



# Hemiola

St George's Singers

## WHITTINGHAM LIVES BY ERIC NORTHEY

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*Whittingham Lives* is a two-year arts and heritage project, focused around mental well-being. It has music, literature, digitality and visual elements all rolled into it. Whittingham Asylum, near Preston, was part of the national network of asylums, built in the mid-19th century to house 'pauper lunatics'. At one time it had over 3500 patients and, like most asylums, it had a farm, brewery, machine shops, railway station, laundry etc. to provide meaningful work for the patients there. It also had a full orchestra, a dance band and a choir which put on full scale musical productions.

That's what really got me started – besides my love of falling asleep in public libraries. Lancashire Archives holds a huge collection of Whittingham's photographs, medical records, personal stories, military and pauper admission documents, finance reports, visitors books etc, much of which is still unexamined.

A group of us from the NHS, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), the archives' staff were so intrigued that we formed the *Whittingham Lives Association*. We applied for funding from the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to see if we could find ways of celebrating this rather hidden aspect of medical and social history.



In the funding bid, I specifically asked for money for St George's Singers, so that we could commission a new choral piece, on a general theme of 'madness, whatever that is. So, by now



*Whittingham lives*

our choir members will have been introduced to *War's Embers*, by Sasha Johnson Manning; 10 choral settings to words by Ivor Gurney.



Gurney was one of the saddest victims of the First World War. Gifted as both a composer and a poet, he had mental health problems from childhood which were exacerbated by fighting in the trenches, where he was both wounded and gassed. He spent the last fifteen years of his life in various asylums, including nearby Winwick Asylum. He died in Dartford Asylum in 1937. *War's Embers* is a beautifully integrated choral suite of 10 pieces which we'll be privileged to premiere at the Royal Northern College of Music, appropriately, in our November concert, as that coincides with the centenary of the Armistice which at least ended the madness of the killing.

But, as part of the publicity drive around that concert, and the wide range of events of *Whittingham Lives* that are being held in Preston, we are holding a **Singing workshop on Saturday September 29<sup>th</sup> at Preston Minster.** >> Page 4

### 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:

Robert Brooks

#### ACCOMPANIST:

Peter Durrant

Registered Charity no 508686

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

**Saturday 23 June 2018**  
**St George's Church, Buxton Road,**  
**STOCKPORT**

**Maurice Duruflé**  
*Requiem*

**Ildebrando Pizzetti**  
*Messa di Requiem*

**Sasha Johnson Manning**  
*War's Embers - selected pieces*

**St George's Singers**

**Conductor** Neil Taylor

**Organ** Pete Durrant

**Tickets:** £15, £12 concessions

**£4 students / children / group**

**discounts**

**Tel : 01663 764012**

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

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## MAURICE DURUFLÉ *REQUIEM*

The last time St George's Singers performed Duruflé's *Requiem*, was October 2006 and our first concert under the baton of the new Musical Director, Neil Taylor. The baritone soloist at this performance was one Marcus Farnsworth, who features on page eight of this edition.



Written in memory of his father, Henry, Maurice Gustave Duruflé composed his *Requiem*, *Op. 9*, in 1947. He belonged to the generation of French composers who came under the influence of *Gregorian* chant, and, according to Duruflé, his text was based exclusively on themes from the Gregorian funeral mass. He intended his *Requiem* to be intimate, peaceful and loving; it is an undoubted choral masterpiece, an intensely

moving and personal setting of the requiem text. Although based on plainchant, it possesses sumptuous harmonies and lavish orchestration.

Maurice Gustave Duruflé's musical career began in the choir of Rouen Cathedral and after training at the Paris Conservatoire continued in the realm of French religious music. Primarily an organist, he played in the leading Parisian churches and toured widely throughout Europe. His compositions include a few pieces for organ from the early part of his career and some instrumental and orchestral works. He is best known for the 1947 *Requiem* for two soloists, organ, chorus and orchestra.

The *Requiem* started life as a planned set of organ pieces on the chants for the Mass of the Dead. It had been commissioned six years earlier under the Vichy regime but Duruflé was still working on it in 1944 when the regime collapsed. When his publisher asked him to produce the mass, he had the opportunity to expand on this original organ material.

Using Fauré's *Requiem* as his model, he chose similar text, for example taking the last two

lines of *Dies Irae*, (*Pie Jesu, Domine, dona eis requiem*) and set them as a short, tender mezzo-



soprano solo.

The composer wrote that, 'sometimes the musical text was completely respected, the orchestral part intervening only to support or comment on it; sometimes I was simply inspired by it or left it completely, for example in certain developments suggested by the Latin text... I have sought above all to enter into the characteristic style of the Gregorian themes... to reconcile... Gregorian rhythm as it has been established by the Benedictines of Solesmes with the demands of modern meter.'

There are three versions of *Requiem Op. 9*. The 1947 accompaniment by a large orchestra was followed by a further version for organ only. In 1961, Duruflé rescored the work for a small chamber orchestra.

## THE 'SECRET' FIRST WIFE

It is an open secret that Maurice was married before marrying the virtuosic organist Marie-Madeleine Chevalier, 15 years his junior, who was quick to gain an international reputation as his primary interpreter.

Lucette Bousquet married Maurice in 1932. Despite being sometimes described by members of the Chevalier family as 'not mentally balanced', Lucette had a long, prodigious career as a pianist and teacher, developing the vocations of a number of several accomplished artists at the time. Lucette was by his side for at least 15 years, the period during

which he composed his most famous masterworks.

