



# Hemiola

St George's Singers

## ALAN'S SWAIN SONG

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### ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

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Just before St George's Singers Christmas Concert (Saturday 9 December), we formally bade farewell to our dear friend Alan Swain – Tenor. Alan is best known for his capacity to create practical solutions to our performances. In Issue 54, we learnt how he built our staging. A recent interview revealed more.

#### Tell us about your initial interests in music.

Music has always been important in my life. As a teenager in the forties I regularly tuned in to Hilversum Radio where I could listen to classical music. When I was 11, my musical friend and I heard a brass band in Sale. The following week we became members and so began my interest in making music. When living in London I started playing the mandolin just for fun. A church choir in Brixton got me interested in singing but for 20 years until I retired I didn't sing. A colleague at work tried over many years to persuade me to join his choir. On retiring I took up the offer and enjoyed about five years there.

#### You joined St George's in 1995 – why were we eventually blessed?

At a school staff party in my house, the new headmistress, who happened to be a member as well as the wife of the chairman of St George's Singers, tried persuading me to join her choir. At the time, I wasn't too pleased with things at my current choir, so I decided to go. The first rehearsal I attended was such an amazing improvement from what I was used to. The music was the *Chichester Psalms*, still one of my favourite pieces of music.

#### Who was your MD and accompanist?

The musical director was Ray Lomax, timpanist for the BBC Phil, and the new accompanist was Andrew Green from King's School Macclesfield. Also, I recognised my neighbours, Barbara and Campbell Begg, and Doug Whalley and his daughter, Alison Gunn, a classmate of my son in junior school. Having Ray as MD meant that often our 'backing group' were from the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra.

#### Any interesting memories of working with Ray?

Ray was not too pleased on one occasion, when, after a very successful opera concert at the RNCM, we were invited to sing at a Conta Opera evening. That particular evening, it was rather warm. We were being bitten by gnats, nowhere to sit, nothing to drink, and were not to be seen anywhere by the paying audience until our slot. Never again!

#### Most people know of your considerable contribution in the form of staging, building, etc. What was your background/training?

My ability to 'fix' things and construction comes not through training but from being dyslexic. About five years ago at the age of 78, in a conversation with Eric Northey's wife Julie, I discovered I had all the classic symptoms of dyslexia. This made me realise why I struggled at school in subjects like English, History, languages. There was no such thing as dyslexia then, you were just 'not very bright', even with a high IQ. Geometry, for me, was an easy game. At home, instead of reading, I would take apart anything mechanical such as chiming clocks or gramophone motors. Then after cleaning, reassemble them. Once I was the talk of Sale Grammar School staff room.



**Saturday 17 March 2017**  
**St George's Church, POYNTON**

**John Stainer** *The Crucifixion*  
**Henry Purcell** *Man that is born*  
*In the midst of life*  
*Thou knowest, Lord, our offences*  
*Remember not, Lord*  
**Orlando Gibbons** *Drop, drop slow*  
*tears*  
**Thomas Tomkins** *When David*  
*heard*  
**Antonio Lotti** *Crucifixus a 8*  
**T L de Victoria** *O vos omnes*  
**Ola Gjelleo** *Ubi caritas*  
**Bob Chilcott** *God so loved the*  
*world*  
**James Macmillan** *Lux aeterna*  
**Kenneth Leighton** *Drop, drop*  
*slow tears*

**St George's Singers**

**Conductor** Neil Taylor

**Organ** Pete Durrant

**Tickets:** £12, £10 concessions

£3 students / children / group

discounts

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## PASSIONTIDE CONCERT MUSIC

### PREVIEW OF STAINER'S *THE CRUCIFIXION*

John Stainer was one of the most distinguished musicians of his generation. In 1872 he was appointed organist of St Paul's Cathedral, where he raised performance standards and greatly expanded the repertoire. He was renowned for his considerable scholarship as a researcher into and editor of early music. He was regarded as one of the foremost composers of cathedral music, and was closely involved with the compilation of *Hymns Ancient & Modern*, as well as being music editor of several other important publications. He was an Oxford Professor, a general inspector of music education and held presidencies of several professional bodies. As organist, conductor, composer, teacher and author, the immense contribution that Stainer made to the music of his time can scarcely be over-estimated. As is so often the case, however, all this worthy

enterprise has long been forgotten, and today Stainer is remembered simply for *The Crucifixion* and a few rather fine anthems and hymn-tunes.

*The Crucifixion* ... was first performed in February 1887, conducted by the composer ... In composing *The Crucifixion*, Stainer's intention was to provide a Passiontide cantata written in a musical language and on a scale that would put it within the scope of most parish choirs. Its structure is clearly modelled on the scheme of choruses, chorales, recitatives and arias of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, which in 1873 Stainer had introduced into the Music for Holy Week at St Paul's. The Rev William Sparrow-Simpson, Succentor, and librarian of St Paul's compiled the libretto ...

The first performance ... was well received, but it soon attracted fierce criticism, both for its libretto and its music. The combination of Sparrow-Simpson's shortcomings as a poet and his excessively sentimental language was scarcely a recipe for literary success. Some of the music is also typically sentimental Victoriana, such as the 'Fling wide the gates' choruses ... Nevertheless, there are also passages of great beauty — the unaccompanied setting of 'God so loved the world', for example, which continues to be performed as an anthem in its own right ...

