



Hemiola

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

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Dame Joan Bakewell

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

LOCAL SCHOOLS ON SONG

BY ANNE FRANCIS

When we decided to dedicate our current season to a 'youth' theme, the Committee discussed a number of ideas on how to encourage and promote young singers and musicians, and how to get more involved with our local community.

As a teacher, and for many years since joining St George's, I have wanted to do something to get more youngsters singing, and to involve them in our concerts. This year was the ideal opportunity.

The first step was to approach the Heads of the primary schools in Poynton (Lostock Hall, Worth Primary, Lower Park, Vernon Primary and St Paul's Catholic Primary). All were happy to take part, both in our Christmas poster competition (see page 5), and to provide readers or musicians for the concerts themselves.

To get the children interested in the project, I went along to Assembly at each of the schools, accompanied by choir mascot George (in all his Hungarian finery!) and told them about the Choir, where we get to on tour, some of the important concerts we've given, and showing them what fun singing can be.

I have also been running sing-

ing sessions with Lostock Hall, which wanted to develop their singing. Every Tuesday morning for the last couple of months I have been going into the school and spending twenty minutes teaching the children simple rounds and action songs, getting them to vocalise and listen to each other, and teaching them how to learn a piece.

The sessions have been received enthusiastically by staff and children alike. Within two minutes, the children all have grins on their faces, and are clearly enjoying themselves, as well as learning a great skill that will remain with them for life.

I'm delighted that this year we'll be joined by local school-children at both our carol concerts, either as readers or as musicians. Although the Choir's hectic schedule this year means that we haven't had time to learn any joint carols with the children, this may well be possible for next year.



Anne Francis at Worth Primary School in Poynton with (from right) Holly Axon with her winning poster in our Christmas Poster competition, music teacher Rachel Hall, and Katie Wadd, one of the runners-up

The importance of singing in schools was recognised a couple of years ago when the Government established the Music Manifesto National Singing programme—or Sing-Up campaign—under the leadership of composer Howard Goodall as the nation's Singing Ambassador. I have recently signed up St George's Singers as members of Sing-Up, to keep in touch with the latest developments and utilise all the information and tools that the programme is generating.

Hopefully the collaboration we have started this year with local schools may be the start of a more ambitious plan – perhaps even to establish a youth choir for St George's!



I'm in charge! Neil demonstrating his usual unflappability in the face of massed ranks of orchestra, chorus and soloists.

MEMORIES OF A GREAT DAY: BACH'S *MASS IN B MINOR*

Review by Robert Beale of the Manchester Evening News

BACH'S Mass in B minor is a challenge for any choral society which offers it in concert, and it's a sign of the fact that St George's Singers' new musical director, Neil Taylor, is aiming every bit as high as his predecessor - if not higher - that this was chosen for their first concert together in the Bridgewater Hall.

The way they handled the complex choral writing, whether in four, five, or eight parts, producing a mellow, balanced sound every time, is a tribute to the qualities of the choir's members and the skill at work in their training.

There could have been a temptation to go for the big, dramatic effect beloved of choir-masters of an earlier generation in passages like the opening slow Kyrie Eleison or the beginning of the Sanctus, and Neil Taylor was obviously not unaware of the possibilities there, for he had them sing those straight at their audience from

memory rather than reading from their books.

But there was no forcing in the singing there or anywhere else: instead a transparent sound which demonstrated how well the choristers knew their notes.

Occasional thinness on the top soprano notes is hardly to be wondered at in Bach's writing (which sometimes seems de-

signed more for the choirs of heaven he probably imagined in his head than mere mortals here below), and the earthy St George's basses give the sound an attractive humanity.

The soloists' team was distinguished by the purity of Nancy Argenta's soprano (particularly in the Laudamus Te) and the versatile, richly coloured mezzo of Rebecca Outram. Michael

George's bass was - as ever - intense and expressive, and Mark Wilde gently mellifluous in the tenor solos.

The singer with the greatest impact, however, was counter-tenor Tim Mead, taking the place of the originally advertised (and

his one-time teacher) Robin Blaze. This was singing of individuality and thoughtfulness - witness his Qui Sedes.

Manchester Camerata, led by Richard Howarth, provided the accompaniment with distinction (and just the odd hiccup in the continuo) - especially in some glorious solos from Rachael Clegg (oboe d'amore) and Amina Hussain (flute).

St George's Singers' performance of Bach's *Mass in B minor* at the Bridgewater Hall on 22 June was a resounding success both artistically and—with a large and appreciative audience—financially. Here are just a few memories from what proved to be a fantastic day for the Choir, and, in his Bridgewater debut, a very special day for our Musical Director, Neil Taylor.