Marie had known Maurice professionally for a number of years, never 'courting', when he proposed unexpectedly. She had three terms before agreeing to marriage, one of which was for her to continue practising her Roman Catholic religion. As such, the church's annulment of his marriage to Lucette was a necessary condition, in addition to a civil divorce. Marie Chevalier's Catholic piety clearly would not countenance her marrying a man still married in the eyes of the church.

Maurice's first marriage ended in civil divorce in 1947, but was only declared null by the Vatican on 23 June 1953, due to a backlog of settlements on the marital status of hundreds of couples whose men had not returned from the war.



Marie-Madeleine and Maurice

# ILDEBRANDO PIZZETTI *MESSA DI REQUIEM*

2018 sees the 50th anniversary of the death of Ildebrando Pizzetti. Neil Taylor has had a CD of Pizzetti's *Messa di Requiem* but for some time only ever listened to the other work on the disc. It was last year that a former colleague spoke about it, and, on listening to the piece, Neil realized SGS had to perform it.



Industria Mimeri

Pizzetti's *Messa di Requiem* is probably his masterpiece. Written in 1922 for a *cappella* choir it employs neo-Renaissance techniques to the text of the Requiem Mass and, like the Duruflé, employs familiar plainchant melodies.

The son of a piano teacher, the young Ildebrando showed an early inclination towards the theatre, and later developed professional relationships with those who nurtured his operatic tendencies. In particular a collaboration with playwright and librettist Gabriele D'Annunzio, led to his composition of *Fedra* in 1915, a dramatic opera based on Greek tragedy involving jealousy, sacrifice and the slaying of Hippolytus by his horse. The opera was premiered at La Scala, alongside other of his works.

However, by the 1930s, Pizzetti's opera output suffered because of his strict adherence to his

own music-dramatic theories that he had developed in the early 1900s. His works became dogmatic and repetitive. Along with Respighi and other reactionaries, he signed a manifesto in December 1932, that attacked progressive trends and recommending a return to tradition. He did return to some level of creativity post World War II, but his operatic success remains that of his early career.

Ildebrando was known and famous as a music critic, conductor, music school professor as well as a writer of vocal, instrumental and orchestral work. Although



Pizzetti is relatively unknown outside of Italy, his compositions were, and still are, significant in his own country.

In addition to opera, Pizzetti is famous in Italy for a number of epic film scores, grand guignols that told stories of war, slavery, tempestuous love and elephants. Yes, war elephants of Hannibal.

The 1914 film *Cabiria*, that tells the story of a slave girl in Carthage, contains an original composition by Pizzetti, a ten minute piece that accompanies the *Invocation to Moloch*, when 100 children are sacrificed to the god of Carthage.



## *MESSA DI REQUIEM*



While his close contemporary, Respighi, was luxuriating in orchestral colour, Ildebrando Pizzetti was following an increasingly austere path largely divorced from the musical world of his contemporaries. He had a respect for tradition with a particular interest in Renaissance polyphony and Gregorian chant, although the *Dies Irae* is the only section with uses plainchant.

The main difference between his and Duruflé's *Requiem*, is that Duruflé used real plainchant; Pizzetti seems to have composed his own plainsong using the modal system and triplet melismas characteristic of this style. However, his early love of theatrical works manifests itself in dramatic elements in the piece, particularly in the *Dies Irae*, with dramatic outbursts of 'Rex tremendae' and 'juste iudex'.

Pizzetti composed *Messa di Requiem* during a period of professional and personal transition. The period of its composition, from November 1, 1922 to January 2, 1923, coincided with the end of two significant tenures. He assumed his new position as

director of the conservatory in Milan shortly before completing the work.

This transitional period was also marked by the loss of Pizzetti's beloved first wife, Maria Stradivari, who died unexpectedly in 1920; the *Messa di Requiem* was written in her memory.

The requiem was published just one year after Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G Minor* and comparison with the two pieces are often made, that they are both 'backward looking', drawing on the 16 century polyphonic techniques and modal tonality.

I do not know if, without a commission, I would ever have composed a *Messa di Requiem*. At the time of writing it, I was in such an emotional state that I became overwhelmed by the tremendous immensity of the text. Time and time again I asked myself why I had returned to set religious texts to choral music. Was it because of a desire to believe in something extra-terrestrial beyond my comprehension? Or was it because of my need for the hope of peace?...

Was that feeling of resignation, though, provoked by my inability to comprehend the meaning of our present existence or the mystery of the afterlife?

**From Ildebrando Pizzetti: *Cronologia e bibliografia* by Bruno Pizzetti, son of Ildebrando (1980)**

# WHITTINGHAM LIVES

◀◀ Page one Preston has a great number of very fine buildings, but I think one of the nicest is the Minster, which has a lovely acoustic for choral singing. We intend to involve as many people as practicable, particularly from the Preston area and particularly mental health service users.



St John's Minster, Preston

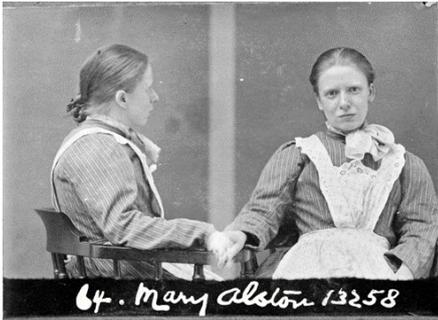
We have invited singers from the Preston Community Choir, Preston Orpheus Choir, UCLan staff choir, Preston Cecilians (conductor, one Robert Brooks!) and are actively seeking singers from service user groups across the Fylde area.

