children. By now Brahms was helplessly in love with Clara. But he owed Schumann a great debt: Robert had made Brahms famous across Europe, declaring this student from Hamburg the coming saviour of German music. The situation was messy! In 1855, with Robert still in the asylum, Brahms wrote to Clara: 'I can do nothing but think of you... What have you done to me? Can't you remove the spell you have cast over me?'

In 1856 Robert died insane, leaving Brahms and Clara free to marry. But the happy ending didn't materialise. The couple went on holiday to Switzerland, but Brahms ultimately decided that he needed to live his own life, and that he could never marry Clara. His motto became *Frei aber einsam* – free but alone.

Clara was devastated, and she never understood why Brahms so ruthlessly turned away.

A young Clara Schumann, née Wieck



The young, and very handsome, Brahms

But she took up her performing career again, and for the rest of their lives they would maintain their strange but unbreakable connection. And if Brahms would not marry Clara, neither would he marry anybody else. He kept to a life of composing and performing, fell in love



Brahms at Clara's funeral in 1896

periodically with a number of women, usually singers, but always fled from them. None of them was Clara.

Brahms was a classicising Romantic, a loner who was a creature of the musical mainstream, a backward-looking artist who anticipated and inspired the future of music. The chaos of emotion shackled and subdued by a relentless sense of form and discipline: that is Brahms' art in a nutshell. His life mirrored his art.

And the most familiar and beloved note in his art is the note of yearning.

THE ELECTRIFYING ELIZABETH WATTS

There are many reasons why people should come to our concert on Saturday 26 November. Brahms' *German Requiem* on its own is worth coming out on a cold winter's night. But when you add to that two of the best young soloists in the country – well, *Strictly Come Dancing* simply offers no competition.

Baritone Marcus Farnsworth is well known to St George's, of course. As our President and former Assistant MD, Marcus has found time in his hectic international schedule to come and sing with us again. In *A Sea Symphony* he was joined by soprano Alison Rose. For this concert, his partner on stage will be soprano Elizabeth Watts.

With a voice described by *International Record Review* as 'one of the most beautiful Britain has produced in a generation' Elizabeth is now established as one of Britain's leading sopranos. Her debut recording of Schubert Lieder was hailed for its 'milky timbre and interpretative maturity', 'technical mastery' and 'radiant delivery'.

Elizabeth was a chorister at Norwich Cathedral, where her

first choral director happened to be Neil Taylor! She then went on to study archaeology at Sheffield University, before attending the Royal College of Music, after which a string of awards followed: she was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust in 2004, became a Radio 3 New Generation Artist, won the 2006 Kathleen Ferrier Prize, the 2007 Outstanding Young Artist Award at the Cannes MIDEM Classique Awards and the Rosenblatt Recital Song Prize at the 2007 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

'The glorious voice of Elizabeth Watts – now established as one of Britain's leading sopranos – more than justifies the purchase price.'
The Guardian

Since then Elizabeth has gone on to become an international star on the opera stage, in the concert hall and as a recitalist. From 2005–07 she was a member of English National Opera's Young Singers Programme, and has sung for the Royal Opera, Welsh National Opera and Glyndebourne. She is currently an Artist in Residence at the Southbank Centre, London and the recipient of a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award.

She has given recitals at Wig-

more Hall, Bridgewater Hall, Purcell Room, Aldeburgh Festival and Cheltenham Festival, and at prestigious venues and festivals throughout Europe. In 2014 she appeared in the *Last Night of the Proms* and she has sung with leading orchestras and conductors in the UK and internationally. Elizabeth was made an honorary Doctor of Music by Sheffield University in 2013.

'Watts' lustrous soprano is able to meet every expressive demand made of it.' *The Times*

Neil is thrilled that we have managed to engage Elizabeth to sing with us in the *German Requiem*. 'I've been looking for an opportunity to work with Elizabeth again, and I'm delighted that this is happening in St George's Singers' Diamond Jubilee Season' he said. 'It has been a delight to watch her career go from strength to strength.'