Mark Wilde and Nancy Argenta in harmony at rehearsal



Bass Michael George



Nancy Argenta putting her feet up during rehearsal



Sorry Neil—you can't back out now!

Relaxing back-stage before the concert



Tim Mead and Rebecca Outram

DON'T PANIC! COUNT-ER-TENORS!

It's 7pm the evening before the Bridgewater Hall concert, and our Publicity Officer was doing some last minute work on the 'Sanctus' (whoever suggested doing this from memory needs shooting!) The phone rings. "Hi, it's Jo." Alarm bells take over. There could be a myriad reasons why the Concert Secretary was phoning the Publicity Officer just 15 hours before we're due at the Hall—none of them reassuring. She continues in a rather strained voice. "Are you sitting down?" Not any longer. Come on Jo, spit it out. "Robin Blaze is ill, and definitely won't be able to sing."

They say that in moments of crisis, time stands still. They're wrong. The clock on the wall is whizzing round as if it's in a time warp. We're 24 hours away from the concert, and we've lost our countertenor. (Sopranos come in pairs—it just had to be the countertenor didn't it!) Then the good news. "Robin's suggested a replacement—Tim Mead." We've never heard of him, but if he comes recommended by Robin Blaze, he must be good. All we need to do is figure out the best way of handling the change of plan. The agent has emailed a photo but for some reason it's

not coming through the ether. It's already 8pm. Onto the internet to download a biography and an image, then a new page created for the programme. Now it's 9.30pm. Too late to have it printed, but Jo says she can get it photocopied at her office, so it's emailed through to her. 10.30pm. The email hasn't arrived. Aaagh! Frantic pounding on the keyboard, and this time it arrives safely, and Jo (AKA Wonderwoman) rushes it round for printing. It's 1.00am on concert day and all is calm again. Time to return to the 'Sanctus'? You must be joking!



Tim Mead

PETITE MESSE SOLENELLE: SINGING DAY PREVIEW

Our next Singing Day is on Saturday 17 January, and this year Neil Taylor has chosen the ever popular *Petite Messe Solenne* by Rossini to blow the winter blues away.

Gioachino Rossini was born on 29 February 1792, son of a trumpeter and a singer. He grew up to become the most influential Italian composer of his generation, raising *opera buffa* to unsurpassed heights and laying the foundations for the Italian Romantic opera of the mid 19th century.

Then, just after the triumph of *William Tell* in 1829, at the height of his fame—and having amassed a not inconsiderable fortune—at the age of 37 he announced his decision to stop writing opera. He went on to live until he was 76, but whilst he wrote lots of fairly insubstantial and often humorous pieces during this period, he composed only two important

works: the *Stabat Mater* in 1861 and the *Petite Messe Solenne* in 1864.

The title is a misnomer, and is indicative of Rossini's whimsical and self-deprecating humour. The mass is light-hearted rather than 'solemn', and 'small' only in the sense of the musical forces required. It was originally written for 4 soloists, an 8-strong chorus, piano duet and harmonium, and was intended for private performance in the family chapel of the Countess Pillet-Will. Rossini described it thus: "*The work requires twelve singers and three sexes: men, women and castratia total of twelve cherubim. This little composition is alas, the last mortal sin of my old age.*"

Instead of writing opera, Rossini spent a substantial part of his later years entertaining. A visit to his villa at Passy was obligatory for every eminent musician who was passing

through Paris, and Verdi and Wagner were just two of the many visitors entertained by his wit and his cooking ('tournedos Rossini' being another of his legacies).

Places on the Singing Day are limited so early booking is recommended. Application forms are available from Gillian Banks (Tel 01925 213949, email Gilliam.m.banks@tesco.net.) Tickets cost £20, which covers music hire, a great day's singing, and tea and coffee during the day. And keeping up Rossini's culinary tradition, we will also be making homemade soup, sandwiches and cake available to purchase for lunch and tea.

The concert on the evening begins at 6.00pm, when we hope to have an enthusiastic (if small!) audience to hear the fruits of our day's labours. What better way to spend a dark, cold January day!

"Give me a laundry list and I'll set it to music"

"One can't judge Wagner's opera Lohengrin after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend to hear it a second time."

"Every kind of music is good, except the boring kind." - Rossini

"An intellectual snob is someone who can listen to the *William Tell* overture and not think of the Lone Ranger."

- Dan Rather



Gioachini Rossini

Israel in Egypt

Saturday 22 November, 7.30 pm

St George's Church, Stockport

Tickets:

£12, £10, £1 students/children

Tel: 01663 764012

Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Moses separating his laundry

"Too solemn for common ears"
- first night audience, 1739

"Handel's most superbly magnificent failure"
- 1739 critic

"Spectacularly camp!"
- Matthew Hamilton, 2008

ISRAEL IN EGYPT: CONCERT PREVIEW

Israel in Egypt is the first example of a product virtually invented by Handel, the biblical oratorio—a format which enabled him to provide entertaining pieces with all the audience appeal of opera (though without the lavish and expensive staging) and with the distinct advantage of being capable of being 'marketed' during the Lent season.

