



# Hemiola

**S t G e o r g e ' s S i n g e r s**

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Radiant Light! Review 2  
Diary of a Flora host 2

Memories of Flora 3  
New Assistant MD 3

Good vocal health—  
by Sue Roper 4

Season Preview 5

What Elgar did for us—  
next concert preview 6

Interview with Sasha  
Johnson Manning 7

St George's Singers  
news 8

## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

### PRESIDENT:

Joan Bakewell CBE

### VICE PRESIDENTS:

Sue Roper  
Mark Rowlinson  
Stephen Threlfall  
Stephen Williams

### MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

### ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Matthew Hamilton

### ACCOMPANIST:

Jeffrey Makinson

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National  
Federation of Music Societies

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

## BRITAIN HAS BRILLIANT ARTS - SO WHY JEOPARDISE THEM?

BY SGS PRESIDENT, JOAN BAKEWELL

Just consider the goodies. A Lee Miller exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum; Millais coming to Tate Britain; China's ancient terracotta warriors at the British Museum; the Complicite theatre company at the Barbican. And the fun isn't all in London. The Turner Prize is going to Liverpool; The Lowry in Manchester has a Jimmy McGovern play, King Cotton. These are merely the opening shots in seasons of music and plays dazzling in their range and quality. The country is dense with creative activity this autumn. So why is the arts world in a state of trepidation?

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review is due to announce its figures this autumn. As chair of the National Campaign for the Arts, I know only too well that, whenever two or three arts people come together these days, there is fretful speculation about the timing, the date and the money involved.

There has been a good deal of shadow-boxing between the Treasury and the arts agencies. First, the Treasury warned that everyone should plan for cuts. The figure of 10 per cent emerged. Rumbles of distress were transmitted urgently back to the Treasury. Many companies then began planning for a 3 per cent budget cut. Now there is talk that a standstill settlement might be in the offing. Will that include inflation or not? Who knows? Only the Treasury, and they aren't telling just yet.

So there is still time to make the case for funding the arts, and it goes like this.

When Labour won in 1997, morale in the arts was low, institutions around the country were in crisis. Almost at once, the new Government responded. The next three years gave the arts an extra £290m and in 2000 the Arts Council's grant went up by 78 per cent. Free entrance to museums and galleries transformed attendances. Bliss was it in that dawn. But new dawns grow into bleak day and, when pressures build up from other directions, the modest sums that sustain this great tapestry of cultural riches looks vulnerable. Plus, of course, there is the looming threat of what the Olympics will finally cost.

There is no doubt the quality of life of the entire country has improved. There are performances and art classes in prisons, resident artists in offices, small theatre groups visiting schools. The Government demanded value for money and got it. Companies were required to tick boxes that show they are reaching ethnic minorities, failing schools and first-time visitors. With their usual resourcefulness, arts companies came up with results. There has been a surge in black writing and black audiences. Matinees are packed with the elderly taking advantage of cut-price offers. Labour's agenda is being well and truly served. But take away the money that makes



this possible and this frail but valuable support system will be damaged.

Big enterprises and small, faced with cuts, will revert to what is at the core of their work and seek to safeguard that as a priority. The outreach and educational work the Government is so keen on might be the first to go. There is no point in reaching out to new audiences when the quality of the work has been so diluted that they won't enjoy it. Only the best work makes converts: second best can put people off.

This chimes with something new in the arts climate. It is this: that perhaps all the requirements of box-ticking and its social engineering have gone far enough. They have been effective, but some arts leaders now feel they are starting to distract from the true focus of the arts, which is to create work of excellence in all the various performance and exhibition disciplines. It is what we are overwhelmingly good at. Hopes are now that the Treasury won't spoil it for what is virtually the small change of government spending.

## RADIANT LIGHT! REVIEW



St George's Singers with Musical Director, Neil Taylor at our Radiant Light! concert at St George's Church, Stockport

Our final concert of last season on 23 June in St George's Church, Stockport, went with a bang—literally. Radiant Light! featured music by some of the



Julia Mayall, Mark O'Leary and their team of bell-ringers

greats of 20th century American choral music, including Barber, Copland and Bernstein's fantastic *Chichester Psalms*, with a thrilling performance from countertenor Daniel Keating-Roberts. But it was the less well known works by Whitacre and Lauridsen that really captured the audience. Lauridsen's beautiful *Lux Aeterna* closed the first half of the con-

cert, leaving the audience with a sense of peace and serenity. The mood was retained into the second half with Barber's famous *Agnus Dei* but was blown away by Whitacre's *Cloudburst*, which called for the Choir to simulate a cloudburst by clapping hands and slapping thighs, accompanied by a team of bell-ringers and percussionists.

We leave it to others to judge whether our performance was so lifelike that it influenced the weather—the downpours began the next day!

A big thank-you to Mark O'Leary and Julia Mayall for organising a superb team of young handbell ringers, and to Marcus Farnsworth for delighting us all with some beautiful songs by Samuel Barber.

## DIARY OF A FLORA HOST



By George! Our very own ceildh band at the end-of-tour party

It's three weeks before our guests arrive from Estonia and we've not found enough beds. Providing hospitality for 38 visitors for four days is proving a bit of a challenge. After last minute ringing round we have enough beds - St George's has risen to the occasion again.

A week before they're due to arrive, we're still trying to finalise details. Contact is impossible as they've already left for the four day coach journey. We finally reach them by mobile — and suddenly, they've arrived, exactly on time in Poynton civic centre car park! It's three years since we met but there are lots of familiar faces. Hosts and guests are matched up and cars leave in all directions.