We are all extremely excited that Elizabeth has found time to sing with us and even more delighted that she will be joining Marcus in a recital of Brahms' songs in the first half of the concert.

This is a wonderful opportunity for all music lovers to hear one of the great young stars of the opera and concert stage. Don't miss it!



Elizabeth Watts

'You'll hear real bloom in the sound, a lyric soprano as ravishing as one could possibly want in this repertoire.'

International Record Review



'Watts' youthful radiant delivery with no flaws in technique that I can hear, fits many of the Lieder like a glove.'

BBC Music Magazine

DINNER WITH BRAHMS

Brahms' contemporaries often mentioned his love of food and drink in their remembrances of him. 'I live in Vienna as if I were in the country,' Brahms once told a friend. He ate his midday meal at the same restaurant every day: *Zum Roten Igel* (The Red Hedgehog), a famous tavern located at Wildpretmarkt 5, a two-minute walk from St Stephen's Cathedral, and the site today of the Hotel Amadeus. In its heyday the *Igel* hosted musical performances and was also favoured by Franz Schubert. But, hang the music. What about the food?

Composer Robert Kahn recalls that Brahms never ate alone; he always had two or three acquaintances with him, and the meal could be accompanied by jokes and prickly insults of all sorts.

Brahms was evidently fond of a highly-seasoned meat dish (possibly beef goulash) and the staff kept in the cellar a small barrel of the finest Hungarian Tokay for his private consumption. He was also known to have a special weakness for *Rindspilaw* (beef-pilaf), a simple peasant dish. His proletarian taste also revealed itself in the

homes of those who hosted him. The Kalbeck family noted Brahms' fondness for *Silsalat* (an Austrian herring salad), while a Dutch professor recalled his 'loud demands' for whitebait – a favourite fried food of the dockworkers. There was even a rumour that, when opening a can of sardines, Brahms would drink the oil directly out of the can.

Clearly, you can take the boy out of the Hamburg slums, but you can't take memories of favourite childhood foods out of the man.



Inspired by the Red Hedgehog, our craft supremo Alan Swain created a 'ticketometer' for the Brahms concert: Johannes only gets to the pub if we sell all the tickets...

The winner of the latest MACA (Most Appropriate Concert Accessory) Award for the *Sea Symphony* concert is Jo Bluck.

Many ladies took the sea as their principal decorative motif: ammonite necklaces, starfish earrings, and beautiful silver shell brooches and pendants. However, Jo spurned things nautical in favour of elephants, representing the Hindu god Indra from the *Rig Veda*. So, congratulations to Jo: out of left field as ever! Next concert: Brahms *German Requiem*. Now there's a challenge!



THE SOCIAL EVENING: JOURNEY INTO AN ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE

The 2016 Social Evening as usual turned up some musical gems – and some truly bizarre moments. Amongst the former were a beautiful rendition by Ian Banks of 'Meditation' from *Thais*; folk songs from Mel; regency dances by Kate on the flute (recently played on tour to Bulgaria!); an Elizabeth Poston song from Gillian; Chopin's Etude in E flat major by Pete; a piano solo from Rhiannon; and a surprising turn by Neil, who swapped keyboard for the trumpet to play the 'Habanera' from *Carmen*.

So far, so musical. More humorous offerings came from Chris Shelley, who took us back fifty years to the hilarity of Flanders and Swan with *Have some Madeira, m'dear*, and Michael Calam's traditional

McGonagall poem – this year a blessedly short one, *Loch Ness*.

From then on we were all beamed up into an alternative universe populated by rapping Egyptian pharaohs (Sarah and her mummies backing group) and homicidal refuse collectors, with Eric leading us in a round that involved trolley bus wire wipers and Biffa bin waggons. The evening ended with a large, undisciplined and grossly under-rehearsed choir in an SGS version of the George Shearing song *Live with me and be my love*. As the authorship of the words is disputed (was it Shakespeare or Marlowe?) both writers were brought in to



Brush up your Shakespeare - or your Marlowe

demonstrate their ability to turn a pretty phrase. The result? *Measure for Measure* meets *Comedy of Errors*.