Always a canny business-man, Handel also recognised a downward trend in the popularity of Italian *opera seria*, which led him to turn almost exclusively to oratorio from 1738 onwards.

Handel composed the work in only two weeks in 1739, with texts drawn from Exodus and the Psalms, the only one of his oratorios (apart from *Messiah*) that uses a biblical text.

It tells the story of the Hebrews' escape from oppression and slavery in Egypt as they are led to freedom by Moses, and depicts (with not a little schadenfreude) the assorted plagues that befell the Egyptians, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the drowning of the hapless Egyp-

tians and their horses as they pursue the fleeing slaves.

The work is remarkable on a number of levels. It contains a massive amount of choral writing—in fact, despite the fact that six soloists are employed in the work, it is the chorus that



takes the starring role. Whilst this feature made the work one of Handel's least popular oratorios in the 18th century (amateur choirs not being up to the challenge at that time!), since the mid 19th century and the rise of the large amateur choral societies it has become a big favourite with choirs and audiences alike.

Israel in Egypt is also remarkable for the vividness and sheer fun of the writing. Handel must surely have enjoyed describing leaping frogs, swarms of locusts, buzzing flies and lice, and fierce hailstorms.

If the words leave something to

be desired in terms of poetic elegance (and Handel's native tongue was German not English), the music is enormously enjoyable and the choruses as memorable as any in the *Messiah*. Indeed, many people believe that the only reason *Messiah* is more popular than *Israel* is that the words of *Messiah* lend themselves to musical setting more successfully than those of the Old Testament.

For the concert, we are joined by old friends from St George's Orchestra, led by Pia Oliver.

And we're especially delighted to welcome soloists from the Royal Northern College of Music, as part of our *Celebration of Youth* season: Charlotte Carter, Mark Duff, Matthew Duncan, Jennifer France, Ian Gifford and Helen Jarmany.

These final year or post-graduate students already have impressive CVs on the concert and opera platform. Given RNCM's record at producing world-class singers, you just might want to take this opportunity to hear some of the singing stars of the future!



Our next concert at the Monastery:
Saturday 20 June 2009, 7.30 pm
*In a Monastery Garden—
music for a summer's evening*

CHOIR BOOSTS MONASTERY FUNDS

Following the success of our first concert at Gorton Monastery, a repeat performance of Rachmaninov's *Vespers* on 20 September by St George's Singers raised even more funds for the Gorton Monastery Trust. The Choir presented Elaine

Griffiths, the Director of the Monastery, with a cheque for £4,000 after the concert, a sum which was added to the £3,300 we contributed earlier this year.

The Trust still needs to raise £1 million to complete the renovation of the building and its sur-

roundings. So our most recent contribution was put to immediate use—in the car park! Along with building materials contributed by Tesco, who are building a new superstore in Gorton, the money enabled the car park to be completed.

2008 CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

St George's Singers has a hectic few weeks over the Christmas period, with no fewer than five events and concerts to fit in.

The festive season starts on Saturday 6th December with our traditional and very popular *Carols and Brass by Candlelight* at St George's Church in Stockport, with VBS Poynton Brass Band. This year readings will be given by children from Poynton's primary schools, who will be bringing their own special charm to what is at heart a festival for children. Mulled wine and mince pies are included in the ticket price, so book early to

avoid disappointment!

On Tuesday 9 December, a small group of choir members will be entertaining the residents at Carmel Lodge Nursing Home. Then on Sunday 14 December the Choir has been invited to sing in the Chapel at Lyme Park and will be performing four sets of carols at various times between 11 am and 4 pm. Our usual visit to Adlington Hall follows on 23 December.

And our final concert is a carol concert at our 'home' church of St George's in Poynton on Saturday 20 December. 2009 sees

the 150th anniversary of the building of the present church, and we are delighted to be taking part in the celebrations with this special concert. Conducted by our Assistant Musical Director, Matthew Hamilton, and with readings and music from the children of Poynton's schools, we hope you will join us in the lovely St George's Church for the concert, and in the church hall for refreshments afterwards.

With so much choice, please come and join us at one of our special Christmas events!

Saturday 6 December, 7.30 pm
St George's, Stockport
Carols & Brass by Candlelight
£12, £10, £1 students/children

Saturday 20 December, 7.00pm
St George's, Poynton
Celebration for St George's
£10, £8, £1 students/children

Ticket hotline: 01663 764012
Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

CHRISTMAS POSTER COMPETITION

All five primary schools in Poynton took part in St George's Singers' poster competition this year, and between them submitted over 300 entries!