Our friends bring us lovely gifts from Estonia – juniper wood butter knives, chocolate, candle holders, liqueur – and after food, drink and lots of talk we crash out.

Early the next day it's back to the car park to pick up the coach and head for Manchester. Hair-raising

moments as we collect people down narrow streets, then a stop off at Manchester United for photos and gifts for football-mad family at home. Onto Bridge-water Hall, and suddenly we're tour guides! We talk knowledgeably about Manchester's architecture and history, visit the library, the Town Hall, Science Museum, John Rylands library and the Peoples' History museum – somehow between us we know quite a lot about Manchester! Finally, after hitting the shops, we meet up at the Cathedral, and onto the coach for Didsbury.

Flora's first concert is at Emmanuel church. They change into traditional Estonian dress and spend at least half an hour warming up before running through their programme. A respectable audience for the concert, then home for dinner, or off to the pub—Flora have heard a lot about English pubs!

On Saturday we leave our guests at Lyme Park, whilst we rehearse

for our joint concert that evening in Poynton. Very successful concert, good audience, then into the Church Hall for the party. By George! our newly formed ceildh band plays, we join in a few rough and ready folk dances together and entertain each other with some remarkably silly songs.

On Sunday it's a day off for the hosts while Flora spend the day in York. Then home for a farewell dinner, and much laughter as we discuss the peculiarities of choirs and decide that an international symposium on choir management is needed!

Up early the next morning to get Flora to the coach for their long journey home. We suddenly feel quite emotional—we've become good friends in the last four days. It's been exhausting but what an enriching experience. And then there's the invitation to Estonia at any time. The Song Festival in 2009—now that would be something!



Flora and hosts—on the way home

## MATTHEW HAMILTON— OUR NEW ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR

St George's Singers is delighted to welcome Matthew Hamilton as our new Assistant Musical Director.

Matthew grew up in Cambridgeshire, and read music at Worcester College, Oxford, where he held both choral and instrumental scholarships. He graduated in 2005 and moved to Manchester to take a Masters degree in composition.

In addition to his new position with St George's Singers, Mat-

thew is currently Director of Ad Solem, the University of Manchester Chamber Choir, with whom he recently appeared on BBC Television, and has given many performances with the University's New Music Ensemble. He has conducted visiting choirs at Oxford and Wells Cathedrals, and taken part in conducting master-classes with the National Youth Choir. He also sings as a lay-clerk at Manchester Cathedral.

Matthew is also a very busy composer, whose works have been performed by a wide variety of ensembles and choirs, including the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's contemporary music ensemble '10/10', and Chetham's School of Music Chamber Choir.

We're all looking forward to working with Matthew in the coming years, and assure him that we'll do our best not to pitch him in at the deep end!



SGS new Assistant Musical Director, Matthew Hamilton

## FLORA'S TOUR— FRIENDS OLD AND NEW

The visit to Poynton in May by the Flora Chamber Choir of Estonia was an enormous success, with appreciative audiences at both Emmanuel Church, Didsbury and at our joint concert in St George's Church, Poynton.

Flora's Marie Trummer wrote after their return, summing up the sentiments of all the choir. *"We are all happily back at home and full of marvelous memories about your country. Thank you for your hospitality—everything was fantastic. England is so beautiful and interesting that I hope to come back some day."*

Flora were all accommodated by members of St George's Singers in their homes, and without their generosity it is most unlikely that the choir could have made the trip. Sue Sawyer did a great job allocating visitors and hosts, and ensuring everyone turned up in the right place at the right time!

The end of tour party was enjoyed by everyone. Flora presented SGS with a beautiful iron-work candle-holder, and members of the Flora choir received St George's Singers' latest CD and cookery book—

a taste of England to take back to Tallinn!

One unexpected and very happy event was a meeting between a member of the audience at the Poynton concert, Elvi Livesey from Preston, and the Flora Chamber Choir. Elvi picked up a leaflet about Flora's visit when she was attending a concert at the Bridgewater Hall, and immediately determined to come along.

After her mother's death, Elvi went to live in Estonia with her father and remained there until she was 15. Like most Estonians, she sang in choirs, regularly taking part in the Song Festival.

Elvi still remembers summers spent in beautiful pine forests, and the chance to meet up with people from Estonia and sing along with songs from her childhood brought Elvi to the concert—and an emotional reunion with people from her 'home country'.

Flora brought much joy and happiness to a lot of people on their tour. We hope to see them all again soon—in Poynton or Tallin!



Flora Chamber Choir and St George's Singers at our joint concert in Poynton



Post-concert party—not sure what's going on here Dave!



A present from Tallinn



Elvi Livesey with members of the Flora Chamber Choir



Conductor Erki Meister leading Flora at Emmanuel Church, Didsbury

## GOOD VOCAL HEALTH BY SUE ROPER, DIRECTOR OF VOCAL STUDIES, RNCM

The demands on you as a choral singer are great: the ability to deal with a wide vocal and dynamic range, to sustain notes at extreme pitches, blend vocal colour, and to perform with energy and emotion.

Here are my five top tips for enhancing good vocal health.

### Posture

Firstly you need to think about how you stand. Like any musician, you need to hold your instrument well in order to allow your voice to perform to its best ability. A noble, dynamic, flexible posture is the aim.