Bridget was in the kitchen helping with the washing up when she thought she heard a distressed cat in the main hall



ACCOMPANIST EMBARKS ON IRONMAN JOURNEY BY PETE DURRANT



The first of an irregular series of updates from our brilliant (but plainly quite mad) accompanist, Pete Durrant

On 17 August 2014 I participated in my first ever triathlon, a sprint distance event in Salford Quays made up of a 750m swim, a 20k bike ride and then a 5k run. I finished 123rd out of 343 and was officially hooked on triathlon. Back in 2007, I was living with two girls in Didsbury and they decided that they, and of course I, would enter the Great Manchester Run, a 10k run from the city centre, to Old Trafford and back to a finish underneath the Beetham Tower. The following year, a male flat mate encouraged me to enter the Reading Half Marathon, so I did that as well, just sneaking under the 2-hour mark! I got a place in the London Marathon in 2013 on what was the hottest day of the year, and the race was an absolute disaster. I went off way too hard for the warmer conditions and ended up detonating by about mile 18; those last 8.2 miles were probably the hardest physical activity I've ever done. 4 hours 12 minutes 28 seconds. At that point triathlon came to my attention. I already pound-

ed the pavements, and I cycled as a commuter already: how hard could a swim before it possibly be? So I entered the Salford Triathlon 2014 and then look what happened! I am entered into Ironman UK.

'Ironman is a stupid, stupid idea, you have totally lost your mind', is the general reaction to this. It's a long distance triathlon incorporating a 3800m swim in Pennington Flash, a 112-mile bike around hilly Lancashire and then a marathon (26.2 miles) from Bolton's football stadium to Bolton (plus a lot of laps). At the end I get to call myself an Ironman and receive that priceless medal!

Spring 2015: I did the Manchester Marathon and had a much better time of it, dipping under 3 hours 30 mins; then that Summer I did my first Olympic distance triathlon (1500m swim, 40k bike, 10k run), again in Salford. This year I did my first Half Ironman distance race. Or so I thought! The organiser hadn't laid on any mar-

shalling, security or health and safety – so instead of the 1900m swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run, we took in a 3-mile run, 51-mile bike and 12-mile run to finish. The swim was cancelled the night before due to inclement weather, and 75% of the run was on uneven grass and mud. It was a day to forget.

Luckily I had also taken part in the 2016 Salford triathlon so there was a good race this summer. Indeed I was not the only member of SGS to participate in the race; David Morris of bass fame tweeted at me the day after saying that he had spotted me on the run. Sadly I hadn't seen him, tunnel vision and all that!

So between now and July 16 2017, in all the many hours of spare time I don't have, I will be swimming, cycling and running in an attempt to call myself an Ironman. It should take me 12–15 hours to complete the race. I'll write the odd training report update for future *Hemiolas* – so watch this space!

A SEA SYMPHONY – A STORMING PERFORMANCE BY JOE KEANEY

The combined forces of St George's Singers and the Stockport Symphony Orchestra delivered a turbo-charged performance of Ralph Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* to a rapt, near-capacity audience at the Monastery, Gorton on Sunday 26 June 2016.

With the support of two wonderful soloists, soprano Alison Rose and baritone Marcus Farnsworth, and conducted by Neil Taylor with his usual precision and elan, the Singers produced a dramatic, robust,



siniwey interpretation of the 1909 work as wave after wave of sound crashed around our ears.

From the opening 'Behold, the sea' until the shimmering conclusion as the sound of the cellos ebbed away, there was no doubt about the fire and commitment from both singers and orchestra.

There is a danger in such a heavily scored piece for the chorus to be drowned out, but the choir rose to the challenge, pulling off a performance of great intensity and drive.

The chorus demonstrated a wide and controlled range of dynamics, especially towards the pianissimo end of the scale, used to highlight key moments within Walt Whitman's text. They were particularly cohesive and balanced when it was shadowing the solo singing of Alison and Marcus. The way they duetted at 'O Thou transcendent' was a perfect blend, neither eclipsing the other, a wonderful marriage of harmony and musicality.