As part of the Choir's Celebration of Youth season, Chair Anne Francis visited all of Poynton's schools in September, and invited all the children to design a poster for our carol concerts this Christmas.

According to Anne, the standard of entries was exceptionally high. "The imagination and technical ability displayed by the children was outstanding, and we had quite a job selecting just two out of so many excellent and often very striking drawings. The children had obviously thought very carefully about Christmas, and what it means, and whilst we had a lot of very traditional



The winning poster by Holly Axon of Worth Primary School

images such as Father Christmas, stars and holly, many of them were of much more unusual subject matter. It's just a shame we're only giving two carol concerts, and that we couldn't use more of them!"

Two winners were eventually selected: first prize went to Holly Axon from Worth Primary, and second prize to Suzanne Cantillon from St Paul's Primary. The children both received book tokens, and the two schools were each given vouchers from music store Wright Greaves.

A further four children also received Amazon gift vouchers.

A selection of the short-listed entries will be on display in the church venues on the day of the carol concerts, and parents, children and other visitors are welcome to view them in the afternoon from 2 pm to 5 pm (during rehearsal), as well as during the concerts.



Suzanne Cantillon's poster for our concert at St George's in Poynton

ALTOS—THE REAL MUSICIANS

Famous people who began their careers in choirs:

Aretha Franklin, Gary Barlow (Take That), Ian Hislop, Neil Diamond, Whitney Houston, Axl Rose (Guns N Roses) and (of course) Mick Jagger.

The altos are the salt of the earth—in their opinion at least. Altos are unassuming people, who would wear jeans to concerts if they were allowed to.

They are in a unique position in the chorus in that they are unable to complain about having to sing either very high or very low, and they know that all the other sections think their parts are pitifully easy. But the altos know otherwise.

They know that while the sopranos are screeching away on a high A, they are being forced to sing elaborate passages full of

sharps and flats and tricks of rhythms, but nobody notices because the sopranos (and usually the basses as well) are singing too loud.

Altos get a deep, secret pleasure out of conspiring together to tune the sopranos flat. They have an innate distrust of tenors, because the tenors sing in almost the same range and think they sound better. But altos like the basses, and enjoy singing duets with them—the basses just sound like a rumble anyway, and it's the only time the altos can really be heard.

But the altos' only real complaint is that there are always too many of them—so they never get to sing really loud!



BRAVO, MAESTRO!



Take a bow Maestro!

The BBC series 'Maestro' turned the spotlight on that most benighted (and occasionally be-knighted) group of musicians—the conductor.

The orchestra is about to play, but the conductor isn't there. Someone remembers one of the third violins has some experience with the baton, so he's put on the rostrum, and conducts the whole concert. Next day the maestro is back and the violinist takes his old seat. His neighbour looks at him, puzzled. "Where on earth were

you last night?"

Definition of a Conductor: A musician who is adept at following many people at the same time.

What's the difference between God and a conductor? God knows He's not a conductor.

What do you do with a horn player that can't play? Give him two sticks, put him in the back, and call him a percussionist. What do you do if he can't do that? Take away one of the sticks, put him up front, and call him Maestro.

Why are conductor's hearts so coveted for transplants? They've had so little use. OUCH!

In the spirit of fair play, let's hear the other side:

"God tells me how the music should sound, but you stand in the way" - Toscanini.

"Here are two golden rules: start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn what goes on in between" - Beecham

What is equal temperament?



Equal temperament is a system of tuning an instrument in which every pair of adjacent notes has an identical frequency ratio, and the octave is divided into a series of twelve equal steps (semitones). This means that the instrument always sounds in tune whatever key it plays in. Vincenzo Galilei (father of the more famous Galileo) was the first advocate of the twelve-tone equal temperament in 1581.

BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO MUSIC NO 3: BAROQUE (1600-1750)

This is when music theory really started to take form. Bach started writing in 'equal temperament', which meant that polyphonic harmony could now change key at speed. Masques and dance music became popular, and the minuet was the hip dance. Despite the fact that many great composers of the era (Handel, Bach, Vivaldi) wrote a lot of church

music, non-religious music began to thrive, notably opera. The baroque era brought in the concerto grosso—a small bunch of soloists of equal importance, with an orchestral backing group featuring a continuo (bass and harpsichord improvising from a chord sheet). Violins, cellos, trumpets, recorders, oboes and bassoons became popular, and the timpani and

the piano first appeared. Complex polyphony and more chord changes (unlimited by the end of the era) made compositions more complicated, and whilst orchestras started to get bigger, virtuoso players became more common.

And 1685 was a BIG year—Bach, Handel and Scarlatti were all born.