Sue Roper in a warm-up session with her class at RNCM

How to find this:

- Place feet under hips, as wide apart as the hip bones, with feet in firm, comfortable contact with the floor. Head nicely balanced, looking ahead at eye level
- Shoulders gently open, back and down
- Ears in line with shoulders
- Shoulders in line with tops of hips
- Tops of hip bones in line with backs of knees
- Backs of knees in line with the middle/front of ankles
- Check pelvis is released and turning towards the floor

The idea is to join the dots - the ears, shoulders, hips, knees and

mid-ankles - to create an inner line, a sense of alignment that is strong, energised, yet flexible. It is so important not to hold anything rigid. If you are rehearsing in a seated position, hold yourself well – feet flat on the ground and a nice straight back in the chair with a gentle lift-up through the body.

### Breathing

Talking about breathing can be complex. Breathing is a personal, sensory experience and not easily put into words so I keep my comments general.

- Welcome your breath into the body with a loose open throat and with the emotion of the music you are singing
- Whether singing or breathing the posture should remain the same
- The breath flows without any sensation of grabbing or holding
- During inhalation there will be a gentle and fluid movement of ribs, lifting and opening, up and away from the hips
- Breathe according to the amount of air you need - a partial breath is as important as a full breath
- Let the breath flow evenly throughout the phrase.

### Vowels

Singing is all about vowels – they can be bright or dark, open or closed, and so on. It is the vowel that opens the door to a full range of vocal colour.

- It is important that you think the vowel strongly before you sing it
- Be sure to sing the vowel on beat and consonant before beat
- Work out which vowel you are singing on, particularly when confronted with a diphthong, and know exactly where the diphthong occurs

- Sustain vowel colour throughout the value of the note by singing the vowel, in your mind, many times within the one note
- Be careful not to over exaggerate vowel shapes in the upper registers.

### Consonants

When asked to 'project more' an inexperienced singer may try to do this by pushing out more sound.

Keep the muscles of the articulators (jaw, tongue, lips and teeth) flexible and free when striving to project. Consonants must be formed clearly but with as little muscular involvement as possible.

- Form the consonants towards the front of your mouth so that the back of your throat can remain open and loose
- Release the consonant into the vowel that follows so that the breath flows continuously.

### Listen to your body

Your body will tell you if you are singing well – your singing should sound good, look good and feel good.

Always warm up properly before rehearsals, but if you don't have time to do this then make sure you spend five minutes loosening the throat and wakening up the breathing mechanism.

All singing must carry emotion and an open throat, which connects to the support, will allow you to access this.

Feel and mean what you sing, and above all else, enjoy your singing.

*Sue Roper is Director of Vocal Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music and Vice-President of St George's Singers.*

**“Your body will tell you if you are singing well - your singing should sound good, look good and feel good.”**

## INTRODUCING OUR 2007-8 SEASON

BY ANNE FRANCIS

I hope by now you have all picked up a copy of our 2007-8 Season Brochure. If not, I would urge you to do so quite soon—they're disappearing very quickly!

Last season was very much one of consolidation—getting to know Neil, and giving him time to learn more about us. Even so, it turned out to be a hectic year, and this season promises to be no less busy.

Every concert is special for us, and we're looking forward immensely to the November *Elgar and After* concert, as well as our traditional *Carols and Brass by Candlelight*, once again with the great VBS Poynton Brass Band.

I must admit though that the following two concerts should be really special. In March 2008 we are performing Rachmaninov's *Vespers* and Taverner's *Nunc Dimittis* in the won-

derfully restored Gorton Monastery. This will be no ordinary concert, as we shall be joined by our very own President, Joan Bakewell, and by Terry Waite, who will be delivering readings to reflect and illuminate the music. Before the concert, members of the audience will be able to look around this magnificent building, and discover more about its history and restoration. Refreshments are also included in the ticket price.

To help audience members get to this concert, we are laying on transport to Gorton Monastery from Poynton and Hazel Grove. Tickets are already on sale for this concert, and we have already taken bookings!

The final concert of this season sees us returning to The Bridge-water Hall, in Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, where we will be joined



Manchester Camerata

by the Manchester Camerata, and a starry line-up of international soloists including soprano Nancy Argenta, counter-tenor Robin Blaze, and bass Michael George.

There are also other exciting projects this year, including an *Elijah* with Paul McCreech, and a tour to Dublin.

But for more about that, you'll have to get hold of our Season Brochure, or read the next *Hemiola!*

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



Soprano Nancy Argenta

### SEASON TICKETS

This year we are offering Season Tickets at special prices for our regular concert goers. Tickets are £50 (£43 concessions) covering five concerts, including Bach's *B Minor Mass*. For more information : Dave Francis, Ticket Secretary, tel 01663 764012, [tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk](mailto:tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk)

## BRAHMS' GERMAN REQUIEM— SINGING DAY PREVIEW

Following a boisterous performance of *Carmina Burana* at last year's Singing Day, our 2008 Singing Day in January will tackle something completely different.

Brahms' *German Requiem* was the composer's first major work for choir and orchestra, completed in 1868. The roots of the work can be traced back many years earlier, however, to the aftermath of his friend Schumann's suicide. It is also possible that the death of Brahms' mother influenced part of the work.

On the other hand, Brahms was obsessed by human mortality, and composed music

associated with death and mourning throughout his life. The *German Requiem* is very different to other requiems in the choral canon. Brahms avoids the liturgical (Latin) requiem text entirely, and chooses texts from the German, Lutheran bible. Instead of prayers for the souls of the dead, this requiem seeks to provide comfort for the bereaved. Brahms did not want to be tied down by doctrine, and commented, "I could easily dispense with the word 'German' and replace it with 'Human'".