Marcus, with his crisp diction brought a sturdy oak-like gravitas to his performance, constantly communicating with the audience. It was Alison's warm emotional engagement with the text that really stood out for me. Her seemingly effortless ability to soar to a top B flat at 'Chanting our chant' was lovely and her singing at 'Bathe me, O God in thee' was honeyed bliss.

What a contrast too, was the gigantism of the *Sea Symphony* from the first half of the concert which gathered together *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* and the *Ave Maria* by Gustav Holst with Ekaterina Walter-Kühne's *Fantaisie on Themes from Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin*.

The St George's sopranos and altos were wistful, dappled and ethereal by turns, their musicality unforced and natural. The *Ave Maria* was particularly touching and engaging. The *Rig Veda* was accompanied by the melliferous harp playing of Louise Thomson. Her Walter-Kühne solo was delicate, intimate and warm.

All in all, a concert of great emotional depth with two very contrasting halves that showcased St George's Singers' ability to work on both a small and a large canvas.



Harpist Louise Thomson and our conductor Neil Taylor taking the audience applause



Our two wonderful soloists in *A Sea Symphony*, Alison Rose (aka Mrs Farnsworth) and Marcus Farnsworth (aka our President). There's nothing like keeping things in the family!

HOW ALISON ROSE TO THE OCCASION

The BBC's *Last Night of the Proms* was particularly interesting for St George's Singers this year, as one of our recent soloists was singing in the performance.

Soprano Alison Rose, who sang with us in *A Sea Symphony*, was one of sixteen young soloists specially chosen to perform Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*. The work was originally premiered at the Proms in 1938 when the soloists were hand-picked by the

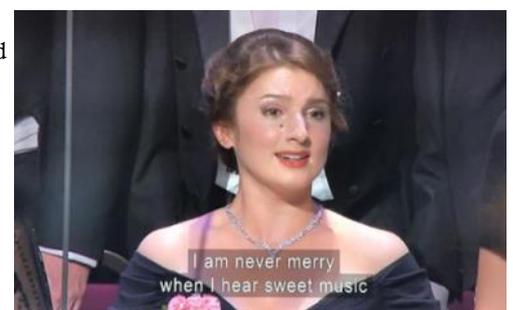
composer. The part sung by Alison this year ('I am never merry when I hear sweet music') was in 1938 given to Elsie Suddaby, a famous lyric soprano of the inter-war years and regarded as the equal of Isobel Baillie.

Born in Leeds in 1893, Elsie was a star of the concert hall for over 40 years. A pioneer of both broadcasting and the gramophone, particularly for HMV for whom she recorded many times, she was known as

'The Lass with the Delicate Air', after one of her most famous recordings. Elsie's voice is described as having a freshness and spontaneity all its own, and it is said her style and tone pre-echo that of today's Emma Kirkby.

Alison couldn't have better footsteps in which to tread!

Alison Rose



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



**Hot off
the
press!**

An evening with Maggie

The Choir was thrilled to have another fascinating workshop with renowned singer and voice coach Maggie McDonald. Instructing us on the use of every part of our bodies from toes to tongue, Maggie helped us prepare for the stamina-draining *German Requiem*. Just brilliant!

For our new members

A warm SGS welcome to a number of new members: soprano Kathryn Halsall, alto Erika Öhman and bass Alan Sykes all successfully got through their auditions and will be singing with us in the Brahms. For those whose auditions fell after our print deadline – good luck!

And for the older members

Congratulations to SGS members who have earned their stars and stripes. Ann Young (who has been unwell for some time, but is still much in our thoughts) and Susan Bayley both receive their 40-year award, whilst Ursula Birkett, Cath Bryant and Ali McLay have reached their 20 years. Magnificent staying power ladies!

A night at the Bridgewater ...

Members of St George's Singers joined young singers from Chetham's on Friday 8 July in a rousing performance of favourite opera choruses in the Bridgewater Hall. A wonderful evening all round – particularly

as we were able to sit in the audience to hear Chetham's orchestra play Mahler's Symphony No. 1 and the amazing young flautist, Mina Middleton in Nielsen's Flute Concerto.

... and a night at the Proms!