We hope to sing work related to mental health and to introduce some of Sasha's settings to a wider audience – perhaps to build up interest in our premiere, at the Royal Northern College of Music in November.

And, above all, we hope to have some fun. So, do come and join us!



Whittingham Asylum cricket team



## WAR'S EMBERS SASHA JOHNSON-MANNING

Sasha Johnson-Manning first came to our attention of St George's Singers when, in 2001, we commissioned her to write a piece for the choir.

Sasha's three-movement setting of Psalm 91 made her an SGS favourite. The piece was first performed in 2002, along with an ambitious performance of *Spem in Alium*, sung in the round, under the baton of Stephen Williams.

In later years we asked Sasha to write a Christmas piece. She chose Wendy Cope's *The Christmas Life*, performed in December 2005 with John Turner playing the recorder.

When Stephen Williams left the choir in 2006, he was presented with the gift of another of her commissioned works, a setting of Dryden's *A Song for St Cecilia's day*.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SALLY-ANNE HEAFORD

Our librarian, Gwyneth Pailin also received a commission. On a special birthday, her husband, David, asked Sasha to set Blake's *Divine Image* and this was performed at Christmas in 2008.

When researching the hospital, Sasha became fascinated with the stories in its history, particularly the First World War years, when it was used as a military hospital.

'Incredibly, from the trenches, Ivor Gurney managed to create a number of beautiful poems before being wounded ...Ivor Gurney's words naturally give themselves a melodic flow and musical phrasing. I hope that, in a gentle way, I have done respectful justice to the shining legacy of this tender, yet brave individual, whose creativity, despite taking place in the midst of unimaginable horror, lives on.'

### To the Poet before Battle

Now, youth, the hour of thy dread passion comes:

Thy lovely things must all be laid away;

And thou, as others, must face the riven day

Unstirred by rattle of the rolling drums,

Or bugles' strident cry. When mere noise numbs

The sense of being, the fear-sick soul doth sway,

Remember thy great craft's honour, that they may say

Nothing in shame of poets. Then the crumbs

Of praise the little versemen joyed to take

Shall be forgotten: then they must know we are,

For all our skill in words, equal in might

And strong of mettle as those we honoured; make

The name of poet terrible in just war,

And like a crown of honour upon the fight.

Ivor Gurney, *War's Embers*, No. IX

Whittingham Asylum Orchestra



# PASSIONTIDE CONCERT

It is hard to believe, as I write this on a balmy, sunny spring afternoon, that just two months ago our Passiontide concert was held in blizzards, tempests and very damp feet. The weather in March had been particularly testing, and on Saturday 17 March, we were unsure as to whether we could go ahead.

But credit must go to all our singers, musicians, MD and, especially to our audience, that we all beat our way through snowed up roads, bitter winds and blustering snow to listen to the works written to represent the passion of Christ.



OK, Show of hands... Who's tired of snow?

During our rehearsals for all these pieces, there were many choir members who found singing this repertoire

intense and profound. With its counterpoint, dissonance and polyphony, we came to relish the bars leading up to a particularly poignant moment in pieces such as Lotti's *Crucifixus* and Vittoria's *O Vos Omnes*.

The first half of the concert was all acapella, relying on supported singing, careful listening and a permanent eye on Neil.

The performances of Gibbon's and Leighton's interpretation of Phineas



Neil conducts our soloists wearing his lucky rehearsal shirt just in case.

Fletcher's *Drop, drop slow tears*, was one we all enjoyed performing, having spent some considerable time working through the mysteries of Leighton's intervals and turns.

After the concert, Neil told the choir that he considered this acapella singing was some of the best he had heard from us, that we committed to sustaining the sound appropriate to this style of music, that we sung as one.

**Virginia Fox** had her own adventures before even reaching Poynton. Taking a piano lesson in school, she found herself in a few tricky situations; first without car keys (picked up by someone else); locked into the school; tracking down a window or fire door to get out; fighting through the melee of a blizzard to get to her car; making the car start; and finally manoeuvring through snow banks to reach the rehearsal.

The second half, a performance of Stainer's *Crucifixion*, featured substantial and well executed solo performances from tenor Paul Mummery and our Chair, bass John Smith.

*The Crucifixion* is not everyone's cup of tea, and even Stainer himself once described it as 'rubbish'. But the choir and audience alike both enjoyed the performance, with the impassioned and familiar chorus of *Fling Wide the Gates*, as well as the well-known melody of *God so Loved the World*.

## BROOKS' BARBS

**Pizzetti-Dr Who** had a sonic screwdriver; Pizzetti had a harmonic one.

**In response to a bass**, 'was concentrating on our lovely low G'. **RB-Well**, if you love it, you need to let it go.

**Durufle Dies Irae**-Altos, give us a bit of the Wembley Stadium.

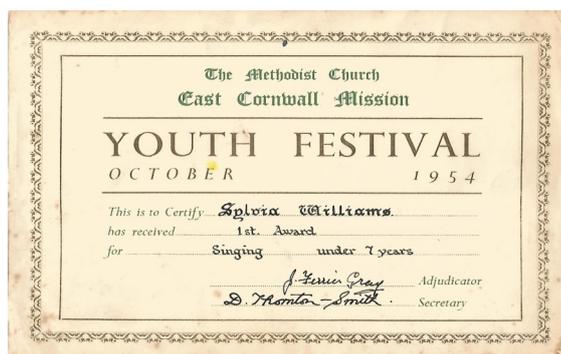
## IN THE SWIM

On Friday 27th April, **Linda Campbell (Soprano)** took part in a Swimathon at Hatherage open air pool.