SOUNDING CAN REALLY HEAL

—BY GILL HOLT

We'd been singing, chanting and using moving meditation for days, and it was a wonderful experience, but sitting on those bean bags for hours at a time was killing me. I was in such pain, and by the sixth day, I didn't know what to do with myself. Brigitte stepped in. "Let's give Gill a sound bath."

At this point I have to explain that I was the universe's biggest sceptic. If there was no scientific evidence, or you couldn't prove it, or you couldn't see it, then it wasn't real, it was all in your mind. But the pain was so bad I would have tried anything, and anyway I didn't want to let the group down.

So I lay on the rug on the floor while twelve women and men knelt or stood round me and started to improvise and 'sound' my name. "This is very nice and relaxing" I thought, "what lovely sounds". But nothing prepared me for what happened next. It felt as though the blood in my legs started to heat up and flow upwards towards my body. A few minutes later the warm blood pulsed along my arms, and I started to get hotter. Then I felt myself lifting, and that was the

point I realised that I needed to remember all this to report back later, and I came back to earth again. As the sounding continued I started to feel nauseous. As the voices gradually stopped, Brigitte held my feet and sang long low sounds until she had 'grounded' me, and the nausea went away. I experienced no more pain for 22 hours! I was totally amazed.

I have always sung since I was a very small child, and music has played a vital role in my everyday life—but this experience took music into a different place. When I saw an advert for 'Introduction to Sound Healing' with Simon Heather I just had to go. I learned how to use sounds with intention, as the group had done in my sound bath, and ways in which I could use sound for self-healing. It was a beautiful weekend—and I had no more pain for three and a half weeks! I had the proof. I was a sceptic no more.

Since then I've completed the Sound Healing training with the 'College of Sound Healing' and also the teacher training. I continue to use 'sounding' daily for 15 minutes or so for my

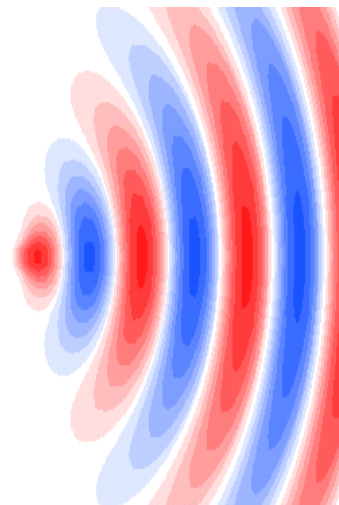
highest good, and have experienced improvements in every part in my life. I am so grateful to Brigitte for opening that door for me.

You don't need to be a singer to use sound for healing, and of course, other healers may use bowls or gongs or drums, but I find the voice works just fine. It is part of you—and it's cheap, and you always have it with you.

There are very few practitioners in the North West. That is about to change. I have just run my first Sound Healing training in Stockport, starting with Part 1—the introductory weekend, which can stand alone, or be the first of a four weekend training course for practitioners, which is spread over 12 months.

I am also running a workshop in Spring 2009 which is open to anyone. So come along to the Cenacle Centre—a holistic treatment centre in Stockport—and hear for yourself what sound healing can do.

For more information, contact gill@gillbecque.co.uk.



"There will come a time when a diseased condition will not be described as it is today by physicians and psychologists, but it will be spoken of in musical terms, as one would speak of a piano that was out of tune" - Rudolf Steiner

NEW ROLE FOR OUR PRESIDENT

St George's Singers' President, Dame Joan Bakewell, has taken on a new role as 'Voice of Older People'. Her job will be to champion the elderly, raise the profile of age equality issues and encourage public debate around age discrimination laws.

Joan regularly comments on age issues in her column, and

her books include *The View from Here: Life at Seventy*. In addition to her broadcasting and writing, she is also Chairperson of the National Campaign for the Arts, and a member of the Advisory Board of Gorton Monastery Trust.

The Aldeburgh Festival, the Tate Gallery, the British Film Institute, and the Royal Na-

tional Theatre have all benefited from Joan's leadership.

She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, was appointed CBE in 1999, and a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) in the 2008 Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to journalism and the arts.



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS NEWS



THE WEDDING OF THE YEAR

“What a lovely wedding” is often the response made by guests as they leave a reception well fed and watered(!), but the enthusiastic thanks of the guests leaving Neil and Mary’s wedding on 25 October at St Matthew’s church in Sheffield were clearly genuine and conveyed how much everyone had enjoyed the day.

Of course Mary looked beautiful and Neil looked as calm as he does on the rostrum of the Bridgewater Hall, but

what made for a truly special day were the individual touches, such as the six bridesmaids dressed in black. The Order of Service included the music for the hymns with instructions to the guests to “Sing—you are the choir”!

