



Hemiola

St George's Singers

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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

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Matthew Hamilton

ACCOMPANIST:

Jeffrey Makinson

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www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

MUSIC—THE ULTIMATE RECESSION BUSTER

BY ROBIN OSTERLEY

It is hard to escape the doom and despondency being generated by large sections of the media about the economy. The arts press is no different, with gloomy forecasts ranging from a huge decline in sponsorship, to the demise of many arts organisations due to shrinking audiences. So what of amateur music-making?

At Making Music we field, on average, some 300 enquiries per week. At the time of writing not one single enquiry has been as a result, directly or indirectly, of the economic downturn. Our members are getting on with the business of putting on events, providing musical opportunities for young people and adults, and rehearsing their members. And attracting new members too.

A moment's thought will discover why. Unlike the professional sector, amateur groups rarely rely extensively on external funding—primarily because they have a regular and guaranteed source of income (membership subscriptions) and much lower costs. Although many do fund raise, it is often for special events or discretionary activities, so difficult times are more likely to cause a cut-

back in their activities than threaten their very existence.

This is hardly a cause for rejoicing, but it offers some reassurance that the voluntary music sector is more resilient than its professional counterpart in times of economic trouble.

And there are plenty of other causes for rejoicing. Performing and listening to amateur music is one of the least expensive of hobbies. Typically our members charge around £100 per annum for subscriptions, although this varies widely according to type, size and geographic location. Taking this as an average, participants pay around £2.50 per week for a 40-rehearsal season. To attend an amateur music concert costs as little as £10, often less. Some interesting comparisons:

- A pint of beer and glass of wine per week: £5
- A ticket to a local cinema: £6
- A ticket to see Macclesfield Town at home: £14
- A meal out including half a bottle of wine: minimum of £20
- An average ticket to *The Lion King*: £70

So it is really a recession-busting thing to do. And think of all the additional benefits: meeting new people, having exciting opportunities to perform or listen to great music, learning new skills, and pursuing a common goal.

Research shows that musical activity is good for you—participating in music is surely one of the best ways to alleviate the stress of everyday life.

So when economic times are tough—do more music!



Robin Osterley, Chief Executive of Making Music

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Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies, is one of the largest arts umbrella organisations in the UK, representing and supporting over 2,650 voluntary music groups, and lobbying on behalf of its members to national and local government and other agencies. Making Music's 180,000 musicians and music lovers present around 10,000 concerts each year to 1.5 million people.

SINGING DAY IN THE RAIN!

Our annual Singing Day was held on 17 January, and proved to be yet another wholly enjoyable and very successful day.

Despite the awful weather, a choir of over 180 voices gathered in St George's Church in Poynton to rehearse and perform Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*—one of the composer's best loved and also one of his last works.

The day began with an introduction by our Musical Director, Neil Taylor, to Rossini and the work itself. Then we went into 15 minutes vocal—and very physical—exercises designed to get us all to sing more 'brightly' (one of Neil's favourite topics on Tuesday evenings).

Then into the work itself, and a good two hours solid singing



Peter, Cath and (keeping a close eye on the soup) chef de cuisine Deborah

before we were all allowed a break for lunch.

As usual, St George's Singers had surpassed themselves by providing gallons of delicious home-made soup and sandwiches for our visitors, and this year the organisation of the 'soup kitchen' was even better than previously. Masterminded by Deborah Sallaway (on her second year in the hot seat), assisted by Cath Bryant and coffee tsar Peter Farrington in

the kitchen, and supported by lots of volunteers from St George's, soup was ladled out with the efficiency of a car assembly line—making sure everyone was back in rehearsal promptly. Then more singing until 4.30pm, when it was time for tea—this time with home-made cakes.

One of the highlights of the



Four young singers on our Singing Day: Joanna Butler, Imogen Makin, Helena Curtis and Heather Chang.

Singing Day is the evening concert performance. Whilst there are many singing day events, not all of them include a performance at the end with professional soloists and musicians. This year four marvelous soloists joined us for the concert. Soprano Katherine Moore (a late replacement for Nicola Mills), mezzo Joyce Tindsley, tenor Richard Dowling, and baritone Marcus Farnsworth provided the choir and the small but wonderfully appreciative audience with a treat as they gave a performance worthy of a major concert hall.

As part of our 'Celebration of Youth Season' St George's Singers this year decided to make a number of free places available at the Singing Day for young people who wanted to come along and see what choral singing was all about. We were delighted to welcome five



Tenor Richard Dowling at rehearsal in his first concert with St George's Singers

youngsters to the event, and even more delighted to know that they had all enjoyed the day thoroughly and that they would certainly like to continue choral singing when homework and exams gave them more free time.

