



St George's Singers

Hemiola

St George's Singers

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Joan Bakewell CBE

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Sue Roper
Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ACCOMPANIST:

Jeffrey Makinson

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

MAKING MONEY TO MAKE MUSIC BY SALLY SMITH

Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies, was founded in 1935 to support and champion voluntary music. There are now over 2,500 member groups nationally and we have over 250 here in the North West, ranging from large symphony orchestras to village handbell ringers, youth choirs to community jazz bands.

The organisation lobbies hard on behalf of the members at national and local levels and also offers a great support mechanism to individual groups.

I read Joan Bakewell's article in your last *Hemiola* newsletter with interest. Luckily Making Music is in the fortunate position to have had their ACE (Arts Council of England) funding secured for at least the next three years. However, there is no doubt that recent arts budget cuts, coupled with soaring Olympic costs contribute to the frail and damaged support system which is now directly affecting voluntary music groups.

As North West Regional Development Officer for Making Music I have met a wide range of groups. Some seek innovation and development; others just want to carry on doing

what they've done for years. In order to remain strong and indeed grow Making Music is encouraging groups to think outside the box and take a fresh look at the things we do already.

There are increasing amounts of grant monies out there to support community development projects, work with the older generation, social inclusion and involvement of young people. Although these pots of money don't traditionally have 'arts and culture' written all over them, if we take a good look at ourselves we are more than likely hitting most of these targets already without distracting too much from the true focus of our art.

There are also wonderful opportunities for choirs through workshops, collaborations and concerts as well as regional and national events. Although not always direct forms of income, the publicity, local recognition and individual development within the group often reap the greater rewards.

Choirs across the North West have a unique ability to network, support each other and share members, collaborate for performances, events and in-



Sally Smith, North West Regional Development Officer, Making Music

deed travel the world singing together.

In whatever shape or form our ups and downs come, we all have one thing in common: the love of music making.

Making Music wants to give you the inspiration and support to do whatever you want, and with the enthusiasm and quality of singers across the North West, our choirs should never be short of members, audiences or money!

Why not join us on Saturday 1st March in Lancaster for a Gospel Workshop led by the legendary Scott Stroman. Costs £15. Details from sally@makingmusic.org.uk.

For more information about Making Music visit www.makingmusic.org.uk

GORTON REPEAT?

Want to know how Rachmaninov played those amazingly difficult piano pieces? Just Google 'Rachmaninov Big Hands'.

St George's Singers' forthcoming concert at Gorton Monastery has met with such interest, that tickets were sold out early in January.

Ticket Secretary Dave Francis has set up a waiting list, in case some tickets are returned, but fears that hundreds of people will be disappointed. Chair Anne Francis commented, "We hate to disappoint all the people

who rang and emailed for tickets, particularly those who loyally support the Choir on a regular basis, but the capacity of the Monastery is limited, and it is simply not possible to squeeze any more people in.

"The Choir has therefore decided to investigate the possibility of singing again at the Monastery later in the year, depending on the availability of the

venue and our existing concert programme."

Anyone wishing to have advance notice of any future performances at Gorton Monastery can register with the Choir's Mailing List on our website, or by contacting the Publicity Officer (see back page for details).

SOUNDS LIKE RUSSIAN (OR FRENCH, OR)



Nataliya bringing the sound of Russia to St George's Church Hall

It's Tuesday evening rehearsal for Rachmaninov *Vespers*, well after the tea break. Tonight we've had expert tuition in Russian pronunciation (well, Old Church Slavonic actually) from Nataliya Kompaniyets-Jouri, principal soprano with the Kiev Opera.

When Nataliya speaks, the sound of the wind flowing across the Russian steppes permeates her every word. When we try it, it's more like a foggy day in Poynton—but we persevere. What was that 'khu' sound again—and how do you mark it on your score to differentiate it from the 'shch' sound?

Getting to grips with many different languages is one of the big challenges for choral singers. Even singing in English means pronouncing sounds in different ways to get different effects. That bright northern 'a' that Neil asks for is quite unlike the effete southern variety.

One way of simplifying sound notation is to use the phonetic alphabet. Phonetics is the study of human speech, which contains more than a hundred different sounds across all languages.

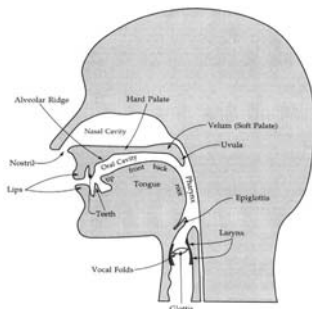
All these sounds can be transcribed in a standardized way by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), in which one symbol equates to one sound. Roman alphabet characters are used for common sounds, with new symbols for less usual sounds, or to indicate intonation and other nuances of speech.

Phonetic symbols can be a major tool in helping singers to represent pronunciation more accurately. And whilst the simple phonetics singers use go nowhere near approaching the complexity and accuracy that specialist phoneticians and speech therapists employ in their work, most people will find three or four symbols that might help them get their pronunciation a bit closer to the ideal.