The bridal march had been specially composed for Mary, and Neil’s daughter Ella sang beautifully during the signing of the register. The plethora of Cathedral organists available ensured some really spectacular playing—as one guest commented “I didn’t realise we got a free organ recital as well.”

The reception in the elegant Millennium Galleries was also full of surprises with endless

champagne and canapés followed by “pie and peas” and ice cream cornets!!

Each guest was presented with a bottle of local Sheffield relish and the gastronomic experience concluded with a cheese board that had most of the guests drooling.

It was a lovely celebration and one which will be remembered for a long time.

Well done to Neil and Mary for planning such a great day, and many congratulations to you both from the whole Choir.

CAROL CONCERT PREMIERE

David Pailin was in a quandary. What should he give his wife Gwyneth for her 70th birthday? There was nothing she really wanted, and her main interest outside the family was St George’s Singers, for whom she had served as Librarian for many years, and which (according to David) “totally dominates her life”.

Then inspiration struck. Commission a piece of music for her! But who from? The only suitable composer David was aware of was Sasha Johnson Manning, whom he had seen at the premiere of the last work she’d written for St George’s. But he had no idea how to commission a piece of music himself, and wanted to be sure that the commission would be acceptable to St George’s, as well as appropriate for Gwyneth. So he contacted Anne Francis and Neil Taylor, who thought this was a great idea. Having secretly rifled through Gwyneth’s many files, David found Sa-

sha’s phone number and called her. She said she’d be delighted to write something for Gwyneth, and would liaise with Neil about the musical side of the work.

Next thing to decide was the setting. David suggested ‘The Divine Image’ by William Blake, a poem whose sentiments he endorsed and that seemed eminently suitable for this commission.

So far so good. Then problems arose. Sasha moved house, and was out of contact for quite a while—leaving David rather anxious about progress. But the biggest problem was keeping it all a secret. “Gwyneth spends so much time on the computer and the telephone doing Choir work, she was bound to intercept any phone calls or emails,” said David. So an elaborate communication system was set up. David gave Sasha his daughter’s number so she could contact him, and

asked Alan Swain to let him know if anything came out at choir about the piece. Phone calls from Neil and Anne were made during breaks at Tuesday evening rehearsals whilst Gwyneth was handing out music—the only time David could be sure that Gwyneth would not be at home to take a call.

At last, to David’s great relief, not only was the score finished on time but was also scheduled to be sung by the Choir. He had it bound ready for presentation to Gwyneth at her birthday celebration in October, and 18 month-old Lara presented it to her grandmother. Initially thinking it was some sort of ‘This is your life’ book, Gwyneth was stunned when she opened it and saw the dedication on the first page. It was a total surprise, and surely one of the most wonderful presents a music lover could be given.

‘The Divine Image’ will be premiered by St George’s Singers at our Christmas carol concert on 6 December 2008

The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew;
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

William Blake

ON REALISING 'THE DREAM'

BY ANTHEA SLATER

To sing *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Hallé – surely an ambition too far; but one windy day in April found me outside the artists' entrance of the Bridgewater Hall. Telling myself I was excited rather than nervous (who was I trying to kid?) I duly reported to a lovely smiling lady. The waiting area was quite full (auditions each weekend for four weeks) so I sat between Helen from Buckinghamshire and Laura from Halifax. "Here's the sight reading and can I take your photograph?" resulted in my face forever in the Hallé files as this terrified being who looks as if she is being confronted by a Dalek!

The choral director Jamie Burton was charismatic and efficient. A quick check on the application form, voice exercises then wonderful piano playing and I had to launch into 'from the nethermost fire'.....(literally!?) Let's just forget the sight reading but as I left I enquired "Was *any* of it correct?" and JB just smiled.

The results would be out in about four weeks, but only two days later "It's the Hallé....." my heart thumped and my stomach literally fell to my knees..... "we thought we'd let you know early". I controlled my shriek of surprise (just) but seconds later was jumping and shouting for joy. My lovely supportive husband came running thinking I was being murdered at least! I was later told that the person who rang the 31 other successful candidates very soon learnt to hold the phone away from her ear or risk being deafened!

The rehearsal schedule was demanding (especially as there

was Bach's *B minor Mass* to learn as well!) Over the next three months we had three full days and five evenings of intensive work. Venues varied from the huge hall at William Hulme School, the splendid auditorium of Manchester High to the glorious Chethams where I felt privileged to see the impressive inner sanctum.

The week of the concert performance and recording of the CD (Wow! Yes another joy!)

we were at the BWH each night totalling 23 hours. Jamie Burton was always a powerhouse of energy and commitment, never flagging, always expecting 100% and every second counted. We never knew what was coming. Certainly I didn't expect the Telly Tubby noises or the hand jive, and I hope never to forget his 'penguin with attitude' or his 'diaphragm demonstration' complete with tightened T-shirt. The group back massages were great but mixing up out of section and sight reading another part was just a bit too scary!