**Cancer Research UK** and **Marie Curie** teamed up and headed to the pool, where thousands of swimmers, including Linda, took part in a rather chilly event. Undeterred, Linda swam for 2.5 km to raise over £250 for these charities. Well done!

## IT'S IN THE BLOOD

Sorting through some old papers, **Sylvia Johnson (Alto)** found evidence of early forays in the world of singing. A certificate earned under the age of seven, showed she had received the 1st Award in a youth festival. Please also note this evidence that the Methodists always have the best tunes.



## SGS BY INVITATION—ELGAR *MUSIC MAKERS*

### ODE

We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers  
And sitting by desolate streams;-  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the mover and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems.

In August last year, St George's Singers were delighted to be singing in the Stoller Hall at the request of Stephen Threlfall, to join Chetham's Music School pupils for a performance of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*. For many of the Choir, this was their first experience of the new concert venue in Manchester.

At Christmas time, we were on stage with Chetham's pupils again, joining them under the baton of John Rutter at the Bridgewater Hall.

On Friday 6 July this year, we will be back in the Bridgewater Hall, once more joining Chetham's pupils, to sing Elgar's *The Music Makers*.

The first two lines of O'Shaughnessy's famous poem, *Ode*, are often thought of as the title. And although it is commonly believed to be only three stanzas long, it actually has nine. Elgar chose to set all nine in his work, dedicated to his friend, Nicholas Kilburn.

The work was first performed at the Birmingham Festival in 1912, although Elgar had been developing the music intermittently since 1903. He announced his interest in this poem in an interview in March 1904.

Elgar saw himself always as an outsider. His father was merely a tradesman and Elgar was Roman Catholic. He did not study music, but was self taught. Very often he was uncertain about his abilities and his status in society and suffered from depression. However, when he gave the interview things could not be more favourable for him. On 3 February 1904 he was invited to dine with King Edward VII and conducted his famous *Pomp and Circumstance* after dinner. On 14 March 1904 his work was celebrated with a three day festival at Covent Garden and two days later the Prime Minister asked him whether he would accept a knighthood in the June Birthday Honours. Maybe the reassurance by these honours and recognition was the reason for him to speak about this project.



Sir Edward Elgar: photo Creative Commons

*Ode* deals with the role of the artist in society, with the first lines focussing on the isolation of the creative artist, a dreamer wandering alone. But this same verse ends with a very different image of the artist, the more famous words, 'Yet we are the movers and shakers / Of the world forever, it seems/'. It's likely that Elgar saw this vision as a responsibility and duty of the artist, as well as a burden.

In the work, Elgar referenced a number of his previous works, quoting from both Symphonies and *The Dream of Gerontius* amongst others. These quotations of past work were one of the main criticisms of it; it was not received as a great triumph, and in addition some considered that his music had belied the hope of the poem, almost reversing its meaning. Elgar had an emotional and turbulent relationship with *The Music Makers*, expressing his despair in a letter to a close friend, longing to, 'destroy the work of my hands'. Yet in another letter a few weeks later, he recognised 'I have written out my soul in ...the *Ode*...I have shewn myself.'



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

This publication welcomes two guests to the *Accompanist's Saddle*. Dave Francis and Andrea Millington (among others) attended a concert for which the principle piece was composed by the man who usually sits in this seat.

On Saturday 12 May, several of us went to Leek to hear Leek Choral Society perform the premier of *100 Years' Requiem* by our brilliant accompanist Pete Durrant. The piece is a tribute to those who died in the First World War and in many wars since then. The piece is in eight movements, using the Latin mass as the key text.

Pete had composed this in two months, drawing upon ideas that he's been mulling over for some time.

"I have had this in my head for many years," he told us. "This is not my first composition, it's actually my Opus 2. The first was a toccata for organ written when I was twelve years old." Pete is thinking about an Opus 3, "perhaps a violin sonata".

The Requiem was well received by a full church and the choir sang with commitment and sincerity, as well as some sadness as this was Pete's last concert as their Musical Director.



Afterwards, among many other gifts, he was presented with the banner which had been displayed outside the church.

It was good to share this special evening with Pete.

## SGS BY INVITATION—MAHLER 2ND SYMPHONY

On September 29, we have been invited to join the Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra at Gorton Monastery for a production of Gustave Mahler's *2nd Symphony*, a choral symphony also known as the *Resurrection Symphony*. Written between 1888 and 1894, this was one of Mahler's most popular and successful works during his lifetime, and the first work that established his lifelong view of the beauty of afterlife and resurrection.

Born on 7 July 1860, in the

Bohemian town of Kaliste, Gustav Mahler was the second of 14 children of a Jewish distillery-owner. His father recognised and supported his son's early musical ability. Gustav gave his first piano recital at the age of 10, and five years later was taken to the Vienna

Conservatory to play for Julius Epstein, who pronounced the 15-year old 'a born musician'.



Accepted in to the conservatory, Mahler became a devotee of Wagner's music and Nietzsche's philosophy.

Mahler's career as a conductor began with operetta at the Austrian provincial theatre of Bad Hall.