Finally, a word of thanks to the three hardest workers on the day. Neil was indefatigable—whether rehearsing the soloists, leaping up and down the chancel stairs in excitement (and occasionally exasperation!), or bouncing around on his podium, exhorting the choir to ever greater levels of brightness, his enthusiasm was infectious, and succeeded in drawing a fine performance from the singers on less than 5 hours rehearsal. And we must not forget our two great accompanists. With



Jeff and Graham playing up a storm on the harmonium and the piano

Graham on piano, and Jeff on harmonium (which he himself admitted was the easier of the two!) they played almost non-stop from 10.30 in the morning till 7.30 in the evening. Let's hope they got a cup of tea and a piece of cake for their efforts!



Conductor Neil Taylor with our two fabulous accompanists for the day: Jeffrey Makinson and Graham Eccles

"It was brilliant. Brilliantly organised, conducted and hosted." - a visiting member of the 200-strong choir



Singers come from all over the country to our Singing Day—these two ladies enjoying their lunch have travelled from Gloucestershire

A LETTER FROM SANTA

*Mr & Mrs Claus
The Grotto
Lapland*

Dear St George's Singers

You'll be surprised to get a letter from me at this time of year! But I simply had to write and apologise for a most unfortunate incident that occurred last December, which may have caused a few problems for you at your annual carol concert. Let me explain.

Early every December I put Rudolph and the team through an intensive work-out programme. Usually the boys are very conscientious about staying in good shape throughout the off-season. In fact, this year Prancer and Dancer have taken up something called 'Strictly Reindeer'. They claim they've lost over thirty pounds between them, their antlers are more velvety, and they're fitter than they've ever been. The elves are all wild for it too and the wife never misses – claims it's all for charity. (Personally, I think the whole thing terribly vulgar. The place for sequins and glitter is the Christmas tree.)

But I digress. In the run-up to the Big Night a few hours extra flying gets them and the sleigh nicely tuned up.

So I set off from Lapland one Thursday evening, and decided to head down to Hampshire, where there was some rival establishment I wanted to check out. I also thought it would be a good opportunity to test out the new GPS system the missus bought me in the January sale last year, following a rather embarrassing navigational error near Hemel Hempstead on the Big Night. (Well, the light pollution is so bad sometimes, you can't always see the stars to navigate by. And – I'm sure the gentlemen of the choir will agree with me here – stopping to ask a total stranger for directions is just too demeaning!)

Anyway, it must have been a couple of hours into the journey – somewhere over Stockport I guess – when I switched the GPS on. Donner and Blitzen! No, not the lads in the second row - real thunder and lightning! The whole gizmo blew up, sending a streak of lightning earthwards. It struck the building directly below us, and there was an almighty rumbling sound from the interior.

Rudolph pulled up immediately and said we must stop and exchange insurance details with the authorities. Comet and Dasher advised scarpering before someone got our registration number. I couldn't see any damage, so told the lads to keep going – andante (as

you would say) but with accelerando to prestissimo pretty sharpish!

It was only later I discovered—to my horror—that I'd inadvertently blown up the organ at St George's Church.

Well, it took me two days to sort out this bunch of fake Laplanders in Hampshire, and it was Saturday evening (the 6th December as I recall) before I took to the skies again and headed home. I was feeling rather uncomfortable about the GPS business, so decided to fly back via Stockport just to see what was happening.

It was a lovely night. Bitterly cold but diamond clear. As I approached St George's at about 7pm and saw the traffic chaos, I realised that there must be something going on in the church. Perhaps my destruction of the organ hadn't been such a disaster after all! Eagerly, I ordered the team to descend for a closer look, when suddenly – bang!

I'd totally forgotten Rudolph had just had laser surgery to correct his short-sight. (He's been suffering from astigmatism for years, but he's so vain he refuses to wear glasses.) He was still getting to grips with distances, and on the way down he'd misjudged the trajectory. We'd clipped the lightning rod on the tower – and all the lights in the church went out.

I was horror-struck. I'd spotted the sign on the A6 – a candlelit carol concert, with choir, brass band, and no doubt hundreds of adults and children in the audience. I imagined the screaming and panic inside the building. Would they have enough candles? Would the choir be able to see the conductor? Would the wine be sufficiently mulled? Would everyone find the mince pies?

Then, as I took the sleigh into a holding pattern round the church, the lights mercifully came back on. Some electronics genius was clearly at work. Perhaps the concert could be saved after all! By this time, my nerves were shattered. I had to reassure myself that I hadn't brought devastation to Stockport a second time.

We landed in a school car park just at the back of the church. Since I didn't have a ticket for the concert, I couldn't just walk in. Instead, I lurked outside (yes, I know Santa isn't supposed to 'lurk', but I've never got round to getting CRB certification) and listened to what was going on. The concert had started – and what angelic voices they were! The sopranos soared into the ether, the altos harmonised gloriously, the basses were sonorous as the night, and the tenors ...



Ah, the tenors! Words fail me even now. I was transfixed.

Mrs Claus had to hear this. I pulled out my new i-Phone and dialled home. I could hear the phone ringing in the Grotto, but there was no answer. I tried again. Still no answer. Then I remembered. Saturday night is 'Strictly Reindeer' night. There was no way I'd be able to drag her or the elves away from that – even to hear this wondrous choir.