The *Requiem* achieved immediate recognition and was per-

times over the next ten years throughout Europe, a popularity which persists to this day. The *Requiem* will be sung in English and Neil Taylor will be conducting Brahms' own arrangement of the work for two pianos. Jeffrey Makinson and Graham Eccles will once again be performing miracles on the keyboard, whilst Marcus Farnsworth and Nicola Mills make a welcome return.

All this, and homemade soup and cakes too.

What better way to dispel the January gloom than coming along to St George's Church in Poynton for a day of fantastic music making!

**St George's Singers  
2008 Singing Day  
Saturday 19 January  
St George's Church, Poynton  
£20 singers (including music  
hire), £5 audience  
Booking form available from  
[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)  
or tel 01625 877887**



## WHAT ELGAR DID FOR US—CONCERT PREVIEW



Elgar in 1915

**“The trees are singing my music. Or have I sung theirs?”**  
*Elgar*



2007 has been a year of musical celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Edward Elgar. St George’s Singers’ first concert of the new season, on Saturday 10 November in St George’s Church, Stockport celebrates the birth of this great English composer in a different way - by tracing the glorious revival of English choral music that Elgar himself inspired.

*Elgar and After* takes the Choir on a musical journey through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the later works of Parry and Elgar, and ending with contemporary composers John Tavener, Jonathan Dove and Sasha Johnson Manning.

Neil Taylor wanted the Choir’s own celebrations for Elgar to be different. “Purcell was the last truly great English choral composer - Handel of course being German - and in the Victorian era, England was even known as ‘the land without song’”. Then at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great renaissance in English music, with new ideas taking hold in both secular and church music, and a rediscovery of our musical national identity.

“Stanford, Parry and then most importantly Elgar led this revival, and the result has been a century of innovative and excit-

ing choral music unheard since the days of Purcell.”

Neil has chosen works from each decade of the century to reflect this revival in the nation’s choral life. Although most of the works take their texts from scripture in one form or another, they represent both sacred and secular worlds, and collectively display a characteristic sensitivity and imagination in the setting of text to music.

The concert opens with works well known to choral groupies: Parry’s majestic anthem *I was glad*, composed for the 1902 coronation of Edward VII, followed by Elgar’s *Give unto the Lord*, written for the Sons of the Clergy Festival at St Paul’s Cathedral in 1914.

Vaughan Williams 1922 *Mass in G Minor* is full of rich choral writing for unaccompanied double choir and soli. The next work, Walton’s *Set me as a seal upon thine heart*, was written for a wedding when the composer was 16 and still a chorister, and was his first published piece. Lasting only two and half minutes, it is a delightful miniature, in which every note counts.

Britten’s 1943 cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb* takes its text from the 18<sup>th</sup> century poet Christopher Smart’s poem of the same

name, written whilst Smart was in an asylum. Its theme is the worship of God by all created beings and things, including Nimrod the hunter, Smart’s cat Jeoffry, flowers, and various musical instruments such as shawms and dulcimers.

The *Three Shakespeare Songs* by Vaughan Williams were composed for a 1951 music festival, with wonderful harmonies in settings of texts from *Tempest* and *Dream*. The assassination of President Kennedy in 1962 was the inspiration for Herbert Howells’ beautiful *Take him, earth, for cherishing*, and was one of the last major choral pieces Howells wrote.

Moving into the modern era, Richard Rodney Bennett’s *Spell of Sleep* is a challenging work, whilst Tavener’s 1987 *Magnificat* encompasses Byzantine chant. Jonathan Dove’s anthem *Bless the Lord, O my soul* is an exuberant work, as original as anything by Britten, that rejoices in the creation.

The final stage in the journey—bringing us right up to the present day—will be Sasha Johnson Manning’s lovely *Psalms 91*, which was commissioned by St George’s Singers. And to find out more about that work, you can read an interview with Sasha on the next page.

## BREAKING THE CODE

**The Enigma machine, the cipher device used by the Germans in the Second World War, was named after Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* by its German inventor, Arthur Scherbius.**

Elgar was fascinated by cryptography. The best known of his puzzles is the *Enigma Variations*, whose melody he hinted was based on a well-known tune. *Auld Lang Syne* and *Rule Britannia* have been proposed but so far this ‘ur-tune’ remains a mystery.

Elgar may also have used morse code in the Enigma theme: two short, two long; two

long, two short notes, spelling out the words “I am, am I?”

Links between music and ciphers go back centuries. One of the earliest cryptographers was Al-Kindi, a 9<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad musician, and spies from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (as seen in Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes*) have sent messages disguised as music. One 18<sup>th</sup> century cipher matches the first

12 letters of the alphabet to an ascending scale of 12 crotchets, and the next 12 to a descending scale of quavers.

Elgar left other codes still to be deciphered: the so-called Dora-bella cipher, which he created in his letters to Dora Penny, and his mischievous encoding of the names of some of his critics in the Demons’ Chorus in *Gerontius*.

## INTERVIEW WITH SASHA JOHNSON MANNING

### *When did you start composing?*

I had lots of tunes in my head as a child. One night I didn't want to go to bed (I was 7), and was sitting in the kitchen thinking of a tune. I asked my Mum (who was a music teacher) how to write this down on paper and I found the act of making the dots on the paper very exciting. I've still got that piece of paper – I call the tune 'Manning's Waltz', and it's got lots of dotted rhythms and is quite complicated really. I then carried on writing music for a little recorder group, and composed instead of doing piano practice – it was much more interesting! I also got lots of encouragement from my mother and I was nurtured through school at Withington. They even ran a composition competition – I think they did it just for me really!