Further appointments included Olmutz, Kassel, Prague, Leipzig, Budapest, Hamburg and, in 1897, the

Vienna Court Opera. There he was lauded by many but persecuted by the city's strong anti-Semitic faction, forcing his resignation in 1907 – the year that he was diagnosed with serious heart condition that was to kill him four years later.

Mahler left Europe for New York, making his Metropolitan Opera debut on 1 January 1908 and becoming conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1909, though he returned to Vienna to die.

## SLAITHWAITE ORCHESTRA

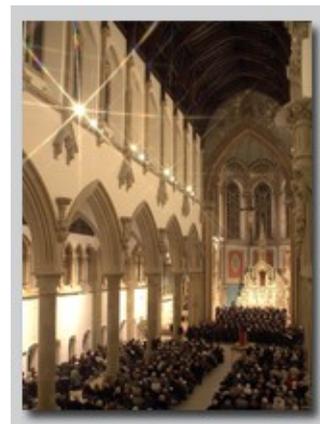


Founded in 1891, the Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra (SPO) has existed for an impressive 125 years, supported by the hard work and belief of its members and audience. Many generations of the same families have remained at the centre of its existence, such as that of cellist John Taylor, who started the orchestra with a group of friends.

The SPO thrived in the early years under the baton of conductor Arthur Armitage, winning many national competitions. Despite a struggle for survival over 20 years after the Second World War, it was revived under the baton of Adrian Smith in 1969, who led the orchestra

during its centenary years. During his leadership, the orchestra won national awards and presented large scale works. The orchestra has an impressive repertoire, ranging from John Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* to John Williams' suite from the film of *Harry Potter*.

The SPO recently completed an invited and highly successful tour in China, performing on nine consecutive nights, across a variety of the provinces in the South East of the country. Amazing that there should be few mishaps other than occasional lost items and a misunderstanding at security check, after which the percussionist demonstrated a delightful 'ting' of a triangle to prove its provenance as a musical instrument, despite the protestations of the x-ray machines! We are delighted that SPO have decided to stay closer to home for our performance with them at Gorton Monastery.



## ALMA MAHLER



Alma Maria Schindler married Gustav Mahler in 1902. Through her life she was composer, author, editor and a well known socialite, who had acquaintance with many influential artists, movers and

shakers in Europe and the USA.

Alma had started an affair with Gustav when her secret relationship with tutor Alexander

von Zemlinsky began to grow strained. Her marriage to Gustav was not always happy; he was 19 years her senior and not interested in her continuing to compose whilst they were married. She repressed these compositional yearnings and embraced motherhood; she had two daughters with Gustav, one of whom died at the age of five.

In the wake of Maria Anna's death, Alma became severely depressed. Later in the marriage, she began an affair with an architect, who was to later become her husband; Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus School, one of the masters of modernist architecture. >> Page 9

### What is a Choral Symphony?

The term "choral symphony" indicates a composer's intention that the work be 'symphonic', even with its fusion of narrative. To this end, the words are often treated symmetrically to pursue non-narrative ends, by use of frequent repetition of important words and phrases, and the transposing, reordering or omission of passages of the set text

# THE FEATS OF FARNSWORTH

## STREPHON, SON OF IOLANTHE BACK IN MANCHESTER BY JOE KEANEY



Our Honorary President has been a busy boy, and accomplished many feats over the last few months. Together with the company of English National Opera, Marcus Farnsworth enjoyed critical acclaim in the recent production of *Iolanthe*, staged at the Savoy theatre in London.

Marcus took the role of Strephon, son of the titular *Iolanthe*, a fairy banished from fairyland for having married a mortal. Strephon loves Phyllis (as do most of the House of Lords and the Lord Chancellor himself) and much shenanigans ensue.

Gilbert and Sullivan's satirical opera of people and politics, (always an area ripe for humour) was reviewed by David Nice, writing on *Arts Desk*.

'Sullivan's spoof of supernatural Mendelssohn/Weber, as dewily beautiful as its sources, meets Gilbert at his multiple-rhyming sharpest in the *mésalliance* (that word is French) between fairy ladies and parliamentary gentlemen, with just a dash of the right pathos. Could relative opera novice Cal McCrystal, having had trouble making dreary Haydn funny, get it right? He does, and in a way that should please absolutely everyone, given a cast that responds unanimously to his baroque invention. If you're not crying with laughter midway through the second act, visit your GP.'

David Karlin, writing in *Back Track*, praised Marcus' performance; 'The shepherd-and-shepherdess couple of Marcus Farnsworth and Ellie Laugharne gave us the strongest purely operatic voices of the evening, ably supported by Samantha Price in the title role.'

David Nice highlighted the dancing prowess of our Hon Pres; 'Marcus Farnsworth's energetic but focused Strephon and Ellie Laugharne's feisty Phyllis follow...with a brilliant tap number.'

The versatile Marcus Farnsworth clearly relishes not being boxed in. The bass-baritone conductor and founding artistic director of the Southwell Music Festival (now in its fifth year) has a chameleon quality about him that was playfully and prayerfully at work over the Easter period and beyond.



We first caught up with him on Maundy Thursday at the Bridgewater Hall where he was a menacing, Bible waving, duffle-coated, Doc Marten booted presence in a semi-staged performance of Handel's *Messiah*. The four great bass arias were performed wonderfully - anger, sorrow, pity, and recrimination infused *The People that walked in Darkness* and *Why do the Nations so furiously rage together* while the transformative, miraculous joy of *Behold, I tell you a Mystery* and *The Trumpet shall sound* was truly uplifting. Marcus' sustained control at the start of the former was, well, breathtaking. The whole semi staged performance was moving and to be on stage, as I was, was to be enveloped in sweet clear young chorus voices.