I dialled a third time, but as I punched the 'call' button my attention was drawn back to what was happening inside the church. The conductor was speaking to the audience. Something about green, amber and red traffic lights – then suddenly all went silent. Oh no! My i-Phone was interfering with the sound system. I was wreaking havoc again! I had to get out of there before I did more damage.

I picked up my skirts, tucked my beard in, took a firm grasp of my hood and pelted back to the car park, shouting instructions to the team for an emergency take-off. With Rudolph's nose on red alert, we screamed into the sky, alarming the neighbours who not unnaturally called the police. (Sirens make such a noise don't they? I hope someone wasn't trying to record something at the time).

So, my dear friends—that ends my sorry tale. I have asked George (he and Rudolph were at school together) to pass on this letter to you all, and beg you to accept my apology for nearly ruining your wonderful evening.

I am comforted only by reports from George that the concert was a tremendous success and that he was greatly admired by the many children in the audience.

Be assured that next year I shall ban the use of all communications and navigational technology during the festive season, and instead return to the traditions beloved of generations: sending letters up the chimney and following the stars.

Yours ever

Santa



The Reindeer Flight Simulator



MUSIC FOR SACRED SPACES— CONCERT PREVIEW

On Saturday 25 April, St George's Singers will be joined by the young members of Chetham's School of Music Brass Ensemble in bringing the musical splendours of 16th century Venice to Manchester Cathedral in our *Music for Sacred Spaces* concert.

Works include choral music by two giants of the era, Gabrieli and Schütz, but also offers a fascinating opportunity to hear—and compare—sacred music by the modern Estonian composer Arvo Pärt.

Ever since mediaeval times, composers have exploited the architecture and acoustics of sacred buildings to create sublime musical effects. Sixteenth century Venice saw this art taken to new heights by Giovanni Gabrieli, who used the organ lofts and balconies of St Mark's Basilica as a stage for multiple choirs ('cori spezzati' or 'broken choirs') located around its shimmering spaces. Each choir would have had its own instrumentalists and continuo, but the acoustics of St Mark's were so good that (provided everything was positioned absolutely correctly!) the result would have been perfect clarity.

Although the layout of Manchester Cathedral makes it impossible to replicate exactly the composer's intentions, Musical Director Neil Taylor will be aiming to re-create some of the original Venetian atmosphere by positioning musicians of the Brass Ensemble around the Cathedral.

Gabrieli was one of the most important composers writing at

the end of the Renaissance. His music travelled far beyond Italy, influencing church music throughout Europe and paving the way for the great Baroque era. The concert will feature three of his works: the *Magnificat*, the exuberant *Jubilata Deo*, and one of his most famous works, the motet *In Ecclesiis*, an opulent work written for a great state occasion with the Doge himself in attendance at St Mark's or some other great Venetian church.

Heinrich Schütz, originally a student of law and etymology, became a pupil of Gabrieli in 1609, and is generally regarded as the most important German composer before Bach. *Psalm 150*, written

In dramatic contrast to the luxuriant and complex sounds of Renaissance Venice, the

third composer featured is Arvo Pärt, the modern 'minimalist' Estonian composer.

Born in 1935, Pärt's early work was regarded as extremely progressive. Then in the 1970s he changed

direction; his music became much more austere, he developed an interest in early music, notably Gregorian Chant. By 1976 he was using a technique he termed 'tintinnabuli', in which the bell-like resonance of notes underscores a melodic voice which revolves around a central pitch.

St George's Singers will perform three works by Pärt: the *Berliner Messe*, composed for the 1990 'Catholics Day' festival in Germany; *The Beatitudes*, his first setting of an English text; and the *Magnificat*, commissioned by the Cathedral Choir of Berlin in 1989, and perhaps his most appealing work.

Neil Taylor explains the connection between the three composers. "It would probably be deemed unusual to link Gabrieli with Pärt – composers from entirely different eras and styles. However, like Gabrieli, Pärt plays with groups of voices and resonances, testing out different combinations to create new and striking effects in his sacred music. The contrasts between the two very different styles will be fascinating to hear as well as to perform."



The Grand Procession of the Doge of Venice in Gabrieli's day



The sacred spaces of St Mark's Basilica in Venice

for double choir, was one of his first choral compositions in German, and is a joyful and lively setting of the words of the very last Psalm of David, giving praise to the Lord with trumpets, cymbals – and other assorted instruments – allowing the young musicians of Chetham's Brass Ensemble to display their skills to the full. The *German Magnificat* comes from the very end of Schütz' life, written in 1671 when the composer was 86, and which he himself called his 'swan song'.

Tickets:
£12, £10 concessions,
£1 for students and children.

Available from
tel: 01663 764012
email: tickets@
st-georges-singers.org.uk

More information on our
website at
www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



Arvo Pärt

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**And one for the musical
anoraks amongst us:**

**How many hemiolas are
there in Schütz'
Deutsches Magnificat?**

SAVE OUR SCORES—BY GWYNETH PAILIN

Do you ever look and see where your music has come from? The 720 vocal scores hired for our *Sacred Spaces* concert have come from public libraries in Bristol, Herts, Birmingham, Manchester, Staffs, Bucks, Bedfordshire, Bournemouth, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and from choirs in Llandaff, NE London, Sherborne, Sheffield and Hertford.