Well done to all SGS members who sang with Manchester Chamber Choir and the Hallé in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. You can come down from that top C now!

Wood Requiem success

Composer Christopher Wood congratulated SGS on their organisation and Neil in particular for his inspiring leadership in what he called 'the best Requiem workshop he's been to'.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO GEORGE BY URSULA BIRKETT



George on tour in Prague

George has been mascot to St George's Singers for 12 of our 60 years. He came into our lives during the St George's tour to the Baltic in 2004, an elk (or moose) with an engagingly soft nose, bought by tenor Mark O'Leary in Finland as a present for his young daughter. This

charming moose (or elk) was immediately showered with affectionate pats by all who came near him, and his return to the choir by kind permission of his new owner for subsequent concerts and tours was much welcomed. Ursula made him a dinner suit, to match the men of the choir, theirs being admittedly smarter than his.

On our next tour, to Hungary in 2006, including Poynton's twin town Erd, George came too, which led to a costume upgrade. At a shared Poynton/Erd choir dinner, a lady from Erd offered to make George a traditional Hungarian coachman's coat – measurements taken on several paper napkins. This was duly delivered, an intricate and elegant piece of cutwork, worth a close inspection, and came complete with

hat and boots. All this was accomplished with no common language, but with much goodwill, and George is now a Beau Brummel among moose (or elk).

Eventually Mark's daughter decided she had grown out of soft toys, however elegant, and George was offered to the choir on a more permanent basis. Helen Rollinson looked after him for some years, and when she left the choir, Ursula became his next hostess. She made a choir cotton bag – 'A Passion for Singing' – into a carrying bag, with leg holes for comfort and security, for travelling, (and also for hanging storage!). George has become a calm habitual traveller, well used to sleeping in less than perfect dignity, en route to the concert halls and even the cathedrals of Europe. How many other elks (or moose) have been welcome at Notre Dame, or the Bridgewater Hall?

To date he has come on all tours, and to most concerts since he joined us. He gets a new cap badge for every tour, as relevant to the venue as possible (Paris = Eiffel Tower, Lincoln = Imp, etc). He is an easy guest, undemanding and

uncomplaining, and can also be quite a conversation starter – why would there be a large brown moose (or elk) in a childless house in Disley?, for instance.

However, his present hostess by now feels it is time for him to join a new household. So ...

WANTED

**Good home for well-behaved pet
GEORGE**

An exceptionally calm house guest (with occasional bursts of activity).

**He has been
GIVEN NOTICE
by his current family, and seeks another.**

**He comes with the
BEST REFERENCES,
supplied on request,
and his own sleeping/
carrying bag.**

**Please apply to
Ursula Birkett (alto)**



George with landlady Ursula on tour in Edinburgh – taking tea in the café where JK Rowling wrote *Harry Potter*

PHIL EGERTON REMEMBERED

Tuesday the 18th of October's rehearsal was preceded by the sombre announcement that our beloved tenor rep, Phil Egerton, had died. It was a shock. We hadn't prepared for such an imperfect cadence. Of course, as he would have wished, we swallowed hard and sang with the professionalism and concentration that he would have expected of us. But it was still a muted evening.

Phil was a prince amongst men. Tall, and still very handsome, he was full of a positivity for life, that radiated an infectious enthusiasm, energy and delight in music and mathematics. He had become interested in singing by joining that loyal band of spouses, who come and support us by attending concerts, helping with marketing, doing front of house etc. But then he heard that there was also the St George's Singers golf division (the Dragons), largely composed of abandoned males, who equally support our tours by attending nearby golf courses

in the cities we visit, both at home and abroad. All that fresh air and exercise clearly gave Phil a taste for the whole choral experience, so he auditioned and, as a tenor, was of course, immediately accepted.

He blended in, both musically and socially, with the grace of a well swung driver. He was jovial and funny and witty and a terrific companion. He took to singing with the same enthusiasm that he applied to everything he did. He got a teacher, did exercises, prepared, practised and note-bashed – far more than most of us – so he very quickly became someone in the middle of the whole section on whom we could rely. It was a real privilege to stand next to him because he was so diligent and supportive, in everything, from music to chair shifting, repping, ticket selling and all those essential, unsung jobs that make a choir successful.