### *Which do you prefer – singing or composing?*

I love them both for different reasons. The feeling you get from being in a group, breathing together in search of something, the warmth of choral singing can't be matched by anything else. It becomes quite addictive. But I also love composing, just being on my own and writing.

### *Does being a singer help with your composing?*

Definitely, because I know more about how choirs work. I've always given the altos the worst parts – the difficult bits, the nuts and bolts that make the difference. I always had good sight readers amongst the altos in my choir and knew they could handle it. Tenors are inclined to sing out and really enjoy themselves, so I like to give them a nice melody to sing. The bass temperament is different—trusting and faithful. They underpin the music. Being a cellist as well I thought a lot about bass lines when I was a child, and when we played

hymns in assembly I got to look at the music from the bass perspective, and learnt how important they are.

### *Has your style changed over time?*

I used to do a lot of writing for an extremely good American choir (the St Louis Chamber Choir), and had complete freedom to write what I wanted. I tried new colours, though I never moved far from the English sound that I love. Now I tend to take a little more care, go back and re-work things. I'd probably revise parts of *Psalm 91* if I were writing it today!

### *What is the English sound?*

It's in everything I write. You hear it in all English music, particularly the early music of Tallis and Gibbons, through to Vaughan Williams and lots of others. It comes down to bare fifths. Rather than fleshing out each chord to its maximum, contriving or 'sugaring' phrases, the real English sound leaves it bare. Why over-dress a Christmas tree? The tree on its own is beautiful.

### *What's your ideal commission?*

My pet wish was always to be asked to write a carol for Kings College. Now I'm not so bothered – I love being asked to write anything.

### *How do you start on a new commission?*

I really just want the singers to have a good time so that their enjoyment shines through when they're performing it. Just singing the notes isn't enough – they have to give 300% without trying so that it conveys that something extra. For me also the words must come first, so that the music flows out of them and feels natural. The music colours and describes the sentiment behind the words, adding another dimension to the text.

### *How did you choose the text for St George's Singers?*

I was overjoyed when Stephen Williams asked me to write something. He didn't make any specific requests at all, except that he wanted something of a certain length. I chose *Psalm 91* because it's sublime, one of my favourite of all the psalms, with beautiful imagery and language, and great comfort in the words. It also falls naturally into three sections and three moods, allowing me to bring back the beginning of the piece at the end without harming the integrity of the work. For *The Christmas Life*, I sat down with Annie Windsor from St George's Singers and we went through 6 or 7 possible texts, before choosing that wonderful poem by Wendy Cope.

### *Who are your musical heroes?*

Bach (of course!), and Mahler – he was an absolute genius and stirs something deep down in the soul. I love all early music, and amongst living composers I'm a great fan of Macmillan. I also like a lot of popular music, as long as its artful and well thought out. Abba (great chords!), Rick Wakeman, and anything that has a lust for life – even bits of the Kaiser Chiefs and Franz Ferdinand!

### *Is there a big difference between writing for yourself and commissions?*

There's no mystery to composing—it's easy! If you're writing for yourself, you can do what you want and you're not worried about what people will think of it. Things come to me all the time, and I just pop them on my iPod until I want to use them. It's different when you've been commissioned. I used to worry a lot about commissions, but I recently wrote a piece for James Bowman that was a turning point for me. I didn't feel pressured, and was much more relaxed.



Sasha delivering the manuscript for her *Psalm 91* to former SGS Musical Director Stephen Williams

### *What's the biggest work you've composed so far?*

The *Requiem* I wrote for the St Louis Chamber Choir was in eight movements, and took 8 years to finish. And I've just finished the *Manchester Carols* which receives its premiere this December. That's a collection of 14 carols I've written to words by Carol Ann Duffy, linked together by narrative telling the Christmas story.

### *What does music mean to you?*

It means expression. I'm not very good with words, and have always been fairly shy. This was a way of saying things, displaying feelings that I could never put into words. Sometimes friends listen to something I've written, and then say 'did you really write that?' They're surprised that the Sasha they thought I was could actually write something like that, whether it be passion, or darkness, or some other emotion. Music is my life and I think I've got a great life. I'm doing the best job in the world.

**St George's Singers will be performing Sasha's *Psalm 91* on Saturday 10 November 2007 as part of our *Elgar and After* concert, and her *Christmas Life* carol at our carol concert on Saturday 8 December.**

### What is a shawm?



A shawm is a double reed 'hautbois', the more powerful predecessor of the modern oboe. Introduced to Europe during the Crusades, shawms were used from the 14th -17th century for ceremonial or festive occasions performed outdoors or in large buildings. A fine example of a tenor shawm was found on the *Mary Rose*, Henry VIII's flagship. Shawms ranged in size from 18" to over 9', the latter great bass shawm having a 9" bell. Modern shawms are still used in Catalan music and in many Asian cultures.

## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

### EXIT STAGE NORTH

Congratulations to SGS bass Daniel Murfin, who has been accepted at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow.

Dan has done a marvelous job as our Stage Manager over the last year, as well as taking on a number of solo roles. We wish him well in his career, and hope to see him back for occasional concerts.

### NEW OUTFITS FOR SGS

Regular members of the audience at our Radiant Light! concert noticed that the ladies were not wearing the usual red and black, but were sporting a rainbow of brightly coloured tops under their black shirts (see page 2). And the men were looking positively cool (or so the basses say!) all in black.

Whilst not a permanent change, it was felt a more casual outfit suited this concert better. Let us know what you think !