How do we find them? The first port of call is always the Interlending scheme operated by Cheshire County Council. The Encore website gives details of who's got what but then everything has to be ordered through Cheshire. Up until this year we could have 100 copies of up to

5 different pieces which would eventually arrive at Poynton library - usually one lot at a time! – and then everything else had to be found elsewhere.

The Henry Watson library in Manchester and Wakefield operate and charge separately though at least music can be picked up from Manchester. When the Wakefield order is large, members of the choir have been prepared to make the round trip.

The Gerontius and Making Music websites give details of what different choral groups have and these can be ordered by email. Occasionally there are some copies locally but

normally we have to use the post (or a travelling SGS member!) Thanks to people in the Choir who have helped transport music—and listen out for more appeals!

Sometimes it can be easy, sometimes difficult and sometimes impossible to find the right music. Regretfully it is about to become harder as from now on we are only allowed **60 copies of up to 4 pieces from Interlending and NONE at all for Singing Days**. This will have a serious impact on future concert costs, and on the repertoire we are able to perform. For the future of the Choir, the Committee is investigating possible courses of action.

We will keep you informed of any further news on the Interlending problem. If you know of any other choirs who have been seriously affected by Cheshire's decision, please let Gwyneth Pailin or Anne Francis know

THE RED ROSE OF ST MARK

The patron saint of Venice is St Mark, and his day is 25th April—the day of our *Sacred Spaces* concert. Every year on St Mark's Day Venetian men present their loved ones with a single long-stemmed red rosebud – a 'bòcolo'.

The origins of the gift lie in the legend of Tancredi, a humble troubadour, and the nobly-born Maria Partecipazio, daughter

of the Doge. Desiring to prove himself worthy of her, Tancredi joins the Crusade, and serves valiantly and with great honour. But tragically, Tancredi is mortally wounded. As he dies, he falls onto a white rose-bush which, stained with his blood, turns red. Tancredi extracts a promise from his friend Orlando that he will return to Venice with a rose from the

bush for his beloved Maria. Orlando reaches Venice on 24th April, and gives the rose to Maria, as the last love message from her dead suitor.

The next morning, St Mark's Day, Maria is found dead, the red bloom pressed to her heart. Ever since, Venetians have used the red rose as a pledge of love.



BLUFFERS GUIDE TO MUSIC: NO 4: THE CLASSICAL AGE (1750-1820)

Polyphonic music was getting a bit much for some people, with all those tortuous melodic lines. People wanted tunes! So along came the solo concerto (solo instrument with the orchestra as backing band), then the symphony made its first appearance—music for large orchestra without any specific soloist. The wealthy started hiring composers or players to make music in their homes, which led to

chamber music (pieces for small groups, eg string quartet). Opera really started to make its mark in the classical era because the orchestras were larger and music became important to a lot more people. The piano was in regular use by all and its ability to play chords, melody and polyphony combined with dynamics was a revelation. The clarinet and trombone appeared (upstarts!), and the or-

chestra was standardised into four sections: strings, brass, woodwind and percussion. Melody was a big deal, generally kept simple and arranged so it was well out in front, with simple underlying chords. Dynamics (crescendo and decrescendo) were regularly used for full orchestra. So if you hear a great tune with constantly changing loud and soft bits—it's probably classical.



Mozart's mum used to get him out of bed in the morning by playing only the first seven notes of the major scale on the harpsichord. He would get so frustrated with the unresolved melody that he had to get out of bed and play the final note.

POSTCARD FROM THE LITTLE GLOBAL CITY

BY KATE TAYLOR



The last five months of 2007 are something of a blur in my mind. Physically, mentally and emotionally wrung out after managing our move to a country where none of us spoke the language, having had a sum total of 2.5 weeks for both the move and our school summer holiday and having to keep the show on the road for the family throughout all that; joining a choir was not very high up on my list of things to do. James' job continued to take him away a great deal, we had no babysitter and I was still grappling with the basics of living in Switzerland: whether I was ever going to manage to buy the correct size council bin bags at the supermarket, for example.

James, however, had other things on his mind. During a bring-and-share lunch after Mass at the English speaking RC community one Sunday in December he collared the church choir cantor, Dom, to ask if he sang regularly with any other choirs in Zurich. The answer was yes, and before I had finished my next glug of gluhwein, arrangements had been made for me to go along to the Fraumunsterchor with Dom, whom I had only just met. Dom is a delightfully friendly American, and I was very happy to go to any new choir with someone else who spoke English rather than try to forge my own way in pidgin German – way too much like hard work and effort. We still hadn't found a babysitter, but that job had now moved up the priority list.