Stainer's setting of the seven last words from the cross, for four-part men's chorus, is highly effective, especially since it is followed by the stark, unaccompanied final statement from the tenor soloist, 'And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost' ...

How should we view *The Crucifixion* today? ... opinions are still

**John Stainer lost the sight in one eye, the result of a childhood accident, but this did not prevent him from becoming one of the leading organists of his age.**

sharply divided as to its worth. On the one hand there is the school of thought exemplified by this excoriating critic, writing back in 1971: 'Sparrow-Simpson's appalling doggerel set to Stainer's squalid music is a monument to the inane'. On the other hand there are many who would agree with the eminent musician Barry Rose ... who writes, 'To [Sparrow-Simpson's] words Stainer added his music, writing some of the most memorable hymn-tunes we shall ever hear, and showing a rare sense of understanding in painting the text with music that is both thoughtful and dramatic, whilst also giving us the sublime and unsurpassed unaccompanied setting of God So Loved The World.'

There is little doubt that Stainer's cantata falls far short of the high standards achieved by his contemporaries, Parry and Stanford. But let us not forget that Stainer's aim was a modest one: to provide an extended Passiontide meditation which ordinary choirs could perform and to which congregations could immediately relate. ... In this respect he was undoubtedly successful, as the enduring popularity of *The Crucifixion* continues to testify.

© John Bawden, MMus



Sir John Stainer

## PASSIONTIDE CONCERT MUSIC

### WHEN DAVID HEARD THOMAS TOMKINS

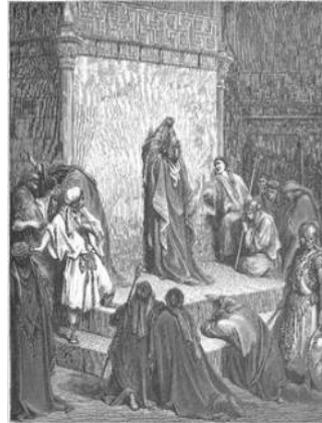
Once you know the kind of life Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656) led, you can understand why his music might sound melancholy. A devoted royalist, he was organist at Worcester Cathedral when it was desecrated by parliamentarians in the civil war, the same year as his wife died and his own house was hit by cannon shot.



Still he continued to write music.

*When David Heard* draws on the words from the Old Testament that tell of King David's grief on hearing of the death of his son, Absolon, with whom he had a tumultuous relationship.

In rehearsal, Neil Taylor helped the choir to interpret both music and text. David's grief is expressed in Tomkins' contrapuntal skill embedded within the various vocal lines, and the way in which melodic ideas almost fall over one another to be heard, such as the repetition of Absolon's name, or the words 'would God I had died' or 'O my son'.



*David mourning the death of Absolon*  
Wood engraving by Gustav Dore

If you listen closely, one interesting aspect of this work (and of the musical style at the time) is the constant change between major and minor that appears

to depict the alternating moods of grief, between deep sorrow and sometimes a state of euphoria.

Perhaps the most beautiful moments are in the quieter sections, in which the high tenor and alto entries carry a single line that develops into all five voice parts (SAATB) singing the phrases back and forth until achieving a homophonic texture at the end of the phrases.

**When *David Heard* was published in Tomkins's *Songs* (1622), a volume that bears a dedication to his master, William Byrd.**

### O VOS OMNES TOMÁS LUIS DE VICTORIA



Victoria is one of the most significant composers of the Counter-Reformation in Spain, a composer of sacred music in the late Renaissance, which reflected his intricate personality and expressed the passion of Spanish mysticism and religion. In comparison to his own master, Palestrina, Victoria's work includes quarter-note dissonances. He was a master at overlapping and dividing choirs with multiple parts with a gradual decreasing of rhythmic distance throughout.

**O vos ómnes qui transitís per viám, attendíte et vidéte: Si est dólór símíllis scút dólór méús.**

**O all you who walk by on the road, pay attention and see: if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.**

His melodic writing and use of dissonance is more free than that of Palestrina; occasionally he uses intervals which are prohibited in the strict application of 16th-century counterpoint, such as ascending major sixths, or even occasional diminished fourths. Hmm.

Despite the melancholy of the words, *O Vos Omnes* is a beautiful work.

A Canadian blogger, Andrew Moore, included *O Vos Omnes* in a weekly post, **Beautiful Song of the Week** (see box).

If you are catholic in your taste of music, you may want to have a look at the eclectic mix, written with Canadian humour.

#### BEAUTIFUL SONG OF THE WEEK

Polyphony used to be considered offensive. It's hard to imagine how two people singing different notes could possibly offend anyone, but there was a time when the Catholic Church decreed that anything other than Gregorian chant, or plainsong, was unsuitable. Pope John XXII had this to say about composers who used harmony:

These composers...cause great confusion. The great number of notes in their compositions conceals from us the plainchant melody, with its simple well-regulated rises and falls that indicate the character of the church mode. These musicians run without pausing. They intoxicate the ear without satisfying it; they dramatize the text with gestures; and, instead of promoting devotion, they prevent it by creating a sensuous and indecent atmosphere.' (From *Teachings of the Holy Father*, 1324)

With this in mind, songs like *O Vos Omnes* seem as rebellious as anything London produced during the peak of punk. So put on some ripped jeans, gel your hair into a mohawk, give yourself a *Palestrina 4 Life* tattoo, and enjoy this wonderful piece of polyphony by Tomás Luis de Victoria.