For example, the symbol ə (also called 'schwa') is the most frequently occurring vowel in English. It is always associated with weak syllables, and is familiar as the first syllable of words such as 'about' or the first and last syllable of 'another'. Other symbols that might come in handy include:

- ŋ the nasal sound at the end of 'song'
- œ the vowel sound as in the French word 'oeuvre'
- y the vowel used in French and German that is shaped by the lips as 'u' but is sounded like an 'i'
- $\text{ɔ} :$ the long vowel in the word 'born'. If it has a \sim over it, it turns into the vowel in the French 'bon'
- θ as in 'think' and its voiced counterpart ð as in 'this'
- X as in Scottish 'loch' or German Bach
- tʃ as in 'chain' and dʒ as in 'gin'
- ʃ as in 'sheep' and ʒ as in 'measure'

These are just a few of the simpler sounds choral singers might find useful. A more detailed list of phonetic symbols and their use in foreign languages is available from the IPA website, or at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA>.



ELGAR AND AFTER—CONCERT REVIEW

St George's Singers' last concert met with rousing applause from the audience—and not a little relief from the Choir!

Musical Director Neil Taylor had chosen a tremendously ambitious and varied programme for the autumn concert. Described as a 'choral journey through 20th century England' the concert began in the familiar, gentle landscapes of Parry, Elgar and Vaughan Williams, whose thrilling *Mass in G Minor*, heard here only in extract, surely deserves to be sung in its entirety at one of St George's future concerts.

Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* drew the first half of the concert to a rousing close, and brought wonderfully expressive performances from the Choir's soloists Jennie Smallwood,

Cherry Smith, Paul Mummery and Jonathan Gort, who were joined in other items by Andrea Millington and Sylvia Glover.

After the interval however the Singers found themselves in far more strenuous and potentially treacherous terrain.

Vaughan Williams' *Three Shakespeare Songs* are ravishing to listen to, and wonderful to sing, but require enormous control and precision from all sections.

Then the journey reached Richard Rodney Bennett's *Spell of Sleep*, a work lasting a mere four minutes that St George's Singers had been rehearsing diligently for weeks—probably accounting for more rehearsal time than any other work in the programme!

On the night, however, the

Choir did full justice to the composer's intentions, weaving the strong harmonies and rhythmic variations with great confidence.

Then onto the second performance of Sasha Johnson Manning's *Psalm 91*, which was originally written for St George's Singers, and the concert finally closed with Jonathan Dove's exhilarating *Bless the Lord*, which elicited a virtuoso performance on the organ from Jeffrey Makinson, and some beautiful and sensitive singing from the Choir.

In the words of one audience member, "That was an incredibly ambitious programme—but you certainly pulled it off!"

"The concert was really enjoyable, full of vitality and energy. I think the choir being on the edge of their seats helped add excitement as well! It was great to listen to works in English and understand every word. Altogether, a super night!" - audience member

NEW SOLUTION TO ELGAR'S ENIGMA?

A groundbreaking solution to one of classical music's most enduring mysteries—the source of Elgar's theme for the *Enigma Variations*—has been proposed by Leeds University's Dr Clive McClelland. He believes the solution lies in the popular hymn, 'Now the day is over'.

The *Enigma Variations* comprises 14 variations on an original theme and contains two 'hidden' puzzles. The first is the identity of the 14 'friends pictured within' - the characters on whom the variations are based. Elgar himself identified these people later in his life. The second and more contentious mystery is the identity of the piece of music that is sup-

posed to be a counterpoint to the main theme.

Many solutions have been proposed since the work was first performed in 1899, but Dr McClelland believes his idea is the best to date because, unlike most others, it accounts for all 24 notes of the theme.

Nearly all the well-known solutions, such as 'Auld Lang Syne' or 'Home Sweet Home' fail to account for some of the notes, or have dissonances if they do. Dr McClelland believes that whilst Elgar loved a good puzzle, in setting one he definitely would not have left any anomalies. Of the 24 notes, Dr McClelland has identified 12 precise matches, and the other

12 are all harmonious intervals (11 thirds and one fifth).

'Now the day is over' was written by Rev Sabine Baring-Gould, an Anglican priest, novelist and hymn writer who also wrote 'Onward Christian Soldiers.'

Dr McClelland says, "The Enigma theme is very strange—it has the feel of something that has been worked out rather than composed in a moment of inspiration." Unlike the solution, which came to the good Dr in bed at 4am—a genuine Eureka moment! Nonetheless, the true identity of the music will probably never be known for certain, as Elgar died without revealing the source.



Elgar's first cycle—or is it someone else's?

WHY SINGING IS GOOD FOR YOU

BY JILL BARLOW, MUSIC FOR HEALTH



Just over two years ago, the RNCM started to investigate the potential for using live music within healthcare settings. Music has a role to play in people's sense of wellbeing and the RNCM were keen to explore the skills and competences that musicians need in order to lift people who are vulnerable because of ill health.