January. Dom and I had arranged to meet outside Sprungli on Paradeplatz, the flagship store of the renowned choco-



latier, set in the heart of the city's financial district. Two years ago I was unsure if there were any other districts in Zurich, but there are many: University, Art, Trendy Art, Concerts, Opera and, of course, Shopping, Arty-Trendy Shopping, Outrageously-Expensive Shopping and The Lake, to name but a few. Dom arrived, and introduced me to the Fraumunsterchor and Alex Hug, the then organist and choirmaster.

The Fraumunster belongs to the Swiss Reform Church, and is the oldest religious foundation (founded 853) in central Zurich. The choir was founded in 1876 and is, essentially, an un-auditioned church choir numbering 80-100 that sings on the High Holy days of the church's year (Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost etc) and gives – wait for it – two concerts a year - and even then the same concert two nights running. With family and other commitments I've so far managed to sing on Good Friday 2008 and the concert weekend and that has been it for "performances"; but the concert weekend was something else entirely.

Alex Hug was the sixth choir master in 125 years, and was in the retirement year of his work at the Fraumunster, having held the position since his mid thirties. As the Fraumunster is one of the three main churches in the city centre, his position within both city life and professional musical circles was prestigious, and rightly so. A wonderfully gifted but humble organist and composer, with a

shock of white hair and the twinkly eyes of a mischievous grandfather, he will remain a much loved figure. His retirement weekend at the end of October 2008 included two very moving performances of the Bruckner F minor Mass. The piece really isn't my cup of tea – or gluhwein for that matter – but it does contain some moments of real, tender beauty and emotion: I might yet be converted to like music of the Romantic period. Give it another 25 years or so.

Alex directed rehearsals in his native Zurichdeutsch, the Schweizerdeutsch (Swiss German) dialect particular to Zurich. There are numerous different dialects of German in Switzer-

land—perhaps one for every valley or village—and most of them are so obtuse that even Germans can't understand them, so Heaven help the British. Despite working every day at my language learning, I am mentally absolutely drained at the end of every Tuesday evening and am ashamed to admit that a lot of the time I struggle to follow rehearsal, so have to try to keep up by methods other than language comprehension. This usually involves surreptitiously looking over my neighbour's shoulder to see what page we're on and then guessing at the entry. Of course this can be problematic when whoever I'm sitting next to isn't paying attention and then neither of us is on the right page – sometimes not even the right score.

"There are numerous different dialects of German in Switzerland—perhaps one for every valley or village—and most are so obtuse that even Germans can't understand them."



Kate Taylor was a St George's Singer for many years, and was our Concert Secretary until she moved to Switzerland with her husband James and two children. She's sent us this very special postcard from her new home in beautiful Zürich.

So – first impressions of the concert weekend ? Well, we used the sanctuary as a communal choir and orchestra changing room – which seemed strange at times, particularly when musicians were walking around in their underwear, as is perfectly normal in a changing room – but in front of the altar and beneath the famous Chagall windows—which isn't. The windows, designed

by Marc Chagall, are a series of five large, stunning, stained glass Bible scenes installed in the sanctuary of the church in 1970, and are an extremely popular stopping point for tourists in the city. We also had no chairs at all, for a performance that lasted 90 minutes – but in fact there were only a few bars when the choir wasn't singing, so I suppose they would have only got in the way. And, as with all choirs of a size, it was hideously cramped and there were pillars and big singers right in everyone's sight lines. Plus ça change !



“interesting” harmonies (though I'm not sure all of them were Bruckner's), and required a lot of rehearsal. Many choir members seemed quite nervous, even on the day, and after a year's preparation. Their fragile confidence was undermined further by the orchestra causing a near disaster in a different place both nights. Just the once on each occasion, but enough to give a number of the choir the jitters. That said, both performances went extremely well overall, were sung to a packed house, with standing room only, and were received with rapturous applause and a standing ovation. Who said the Swiss are unemotional ? Think it might have been me, actually – how shamefully wrong I was.

The concerts kicked off at 5pm, as is the local tradition, which might seem early but was in fact remarkably sensible and civilised. Swiss, perhaps! It meant that by 7pm we had plenty of evening left for the wonderful world of unwinding - friends, wine and fondue - and could still catch the last train home.

On the Sunday evening, after the second performance, the

Fraumunster parish treated the choir and orchestra – some 150 people - to a stunning three course meal. This re-



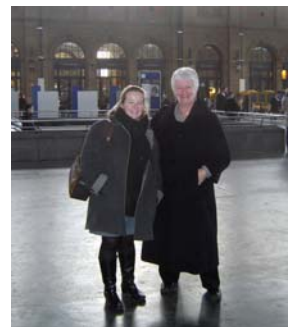
tirement party for Alex was held at the ancient guildhall which is now a private restaurant, directly opposite the church.

As we left the church after the second performance and the second 10 minute standing ovation, the Fraumunster bells rang out in a deafening full peel of thanksgiving for Alex's professional life dedicated to church music.

