



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

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National
Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

SAVE OUR SCORES—LATEST NEWS

In the last issue of Hemiola we told you about the problems the choir was experiencing with Cheshire Library Services about allowing us to hire sufficient scores. Within a week, our President, Dame Joan Bakewell, had taken up the issue in her column in The Times.

Libraries again!
They're making it harder for choirs to borrow sheet music of vocal scores.

The wonderful St George's Singers—of which I am the proud patron—numbers some 100 to 120 voices. They regularly apply to the public library services for enough copies to enable them to perform major musical works. They also give inspiring single-day workshops where anyone is welcome to go along for a day's rehearsal, climaxing in a full performance of a single work.

Recently, 200 people learnt and performed Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*. Now all this is threatened. Cheshire Library Service says that the single-day

workshops won't be possible and it can supply only 60 copies of each requested piece. Not enough to go around.

Its explanation makes no sense at all. Apparently there is an increased demand across the county. More and more choirs are springing up and giving

sively squeezed. In 2001, the choir could have as many copies as it wanted for £10; in 2004 the number was limited to 100 copies at a charge of £35.

These are not large sums of money. Once the choir could work on six pieces at any one time—not unusual if an upcoming concert had several small pieces. Now there is a limit of four. Choral scores are not complex and intricate items; but any choir needs a copy for each singer.

Why is Cheshire's Library Service not rejoicing in the popularity of local music-making and helping it to happen? In more benign times it would have been an ideal chance for a local sponsor. I can't believe voices will fall silent for want of so little cash.

Joan Bakewell, 27 March 2009, The Times

Since Joan's article was published, Anne Francis has been in touch with other local choirs and Making Music, our national federation. A meeting has been arranged with Cheshire Library Services to discuss this problem—which affects many North West choral societies. We'll keep you informed of progress!



Manchester Central Library will close for refurbishment soon—but where will all the music go?

voice. Any other supplier of goods would whoop with delight to still have an expanding market in these cramped times.

But the libraries' response is the reverse of logical. It is to cut down on their already existing supplies.

Provision has become progres-



IN A MONASTERY GARDEN— PREVIEW



An original edition of Ketelbey's score, signed by the composer—and found by Dave Francis during one of his frequent rummages through second-hand book shops!

Poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music.

—Ezra Pound

When words leave off, music begins

—Heinrich Heine

Poetry and gardens are the joint inspirations for our next concert, *In a Monastery Garden*, with settings of poems that show how music can illuminate the poet's intentions and intensify our response to their words.

Benjamin Britten wrote the *Five Flower Songs* in 1950 as a silver wedding anniversary present for two friends. His varied and imaginative treatment of works by Herrick, Crabbe and Clare typifies his uncanny ability to match the words of

the poems to appropriate music, and the songs are carefully balanced in key and mood.

The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote nearly 400 poems in French. His exquisite cycle of poems on roses captivated the American composer Morten Lauridsen whose *Les Chansons*

des Roses provided musical settings designed to enhance their light, joyous and playful qualities and to capture the delicate beauty and sensuousness of the poetry.

The Australian-born composer Percy Grainger travelled across the UK early in the 20th century collecting folk songs. In April 1905 he attended the North Lincolnshire Musical Competition in Brigg and heard Joseph Taylor sing two verses of *Brigg Fair*. Grainger added extra verses from two other folksongs and arranged it for tenor solo and chorus.

The Overhanging Day was written for St George's Singers by Matthew Hamilton. The text is from Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, in which the poet presents an idealized history of his life and feelings, through a description of an island to which he wishes to sail with the beautiful Emilia Vivani.

A summer's evening concert at the Monastery wouldn't be

complete without the famous *In a Monastery Garden* by Albert Ketelbey. This descriptive miniature is among the most famous pieces of British light orchestral music ever written and is an adaptation of a song inspired by a visit Ketelbey paid to the Franciscan Priory in Chilworth, Surrey. It exists in a variety of arrangements, some featuring birdsong effects. Neil Taylor and Jeffrey Makinson will be performing the piano duet version—sadly without the birdsong!—as well as Grainger's *Country Gardens* whose melody derives from a medieval Morris dance called the 'Handkerchief Dance'.

To complete the concert, we welcome choirs from Poynton High and Cedar Mount High School who will be joining St George's Singers to celebrate the restoration of the Monastery's garden. Please come and join us, enjoy a delightful summer evening of music, some strawberries and a glass of wine!



The restored garden at Gorton Monastery

THE MEDIAEVAL GARDEN: FOOD FOR THE SOUL

All the necessities of mediaeval monastic life were supplied from within the monastery walls, and the garden was at the heart of the community.