### SHOPPING MADE EASY

Shopping on St George's Singers' online shop is so easy:

- Log onto the internet
- Put in the shop's address: [www.buy.at/sgsonline](http://www.buy.at/sgsonline)
- Add it to your Favourites so you can return easily
- Locate the store you want through the A-Z list and click through to it
- Make your purchase in the usual way
- Earn commission for your favourite Choir!

## A TRIBUTE TO MARTINE

Martine Jackson was a lovely, lively person who bounced into choir (usually late) dressed in the brightest rugby shirts you could imagine.

Some of us spent her 50th birthday at Martine's with her family. Little did we know the battle she would have within a few months when her breast cancer was diagnosed. At this time we were rehearsing *Elijah* and known only to a few choir members, Martine performed with a drain in her side following surgery. Her family came to this concert and they must have been so proud of her strength and courage. When she lost her long blonde hair,

her choice of wigs amazed everyone, especially when she went for chemo and bounced in wearing a lilac one!!

Martine lived life to the full. On tour, she read up on sightseeing, where and what to eat and drink. On our last tour to Budapest, she booked a table over the internet for a restaurant she wanted to try, and a group of us enjoyed a lovely evening being served by singing waiters at Belcanto's next to the Opera House. She worked sightseeing around the singing, dashing out with a camera or fitting in a drink and a cake before rehearsals started again. By the end of a long weekend we were all

exhausted - you had to be fit to tour with Martine!

Martine moved south just over a year ago to look after her mother and work part-time at Southampton University. Her cancer was diagnosed 6 months ago and we saw her in June when this photo was taken. She was in really good form but tired very easily.

We'll always remember Martine in her final concert—the *Ellington Sacred Concert* — jazzing about on stage and hitting that top 'C' with all the gusto and liveliness she put into her too short life.

*Irene Gibbons, Alison Gunn*



Gill (centre) receiving her Friends' Certificate from Anne Francis and Friends' Coordinator Jean Egerton.

## RETURN OF THE (POYNTON) NATIVE

A former resident of Poynton travelled all the way from Canada earlier this year to visit friends in her home town - and to be officially recognised as a 'Friend' of St George's Singers.

Gill Smethurst, who used to live in Buckingham Road, left Poynton in 1978 to emigrate to Canada with her husband. She now lives in Squamish, British Columbia, north of Vancouver.

Gill is an avid follower of the Choir's activities through their website, and joined the Friends last year. "I just love Poynton and get very homesick sometimes," says Gill. "Being a Friend of St George's Singers helps maintain a connection with the town, and makes me feel I'm doing something valuable to support its musical life."

During her visit to Poynton,

Gill came along to a Tuesday night rehearsal, where she was presented with her official Friends certificate, and heard the choir sing for the first time in 30 years!

For more information about SGS Friends, please contact Jean Egerton, [friends@st-georges-singers.org.uk](mailto:friends@st-georges-singers.org.uk) or ring 01663 764012.

## MUSIC ON A SUMMER'S AFTERNOON

On a lovely Sunday afternoon in June (one of the few nice days this summer!) members of St George's Singers and Choir Friends were treated to an afternoon of wonderful music by four outstanding pianists, all of whom are closely linked with the Choir. The occasion was a recital to celebrate the Choir's new piano, purchased thanks to a generous donation from Andrea Millington in memory of her husband Rob, a stalwart of the bass section for many years. Members of Andrea's family had come up to Poynton just for the occasion.

First up was our Accompanist Jeff Makinson, who played a

Bach Prelude and Fugue, pieces by Schumann, Chopin and Katchaturian, and the Edwardian favourite *To a Wild Rose* by MacDowell. Then Tim Kennedy, one of our Assistant Accompanists, played a Mozart sonata, Debussy's *Claire de Lune* and an exciting version of *Jealousy* by Jacob Gade.

After an interval for wine and cakes (baked by committee members) it was the turn of our Musical Director. Neil entertained us with more Bach and Debussy and two lovely pieces by Copland, finishing with Schubert's *Impromptu No.1*. Finally, for something completely different! Marcus Farn-

sworth (then our Assistant MD but now at the Royal Academy of Music in London) is not just a baritone soloist and conductor, but also an accomplished jazz performer. Marcus demonstrated his versatility by playing and singing a selection of jazz standards.

Having been put through its paces, the piano was judged a smashing instrument. For the audience it was a delight to hear this wonderful playing in such a relaxed and informal atmosphere. The afternoon will stay in the memory for a long time.



Marcus Farnsworth, Tim Kennedy, Jeff Makinson and Neil Taylor resting on their piano

## IN SEARCH OF THE GOOD LIFE

Mel Rimmer is well known at SGS for her impromptu songs at the annual Social Evening, and (in her role as Alto Rep) for trying to keep the bolshie altos in line at rehearsal.

On the internet, though, Mel's better known as Beansprouts!

Mel writes one of the most frequently visited blogs (an online diary) on the world-wide web,

and was even featured in *Delicious* magazine last month.

Beansprouts, subtitled 'one family's search for the good life' is a daily record of life for Mel, her husband, three children, and assorted chickens (not forgetting the bees) on the allotment.

The blog carries news on the latest state of the crops, garden-

ing hints, tips on recycling and environmental issues, book reviews, recipes and even news of St George's Singers.

We also note, Mel, that there's an awful lot of advice on home brewing, wine making and cider fermentation. Enough said! You can find Mel at: [www.bean-sprouts.blogspot.com](http://www.bean-sprouts.blogspot.com)

**"Everything I know about environmentalism I learnt from Star Wars" - Mel Rimmer**

## IT'S OFFICIAL—BASSES HAVE MORE FUN!

Researchers in the USA have found evidence to back up long-held claims that men with deep voices are more attractive to women.