The impact of music on health has been widely researched and a range of effects have been seen. These include reduced anxiety and depression in cancer patients, lowered blood pressure and heart rate in patients recovering from a heart attack and reduced levels of pain after surgery, as well as improvements to general wellbeing for many other people.

The RNCM is now developing a pioneering Music for Health programme that embraces practice, training and research at the highest levels. They are working with a range of partners, across the UK and internationally, looking at existing provi-

sion and mapping out the future. They have been privileged to work with the Parisian organisation, *Musique et Santé*, who bring live music to the bedside in French healthcare. Recent collaborations include a training week in Paris in December 2007 where musicians from across Europe observed musical activities in neonatology, geriatrics and oncology amongst others.

They also work with Nordoff – Robbins in the UK who have an expanding outreach programme bringing music therapy to individuals and communities. The RNCM is hosting their exciting new Community Music Therapy Masters Degree from September 2008.

A new learning programme for both musicians and healthcare practitioners, funded by Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance, is the latest strand to the RNCM's Music for Health Programme. This work will develop musical expertise in the UK as well as raising awareness

across the health sector.

Holly Marland, who has spearheaded the developments, was recently awarded a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to look at music making with older people in healthcare, spending time with professional musicians and trained music therapists in New York and Paris. Holly commented, "I always knew that music had a profound effect on people but what I saw, heard and felt in these hospital settings was something else. The music had an energy that transformed and connected people who had previously seemed inert and isolated."

Working across a spectrum of cultural and clinical uses of music in healthcare, the RNCM's Music for Health Programme is set to become a beacon of good practice in the UK and abroad. To find out more and to support the programme please contact Jill Barlow on 0161 907 5414 (jill.barlow@nmc.ac.uk).

THE HEART EFFECT

It's been known for some time that music is a powerful relaxation tool. Music can decrease anxiety, lower blood pressure and heart rate, and change stress hormone levels. It affects respiration, reduces muscle tension, increases endorphin levels and boosts the immune system. The effect is so powerful, hospitals around the world use music to reduce stress in patients waiting for surgery. Now, researchers in Italy have found out something even more amazing. Doctors recorded the vital signs of 24 volunteers (12

musicians and 12 non-musicians) for five minutes. Then the volunteers listened to six different styles of music. The doctors found that fast musical tempos increased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration, whilst slow tempos reduced them. Fairly predictable. But then the shocker—the style of music and the volunteers' personal musical preferences made no difference at all. Classical, rap, techno, jazz or Indian raga—the only thing that mattered was the tempo. This means that the music you hear,

whether you've chosen it or not, or even like it or not, is going to affect your health. There's more: during the silent pauses, the volunteers' vital signs returned to normal, in some cases stabilising at healthier levels than before. The study also found that musicians were more sensitive to the effect than non-musicians, possibly because musicians learn to breathe in time to the music. Whatever the reason, taking music lessons could be a great way to keep a healthy heart.

To test out your own response to music, go to www.relaxationemporium.com and download two songs, one at 60 and one at 100 beats per minute

A GREAT SINGING DAY

St George's Singers' 2008 Singing Day was once again a great success, with around 220 singers giving a most moving performance of Brahms' *German Requiem* at the evening concert.

Over 160 visitors registered for the event, and were joined by 60 members of St George's Singers (with many of the remaining Singers helping out in the kitchen!)

Rehearsals began at 10.30 am, and for most of the day—with time off for lunch and tea—everyone was hard at work.

Neil Taylor had chosen to sing the work in English rather than the more usual German. "The

Requiem looks fairly easy, mainly because there is no division of sections" commented Neil. "However, it is far more difficult than it looks, with all the parts having to sing high up in their range for quite extended periods. The less we had to worry about the words, the better!"

The day did not go without glitches. Soprano Nicola Mills was unable to join us, so a last minute replacement had to be found—and Rachel Little stepped in at short notice to do a wonderful job alongside baritone Marcus Farnsworth. Then Jeffrey Makinson, one of the two accompanists for the day

along with Graham Eccles, came down with flu but managed to struggle from his sick bed just in time for the concert.

The event raised well over £600 for the Choir from tea and coffee, soup and sandwiches, cakes, CD sales, bookstalls, and a raffle whose first prize was two tickets to St George's Singers *Mass in B Minor* in the Bridgewater Hall.

Many thanks to Peter Farrington, Deborah Sallaway, Lynn Knowling, Sue Sawyer and all their many helpers in the kitchen and on the stalls. And of course, to Neil for a memorable day's singing.



Singing Day warm-up

"Yesterday was brilliant! Congratulations and many thanks to all concerned." - a Singing Day visitor



Raising the roof

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CONCERT-GOERS

1 Thou shalt hearken unto the music with all they heart, with all they soul, and all thy mind. Study thou thy programme notes and thereby be sore fully prepared to garner the blessings of the inspired melodies which are about to be sounded.