In committing to this one off performance, Marcus broke away from a run at the ENO in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, a frothy piece of late Victorian nonsense performed with the joy and verve of the BBC's *The Good Old Days*. Marcus' late mother, Alison, was a dance teacher in Southwell and her

young boy's first stage appearances involved nimble footwork. Such agility is still part of the Farnsworth DNA, as he sang, danced and acted his way through a pantomime plot

with great fizz and sparkle. We saw him at a Saturday evening show after he'd already performed a matinee. How he kept going was truly a mystery.

And so to the end of April and the Whitworth Hall, Manchester for a performance of Elgar's majestic *The Dream of Gerontius*. Marcus does fun infectiously but sobriety really becomes him. As The Priest and The Angel of the Agony, he brought a tender manly sinewy urgency to his singing, a commanding seriousness to an eminently serious work.

Next up? Highlights include singing Debussy, Butterworth, Suk and Stravinsky one night while conducting Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* another at the Southwell Music Festival at the end of August. The versatility, drive and stamina of Mr Farnsworth shows no sign of abating.



# THE FEATS OF FARNSWORTH

## SOUTHWELL FESTIVAL BY GEOFF TAYLOR

Ever since his undergraduate days, Marcus has continually developed a dual role – as a baritone soloist, and as a conductor specialising in choral music. In the last five years he has added a third role with remarkable success – as an impresario.

Five years ago he founded the Southwell Festival based in and around Southwell Minster where he was Head Chorister. Each year Marcus assembles over eighty young musicians, singers and players, for the Festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend to perform an eclectic mix from Bach to Jazz, from Chamber Music to Family Concerts, “Come and Sing” events to grand Oratorios. The concerts are held in a variety of super venues in and around the glorious Minster – ‘a hidden gem’, filled to capacity at the Festival Eucharist and Festival Evensong.

The musicians are hosted by local families, and it is fantastic that many of these brilliant and very busy performers choose to return year after year. It is claimed that the secret of



the Festival’s success, and the remarkable atmosphere of sheer delight in music making, is that ‘Marcus only invites nice people’!

The challenge facing Marcus is to maintain an inspiring mix of the familiar and unknown - this year the programme includes Bach’s *B Minor Mass* in a chamber performance on period instruments, and Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time*. With 33 events over six days he has certainly achieved that.

Marcus the singer will be performing Butterworth’s *A Shropshire Lad* as well as Stuart Macrae’s new work, *Parable*.

The Masterclasses for young talented performers provide a fascinating insight into the process of developing music making. At the first year’s Festival a young local cellist, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, was coached in the Shostakovich Concerto, and went on to win BBC Young Musician of the Year 2016 with the same concerto! A highlight this year will be his performance of the Elgar *Concerto*, followed by Michael Tippett’s *A Child of our Time*.

No wonder that the Sunday Times stated Marcus Farnsworth has put the tiny Nottinghamshire town, with an exquisite Minster, on the map in a short space of time.’ The Southwell Festival is included in their ‘Hot tickets for 2018’.

**Geoff Taylor (Bass)**



## ALMA MAHLER

◀◀ Page 7 Following this crisis in his marriage, Gustav is known to have sought advice from the eminent Sigmund Freud. What advice was given during their time together is not known. However, following these sessions with Sigmund, Gustav changed his previously dismissive attitude to her composing, and began to actively promote it, editing and re-orchestrating some of her works. When Gustav became ill and then died in 1911, Alma did not immediately marry Walter, but embarked on an affair with Oskar Kokoschka, an artist. After divorce from Walter, she later married Franz Werfel, an Austrian-Bohemian playwright, poet and novelist

The American satirist, Tom Lehrer, wrote a song about Alma. He had just read her obituary, which he described as ‘the juiciest, spiciest, raciest obituary it has ever been my pleasure to read...Alma Mahler Gropius Werfel, who had, in her lifetime, managed to

acquire as lovers practically all of the top creative men in central Europe...there were three whom she went so far as to marry...It’s people like that who make you realize how little you’ve accomplished’

Alma, Walter and daughter Manon



### ALMA

The loveliest girl in Vienna  
Was Alma, the smartest as well,  
Once you picked her up on your  
antenna,  
You’d never be free of her spell.

Her lovers were many and varied  
From the day she began her beguine.  
There were three famous ones whom  
she married,  
And God knows how many between...

Alma, tell us,  
All modern women are jealous.,  
Which of your magical wands  
Got you Gustav and Walter and Franz?

**TOM LEHRER**

# CHOIR TOUR TO NORTH WALES

**TAYLOR'S TOURING TEXT TAGS**

**That sounds like...**

Thou art my jaw (joy)

Those who dwelt in the land of glue (gloom)

**In relation to Lotti's *Crucifixion***

**NT:** Were you happy with that opening, Bases?

**ANON BASS:** Were you happy with it, Neil?

**NT:** No.

**How to sing *Lift up you Heads* from *Messiah***

This should be sung with zip, with vigour, like Zippy, think *Rainbow...*



**St George's Singers**  
2018 tour

## Choral Pearls

Five centuries of sacred and secular choral music

**Caernarfon Castle**  
Saturday May 26 12.00 – 14.00

**Bangor, Our Lady and St James Church**  
Saturday May 26 19.30 – 21.30

**Penrhyn Castle (Great Hall)**  
Sunday May 27 14.00 – 14.30 & 15.30 – 16.00

**Colwyn Bay, St Paul's Church**  
Monday May 28 13.00 – 14.00

**St Asaph Cathedral**  
Monday May 28 6pm Evensong

ALL CONCERTS AND RECITALS ARE GIVEN FREE OF CHARGE

St George's Singers, based in Poynton, Cheshire is one of the most highly regarded large choirs in the North West, performing a repertoire ranging from jazz to classical, Renaissance to contemporary, and a capella to symphonic.