#### What makes this a beautiful song:

1. Often, a line begins with a single note, allowing the harmony to grow around it, and accentuating the polyphony.
2. At 1:48, most of the choir drops out, leaving just three voices.
3. It spends so much time avoiding thirds, that when it becomes decisively major or minor, it's always a surprise.

# PASSIONTIDE CONCERT MUSIC

## ANTONIO LOTTI: A LIFE IN DUCATS

The word *ducat* is from medieval Latin *ducalis*, relating to a leader or duke and initially meaning 'duke's or duchy's coin'. Following a series of debasements in the 13th century of the then Byzantine coin, Venice introduced first the silver then the gold ducat.

The Venetians modelled their ducat on the florin, but with a slightly higher weight. The Venetian ducat contained about 3.5 grams of 99.47% fine gold, the highest purity medieval metallurgy could produce. The ducats minted in Venice showed a representation of the then doge on one side; on the other, some representation of Christ.

In later centuries, depictions of Christ on coinage were replaced with the images and emblems of the current leader, duke, monarch, ensuring those who traded them were able to 'render unto Caesar.'

Antonio Lotti was born on 5 January 1667 and died on 5 January 1740 at the grand age of precisely 73. During his lifetime, he generated a prolific output of music, including a large quantity of music for the church. Before he reached the age of 30, he had achieved much. At the age of 20 it is believed that he started singing at the Cappella Ducal de San Marco in Venice – that's Saint Mark's Basilica to those of us without culture – and at 22, he's recorded as drawing a salary of 100 ducats for the position of *cantor di contralto*.

At the age of 23, he was nominated as assistant organist (*aiuto organista*) and paid an extra 30 ducats for the work in this role. Two years later, at the age of 25, he was unanimously elected to the post of second organist (*organista del 2 organo*). Thanks to the careful documentation of monies



spent and received by Saint Mark's, we are able to track some of Lotti's rising pay slips. At the age of 26, his first opera, *Il Trionfo dell'Innocenza*, was staged at the Teatro San Angelo. It is easy to imagine that at this stage the ducats would be rolling in. 20 of his operas were performed over the next 24 years.

At the age of 37, he made a request to take the position of first organist, 'with the salary and benefits he presently enjoys', following the death of Giacomo Spada. In 1714, Lotti married the soprano Santa Stella; her dowry

was recorded as being 18,600 ducats.

At the end of his life, records note that, on 3 January 1740, he was repaid 143 ducats for expenses relating to music during Christmas. On 5th January he died (of dropsy). On 9 January, letters were sent to the ambassadors of other city states, announcing the vacancy following his death.

The potential salary is not recorded. One can assume there was an urgent need for a replacement and the number of ducats was negotiable!

## DROP, DROP SLOW TEARS

Our programme includes two settings of a text by Phineas Fletcher, one by Orlando Gibbons and the other by Kenneth Leighton. *Drop, drop slow tears* was published in his 1633 collection *Poetical Miscellanies*. Fletcher, a pious poet in the spirit of Spenser and Milton, may not have known Orlando Gibbons, though they both served the church at King's College, Cambridge. The poem is based on the biblical text in Luke 7:38, in

The anointing of feet with perfume is often mentioned in other literature from the time of the New Testament; however, using long hair to dry Jesus' feet is not recorded elsewhere so should be seen as an exceptional gesture.

which a sinful (unnamed) woman comes to the Pharisee's house where Jesus is eating. She is weeping in regret for her sins, she brings ointment, and stoops to bathe his feet in her tears, then wipes away the moisture with her hair. She then anoints his feet with the oil.

Luke records Jesus' reaction to the woman, comparing her piety to the lack of hospitality from his host. He forgives her sins as she is truly penitent. The other gospel writers record a time when Mary, sister of Martha and brother of Lazarus, also anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. She is criticized for wasting money. However, Jesus is reported to have indicated she is preparing for his burial.

## KENNETH LEIGHTON

Kenneth Leighton, born in 1929 in Wakefield, always regarded himself as a down-to-earth Yorkshireman. He came from a working-class area of the town, but to parents who quickly recognised his musical ability and enrolled him as a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral, and he began piano lessons, making quick progress.



*Christ in the house of Simon* Dirk Bouts 1445

He went to Wakefield's grammar school, and by the age of 17, had already composed settings of poetry for voice and piano, including his first published work,

*Sonatina Op 1a*. In the same year, he obtained an LRAM in piano performance. A state scholarship to study Classics at Queen's College, Oxford, provided him with the opportunity to study for a degree in Music at the same time.

After some years in Rome, Leighton returned to England and took up the position of Reid Professor of Music at Edinburgh University.

He was a private, reserved man, who shunned the possibility of a career as a pianist, and used his university position for greater creative freedom and time to compose.

The composer Sir James MacMillan, whose work *Lux Aeterna* we will be singing as well, studied at Edinburgh during Leighton's tenure.

## ALAN'S SWAIN SONG

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We had to deliver unprepared speeches to the class. And, WOW! 10/10 for my illustrated talk on how steam engines work. I then had two double periods of woodwork every week - bliss and proved to be very useful part of my education.