A study of the Hadza group of hunter-gatherers in Tanzania has shown that men who speak at lower pitches have on average two children more than men with higher voices.

The reason for this is not clear, but it is thought that if females were drawn to deeper voices, this would in time drive selection in the population towards this trait, resulting in lower-pitched males becoming dominant.

Before our basses start preening themselves, however, they should note that the research is

based on recordings of the Hadza saying the single word 'Hujambo' (hello).

Whether the same result would have been achieved listening to our second basses reaching for that bottom B flat in the Rachmaninov *Vespers* is debatable!



Some bass notes

## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS— WHAT WE DID THIS SUMMER



Gloucester Cathedral

**"I call architecture  
"frozen music"  
Johann Wolfgang von  
Goethe**

### SONG OF THE EARTH

This August a choir of 250 voices came together in a community music project in Gloucester Cathedral entitled 'Song of the Earth', a celebration of the sacred music that reflects today's multi-faith society. Part of the Three Choirs Plus Festival, it presented an extraordinary range of global sacred music, ranging from songs that express a yearning for the divine to choral music that brings an overwhelming sense of peace and serenity.

Singing from all corners of the Cathedral, the Choir sang Irish, Native American and Byzantine sacred chants, Georgian, Indian, Balinese and Hebrew

sacred music, the African *Missa Luba*, spirituals and gospel harmonies, and contemporary music by Tavener.

The concert was part of the Three Choirs Plus event, the 'fringe' of the world-famous Three Choirs Festival. The choir brought together choral societies, community, gospel and church choirs and a capella groups.

According to SGS Alto Susan Hodgson, who sang in the choir, "The aim was to use the magnificent acoustics of the building to create a 'living cathedral' of music. Most of the works had never been heard in an English cathedral before. It truly was a unique experience."

### SUMMER IN SAVOIE

Penny Anson headed off to the mountains of Haute Savoie in France this summer for a 10 day summer choral school under the baton of John Huw Davies—well known to many Singers for his work over many years with Stockport Festival Chorus. After a wonderful combination of hard work (but not too much!) and relaxation by the lake, Penny and another 45 singers from Manchester, North Wales and Cheshire put on three concerts to packed audiences in Chambéry and surrounding towns. Said Penny, "I made some great new friends, did a lot of singing and had a lot of laughs. A fantastic way to spend the summer!"

## 2007 SOCIAL EVENING



St George's recorder group—AKA the Big Busted Boogie Band

Another season, another reason—for having an end-of-season social!

This year our multi-talented Singers were at their finest. Songs from Ann Young and Mel Rimmer, violin piece from Clare Jackson, Beethoven songs from Richard Huddy, wonderful poetry reading from Reynold Higginbotham, Eric Northey's highly entertaining recitations, and community singing led by Alan Swain—and lots more.



Keep smiling dear—they'll shut up soon



Didn't this song have different words last time we did it?

Even Neil was persuaded to join in, providing virtuoso accompaniment on the piano. The highlight of the evening? Well, we couldn't let Neil's first year as Musical Director go unmarked—so take it away, St George's .....

### 'A Choir in a Northern Land'

A choir in a northern land a new conductor needs, the advert said.  
And so I thought perhaps I'll send a CV in and try - though Poynton's not a place I'd chose to go!  
They're called St George's Singers and they claim to be the best in Manchester.  
Though if that's so, I've no idea - I'll just apply and if auditioned, I'll go and find out what they're like.

Cathedral life is very fine, long

robes and sweet communion wine.

Cathedral life is very fine, but now the incense makes me sneeze,  
I want to do more as I please, because the incense makes me sneeze.

I'll cast the surplice off and make a change,  
And have a choir of my own.

I know not if this rough and ready bunch are what I'm looking for.

I know not if I'll change my mind and rue the day I took the job.

I'll try to knock them into shape, I'll try to knock them into shape

A task that might take quite a while!

(Words by Dave Francis—with sincere apologies to Andrew Lang and Edward Elgar)

## BLUFFERS GUIDE TO MUSIC! NO 1: EARLY MUSIC (1000-1450)

Guido a'Arezzo was the first to call the notes by letter names A-G. Parallel harmony was used, and polyphony (literally 'many sounds') began—several vocal lines playing together in harmony. The treble clef was introduced around 1200.

At first, mainly monks chanting with lots of church echo (Gregorian chant). Then monks doing the same thing in parallel 5ths. Very long, slow vowels

with simple organ backing, each piece staying in the same key. Folk material used simple major and minor scales. The motet (different words sung with different rhythms at the same time) arrived c1200.

For most of this era, musicians used octaves, 4ths and 5ths to create harmonies. No 'black' notes—which is why the C-G interval is a 'fifth' even though it has only 7 semitones.

## SINGING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Many congratulations to Liz Watts, who won the Song Prize in this year's Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Liz began her singing career as a chorister at Norwich Cathedral—where her teacher was none other than SGS Musical Director, Neil Taylor.

We're hoping that Liz will be able to sing with us in the near future. Watch this space!



Soprano Elizabeth Watts

## INTO AFRICA BY CORRIE VERDUYN

After nearly ten years as a member of St Georges Singers, I am now sadly leaving the choir, hopefully not forever, but certainly for the next two years. Many of you know that at the moment I work as a specialist doctor in obstetrics and gynaecology in Manchester. I have been in this job for twelve years and decided that I wanted to do something different. I finally decided to do voluntary work for VSO in Tanzania.