In the dark, against a moonlit sky, the timeless movement of the river and the frost on the roofs of the fairytale buildings all around us, the sound of joyful bells and the sight of a thousand appreciative people spilling onto the pavement brought tears to my eyes. It was a remarkable weekend, and I felt very privileged to have been able to take part in it.

Ten days later, on the day Barack Obama was elected President of the USA, we welcomed our new choirmaster. His name is Jorg Ulrich Busch—which, unfortunately for him, translates as George Bush. He comes from Basel, and perhaps it's something about Basel being on the French and German borders, but I'm finding his Schweizerdeutsch dialect far, far easier to understand.

“ ... our new choirmaster. His name is Jorg Ulrich Busch—which, unfortunately for him, translates as George Bush.”



Dave and Anne Francis were in Switzerland recently where Dave had been invited to speak at a conference. Anne decided she'd heard it all before, so took the train to Zürich where she met up with Kate for the day.





Jacqui with her beautiful new daughter, Megan Emily

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

Congratulations to two new arrivals in the Choir. Jacqui Smith's new daughter Megan Emily arrived on 10th February—three weeks earlier than anticipated!

Jacqui had finished work only the week before—as well as fulfilling her duties as Choir Secretary—and fully expected to have a whole month to make final preparations. But young

Ms Smith had other ideas, and Jacqui and husband Paul had to hustle to get everything ready in time. Fortunately, all went well, the baby arrived with no fuss (7 lbs) and mother and daughter are doing fine. We're hoping to see Jacqui and Megan Emily at rehearsal one Tuesday evening in the not too distant future.

Then just a few days later, on

21st February, Chris Brennan's wife Anne-Marie gave birth to their second child, Melissa Maria, weighing in at 7lbs 2oz. No pictures yet (come on Chris, put that Gabrieli down and get your camera out!) but we'll post some as soon as they arrive.

Congratulations to all from everyone at St George's.

Anyone recognise what the following is describing?
“Repressed longing, anger, fear, stormy, sinister, fury, reprieve, relief, dictatorial, confidence, nastiness, respect, reverence, praise, victorious, admiration, grim realization, amazement, awe, disbelief, star struck, congratulations.”
 No, it's not the latest episode of *'Desperate Housewives'*—it was Neil's markings for *Israel in Egypt*.



Spotted on the internet— Matt Hamilton at a National Youth Choir of Great Britain (NYCGB) workshop in 2007. Notice the characteristic 'shh, shh ...' pose, not to mention the 'Keep back—I can't stand any more of this' gesture

THE SOPRANOS (AS NEVER SEEN BEFORE)



The Sopranos waiting after the concert to talk to the second violins

The sopranos sing the highest, and because of this think they rule the world. They have longer hair, fancier jewelry, and swishier skirts than anyone else, and consider themselves insulted if they are not allowed to go at least to a high F in every movement of any given piece. When they reach the high notes, they hold them for at least half again as long as the composer and/or conductor requires, and then complain that their throats are killing them and that the composer and conductor are sadists.

Sopranos have varied attitudes towards the other sections of the choir, though consider all of them inferior.

Altos are to sopranos rather like second violins to first violins—nice to harmonize with but not really necessary. All sopranos have a secret feeling that the altos could drop out and the piece would sound essentially the same. Nor do they understand why anybody would sing in that range in the first place—it's so boring.

Tenors, on the other hand, can be very nice to have around;

besides their flirtation possibilities (it's a well known fact that sopranos never flirt with basses), sopranos like to sing duets with tenors because all the tenors are doing is working very hard to sing in a low-to-medium soprano range, while the sopranos are up there in the stratosphere showing off. To sopranos, basses are the scum of the earth—they sing too loud, are useless to tune to because they're too low—and there has to be something wrong with anyone who sings in the F clef, anyway.

PASSAGE TO INDIA BY ALISON BEESON

In my work as an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music I often undertake tours abroad and recently spent 6 weeks in India, mainly in the cities of Bangalore, Chennai and Delhi, examining a wide range of instruments from early grades up to diplomas and giving seminars for teachers. There was a tremendous enthusiasm for Western music and in fact all things European.

My first port of call was Chennai where I experienced my first monsoon and had to wade bare footed through flood water to reach the exam centre. The candidates all appeared magically on time and well prepared; no extra marks for the young boy candidate who wouldn't leave the exam room until, with a great flourish he raised my hand and kissed it.

One afternoon a taxi could not be found for the return to my hotel but my steward kindly offered me a lift on the back of her motorbike. We must have looked a bizarre couple, weaving in and out of the traffic, Yesia in her Sari and me, clutching the all important briefcase, western skirt billowing. I never got used to Indian driving, no rules except to keep your hand on the horn and allow no gap between vehicles, carts or animals.

My next port of call was Coimbatore, which my Lonely Planet guide described as the Manchester of India. Anyone seen camels strolling down Deansgate? I arrived during Diwali, the festival of light, celebrated with wonderful fireworks at night and very noisy fire crackers all through the day; examining in a war zone

might have been quieter. Uma and her dedicated team run the Coimbatore Music Services. They inspire many beginners to learn to play the piano, violin, guitar and recorder but a large



Alison with some of the music teachers

part of their work is in taking music to the under privileged in orphanages and rehabilitation centres. The children are encouraged to take part in performances, participate in competitions and talent shows.