### Any other benefits from being dyslexic?

Being dyslexic has advantages. We think about problems in a different, more spatial way. GCHQ are now recruiting dyslexic people. Alan Turing, the

code breaker and father of computing was, as was Albert Einstein.

Unfortunately my skills were not something I put to good use in my careers. Two 2-year periods in Post Office telecoms sandwiching my two year National Service as a radio mechanic in Singapore.

After four years with the BBC in London, I went on to 30 years in ITV, the last ten as a videotape editor. This last job gave me plenty of time off for doing many construction projects.

### Any plans for more singing?

Altogether it has been a wonderful 23 years in St George's Singers, being with such a talented and friendly group of people. What a super Swan Song to be able to sing at John Rutter's Christmas concert.

I've taken part in this year's and, hopefully, future Singing Days, and I will be on stage at the Clic Sergeant Brahms *German Requiem*. Twice monthly I go to Eric's Northern Voices, a non-performing group of about 14 singers, meeting in each other's houses.

AS / JB



## NEW MAN ON THE BLOCK

**St George's Singers is delighted that JONATHAN WRIGHT a fellow tenor, has agreed to take over the mantle of being the 'mild mannered man of engineering mystery' that Alan so wonderfully created.**

My first involvement with Alan and his amazing staging was in the summer of 2004, when the choir performed Charpentier's *Te Deum* and Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* in St Georges, Stockport.

I'd already got to know Alan quite well as a fellow tenor, but it wasn't until later that I discovered he was the creator of this staging. While reasonably handy myself, I'd never have contemplated something so ambitious – quite incredible!

Over the coming years, I've become more involved with the setting up of the staging at various locations and have enjoyed working with Alan, solving the various engineering and technical challenges which have inevitably arisen. Always one of the first to arrive, he'd often still be setting up the organist's vid-

eo link or sorting out the lighting when others who had 'done their bit' had broken for lunch.

During Tuesday rehearsals Alan has often been asked to provide advice on the latest DIY challenge.



'Any last minute tips, Alan?'

One tenor in particular was perplexed by the plumbing of his hot water system, which seemed to defy all logic, but Alan was happy to listen and offer solutions where he could. And I think this characterises Alan well – a gentle spirit, always ready to offer support and provide help where it's needed.

## A SENSE OF PLACE

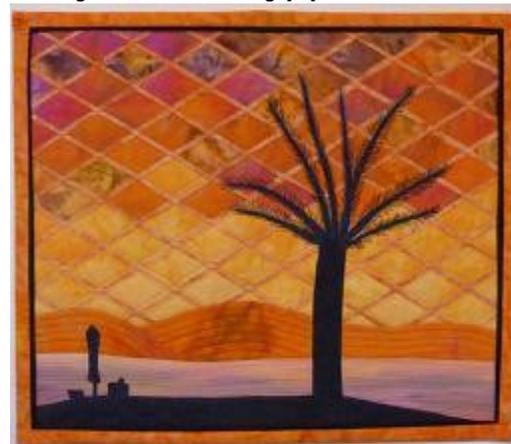
**A previous edition of Hemiola highlighted the work of JUDY TOMLINSON (Alto) in creating a banner for St George's Singers. Her other work will be part of an exhibition taking place in Macclesfield.**

The decision to develop my interest in working with textiles after I retired led me to join Intastitch, a group of textile artists who meet regularly at Bollington Arts Centre.

We have very different approaches and skills, and use a range of techniques – dyeing and printing fabric, embroidery, machine stitching, feltwork, painting, appliqué, patchwork, quilting and more.

The benefit of working and learning together is appreciated

Thoughts of a summer evening! [Ed]



The work I have contributed includes a set of twelve quilts showing aspects of my garden throughout the year.



Example of Judy's work

by all of us and has led to us taking part in a number of exhibitions.

Our current exhibition is each member's personal interpretation of a *Sense of Place* and is at the Silk Museum, Macclesfield until **31 March**.

# CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR FOR SGS



Our Christmas Season started in the week of 4 December, and ended our Singing Day on 20 January! Traditionally we start the **Poynton Festival**. This year was no exception, and we warmed up singing carols before our Tuesday rehearsal. On Saturday 9 December, a sturdy group of stagers met in the morning at **St George's, Stockport** to put up staging, decorations, cake tables etc, in prepara-

tion for our **Carol Concert**. Our afternoon rehearsal was followed by a concert that brought together the **children of Bradshaw Primary School** as well as the six members of **Chetham's Brass Ensemble**. We were all in good voice, and looking forward to keeping it that way for Sunday and Monday, when we worked with **John Rutter, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** and the **Chetham's Chamber Choir**.

The weather on Sunday 10 December was, quite frankly, beginning to look a lot like Christmas in Norway. A number of

our Derbyshire and Cheshire members packed overnight cases, wearing walking boots to the rehearsal in the **Stoller Hall**, and were hosted by friends living closer to Manchester. The rehearsal with **Mr Rutter** and **Chetham's** was an exciting lead in to the rehearsal and performance on Monday in the **Bridgewater Hall**.

After Christmas, we were straight back to rehearsals for an exhilarating performance of **Messiah**, followed the next weekend by our **Singing Day**.

Read all about it!

## CHRISTMAS AT ST GEORGE'S, STOCKPORT

Our annual Christmas Concert of Carols took place in the majestic church of St George's Church.