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



The weather forecast for the weekend in North Wales was a mixture of sunshine, warm temperatures, some rain and lightning. Did that meteorological forecast foreshadow the outcome of our tour?

Friday found us ready and waiting on the coach, all experienced tourists, expecting delay. But none came; no dramas, no late arrivals. One dedicated tourist, whose car had a flat tyre, walked swiftly from the train station, dragging a suitcase with her. Although arriving later than planned in Bangor a number of us enjoyed good customer service, as Premier Inn staff ferried us to tables for a prompt service of food and varied beverages.

Saturday was an early start, leaving for Caernarfon at 08:30.

Our rehearsal took place in the Feed my Lambs Chapel, set on a hill, and in true 'Baptist' colours. Having stretched and hummed and shushed like Welsh steam trains, engaging and loosening stomach and jaw muscles respectively, preparing for the long day ahead, we started our two-hour rehearsal. Sounds of fumbling for music mixed with those of laughter, piano, notes reached

and not reached, as well as the exhortations of Neil in relation to consonants, vowels and intonation.

Caernarfon Castle is a mighty and impressive stronghold that was built for the first Prince of Wales, son of the English king, Edward "Longshanks". Completed in 1857, it was also the site of the investiture of the current Prince of Wales 112 years later in 1969. On the site of that investiture we sang our first two recitals, facing toward one of the imposing walls, to hear our voices revert to us and reverberate around the battlements. We sang to a smattering of tourists and visitors some of whom snapped photos, recording the choir phenomenon as they toured. And those who watched attentively and did not move until we had finished.

The castle was also the site of our only two injury incidents, largely due to damp weather. Both of these candidates for the *Stalwart Performance in the Face of Adversity Award* sprained ankles to varying degrees. One was whistled off to A&E in Bangor. However, both were seen at the evening concerts; one on crutches in the body of the choir, and the other wel-

**Whilst sitting in A&E, waiting for ankle attention, Rosemary Broadbent planned an alternative process for returning music.**

**Overheard by Michael Calam at Our Lady and St James. "Ooh, prosecco. One prosecco, two prosecco, three prosecco, floor"**

coming our audience with smiles and programmes.

After spending time to explore the castle and the town, we headed off to Bangor to prepare for our first evening concert. With a reasonably forgiving acoustic, Our Lady and St James Church, on the outskirts of Bangor provided a welcome arena for our first concert. Our repertoire, some of which was taken from our *Passiontide* concert, was enthusiastically welcomed by our audience. The parishioners had even provided prosecco for audience and choir at the end, giving us the opportunity to talk to those who had taken time to listen.

Sunday allowed for a later start following our very full first day. Some of us took the opportunity to visit the nearby Oriel Ynys Môn, a purpose built museum, arts and events gallery, where we were able to learn about the history of Anglesey as well as taking in the permanent exhibitions of the art from the hands of Welshman Kyffin Williams, as well as the more recent fabric-based work of Josie Russell. Our journey took us onto Anglesey and through Beaumaris via the Menai Straits, with changing views of the straits even in our short time there.

When joined by the rest of the choir, we headed to Penrhyn Castle, originally a fortified manor house, but reconstructed in the 1780s, from the proceeds of slate and slavery, and one of the most admired of the mock castles built in Great Britain. Our non-singing tourists and some of the choir as well had the opportunity to visit the extensive art collection.

After a short warm up, we headed to the Great Hall, which includes a galleried walk high above. Our recital repertoire was greeted warmly by visitors, a



"Well, if they're not bothered, I'll conduct this wall"



**Shock horror! Visiting Yorkshire women forced to wear red roses to sing!**

The other well-

# CHOIR TOUR TO NORTH WALES

number of whom took the time to meet with us later. Calon Lan went down very well with Sue Taylor providing a solo for the second verse.

After two recitals we departed the almost fairy tale surroundings of Penrhyn for more prosaic surroundings of the Premier Inn, to rest and prepare for our choir dinner, an event held every year.

This year we went to a hotel in Bangor, which had been scouted almost a year before by Lorraine and our friend Kath Dibbs, still sadly missed. Before starting our celebrations, we paused to remember and raise a glass to her indomitable spirit.

Leader Lorraine gave a splendid speech, and handed out special awards to choir members who may have suspected one was coming their way. *Stalwart Award* went to A&E visitor Rosemary Broadbent; *Award for the neatest packing* given to Judy Tomlinson; *Support Award* to Rodney Lighton for transporting people and other inanimate (forgotten) objects when needed.

Monday sun rose more cheerfully than Sunday, and we set off for Colwyn Bay, for our concert, held in memory of Kath Dibbs. St Paul's Church is a very different



Penrhyn Castle Great Hall

Some relatively new members of the Choir came on tour. Jackie Harmer (soprano) said, 'One of the main reasons for enjoying the tour is fabulously and diverse music. But the best thing has been properly meeting with other choir members and getting to know them.'