At the first rehearsal with Sir Mark Elder, he received the congratulation card on his knighthood from the chorus with great charm and said he was delighted that Manchester had been so recognised. He also shared with us that his daughter now felt like "a Princess of the World". It was wonderful to sing with the full orchestra - I could feel reverberations through my score. At one point Sir Mark called on the chorus to really spit out the word 'HOSTS' saying "it doesn't matter what comes over here".....the timpanist put up his umbrella! In the final hours of rehearsal the pressure increased with

pages of final instructions being emailed to us, and just before the performance the section leaders were prowling with safety pins in the direction of anyone who dared sprout a cleavage! Then we were on and in front of a full house of 2,500 people and a (for me) forever memorable performance.

The critic Robert Beale loved it and said all the soloists were outstanding; that Alice Coote's vision of the Angel was 'so

warmly human in her tenderness'; that Bryn Terfel made a 'noble contribution and was magisterial in his roles as both Priest and Angel of Agony'; and that 'Paul Groves with his resourceful and intensely beautiful singing of Gerontius was surely one of the best interpretations of the part'.

To say that I felt privileged and jubilant at the end was a vast understatement. I had enjoyed every moment, had learnt loads, met some wonderful people and had sung one of my favourite pieces by Elgar. I will finish with the comments from the paper as my heart still beats faster every time I read it!

"Gerontius is a work which can be made or marred by the quality of the chorus, and the united (and augmented) Hallé Choirs were almost unbelievably fine - from the pure clear tone of the first Kyrie Eleison through the snarling chorus of demons to utterly thrilling singing as the choirs of heaven. And that spine tingling glory was drawn from them by Sir Mark Elder's passionate direction. I don't think I could ever hope to hear 'Praise to the Holiest' sung with such a combination of attack and resource - especially the wonderful crescendo on the last line of the first verse and the final chord, surely the most magnificent ever heard in this work's history."



Choral Director Jamie Burton demonstrating his infamous hand jive



Hallé conductor Sir Mark Elder during rehearsal for *The Dream of Gerontius*

In 2007 SGS soprano Dr Corrie Verduyn left her job in the UK to spend two years working with VSO at a hospital in Tanzania. Last Christmas the Choir raised almost £450 to support Corrie's work, monies which will be put towards the purchase of an oxygen concentrator on the labour ward. Recently Lynn Knowing and Debra Sallaway went to visit Corrie in Tanzania, and brought back this message to all her friends at St George's.

A LETTER FROM AFRICA

Dear all

I have now been in Tanzania just over a year and am conscious of the fact that I have not been in touch. This is in part due to the unique attributes of Tanzanian cyberspace as well as my own lack of time.

Many things have happened in the last year. Starting out at the Village of Hope it became clear after a few months that I wasn't able to be very effective there so I decided to leave. Since May this year I have been at Mvumi hospital which is a rural hospital 40 km out of Dodoma. I am in charge of the care and treatment programme for HIV patients and also of maternity services.

My third job is teaching at the local college for clinical officers who are de facto Tanzanian doctors. I am the only medically qualified doctor in the hospital. The hospital itself is run by the Anglican church of Dodoma and is heavily in debt, staff have not been paid for the last two months. Working circumstances are difficult and morale is low not least because many things are not available. For example there is no oxygen supply available in the maternity department to help resuscitate mothers and babies.

I understand from Lynn and Debra that money was kindly raised by the choir to be put to use here in the hospital. I have suggested that this could be put towards the purchase of an oxygen concentrator which turns 'fresh air' into air with a higher oxygen content thereby avoiding the need for oxygen cylinders.

During the week I am in Mvumi but most weekends I am in Dodoma for shopping, social life and to be away from work. I am in the fortunate position to have a house in town as well as in Mvumi.

Tanzania is the most beautiful country with many nature parks

and beautiful beaches, well worth a visit. Maybe a choir tour would be in order! I am still planning to return next year although I have already received job offers here—who knows, but I plan to keep in touch.

Corrie



The Mvumi hospital



Daktari Verduyn will see you now!



Mother and new baby—both happily doing fine

BUSY YEAR FOR CHESHIRE CONSORT



The Cheshire Consort at Anna and Simon's wedding in September

St George's wedding choir, the Cheshire Consort, has only been active for a few months but has quickly established a reputation for the beauty of its singing, and for the role it plays in making every bride's special day even more memorable. Here are just some of the comments received so far: "The Cheshire Consort's music is the

first thing that most people comment on when they recall the service—a real highlight of the day." "Many of our guests and members of the parish and local community were enthralled by the quality of the music and singing." "Sheer professionalism, beautiful tone and harmony." As well as bringing enormous pleasure to

wedding guests, and great enjoyment to the singers themselves (all of whom freely give up their time), the Cheshire Consort has raised over £900 to date for Choir funds.