The choir has come to see this as their Christmas home, having regularly performed this annual service with brass bands, children, but never animals (to my knowledge) and have made it their business to



ensure the event marks the season of Advent for so many members of the audience.

This year, our repertoire was very similar to the music we would be singing in the Bridgewater Hall the following week, but also included a delightful arrangement of the *Winter Carol* by **Fiona Lander**, that we sang with the children of Bradshaw

Primary School, who had been put through their paces by Vicki Sutherland. We were also joined by Chetham's student brass players, who performed in two small groups, a selection of arrangements for brass.

As ever, the feeling of Advent was made even more powerful by the provision of candlelight and decorations surrounding the church, the aroma of mulled wine as well as the anticipatory taste of mince pies. As we have a number of children both performing and watching, a number of our cake-baking members created trays of cakes decorated in a whole range of vivid and unusual designs.



There were plenty of sheep adorning the icing on these cheerful buns, as well as a few random penguins.



All of the catering for our audience was delivered with military precision by teams of SGS singers, bearing trays of wine and mince pies, keeping our audience well fed and 'watered' in the interval.

Years of practice have brought this culinary delivery to as fine an art as the musical delivery of carols, Christmas songs and brass bands playing in the choir.

**A truly advent spirit.**



### 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

**Colly** is an Old English term for 'black', from the word 'colliery', meaning coal mine.

And **colly birds**, therefore, refer to the common blackbird.

One popular view is that '**collybird**' was a term specific to England and that Britain's former colonies dropped the word in favour of 'blackbirds'.



### TAYLOR'S CHRISTMAS TAGS

**Golden wings** - Goldaim, not golden - think prospectors as in, 'There's goldaim them 'ills'

**'Basses**, this piece is all about jowels'

**'Tenors**, you're a bit bright - pitch wise, that is.'

**Deck the Hall** - 'That's HALL - singular - there's no mentholypus in this carol'

# JOHN RUTTER AND THE BRIDGEWATER HALL

It was back in the first term of 2017, when the choir was told of the opportunity for us to sing under the baton of John Rutter, accompanied by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO), at his regular biannual concert in the Bridgewater Hall. What an opportunity, and one we did not want to miss!



John and Neil discuss the finer details of singing

Neil Taylor and our Chair John Smith made clear that we would need to be focused, committed, and plentiful in number, so that we could provide the quality and volume of sounds that Mr Rutter required at his Christmas concerts. So we signed up for it and began rehearsals.

composed for Suzi Digby and her choir Ora, and was released on Ora's Christmas Album December 2017.

Our first rehearsal with Chetham's Chamber Choir took place in the Stoller Hall on a bleak and snowy Sunday in December. Singing in the Stoller Hall again was a joy, made more so by the fresh young voices of the students.

Our joint pieces included a Rutter arrangement of *Twelve Days of Christmas*, which would later include the RPO. This piece moves skilfully through a variety of musical styles when reaching 'Five Gold Rings', and it took a great deal of concentration to move swiftly on to four calling birds, preceded by three sharp, quick beats on various percussion.

On the big day, Monday 11 December, the weather was not quite so cold, so a number came in early for pre-rehearsal lunch, and also posed happily outside with posters of the great event.

The afternoon was a rehearsal with the full Rutter team; the man himself, the RPO, Chetham's Chamber Choir and our first meeting with The King's Singers, whose youthful and exuberant walk on stage lifted all our spirits further than we thought possible!

Being veteran Bridgewater Hall performers we were aware of the necessity for careful watching of the conductor. We knew Mr Rutter was likely to be far away, and he was a long, long way away. But we benefitted from his expansive conducting and clear playing of the RPO.

We had previously been told that there were very few tickets left, that the concert was near-



From the stage to the auditorium.

ing a sell-out performance. In the evening, as some of us walked back from supper, we saw coaches rolling to a stop outside the Bridgewater Hall, and hordes of audience members piled out with a very Christmas spirit.

And they were a wonderful audience, made more cheerful by Mr Rutter's patter in

between items. We even took part in a Christmas Quiz, with cryptic and not so cryptic musical clues from the RPO.



The King's Singers entertained the audience as well as both choirs and the orchestra, with a variety of musical styles; smooth jazz, precise baroque and always an incomprehensible mastery of

making it all look so easy. Something we all keep trying to achieve!

Three hours after walking on stage, we walked off, most likely on air though a little weary, but all of us grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of this great event.



Pre-afternoon rehearsal lunch.

Being able to say 'Wagamama' went some way to assisting with *The Twelve Days of Christmas*!

Librarian Gwyneth Pailin rejoiced at the production of a single booklet of music by Mr Rutter's team, containing all we needed in one place; no searching, gathering, recording, or chasing to be done.

John came to rehearse with us on 14 November, and set us some high standards that we needed to meet by the time we met again in December.

Our programme of music included his first well known carol for choirs, *Shepherds' Pipe Carol*, as well as one of his most recent, *Suzi's Carol* that was



Excited singers pose by the poster



From auditorium to the stage in performance

Chetham's Chamber Choir gave an exquisite performance of *There is no rose of such virtue*, in which their female voices encapsulated the innocence of Mary.