2 Thou shalt not arrive late, for the stir of thy coming disturbeth those who did come in due season; neither shalt thou rush forth as a great wind at intermission time or before the end of the programme, nor shalt thou trample to thy left nor thy right the ushers or the multitudes that are about thee.

3 Thou shalt keep in check thy coughings and thy sneezings for they are an abomination, and they shall bring forth evil execrations upon thee and upon thy household, even unto the third and fourth generations.

4 Thou shalt not rustle thy programme, for the noise thereof is not as the murmur of the leaves of the forest but brash and raucous and soothest not.

5 Thou shalt not yahoo unto thy relatives, nor unto thy friends, not unto any member of thy club or of thy household, nor unto any of thy neighbours.

6 Thou shalt not whisper, for thy mouthings, howsoever hushed they may be, bring discord to the ear of those who sit about thee.

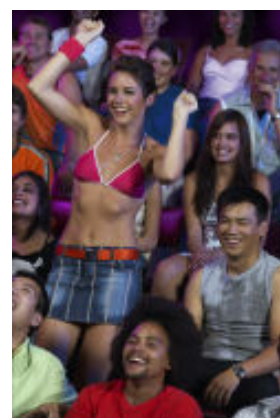
7 Thou shalt not chew with great show of sound or motion. Remember that thou art not as the kine of the meadow who do chew the cud in the pastoral serenity which is vouchsafed them.

8 Thou shalt not direct thy index finger at persons of public note and say unto thy neighbour, "Yonder goeth so

and so", but reflect that some day thou shall perchance be a celebrity, and thou shalt be in great discomfort when thou art pointed at and thou shalt not be pleased one jot or tittle hereby.

9 Thou shalt not slumber, for in thy stupor thou hast ears and hearth not; peradventure thou possesseth a rumbling obbligato when thou sleepeth and, verily, the rabble may be aroused thereby to do thee grievous harm.

10 Thou shalt not become a self-ordained music critic and with booming voice comment garrulously about the singers, or the players, or the playing; neither shalt thou hum or tap thy foot; for thou hast come as a listener and a lover of music, not as a critic or performer, and remember that none among the multitudes has paid to hear thy hummings or thy tappings or to listen unto thine opinions.



Rapt attention from the audience at our last Bridgewater Hall concert

THE SPEECH OF ANGELS: CONCERT PREVIEW



One of the Angels of
Gorton Monastery

"Music is well said to be the speech of angels". Thomas Carlyle's words give the title to St George's Singers' next concert, to be held in the newly restored Gorton Monastery.

Built by the Franciscans in 1863 as the focal point for their charity work in the East Manchester community, the Monastery was finally closed in 1989, abandoned to the elements and the vandals. Now re-opened following a £6m restoration, this architectural gem is once again the centre of a thriving community. Along with the adjacent Angels Centre, the Monastery provides help, friendship and

support to an entire local community, and also provides an amazing venue for cultural events for Manchester.

St George's Singers first heard about Gorton Monastery through their President, Joan Bakewell, who comes from Hazel Grove and has been a supporter of Gorton Monastery Trust for some time. Joan was Head Girl at Stockport Grammar School—as was Elaine Griffiths, now Director of the Gorton Monastery Trust.

Chair Anne Francis commented, "As soon as we walked into the nave of the Monastery six months ago, even when it was still

a building site, we knew at once that this place was made for music, and that we had to sing here."

The concert will feature works that echo the spiritual essence of the building, including the famous *Vespers* by Rachmaninov; Gorecki's *Totus Tuus*, written for Pope John Paul II's visit to Poland in 1987; and John Tavener's *Nunc Dimittis*.

We will also be joined by Joan Bakewell and Terry Waite, who will be giving readings to complement the music, in what we hope will be a truly memorable evening of words and music to uplift the spirit. The proceeds from the concert will go towards the Gorton Monastery Trust, which still needs to raise £1m to complete interior renovations.



THE OTHER RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Sunday 9 March 2008, 7.30 pm
The Monastery, Gorton, Manchester
The Speech of Angels
featuring Rachmaninov *Vespers*
Gorecki *Totus Tuus*
Tavener *Nunc Dimittis*
and readings by Joan Bakewell
and Terry Waite

Russia came late to 'classical' music. A German diplomat in the 1720s wrote of music education in Russia, 'If a scholar has not learnt his lesson during the term prefixed, the cudgels are applied and repeated till such time as he is master of the tune.'

So, whilst Bach and Handel were writing some of the definitive masterpieces of the western canon, Russians were being beaten over the head in an attempt to unleash their musical talents.

The reason for this retarded musical appreciation lies with the Russian Orthodox Church. Russia adopted Byzantine Christianity late in the 10th century, and had developed an entirely individual style of ecclesiastical singing.

All church music was unaccompanied: the Russian church forbade (and still does) the use of instruments, ensuring that the human voice could reign supreme. The Church even

banned the use of folk instruments in the main cultural centres. So Russia had no opportunity to develop its instrumental music outside its liturgical repertoire, and foreign composers had no incentive to work in Russia – even if they had been invited. For centuries, Russia was musically isolated.