By trade, Phil was a mathematician and he was clearly a great

teacher, as I expect a generation of Poynton High pupils know. Jonathan and I found just how good he was, when, jokingly at first, we started to explore what numbers are. Phil patiently answered all our questions and scribbled on bits of paper till we had finally understood. After the Lincoln tour, the link between maths and music and awe culminated in two pages of neat, hand-written, algebraic equations. These Phil had used to derive, from first principles, the mystical number 'e'. 'And that's beautiful', he said as he looked down at the calculations. And it was.

'e' is an imaginary number, made up by human beings. It is infinite and has no ending. It was thus through friendship, music and mathematics, that Phil Egerton gave us a glimpse of this wondrous universe and all its infinities, which are held, alas, in our all-too-finite, human hearts.

We will miss him very much.

Eric Northey



St George's Singers' concert on 26 November, Brahms' *A German Requiem*, will be dedicated to the memory of Phil Egerton

MEET OUR NEW CHAIR: JOHN SMITH

When did you join SGS?

I have to confess that I cheated for a few years. In 2000 I was singing with the Taverner Choir in Halifax and the Chapter House Choir at York Minster. Stephen Williams was conducting the Taverner Choir and asked me to supplement the basses in a concert with St George's Singers. I cannot remember the programme (can anyone help me out?), but I do recall being made very welcome and thoroughly enjoying the concert, so when asked again I happily did so. My first tour was to Krakow in 2002 – again as a guest. After many 'guest' appearances, I finally joined the choir properly in 2005.

Who did you sing with before?

Taverner and Chapter House, York St Lawrence MVC, Halifax and Huddersfield choral societies, St Anne's RC Cathedral, Leeds. It seems rather a lot

of choirs, but generally I have sung with at least two choirs at once!

Have you always lived in Yorkshire?

Yes – born and went to school in York, met a Halifax girl and moved to West Yorkshire. Went to college in Huddersfield and then to Leeds University, and have lived in Halifax ever since. I prefer living in the Pennines to York, which seems far too crowded, and rather flat and boring now.

It's a long way to Poynton.

Are there no closer choirs? There are, but not as good, run as well and as friendly, as SGS.

What's your day job?

I'm a director of take2theweb – the company that has provided website services to the Choir for over twelve years. I started the company in 1999. After unsuccessfully attempting to 'semi-retire' for the last three years,

I'm now intent on persuading my business partner that it's time for me to actually retire.

What are your other hobbies?

I've been a magistrate for 15 years, and Chair of the Bench for three years, based in West Yorkshire. This has turned out to be a full-time job as well, but I will definitely be retiring from the Bench next April as I will be 70 – the age of compulsory retirement from the lay judiciary. The rest of my time is taken up by my four grandchildren.

How do you find time to sing – and practise!

Ah, practise! Neil keeps telling us to 'practise when we're on the bus', so I had better start using public transport more. My business partner and judicial colleagues (and my wife) might tell you that it's more about fitting work and court and home around singing, rather than the other way round.



Who are your favourite composers?

I would happily sing Bach all the time, especially all the double choir motets (and *Jesu, meine Freude* of course). Beyond Bach, I enjoy singing anything, from any period, provided it is musically rewarding.

There are a few works that I never want to sing again!

What are your hopes for St George's for the future?

Short term – sing more Bach! Long term – plan for another 60 years in a fast-changing musical culture.

A YEAR WITH THE FELLOWSHIP

BY JOE JUDGE



Fellowship singing from box at the Royal Albert Hall

As many of you reading this will already know, I have just finished my year as one of the eight Fellows of the inaugural National Youth Choirs of Great Britain Fellowship Scheme. The scheme provided me and the other Fellows with a variety of opportunities to develop our solo singing, consort singing, teaching, and conducting and choral directing skills.