**As we were leaving the stage at the end of the concert on Monday, one of the RPO percussionists said to me how good it was to work with a professional choir and how great we sounded. Susan Sawyer (Soprano)**

A few days later, we were delighted to read part of a **message sent to Neil from John Rutter.**

'Please give your singers my most humble and hearty thanks for their sterling contribution to Monday's concert. It's a helter-skelter ride to rehearse it all with the orchestra in those three hours, and your singers were real troupers. I do hope they enjoyed it, and so please tell them bravo and a very merry Christmas!'

## MEMORIES OF THE KING'S SINGERS

**Choir Librarian, GWYNETH PAILIN has strong memories of a King's Singers early performance in Manchester.**

'...and next year they celebrate their 50th anniversary', said John Rutter, announcing the six young men who filed on to the Bridgewater Hall platform. A ripple of amusement from the audience as these men are obviously not that old.

So – 1968 then! I had recently joined the Cantata Choir at Manchester Cathedral. At one rehearsal we were recommended to hear a new singing group who were performing there. So – I went!

I no longer have the programme nor do I remember what they sang except that the first piece was a *Cantata Domino*. By the time they had sung the first six notes I felt theirs was one of the most stunning sounds I had ever heard. I became a fan. I have quite a few vinyl records from the seventies – often with photos of the group. In later years there was contact with Nigel Perrin borrowing music for his choir from us. Brian Kay once played a request of mine on his radio programme and sent me a brief note.

Obviously the group has changed over the years but I like to think that I was at their first performance in Manchester. I never dreamt I would one day be on the same platform with them!



**JACQUI SMITH and JENNIE NICHOL had dinner with a King's Singer!**

In the break between the rehearsal and concert Jennie and I visited a nearby gastro pub to grab a bite to eat. Having sat for 20 minutes I went to ask if we could order, to then hear the waitress try to turn away one of the King's Singers as there were no single tables! We couldn't let that happen so invited him to join us—and he did!

Chris Bruerton was a true gentlemen and a pleasure to talk with. We learnt some fascinating things about how the group works together. Firstly, there are only the six of them, no stand-ins or back-ups. They have a strict regime when on tour; exercise (lots of it) and alcohol (none of it).

Secondly, they perform about 250 concerts/gigs a year but have a three-month period off from touring. As they perform together so regularly this is their practice; they don't meet in between for other rehearsals.

The group is very self-contained with each member picking up a key role: publicity and education, branding, logistics, HR etc. Some of these are quite onerous, with travel arrangements changing all the time.

They had flown in from Geneva on the morning of the Christmas Concert. They should have flown in the night before but the flights were cancelled and they were lucky to arrive for the afternoon rehearsal.

Being part of such a prestigious group is a big life experience for many who join the ranks of the King's Singers. Some of the Singers are still very young, under 20, and it's not just the touring, but picking up the responsibility of a key role alongside and also learning to live on their own – cooking for themselves etc, and especially managing the touring lifestyle, which is one of the biggest challenges.

So, when our food finally arrived with 5 minutes to spare before we needed to be back at the Bridgewater, we bolted everything down with a big grin on our faces.

It had been a pleasure to speak to Chris and to share our 'Top Table'. Every cloud has a silver lining.

## A NEW DAWN

**DAWN GARFITT (Soprano) has given herself a creative challenge. After 35 years of teaching general Art & Design, she took early retirement, to start creating her own art work again.**

My first challenge to myself was to enter work for Stockport Art Galleries 2015 Open Exhibition. I decided to go back to themes that have inspired me since A-level and throughout my degree; colour in the landscape and gardens at different times of the year.

I visited local parks, National Trust properties, stately homes, RHS Gardens and North Wales. Drawing is my first love, so I started sketching with pencil, then included pencil crayon, oil pastel and used watercolour pans. I took photos to work with the images back at home.

From these studies I produced a textile piece based on spring colour and an oil



pastel piece based on autumn colours. I entered both for the Stockport Open and to my surprise, both were accepted. This gave me confidence to

pose another challenge; to improve my painting skills.

As a textile artist my understanding of the properties of paint is not as extensive as I would like, so I looked for input and advice from others. I found a class run at the Parsonage in Didsbury and joined it in 2016. From these classes I have learnt techniques I didn't even know existed and intro-

duced to artists I had not heard of before, opening up new possibilities and ideas within my work.

Key to all of this is being pushed out of my comfort zone! When my tutor told me I should put on a solo exhibition, my first reaction was to panic, to say no. But I'm having to practise what I've been teaching all my life, 'You won't know unless you try it out.' I realised that I had nothing to lose!

It was hard work producing 20 pieces for an exhibition on my own in just over a year, but the self-discipline required has had a positive effect on my focus. I've found working under pressure motivating. Peoples' reaction to my work has also been positive, which has built up my confidence further. And so now for my next challenge?



# MESSIAH IN NORBURY CHURCH

Our performance of *Messiah*, at Norbury Church on Saturday 6 January was heralded not by professional reviewers, but by an audience who told us they had just witnessed one the best performances of the oratorio that they had ever seen.

This concert was the last of the 'festive' season, but the choir was focussed and committed to delivering a performance that reflected the training we had been given by Neil Taylor. He had continually revisited our pronunciation of key text, drawing out the word endings,

**'What was so good about [the performance] was that you could hear every word.'**

diphthongs, syllables etc, as well as keeping us focused on the musicality of the piece.

Our soloists came from our friends in The Turton Consort, and we were grateful to Monica Marciato who stood in to cover soprano sickness at 12 hours notice!