As a result of their work Uma says that they have developed self-esteem and confidence. The therapeutic value of music relaxes the mind, relieving stress and pain. Singing lessons have resulted in speech clarity, and noisy inattentive and sometimes violent children show controlled behaviour and concentration. They struggle to continue this amazing work with very little funding, enhancing the life quality of these less privileged children through music education. I will be taking part in the Manchester 10K run again this year to raise funds for them and will be grateful for any donations or suggestions for sponsorship.

In the film 'Passage to India' a narrow gauge steam train takes the party of explorers up to the Malabar Hills. This was my next mode of transport, climbing for 5 hours up through tea plantations and gloriously rugged mountain scenery, to the

hill station of Ooty. Here I had an exhausting but happy week examining almost every instrument in the AB syllabus, including a tuba. The cooler climate sent me in search of socks and jumpers and clutching a hot water bottle I managed to keep my pen flowing.

Bangalore and Delhi gave me opportunities for visiting the Taj Mahal, Mysore and Fatipur Sikri, and the beautiful gardens where Ghandi was assassinated. My tour finished in Mussoorie in the foothills of the Himalayas. I will never forget the spectacular scenery, especially the magnificent sunsets over the snow capped mountain peaks.

I was overwhelmed by the dedication and enthusiasm of the musicians I met; they work without many of the resources we take for granted in the UK. Music is hard to obtain, instruments don't stay in tune and teachers are desperate for advice and further training, but everywhere I was met with warmth and friendship and the wonderful feeling that music really does transcend so many cultural and language differences.

Sadly the Mumbai bombings occurred just before my return.



The little train that could!



Alison outside the Taj Majal



The majesty of the Himalayas

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Some of the young readers at our Christmas carol concert

For the first time, our 2008 carol concerts saw readers drawn from local primary schools—and what a great hit they were with Choir and audience alike.

Children from all five Poynton primary schools were involved, ranging from years 4 to

6. The readings had been suggested by the Choir, and Chair Anne Francis had worked with the children and teachers in the weeks running up to the concerts. The children arrived for

the afternoon rehearsal nervous but all very excited, and with a few last-minute tips on microphone technique, they were all ready for the performance in good time. The readings included *Lark Rise to Candleford*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Children's Letters to Santa*, as well as the story of the nativity from St Luke's

gospel. However, the star turn was young Jacob Kalins from St Paul's Primary School, whose grumpy inn-keeper in *Jesus' Christmas Party* rivalled Basil Fawlty on a bad day.

A fabulous evening, and many thanks to all our young readers.



YOUR CHANCE TO COMMISSION A NEW MUSICAL WORK

“As polishing expresses the vein in marble, and grain in wood, so music brings out what of heroic lurks anywhere. The hero is the sole patron of music.”
Henry David Thoreau

St George's Singers is commissioning a new work from our Assistant MD Matthew Hamilton for our concert at Gorton Monastery in June 2009—and we are looking for a score of individuals willing to make a contribution to the cost by becoming a 'Score Shareholder'.

Half the cost of the commission is being met from Choir funds, but the other half will be raised

from Choir members and Friends of St George's Singers by selling 'shares' in the work. Each share costs £25, and contributors may purchase as many shares as they wish. In return, each shareholder will receive a 'Share Certificate', a personal copy of the work signed by the composer, and will be acknowledged in the concert programme. St George's Singers

has commissioned new works on many occasions—in 2001 members became 'Sound Investors' to pay for Sasha Johnson Manning's *Psalm 91*. This is a great opportunity to help create a new choral work and receive a wonderful memento of the occasion.

For information, please contact Anne Francis, 01663 764012.

What was Mozart's Musical Joke?



In 1787 Mozart wrote a divertimenti entitled *Ein Musikalischer Spaß* (A Musical Joke). Its purpose is a source of much contention. It is clearly written in jest, but at whose expense? Wrong notes abound in the score, but not in mockery of the musicians of the time, requiring sophisticated technique on the part of the players, being often easier to hit wrong notes (which sound right) than right ones (which sound wrong!). Violating elementary laws of composition, underneath the seemingly bumbling and inept surface, Mozart wields his usual wit. Far from being a parody, it is an exercise in coping with musical impossibilities.