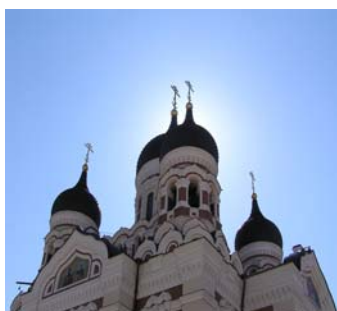
Things began to change during the reign of Peter the Great. His enlightened policies, and those of his successors Elizabeth and Catherine the Great opened up a 'window on Europe', bringing musicians and their traditions from across Europe to the Russian court. By the end of the 18th century, Russia had a vibrant musical culture.

In the 19th century, the establishment of the Russian Musical Society, the St Petersburg Conservatory and the Free Music School, offering musical training (thankfully now minus cudgels) and imaginatively programmed public concerts,

succeeded in joining this enthusiasm to innovation and creativity to produce the great Russian music we know today: Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin and many others.

Sergei Rachmaninov was born in 1873, and studied at the conservatories of St Petersburg and Moscow. Although known initially as a pianist, he became increasingly occupied with composition, and soon forged his own distinctive musical style of soaring melodies, rich harmonies and textures. He travelled widely as a performer, debuting in America in 1909.

Always hyper sensitive to criticism, he suffered from depression in the early years, and even underwent hypnosis to help restore his confidence as a performer and composer. With the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, he emigrated to America, where he died in Beverley Hills in 1943.



ABOUT THE RACHMANINOV *VESPERS*

Regarded as the composer's finest choral achievement along with *The Bells*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers* is also one of the greatest musical achievements of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Written in less than two weeks in 1915, it was first performed by an all-male choir in Moscow to benefit the Russian war effort, proving so successful it was performed five times in the first month.

Although Rachmaninov was not a fervent member of the church, he was fascinated by its ancient melodies, and had a great love of the tradition of the Russian orthodox church and its musical tradition in particular. The first requirement of this tradition was that voices should be unaccompanied; the second was that the text, in Old Church Slavonic, should be of primary importance, never obscured by counterpoint.

The *Vespers* sets to music text of the Russian Orthodox Church's 'All Night Vigil' ceremony, when the services of Vespers, Matins, Lauds and Prime are joined together to form one long service—the last part taking place in the early hours of the following morning. The work has fifteen movements, six of which are taken

from the Vespers service, the others from Matins, Lauds and Prime. Over the hours of the service, a variety of moods prevail – praise, meditation, thanksgiving, penitence and proclamation. All these emotions are reflected in the sobriety of the traditional church music from which Rachmaninov draws chants for some of the setting, inventing his own chants in a similar style for the other movements.

The chants used at Vespers tend to be noticeably softer and more lyrical than those of Matins, perhaps reflecting the gentle candlelight of the evening in contrast to the growing brightness of the new day's sunshine.

It is also clear that Rachmaninov was stylistically attuned to the traditional chants of his homeland, and many of the chants he composed for the *Vespers* appeared in other disguises. The opening melody of the First Symphony is derived from chant, and the chant at the beginning of movement 10 strongly resembles the initial melody of the Third Piano Concerto.

But despite this sober restraint, the choral features Rachmaninov creates are ravishing. He achieves great richness of sound

by frequently dividing each of the sections into two or three parts, and by doubling melodies at the octave. There is also great variety from movement to movement, dividing and melding groups of voices together in different combinations, pitting unison voices against harmonies. Although basically it is four-part choral work, it frequently divides into eight or nine, and even in one place into eleven parts.

Above all, the work is notorious for its low bass notes. Rachmaninov exploited to the full the extended low registers of Russian basses, going down as far as a bottom B flat. Even the composer considered this difficult, exclaiming to the chorus director, "*where on earth will we get these low basses. They are as rare as asparagus at Christmas!*"

In 1917, two years after he wrote the *Vespers*, the Russian Revolution banned all religious music, and Rachmaninov fled Russia for America. But Russia, and his great work, were always with him.

The fifth movement of the *Vespers*, the Nunc Dimittis ('Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace') was sung at his funeral.



Sergei Rachmaninov

The Hours of the Office Vespers: Sunset

Matins: After midnight

Lauds: Dawn

Prime: 6.00am

GORTON MEMORIES

Our forthcoming concert at Gorton Monastery has really captured the imagination of members of the Choir and the general public. Ever since it was announced that St George's would be singing at Gorton, people have been coming up to Choir members to recount their memories of the Monastery in its heyday.

For SGS tenor John Quinn, it is especially significant. John's

mother Dorothea grew up in Gorton, and attended St Francis Primary School. She was married to her husband Paul in the Monastery in 1966 on 19 February—by coincidence the same date as our first rehearsal of the Rachmaninov at Gorton. Apparently it rained all day, so there were no photos taken outside, but they still have pictures of the inside of the church on their wedding day, which

show the amazing altarpiece in its original state.