Graham Eccles, our organist, played magnificently, coping with interesting sight lines with the use of a low-tech vanity mirror to ensure he stayed in touch with Neil.

However, the environment of Norbury Church really did lend itself to the spirit of the piece.



Although we may not have resembled the first performance in the Music Hall in Fishamble Street, with a great deal of planning and stage assembly, we were able to ensure that our audience in both the lower pews as well as the gallery, had a view of the choir tiered across the altar area

**'My friend commented on the drama we brought to the piece and in particular 'He trusted in God' which she felt was breath-taking.'**

# SINGING DAY 2018 CREATION PART I AND II

Ursula Birkett reported the comments of her friends from another choir, who came to our Singing Day for the first time. 'They said how wonderfully stimulating it was, as well as hard work, and praised Neil and his teaching skill (and his hearing!), Pete for

his amazing dexterity and cheerfulness, the soup (of course), the cakes (naturally), the hard work and efficiency behind it all, and the warm welcome from all the members. That sounded pretty comprehensive

to me, not many bases untouched. Oh, and they enjoyed the music, too.'

Our Singing Day on Saturday 20 January was, as ever, well attended and an example of SGS teamwork and team spirit. A happy band of volunteers, cooks, furniture movers, registrars, music handlers,



Not the hokey cokey, but the warm-up

conductor and accompanist and soloists all worked enthusiastically toward a great performance of *The Creation* in the evening. A significant number of those who attended have commented on the hard work, but also the *joie de vivre* that accompanied it, making it a strenuous day, but one that held humour, intensity, friendship and great soup and cakes! We were aware that we had a number of people from Marple Choral Society, and that they will be hold-

ing their own Singing Day later in March – they took away a good understanding of the work that is involved.

And Ursula's friends? They have both been to a Tuesday SGS rehearsal since the Singing Day, which shows real keenness, coming all the way from Buxton.



A happy band of ladlers!



Pete 'Fingers' Durrant pre work out!



'Fancy a ticket from the tombola?'



Neil and our Soloists

# ST GEORGE'S SINGERS RUNNING, WALKING & CYCLING

## WALKING IN WALES

**BRIDGET (Alto) and JOHN Bass) OVEY are known for their love of walking. Last year they took a walk in Wales – quite a long one.**

Llwybr Arfordir Cymru / Wales Coast Path

The path around the coast of Wales was opened in 2012, 870 miles long and divided into 8 regions which begin in Chester and finish in Chepstow.

People ask which section we prefer, but that's an impossible question. The variety of landscape and terrain makes the whole path full of interest. Three years ago, May 2015, we walked the first 300+ miles which included 2 rather spectacular sections, the Isle of Anglesey and the Llyn Peninsula. The path was often very close to the edge of the cliffs, very exciting and sometimes scary as at that time, we were still carrying everything we needed for a month. With strong gusts of wind, when the path is narrow and close to the edge, the weight of the rucksack can add to the feeling of vulnerability.



Last September 2016 we began in Llwyngwrl and walked to Freshwater East, so that stretch included an inland trek around the Dyfi Estuary as well as the stunning coastline of Pembrokeshire. Many more walkers were encountered there as it seems to be one of the most popular sections. That was the first time we took a separate suitcase which was moved on by 'walkalongway.com' and was always there

when we arrived at the B & B. Carrying just waterproofs, first aid, food and water made a huge difference to us both.

Recently we completed the path, from Freshwater East to Chepstow, 22 days walking + a day off with cousins out in the valleys of South Wales. This year included the Gower Peninsula which had spectacular views, wonderfully empty beaches, and some warn-

ings about adders! The South Wales section, also beautiful, was really full of interest. Contrasting with the steel works at Port Talbot, it boasts the second highest sand dune in Europe, rising up to 200 feet. The little village of Ogmore used to be called Sutton and the stone quarried there, renowned for its hardness, has been used in the Houses of Parliament and the Vatican!

What makes the walking so special? John says it's the rhythm of life, the continuous walking, freeing up the mind, taking in the beauty of nature, being out all day in the fresh sea air, the variety of accommodation and interesting people we meet along the way. Life is simplified, brought into a new perspective.



## RUNNING WITH RACHMANINOV

**LORRAINE LIGHTON (Alto) ran a half marathon last year, and the Vespers gave her an added boost!**

If anyone had told me six months ago that I could run 13.1 miles non-stop and enjoy it, I would have laughed in their face.

A 'friend' suggested we give the Manchester Half Marathon a go, so I signed up and downloaded a training plan aimed at finishing in 2 hrs 30 mins. From time to time I'd look at the plan and feel guilty about all the extra rest days I'd taken.

A few months later, on 15 October, I lined up with 17,000 other runners, wondering how far I could go before my legs gave up and I had to walk. We set off and the mile markers came and went, and to my surprise I found myself overtaking the 2hr 15min pace setter half-way round.



I then found myself sprinting past tired joggers for the last 2 miles.

I crossed the finish line in 2 hours 11 minutes 25 seconds, not a world record but pretty fair for an old woman running her first half marathon.

So what has all this to do with Rachmaninov?