A MUSICAL JOKE

Three notes walk into a pub—a C, an E-flat and a G. The landlord says, “We don't serve minors”, so the E-flat leaves and the C and the G have an open fifth between them. After a few drinks, the fifth is diminished and the G is out flat. An F comes in and tries to augment the situation, but is not sharp enough. Then a D comes in and heads straight for the bathroom saying, “Excuse me, I'll just be a second.” Then an A enters, but the landlord is not

convinced that this relative of C is not a minor. The landlord then notes a B-flat hiding at the end of the bar and shouts “Get out. You're the seventh minor I've found in the pub tonight.” The E-flat, not easily deflated, comes back to the pub the next night in a 3-piece suit with nicely shined shoes. The landlord says, “You're looking sharp tonight, come on in! This could be a major development.” Eventually the C sobers up, and realises in horror that he's un-

der a rest. At trial, he's found guilty of contributing to the diminution of a minor and is sentenced to ten years of DS without Coda. On appeal however it's found that he's innocent of all wrongdoing, even accidental, and all accusations are bassless. The landlord decides however, since he's only had tenor so patrons, and the sopranos are flat out in the bathroom, that everything is altoo much treble. He needs a rest, and shouts time.

POYNTON WELCOMES SZIRMOK CHOIR

A very special extra concert has been slotted into the Choir's schedule this spring, when we help welcome the Szirmok Choir from Erd to St George's in Poynton. Erd is Poynton's twin town, so it was natural for the Choir to visit Erd during the 2006 tour of Hungary. In addition to concerts at St Stephen's Cathedral in Budapest and at the Esztergom Basilica, St George's Singers also presented a joint concert with the Szirmok Choir in the town of Erd itself. We're now delighted to return the hospitality, and wel-

come the Szirmok Choir to Poynton on Friday 27 March, when we will be taking part in a concert of music and song with Szirmok and Poynton Male Voice Choir at St George's Church, organised by the Twinning Committee.

Szirmok Choir has been in existence for 24 years, and plays an important part in their town. As their website says, "Our community is held together by the love for singing..... this is what we value the most."



The Szirmok Choir of Erd

For more information about the concert and to obtain tickets, contact Susan Warrington, Tel 01625 874823.

THE GREAT SCARF DEBATE

Forget choice of repertoire, compulsory auditions, enforced pencil markings—the choral world's trickiest problem has always been: what should the ladies of the chorus wear?

Members of the audience at recent St George's Singers concerts will have noticed a change in the ladies' 'uniform'. Gone were the long red scarves, in came red camisoles underneath black shirts. The decision on the change of dress was finally taken in St Ann's Church in Dublin during last year's tour. With the men in the pub (sorry—'warming up for the afternoon concert') the ladies took the opportunity to try out



Or perhaps the academic look?

a number of scarf options. The results were photographed, and after long (occasionally heated) debate, the Committee decided that, although they had served us well for a number of years, it was time for a change. But what to replace them with? With Bridgewater Hall coming up in three weeks, we had to decide on something quickly—then get hold of sufficient quantities.

As soon as we returned from Dublin, a frenzied few days of shopping followed,

trying to find something appropriate but affordable. Finally, a simple red camisole was located in one of the high street stores in Manchester, but they only had a

small number in stock. So ladies from the choir were dispatched on cross-country shopping trips, scouring the stores of Northern England and Wales to find sufficient numbers in the right sizes for all the ladies.

The result was what audience members at the Bridgewater Hall called 'stunning' and 'tremendously smart'.



Maybe off-the-shoulder—isn't Stella McCartney using it this season?



What about the neck-warmer - good for those cold winter concerts?

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

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

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

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



Find us on the web at:

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

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.

MANCHESTER SINGS!

ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY
Friday 27 March, 7.30 pm
St George's Church, Poynton
Concert with the Szirmok Choir of Hungary

Saturday 25 April, 7.30 pm
Manchester Cathedral
Music for Sacred Spaces

Saturday 20 June, 7.30 pm
The Monastery, Gorton
In a Monastery Garden—music for a summer's evening

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

Bach's *St Matthew Passion*

Tuesday 7 April 2009,
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.
James Gilchrist, who sang the role of Evangelist with St George's Singers when we performed this in 2006, returns to the Bridgewater Hall in the same work, only this time he has to make do with the Choir of Clare College. Well, it's Bach, Jim, but not as we know it Tickets £12 to £36.
Box Office 0161 907 9000.
www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk

Manchester University Chorus

Sunday 3rd May 2009,
Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.
The University of Manchester Chorus, under conductor Marcus Farnsworth, presents Britten's magnificent *War Requiem*.

Coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the start of World War Two, this piece poignantly tells of the sacrifice and lessons of war, interspersing the poetry of Wilfred Owen with the Mass for the Dead. This is a new venture in the University's history, and lots of St George's Singers will be supporting Marcus on the big stage. Soloists are Amanda Roodcroft, Roderick Williams and Allan Clayton.
Tickets £12 to £24.
Box Office 0161 907 9000,
www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk.

Bollington Festival

8-25 May 2009. *Tobias and the Angel* Festival Opera by Jonathan Dove, and the concert version of *Porgy and Bess* by

Gershwin, both conducted by Nicholas Smith with the Festival Choir and Orchestra.
Tel 01625 575681
www.bollingtonfestival.org.uk



CAPTION COMPETITION
Send your caption by 30 April 2009 to publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk, with your name and email address. Best caption wins a £5 e-gift certificate to spend through our online charity shop, SGS Online