John himself has no memories of the church, but he was baptized there in 1967—on St George's Day! And our concert in Gorton on 9 March takes place only one day before the first ever performance of Rachmaninov's *Vespers* in Moscow on 10 March 1915.

Spooky or what!



Dorothea and Paul Quinn

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Andy Williamson with St George's Singers' in Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert* at Manchester Cathedral

BIG BUZZARD BOUNCES BACK

Anyone who came to SGS' performance of Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert* at Manchester Cathedral in June 2006 can't fail to remember the force of nature that is Andy Williamson, saxophonist and leader of the Big Buzzard Boogie Band.

At the time of the concert we realized Andy had serious health problems, so everyone at St George's Singers was delighted to hear of his successful kidney transplant a few months ago, which has completely changed his life. Even more important than the operation

though is the fact that the kidney was donated by Andy's good pal, Maff Potts, in the wake of changes to the Human Tissue Act which now allows anyone to donate an organ, irrespective of family ties.

Andy and Maff had been at university together, playing in bands since they were 18. After all those years of shared music-making, Maff simply couldn't accept that this might be the end for Andy. The decision wasn't easy but the risks were as near to zero as possible, and Maff went through a rigorous testing regime before he was allowed to go ahead. Charac-

teristically, Andy took none of this lying down. He got up a petition to the Prime Minister to change organ donation from opt-in to opt-out - and got a result: a government review has now been announced. He started a new group, the Organ Grinders, whose signature song is *Live Life then Give Life*—a message to promote living kidney donation.

Good luck for the future Andy—and keep blowing that sax!

You can follow Andy's progress at <http://bigbuzzard.blogspot.com> or at www.haveoneofmine.com

STRICTLY CHORAL SINGING!

Doing for choristers what 'Strictly Come Dancing' did for ballroom dancers, the nation's finest voices are about to belt it out—as harmoniously as possible—in 'Choir Wars', a new Saturday night knockout competition on BBC One.

Singing in choirs is one of the nation's biggest pastime, with over 25,000 registered choirs,

and at least half a million members. Gospel, barbershop, classical, a capella, folk or rock—any group can enter the competition, but it's personality, passion, power and performance that they'll need to make the Choir Wars cut.

A rigorous judging panel will ensure that only the most electrifying groups make it to the

live shows, but in time-honoured tradition it will be down to the viewers to decide who will become the victors.

Transmission dates are not known yet. Meanwhile, the more staid choral singers amongst us will be relieved to know that BBC Radio 3's 'Choir of the Year' will take place as usual in 2008!

CAROLS AT HUNTING LODGE

BY GWYNETH PAILIN



St George's carol singers with Santa and his little helper

St George's Singers were once again invited to sing at two of the December Festive Gala Evenings at the Hunting Lodge, Adlington Hall.

This has been an annual event and we say thank you to those members who came along (some of them twice) at a busy time of the year to make a very

adequate and balanced group.

Our main function was to lead the diners in familiar carols but we also sang *I saw a maiden* whilst they listened appreciatively. As is the custom *The Twelve Days of Christmas* was sung twice (at double speed the second time) the audience taking a lively part – one group

had petitioned the DJ earlier to be chosen for the Five Gold Rings!

The Charity collection we were able to make afterwards raised over £300 to support CorrieVerduyn's work with VSO in Tanzania. Thanks to the diners for their generosity.

CHRISTMAS HIGHLIGHTS

St George's Church, Stockport, held their first Christmas Tree Festival in the first week of December 2007 and invited local groups from the community to bring along and decorate their own trees.

St George's Church is very much our 'home' church for concerts, so the Singers were delighted to put their arboreal artistry to the test. Mike Mason provided the tree, and Ann

Young organised the team of volunteers to cut out, glue and assemble the decorations. (And based on this exercise, it's quite clear that some members of the Choir don't know what a bass clef looks like!)

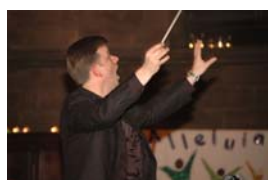
A week later at St George's Church it was our traditional *Carols and Brass by Candlelight* concert with VBS Poynton Brass Band—and you can see some pics from the night below!



Tree designers Mike Mason and Ann Young



.....but not quite sure about the rest of us



Everybody watching



Tenors ready for action.....



Eric Northey recounting the 'Yorkshire' bible



Concert secretary Jo Bluck leading by example



Anne Salloway's beautiful accompaniment to the carols

Concert photos courtesy of Keith Tysall

THE TRUTH ABOUT BASSES

Basses are in the spotlight at the moment, with a starring role in the Rachmaninov *Vespers*. Here for the first time, we are able to reveal the truth about this very strange breed!

The basses sing the lowest of anybody—which basically explains everything. They are solid, dependable people, and have more facial hair than anybody else. Basses feel perpetually unappreciated, but they have a deep conviction that they are actually the most important part (a view endorsed by musicologists, but certainly not by sopranos or tenors), de-

spite the fact that they have the most boring part of anybody and often sing the same note (or in endless fifths) for an entire page. They compensate for this by singing as loudly as they can get away with. In fact, most basses are tuba players at heart.