Some people listen to music as they run, I had an ear worm repeating over and over for the whole 13.1 miles:

*Blagosloven esi, Gospodi, nauchi mya opravdaniem Tvoim!*

# ST GEORGE'S SINGERS RUNNING, WALKING & CYCLING

## ON YER BIKE – TALES FROM THE ACCOMPANIST'S SADDLE

I write to you from my indoor turbo trainer where I'm doing an hour of low resistance, high rpm! [That's revolutions per minute for the less athletic amongst you. Ed]

Training for an Ironman competition takes up a lot of time. I would say that at this time, on average, I am training for about 10 hours per week. And this is how I use those 10 hours:-

**Two runs** of an hour, and one longer weekend run.

**Two bike sessions**, one easy 'spinning' session and another longer weekend ride.

**Two or three swims** of 2500-3000m length.

**And one 'brick' session (bike and run)**, which is usually a 45-minute bike session and then straight into a 15-minute run.



Moving forward, in the next few weeks, the outline of the training plan will stay the same but the length of the weekend ride and run will increase.

I do the sessions with a heart rate monitor and so far most of the training has been at about 65% of my max heart rate!

*Whilst gearing up for an Ironman competition, Pete has also managed to squeeze in writing a Requiem.*

Over the past 10-15 years I haven't been able to do any composing at all, but had formulated some ideas in my head. I decided to write a Requiem, partly to gather all this music in my head together in to one piece, and also to be able to actually write something down!

I wrote this Requiem between mid December 2017 and the first week of January

this year. It is in seven movements, around 35 minutes long. I would describe it as being somewhat neo romantic, with some jazz influences.

The performance will be taking place in early May in Leek. **St Edwards Church, 6 Church St, Leek ST13 5SB, Saturday 12 May, 7.30pm.**

If anyone would like to come to sing in it (especially basses...) that would be terrific! Rehearsals are on Fridays 7.30-9. If you can't make rehearsals but would like to come, then it would be amazing to have some friendly faces in the audience! If you can't do either, there will be a recording made, and you never know, maybe I can persuade Neil to put it on the concert schedule for St George's Singers in the near future!!

**Pete Durrant**

## WALKING TOGETHER IN PERFECT HARMONY



The social side of choir has been important to St George's Singers from the start. Recently we had two walks, one around Whaley Bridge and one on Kinder on New Year's Eve, when seven of us met and had the most glorious two-hour walk along the reservoir and up to the shooting lodge, with magnificent views of Kinder Downfall, blue, clear skies, sunshine sparkling on the water.

One of these walks was preceded by lunch in a pub and the second one with a wonderful lunch in a cafe in Hayfield.

**Sarah Lionheart (Soprano)**



## St George's Singers

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*Hemiola* is sent to all Friends of St George's Singers, and a digital version goes to those on our Mailing List. To receive a regular copy, complete the Mailing List registration on the website, or contact the Publicity Officer.

St George's Singers was formed in 1956 by Rev Eric Chapman and Geoffrey Verney, organist and choirmaster of St George's Church, Poynton in Cheshire, where the Choir still rehearses every Tuesday night. Geoffrey's dream was to build a community choir, capable of performing major choral works to a high standard and which would attract singers and audiences from neighbouring towns. Geoffrey died in 1964, but his legacy was nurtured by his successors Duncan Eyre, Ray Lomax and Stephen Williams, and is continued by our present Musical Director, Neil Taylor.

St George's Singers is recognised as one of the leading and most innovative choirs in the North West of England, performing an astonishingly varied repertoire, and with around 100 members drawn from an area far beyond the community of Poynton. We present at least four major concerts a year, in venues including The Bridgewater Hall, Gorton Monastery, The Stoller Hall, Manchester Cathedral and Royal Northern College of Music, hold annual Singing Days, and tour regularly in the UK and abroad.

St George's Singers continues to explore and expand the boundaries of choral music, and communicating the sheer enjoyment of singing together. Entry to the Choir is via audition, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

### ST GEORGE'S SINGERS CONCERT DIARY 2017-18

17 March 2018

Music for Passiontide  
St George's POYNTON

23 June 2018

Durufié *Requiem*  
St George's STOCKPORT

5 July 2018

Elgar *The Music Makers*  
Bridgewater Hall

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)

## MANCHESTER SINGS!

### *Hansel & Gretel*

Saturday 17 to Sunday 25  
March, RNCM, 124, Oxford  
Road, Manchester, M13 9RD

Based on the **Brothers Grimm** story, this deliciously dark interpretation of the well-loved fairytale by Engelbert Humperdinck, will be devoured by anyone with a wicked sense of fun and fantasy.

Directed by Stephen Metcalf, this coming of age tale is brought to life in the back streets of 1890s Manchester.

### Howarth Series: Marcus Farnsworth Masterclass

Wednesday 14 March, 2:30-  
4:30pm, Carole Nash Hall,  
Chetham's School of Music.

An opportunity to see our President lead a masterclass of the new generation.

**Manchester Chamber Choir:  
Programme of English Part  
Songs** Tuesday 24 April 1:10pm  
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.

**Bridge** *Music when Soft Voices  
Die; The Bee, Britten; Five Flower  
Songs, Parry; Four Songs of  
Farewell*

### *Requiem* by Pete Durrant

Saturday 12 May, 7.30pm.  
St Edwards Church, 6 Church  
St, Leek ST13 5SB

An opportunity to see the premiere of our accompanist's first Requiem. More details from Pete on Page 11!