VSO stands for Voluntary Service Overseas. It is a charitable organisation, which has been involved in developmental work and sending out volunteers for nearly 50 years.

VSO promotes volunteering to fight global poverty and disadvantage. They bring people together to share skills, creativity and learning to build a fairer world.

They work to achieve specific development goals in areas of education, HIV and AIDS, disability, health and social well-being, secure livelihoods, participation and governance. My role as a volunteer will be within the framework of HIV and AIDS. VSO get requests

for a volunteer from various countries to fill jobs where there is either no money or no skilled person available locally to do that specific job.

The job I am going to do is based in Dodoma, the capital of Tanzania, and I will be working for a project called "Village of Hope", which is run by a convent.

This project was set up to look after orphaned children, to provide them with housing and education. These are all children whose parents have died because of AIDS and who themselves are HIV positive.

The village is now expanding into providing care for pregnant women with HIV.

My job will be to participate in this new venture and give medical input in this new project.

In Tanzania there are approximately 70-80,000 children who have contracted HIV through birth.

If pregnant women with HIV give birth, their babies have a 25% chance of being HIV positive. But if they are treated and managed appropriately during their pregnancies, this can be reduced to less than 1%.

Part of my job will be to work towards achieving this. Another part will be education of local health-care workers, dealing with the social aspects of HIV and diminishing prejudice and misconception.

Although there are many reasons why I am sad to leave Manchester, I am also very, very excited about this new job and change of life. Once I have settled in I will attempt to give an update about life in Tanzania. I'm just wondering if there'll be any choirs!

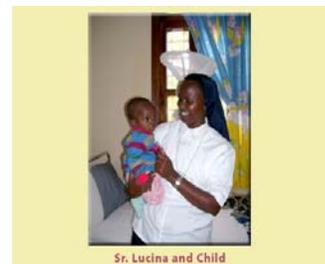
### Message from SGS Chair, Anne Francis:

VSO needs to raise a massive £9 million per year. It is costing them £15,000 just to send Corrie there. St George's Singers will be trying to help this fantastic project by raising money for the Village of Hope during our 2009 season concerts. In the meantime, we look forward to learning more about the Village, and will keep you informed of Corrie's activities and her new life in Tanzania.



Corrie Verduyn

**Information about the Village of Hope can be found at [www.adorers.org/villageofhopeshow.aspx](http://www.adorers.org/villageofhopeshow.aspx)**



Sr. Lucia and Child

One of the children in the Village of Hope

## St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

Anne Francis (Chair), 01663 764012  
chair@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Anna Marsden (Secretary), 01625 877887  
enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Susan Hodgson (Publicity), 0161 338 3013  
publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk



Find us on the web at:

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

To receive a regular copy of *Hemiola*, 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 true 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 more recently, Stephen Williams.

St George's Singers is now recognised as one of the leading and most innovative choirs in the North West of England, performing an astonishingly varied repertoire, and with around 120 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 and Royal Northern College of Music, hold annual Singing Days, and tour regularly in the UK and abroad. Now under Musical Director Neil Taylor, St George's Singers continues to explore and expand the boundaries of choral music.

Entry to the Choir is via audition, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

## MANCHESTER SINGS!

### ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY

**Saturday 10 November 2007, 7.30 pm**

*Elgar and After*

**St George's Church, Stockport**

**Saturday 8 December 2007, 7.30 pm**

*Carols and Brass by Candlelight*

**St George's Church, Stockport**

**Sunday 9 March 2008, 7.30 pm**

*The Speech of Angels*

*including Rachmaninov Vespers*

**The Monastery, Gorton, Manchester**

**Sunday 22 June 2008**

*Bach Mass in B Minor*

**Bridgewater Hall, Manchester**

**Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012**

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

CLIC SARGENT CONCERT  
SGS Alto Penny Anson is once again helping organize the CLIC Sargent concert, in aid of the children's cancer fund.

Monteverdi *Vespers*, performed by the Amici Chamber Choir, conducted by Andrew Dean, is on Sunday 14 October at 7.30 pm at Church of our Lady and the Apostles, Shaw Heath. Tickets £10, children £2. Tel 07881 588792.

CHETHAMS CHAMBER CHOIR

Chetham's Chamber Choir sings a varied programme of sacred and secular music, including Debussy's beautiful *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orleans*, and motets by William Byrd interspersed with music for lute. In aid of the Royal

School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders.

Tickets: £8, £3 Concessions.

Saturday 17 November, 7.30pm, Mellor Parish Church  
Tel 0161 484 5079

JACQUI DANKWORTH  
Jazz vocalist Jacqui Dankworth, who sang with St George's Singers in the Ellington *Sacred Concert* last year, is at RNCM with her own quintet on Thursday 1 November at 7.30 pm. Tickets: £15.50, £13.50, £10.50.  
Tel 0161 907 5555

AD SOLEM

Ad Solem, conducted by Matthew Hamilton, presents a programme of music exploring themes of loss and redemption, featuring works by Brahms, Schoenberg, Ramsey.

Wednesday 12 December, 7.00 pm, Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall. Tickets: £8, £5.

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

MANCHESTER CAROLS

The world premiere of Sasha Johnson Manning's new work on 14 December, 7.30pm at RNCM. With BBC Daily Service Singers, Manchester High School for Girls, Manchester Grammar and Withington Girls Schools. Tickets £17, with concessions. Tel 0161 907 5555

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY CHORUS

Conducted by Marcus Farnsworth, the first concert of the season features Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and Macmillan's *Magnificat*. Sunday 9 December, The Whitworth Hall, Manchester University.