Basses are the only section that can regularly complain about how low their part is, and they make horrible faces when trying to hit very low notes. Basses are charitable people, but their charity does not extend as far as the tenors—basses hate tuning to the tenors more than almost anything else. But basses like

altos, except when they have duets and the altos get the good part.

As for the sopranos, they're simply in an alternative universe that the basses don't understand at all. They can't imagine why anybody would ever want to sing that high and sound that bad when they make mistakes. After all, when a bass makes a mistake, the other three parts will cover him, and he can continue on his merry way, knowing that sometime, somehow, he will end up at the root of the chord.

Q: How many basses does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None. They're so macho they prefer to walk in the dark and bang their shins.

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Above, Doug with some of his first bass chums, and below, with daughter Alison



DOUG WHALLEY

The 2007 Christmas concert saw St George's Singers saying goodbye to one of its longest-serving members, Doug Whalley, who has been forced to retire from the Choir due to health problems.

Doug has been a member of the first basses for 39½ years, since September 1968, during which time he has sung in over 200 concerts.

Music has always played a big part in Doug's life. He served

in three church choirs, and was also a member of the Nelson Glee and Madrigal Society, where he met his late wife Eileen, a soprano soloist.

In a ceremony at the afternoon rehearsal before the concert, SGS Chair Anne Francis was delighted to award Doug Life Membership of the Friends of St George's Singers. Doug will continue to support SGS and looks forward to attending future concerts. We all wish him well in his retirement.

NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to the following new members of St George's Singers who have joined us this season:

Gillian Banks and Helen Peat (soprano), Sally Heap (alto), Mark Hesketh and John Quinn (tenor), and Chris Shelley and Aidan Greenwood (bass).

Happy singing to you all!

THE CHESHIRE CONSORT

**"The glorious singing of the Cheshire Consort made a wonderful day even more special" -
Mother of the bride**

A new choir has been formed by St George's Singers specifically to sing at church weddings in the Cheshire, Greater Manchester and North Wales area.

Called The Cheshire Consort, members of the choir are drawn from the ranks of St George's Singers, who voluntarily give up their time to perform with the new group. All proceeds generated go towards funding

St George's Singers' concerts and other charitable choral activities.

The idea for the choir came when a good friend of soprano Sue Taylor asked if a few Singers would perform at her daughter's wedding. The Cheshire Consort was born, and received 'rave reviews' from the bridal party and guests alike. The Cheshire Consort



will advise on music selection, choir size and accompanists. For more information, or to discuss your own wedding requirements, contact Sue Taylor, Tel 01663 766991, or visit the SGS website at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

What is a crumhorn?



J-shaped crumhorns belong to the woodwind family, the name deriving from German 'Krumhorn' (bent horn).

Crumhorns make a strong buzzing sound, and have a limited range, usually a major ninth. Construction is similar to a bagpipe's chanter, with a cylindrical bore and double reed. Henry VIII owned 25, and a group of crumhorns is called a 'consort'.

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO MUSIC! NO 2: RENAISSANCE MUSIC (1450-1600)

Because the plague had just been in town, people paid the church to dedicate religious masses to them, ensuring God's protection. This kept a good number of composers in work throughout the Renaissance.

Polyphony really started to get going, and lots of musical rules on harmony and melody were

written down and studied. The madrigal (a non-religious song in multiple vocal parts) and the chanson (voices with one or more instruments) appeared.

Famous composers included Byrd and Tallis in England, Palestrina from Italy, and Flemish composers Guillaume Dufay and Josquin des Pres.

Complex harmonies began to be created by weaving vocal lines—called counterpoint. Instruments of choice included crumhorns, citterns, viols, lyres and lutes, whilst the only keyboards were the harpsichord and the organ. The first opera, *La Dafne* by Jacopo Peri, was performed right at the end of the era, in 1597.

ELIJAH MAKES A COME-BACK

Following St George's Singers' acclaimed performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with Sir Willard White in 2004, the Choir has been invited to sing the work again under Paul McCreesh, conductor of the world-famous Gabrieli Consort.

The concerts have been organised by Stephen Threlfall of Chetham's School of Music, and a Vice-President of St George's Singers. Three performances of *Elijah* will be given, with the combined forces of St George's Singers, Chetham's Chorus, Chester

Bach Singers, and singers from a number of North West schools. They will be accompanied by Chetham's Symphony Orchestra.