One of audience members in Colwyn Bay told a choir member at the end of the performance that it had been well worth missing the sunshine to hear us!



'Right lads, this is my left foot. That goes down first. Then my right foot. You can do this, you can walk in time.'

setting than Our Lady and St James, with thick carpet providing comfort to our weary feet but absorbcency to our song! It was quickly apparent that we would need to work hard and be focussed to ensure our singing was sustained. Although our audience was small, they were most appreciative and we had a couple of surprising introductions.

At the end of the concert, a gentleman came to speak to Neil about the performance. He revealed that he had been brought up in Poynton, that his father had been a previous vicar of St George's; he had wanted to attend the concert, and told Neil how much he had enjoyed our singing.

We also had the director of The Orrishmere Singers, Martin Brown, with whom a number of SGS singers during the summer months. During both this and our previous concert, we enjoyed listening to Neil Taylor on the organ, as well as Pete Durrant accompanying the profound *Souls of the Righteous*, written by Geraint Lewis in memory of fellow Welshman, William Mathias.

After our concert we travelled to the little city of St Asaph, where we spent a pleasant, relaxing af-

ternoon in the sunshine before heading to St Asaph Cathedral, where William Mathias is buried. We were delighted to be taking part in the Evensong service, having been drilled on the singing of psalms for a number of rehearsals. St Asaph is a small cathedral, sometimes claimed to be smallest Anglican cathedral in Great Britain. Regardless of its diminutive size, the clergy, staff and congregation gave us a very warm welcome.



On Bank Holiday, we arrived in Colwyn Bay in good time to rehearse at the church. Which was helpful, as we initially went to the wrong church.

We acquitted ourselves reasonably well, though had to have a number of instructions from Neil in order to get both our ducks and our music in order; not too many of us have spent early lives in the domain of high church services. And getting us all to walk in a line, two by two, seemed to exasperate the MD even more!

The end of the service marked the end of the tour. Walking quietly down the nave and out into the warm sunshine, our service con-

cluded with a blessing, accompanied by the sound of birds. We had done triumphant, joyous and jubilant. This fitting end marked the blessing we have always; to sing together, to make music that brings happiness and companionship.



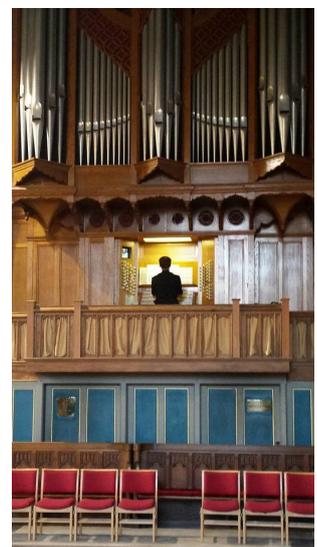
Lorraine receiving a gift from Chair John Smith

## DRAGONS PLAY GOLF (NB Noms de guerre in use)

Joined by guest players Geoff from Anglesey and Dave from Walsall, the Dragons enjoyed two



days of golf in North Wales, cleverly having arranged a rest day to coincide with the rain. Ropey greens at Caernarfon and a long course in the blazing sun at Rhuddlan depressed scores somewhat, but there was no doubt about the winner, "Fairway Forshaw", despite being the organiser, doing the (car) driving and going down with a bug by the second game. "Blaster Bluck" had forgotten to bring the trophy, but fortunately Fairway, who had lost the old trophy the previous year, had found it again, so all was well, and it means that there are now two trophies for "Hit & Hope Hodgson" to aim for next time.



Pete in the organ loft at St Asaph, playing out Evensong.

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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

**Friday 6 July 2018**

Elgar *The Music Makers*  
Bridgewater Hall

**Sunday 23 September 2018**

Mahler *2nd Symphony*  
With Slaithwaite Orchestra  
Gorton Monastery

**Saturday 29 September 2018**

*Whittingham Lives Singing event*  
St John's Minster, PRESTON

**Saturday 24 November 2018**

Bernstein *Chichester Psalms*  
Goodall *Eternal Light*

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!

**Knutsford Music Festival -**  
Friday 22 - Sunday 24 June

BBC Radio 2 and 6 Music DJ Mark Radcliffe, who lives in Knutsford, has teamed up with Knutsford Town Council to host a series of gigs. They will transform Knutsford Little Theatre into a folk club for three nights. This event is part of the town council's wider celebration of music throughout the town centre. Classical events will include Vale Royal String Orchestra, The Tatton Singers and the Hallé Brass with the RNCM Zerbina Duo. Details from Knutsford Town Council.

**Manchester Collective:**  
**Rakhi / Katya**

Wednesday 27 June - 8pm

Carole Nash Hall, Chetham's Music School, Manchester

Rakhi Singh (violin) and Katya Apekisheva (piano) team up to perform in the closing concert of the season. This is the college's smallest and most focussed show of the year, conjuring up a whole world of sound from just two instruments. Alongside sonatas by Prokofiev and Beethoven, you will hear more intimate work by Schumann, Kurtag and Bach.

**Manchester Jazz Festival**

Friday 20 - Saturday 28 July

In venues across Manchester mjf will be creating more musical moments, celebrating the best new music that Manchester-based, northern, national and international jazz artists have to offer.

Albert Square will once again be home to a 1920s Spiegel-tent, where nearly half of all mjf events will take place. A further 20% of events will take place on the free outdoor stage in Festival Square. Many events are already sold out - find out more details from

[www.manchesterjazz.com](http://www.manchesterjazz.com)