For information on booking the Consort, contact Sue Taylor on 01663 766991 or visit our website at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS!

Local horticultural societies can be hotbeds of vicious rivalry. But in Disley, friendly competition is the order of the day.

Geoff & Sue Taylor were approached one day this summer by their next door neighbour, an enthusiastic gardener who opens up her garden every year as part of the Disley & Lyme Horticultural Society 'Gardens Open Days' event.

She believed that their lovely new garden was good enough to go 'on show' and had mentioned it to the organizers. A

quick visit from the judges, and an invitation was forthcoming to be one of 15 gardens on show in Disley & Lyme.

The garden was opened on Sunday 27 July, and received over 70 visitors. With so many people wandering through their garden on a hot day, Geoff & Sue took the opportunity to make money for the Choir by selling drinks in aid of St George's—and raised £85.in total.



Some old English roses with a musical theme and wonderful fragrance: St Cecilia, Sir Edward Elgar, Rhapsody in Blue, Mme Butterfly, James Galway, and (the Editor's favourite!) Benjamin Britten



Geoff and Sue's garden was designed by Cliff Windsor, who sang with St George's for many years, and who now runs his own garden design company, Cliff Windsor Garden Design, Tel 0161 482 4296

SINGERS IN PEAK CONDITION

Concerts are hard work, but exhaustion doesn't deter St George's walkers from tackling some of the toughest walks in



the High Peak. So far this year they've been up Mam Tor (the day after the Rach *Vespers!*), round Castleton, through Lyme Park and along Alderley Edge. For some reason, pubs always seem to figure prominently in the instructions given out by Jenny or Brian and there is a strong suspicion amongst non-walkers that itineraries are chosen more for the quality of the beer at the suggested



hostelry, rather than for the glory of the landscape or the exhilaration of the hike.

Surely not!

Hearts First Hike:
A special 17-mile hike from Cromford Meadows near Matlock to Hurdlow near Buxton takes place on Sunday 23 November in aid of the British Heart Foundation.
Information from:
www.bhf.org.uk/highpeak

WELCOMES AND FAREWELLS

Many congratulations to SGS soprano Jennie Smallwood who had a baby boy on 16 October. Young Ned Peter is reported to have a great set of lungs already—let's hope he's a tenor!

Welcome also to new members: bass Christopher Brennan, and soprano Mary Andrew.

Sadly we also have to say some good-byes. John Smith and Dave Shields have both had to leave because of other commitments, and Charlotte French is now based in Yorkshire and unable to get across to rehearsals. Thanks to them all and good luck with their future singing activities.



CAPTION COMPETITION

Send your caption by 31 January 2009 to Susan Hodgson at publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk, with your name, email and postal address. The best caption wins a £5 e-gift certificate to spend through our online charity shop, SGS Online

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

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chair@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Jacqui Smith (Secretary), 01625 533779
enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk

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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

22 November 2008, 7.30 pm

St George's Church, Stockport
Handel: *Israel in Egypt* with RNCM soloists

6 December 2008, 7.30 pm

St George's Church, Stockport
Carols and Brass by Candlelight
with VBS Brass Bass
and the children of Poynton

20 December 2008, 7.00 pm

St George's Church, Poynton
A Christmas Celebration for St George's

25 April 2009, 7.30 pm

Manchester Cathedral
Music for Sacred Spaces
with Chetham's Brass Ensemble

20 June 2009, 7.30 pm

The Monastery, Gorton, Manchester
In a Monastery Garden
- music for a summer's evening

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

MANCHESTER SINGS!

St Ann's Hospice Festival Choir

Friday 12 December, 7.30 pm
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester
An evening of Christmas music with the Hospice Festival Choir, brass and organ.

Tickets: £21, £18, £16, £12
Tel: 0161 907 9000

Manchester University Chorus

Saturday 13 and Sunday 14
December 2008, 7.30 pm,
Whitworth Hall.

The University of Manchester Chorus, under the direction of Marcus Farnsworth, gives two performances of Mendelssohn's epic oratorio *Elijah*. Tickets £12, £8 and £5

Tel: 0161 275 8951, email:
boxoffice@manchester.ac.uk

Manchester Carols

Wednesday 17 and Thursday
18 December 2008 at Royal
Northern College of Music.
Following a highly-acclaimed world premiere last year, the Manchester Carols return to retell the Christmas Story for the 21st century, with text by poet Carol Ann Duffy and music by Sasha Johnson Manning.

Tickets: £17, Tel 0161 907 5555