Soloists are Stephan Loges as Elijah, with Gillian Webster (soprano), Renata Pokupic (mezzo) and Jeremy Budd (tenor). Dates and venues for the concerts are:

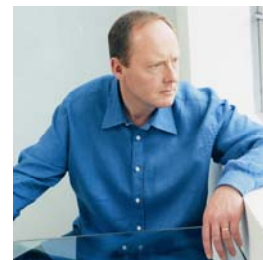
Thursday 14 February, 7.30pm
Chester Cathedral

Friday 15 February, 7.30pm,
Manchester Cathedral

Saturday 8 March, 7.30 pm, St George's Chapel, Windsor

On 10 February, Paul McCreesh is also presenting a workshop on *Elijah*, open to choral singers and instrumentalists who wish to explore this celebrated oratorio under expert and inspiring guidance. The workshop is free, but booking is essential.

Concert tickets are £14/£12 (£2 children) available from 0161 838 7244, www.chethams.com



Paul McCreesh

MUSICOPHILIA: BOOK REVIEW

Anatomists cannot distinguish the brain of a painter, writer or mathematician— but they can instantly identify a musician's brain. Unlike painting or poetry (inventions of man), music seems to have preceded us. We are all hard-wired for music.

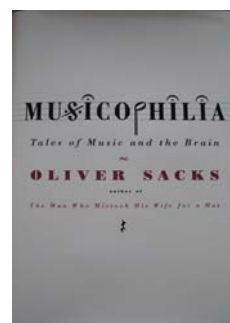
That is the main message of *Musophilia*, Oliver Sacks' latest survey of brains, functioning and dysfunctional. The author presents a collection of anecdotal

stories about how music inspires, heals, distracts and takes over lives. Stories such as the man struck by lightning who suddenly began to listen to, play and then compose music. Or the people affected by injury or disease who can no longer 'hear' music at all. Or the man with the memory span of a few seconds who still manages to play music flawlessly.

Sacks describes in an easily

readable way the latest scientific research into why tunes get stuck in our heads, why people have musical hallucinations, or how some people 'see' musical keys as colours. (Perhaps *Rhapsody in Blue* really was just that).

Sacks' conclusion is that music is universal, and that the grief of *Dido's Lament* can be understood by anybody, in any language, any culture.



HOLIDAY WITH MUSIC BY KATHLEEN GATENBY

The response to a suggestion by a singing friend was obvious. The chance to re-visit one of the most beautiful cities in the world and sing in St Vitus Cathedral! On 23 October we arrived in Prague to meet the rest of the 'choir'— what would they be like? They ranged from two altos who sang with the London Bach Choir to a couple celebrating their golden wedding who had never sung in a

choir before! This is a holiday—anyone is welcome.

First rehearsal—the basses couldn't pitch and were dragging. No problem— two good young basses from a local choir appeared at the next rehearsal and pulled the others along. Result— three rehearsals later a very decent performance with a good, appreciative audience, only marred by a siphoning

organ note being mistaken for the note to begin the unaccompanied Palestrina! After five frantic bars we had to restart. Singing Haydn's *Little Organ Mass* from the organ loft in St Vitus Cathedral as part of the Sunday morning mass was a heady, if chilly experience. Bonuses— Prague is still as beautiful as I remember. Verdict— holidays with music are definitely for me.



Kathleen (second from left) and friends at lunch in their favourite restaurant in Prague's old town square

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

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publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk



Find us on the web at:

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, Stephen Williams and is continued by our present Musical Director, Neil Taylor.

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. 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.

ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY

14 February 2008, Chester

15 February 2008, Manchester

8 March 2008, St George's Chapel,
Windsor

Mendelssohn's *Elijah*

Tickets: 0161 838 7244

Sunday 9 March 2008

The Speech of Angels

The Monastery, Gorton, Manchester

Dublin Tour

26 May 2008, St Patrick's Cathedral/
St Anne's Church

27 May 2008, Christ Church Cathedral

Sunday 22 June 2008

Bach: *Mass in B Minor*

The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012

tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

MANCHESTER SINGS!

CLIC SARGENT

A charity performance of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* will be given at the Church of Our Lady and the Apostles, Shaw Heath in Stockport on Sunday 2 March at 7.30 pm in aid of CLIC Sargent, the UK's leading children's cancer charity. The performance is open to all singers, with rehearsals held throughout February. Singers can register their interest with Penny Anson, Tel 01625 532906, Email penny.anson@tiscali.co.uk.

AD SOLEM

Manchester University's Ad Solem chamber choir and the UoM Baroque Orchestra per-

form Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, the Pergolesi/Durante *Magnificat*, and other works by Bach and Handel. Conducted by SGS Assistant MD, Matthew Hamilton. The Cosmo Rode-wald Concert Hall, Wednesday 5 March at 7.00 pm. Tickets £8, £5 (student special rate). www.quaytickets.com

ELIZABETH WATTS

The Cardiff Singer of the World Song Prize winner sings Brahms *Requiem* with Sandbach Voices. Saturday 15 March 7.30pm, St Mary's Church, Sandbach. £10, Tel 01270 841727.

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

The University Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, under Marcus Farnsworth's leadership, perform Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* at the University's Whitworth Hall, on Saturday 19 April at 7.30pm. With mezzo Louise Mott, tenor Alan Clayton and bass George Humphreys. Tickets £12, £8, £5.