In reality, this meant many a bleary-eyed, early morning Virgin Trains journey for me and fellow Manchester-dwelling Fellow, Aimee, as we headed down to London, where the rest of the gang were still fast asleep, waiting to roll out of bed to the next engagement. Actually, there was one Manchester date in the schedule, and I took great delight in turning up two minutes late, just to make the point, you know.

I jest; of course it doesn't all

happen in London! We were incredibly lucky to perform in Malta, Cornwall, Suffolk including Aldeburgh and Snape Maltings, Norfolk, Leicester, Nottingham, Cardiff, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Our year began with an utterly terrifying 'Launch Event', at the Royal Albert Hall's Elgar Room, in front of a packed audience of many of the choral Great and Good, family, and press. On top of having to perform, off copy, a piece in Haitian Creole, a funky new arrangement of the Arctic Monkey's song *Do You Wanna Know?* by the YouTube a capella sensation and founder of Accent, James Rose, and half of Bach's *Singet dem Herrn*, we had to present the evening by ourselves too. So, after completely forgetting my part of the script and freezing in front of said audience for what felt like five hours, not five seconds,

and owing to my occasionally useful ability to accurately identify and/or recreate any given aural integer, the easiest part of the evening was the Live Sight Reading, where, as you may have guessed from the title, NYC Director, Ben Parry, arrived on stage with an envelope containing nine scores of a piece entitled *My Spirit Sang All Day*, one for each of us and one for the overhead projector behind us. 'Ah, the Finzi, how lovely!' some of you might say. But no, this was a new composition written by Ben, designed to show off our supposed sight-reading ability to the audience. Thanks for that, Ben!

Naturally, the rest of the year was full of what I now consider to be highlights, and here are three that, for me, stand out from the crowd. In December, we had the huge privilege of being Artists-in-Residence at

Snape Maltings for a week, where we were coached on our solo songs and our performances of Bach *Magnificat in D* and this time all of *Singet dem Herrn*, by internationally renowned tenor, and, it has to be said, thoroughly nice chap, James Gilchrist.* He was unwaveringly positive in the advice that he gave to us, and he was brimming with genuine enthusiasm for sung music, particularly Bach (see his discography!). That week was topped off with a performance of the above pieces in the Snape Maltings concert hall.

In early June, we received guidance on audition preparation, and stagecraft, from a panel of



Fellowship launch with John Rutter



Camelot reception, Houses of Parliament

Masterclass with Kitty Whately and Roland Wood



Nick Sears (Head of Vocal Studies at RCM), Sam Evans and Lucy Schauer. The sessions in stagecraft that Lucy led focused on strength of performance, as each of us delivered an aria to the class. I don't claim to be anything of an actor, but Lucy gave me so much confidence to believe that I had the power to be that character: at the point of performance it is too late to think, I just had to be. I remember giving a final performance in that class of 'I know a bank...' from Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream* that I never thought I would be capable of, let alone it be the basis for plenty more development, and I'm very grateful for Lucy's work with us and the Fellowship Scheme for providing us with that fantastic opportunity. >>>

➤➤ In the end, it didn't matter to me at all that I spent all of 52 hours in Shanghai and 20 in Hong Kong, or that after landing at LHR 5pm Sunday I had a 6am Monday morning flight from LGW to Spain to catch. I can't complain in the least at the incredible experience of flying half-way around the world and performing in China's show-off city and the breathtakingly beautiful Fragrant Harbour. With a total of three hours in which to supersightsee Hong Kong, the Peak was sadly plagued with tourists (and being a tourist myself I thought this was desperately unfair), but for the equivalent of

twenty-eight hundredths of a pound sterling we did manage a trip on the famous Star Ferry; views that I will not forget in a hurry.

To sum up my experience as a Fellow of NYC: it will be hard for me to be as nervous as I was before the Launch. I'm grateful for the breadth of opportunity it gave to us. Not only do I have so much more confidence in my ability as a singer and a musician, particularly after the solo masterclasses, through osmosis and observation I now have a lot more hints and tips to call upon, greatly assisting my work as a choral director, singing

teacher, and consort singer. And I discovered that the MP for Cardiff West is an above average kazoo player.

Finally, I can assure you all, there really are seats available on the 5.55am Virgin Trains service



Conducting and ensemble masterclass with Harry Christophers

to London Euston! Although please don't sit there, as I like to lie across them and sleep (don't tell Mr Branson)!

[*St George's Singers remember James Gilchrist well: he sang with SGS in *St Matthew Passion* in 2006 – Ed.]

Hong Kong from Star Ferry



Teaching in Nottingham – launch of NYCGB new Widening Access and Engagement Partnership with Nottingham Music Hub

CAROLS FROM... NORBURY!

St George's Singers' traditional 'Carols and Brass by Candlelight' concert will this year be from a new venue: Norbury Church in Hazel Grove.

It is many years since the Choir gave a concert at Norbury Church, but we are delighted to be returning there in our 60th Anniversary Season.

Whilst the venue is new, the other Christmas delights are as traditional as ever. Following the success of our concert last year with SSBB The Youth Brass Band for Stockport, we have invited this exciting group of young musicians back to join us for another year's festive offering.

Bradshaw Hall Primary School choir will also be coming along to delight and charm us with their young voices and action-packed performance! Mince pies and mulled wine are of course an obligatory part of our carol concerts, as is the candlelight, and Choir members will as usual be baking special Christmas biscuits for the children.

One innovation this year is the introduction of a new 'family ticket'. Available for two adults with two children, family tickets cost £25, a saving of £5 on full-price tickets.

For those who don't know Norbury Church, it is located on

the A6 (London Road) in Hazel Grove. There is some limited car parking available at the church, but plenty of public car parking on the other side of the road from the church. (More detail in our Season Brochure).

The programme for the evening hasn't yet been finalised, but it will include some old favourites, some carols that will be new to many, and the opportunity for our youngest audience members to join in the fun.

And of course, we expect all the audience to be in good voice for the community carols!



10 December 2016, 7 pm
Carols and Brass by
Candlelight
Norbury Church, Hazel Grove
Tickets: 01663 764012
tickets@st-georges-
singers.org.uk
www.st-georges-
singers.org.uk
£12, £10, £3 children,
£25 family ticket

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

John Smith (Chair), 01422 359073
stgeorgessingers.johnsmith@gmail.com

Jacqui Smith (Secretary), 01625 875437
enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Susan Hodgson (Hemiola Editor)
susan.hodgson28@btinternet.com

Jean Egerton (Publicity), 01625 871371
publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk



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 CONCERT DIARY 2016-17 60th Anniversary Season

26 November 2016
Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem

10 December 2016
Carols and Brass by
Candlelight

22 April 2017
Diamond Anniversary Concert:
Six centuries of song

25 June 2017
Verdi *Messa da Requiem*

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

MANCHESTER SINGS!

Thursday 17 November 2016,
7.30 pm, Royal Northern
College of Music

Renowned bass Sir John Tomlinson (the RNCM's new President from January 2017) performs poems, madrigals and sonnets by Michelangelo, in settings by Britten, Wolf and Shostakovich. This semi-staged concert will see Michelangelo in his workshop, looking over his old writing, and reliving each piece in turn. The performance links music with visual art and is a fascinating evening of storytelling that explores the psyche of Michelangelo and his musings on wisdom, the joy and pain of love, creativity, death and immortality.

Tickets: £7-£18. Tel 0161 907 5555, www.rncm.ac.uk

Thursday 17 November 2016,
7.30 pm, Carole Nash Hall,
Chethams

Chetham's singers perform a variety of solo and ensemble works. Enjoy an evening hearing classical and modern vocal repertoire, performed by aspiring young singers.

£6, £5 conc.
www.chethams.com

Wednesday 30 November
2016, 2.30 pm, Carole Nash
Hall, Chethams

Baritone Marcus Farnsworth gives a public masterclass to young singers from Chethams.

£3, free to all students

Saturday 3 December 2016,
7.00 pm, St Ann's Church,
Manchester

St Ann's Ensemble presents Handel's *Messiah*, based on the score from the first performance in Dublin, and featuring Joe Judge as one of the soloists.

£15, £10 conc, £5 students