Monks lived lives of seclusion and deep spirituality, working the land and the gardens when not at prayer. In the order of St Benedict, which influenced most monasteries (including Franciscan), prayer had always to be balanced by physical work. Working the gardens was a form of prayer and honour to God within itself, and prevented idleness, 'the enemy of the soul'. Whilst the ideal of monastic life may have been seclusion and contemplation, in

practice the monks had a reasonable degree of contact with the outside world. Large monasteries often owned vast tracts of land and were large landowners in their own right with communities of peasant villages to oversee and manage.

Monasteries also provided shelter for travellers and pilgrims, and their infirmaries provided health care for the wider community. Monasteries therefore had to produce food, ales, wines and medicines for their own monks and a large number of other people as well. An important part of a monk's

duty of care to their dependents and to God was maintaining the monastic gardens. Everything from herbs and plants such as lavender to freshen the rooms of guests to beeswax to make into candles was produced in-house, with surplus goods often sold at local markets.



Monastic gardens typically had three main areas: the herb or physic garden which provided medicines for the infirmary, the fruit orchard and the kitchen garden supplied the monastery's food.

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In a Monastery Garden
The Monastery, Gorton
Saturday 20 June, 7.30pm
Tickets: £15, £12 concessions,
£1 students/children
(Summer refreshments included)
Tel: 01663 764012
Email: tickets@st-georges-
singers.org.uk

PERCY GRAINGER: ECCENTRIC OR GENIUS?

Even by composer standards, Percy Grainger stands out as an exceptional eccentric. Born in Australia in 1882, Grainger studied in Germany before moving to the UK where he began his career as a composer and concert pianist. He finally settled in America in 1915, becoming an American citizen.

Grainger is now best remembered in England for a small number of piano and orchestral works which he called his 'fripperies' (*Handel in the Strand*, *Molly on the Shore*, *Country Gardens*) and as a collector, preserver and arranger of folk songs. A friend of Grieg and Vaughan Williams, Grainger shared their interest in folk songs, and travelled around the British Isles locating and recording on wax cylinder some 500 songs of rural life before they disappeared in the tide of industrialization.

But Grainger was far more than a folk music fan. He was an entirely original, innovative and

exceptionally talented musician who anticipated many forms of twentieth century music well before they were established by other composers such as Cage. As early as 1899 he was working with 'beatless music', using metres such as 2½/4. His 1916 piano composition *In a Nutshell* required direct, non-keyed sounding of the strings—in this case, with a mallet—which would come to be known as a 'string piano' technique. He developed a style of orchestration called 'elastic scoring', and as Dean of Music at New York University he put jazz on the syllabus, inviting Duke Ellington as a guest lecturer. He also had a deep distaste for German academic music theory, shunning standard structures such as sonata form, which he termed 'German impositions'.

Grainger's 'big idea' however was what he called 'free music'. He first conceived the idea as a boy, observing the waves on a lake. He concluded that the

future of music lay in freeing up rhythm and pitch, producing glissando-like movement. Free music is melodic, making use of long-sustained tones capable of continuous changes in pitch. It requires the abolition of scale, beat and harmony and its replacement by a controlled continuous glide. But he found that human performers on traditional instruments were not capable of producing the wide range of gliding tones with the necessary control over minute fluctuations of pitch. So he invented a machine—the forerunner of the electric synthesizer—to enable him to hear his compositions before they were published.

A man of boundless energy which he expended in many directions, Grainger perhaps failed to achieve his full potential in any one field. But in works like *Lincolnshire Posy*, *Shallow Brown* and *Brigg Fair*, he has left us a legacy of our musical heritage and his remarkable talent.

Mr Grainger:

- was a vegetable-hating vegetarian who lived mostly on nuts, rice, cakes, ice cream and oranges
- believed the best music was written by blue-eyed fair-haired northern Europeans
- avoided using words with Greek or Latin roots
- was known as the 'jogging pianist' for his habit of running to concerts so that he would be in a state of utter exhaustion when playing
- had a particular enthusiasm for flagellation, and donated his whips to a museum dedicated to his work, for whose creation he gave a large part of his earnings
- designed and made his own clothes, which he never ironed and often wore for days on end without changing.



The young Percy Grainger

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Garden designers often took particular trouble to make them attractive as well as practical. Mediaeval monks, like modern gardeners, delighted in the beauty as well as the function of plants - fruit trees and berry bushes were planted through the graveyard so that the space had twin usefulness and beauty. And flowers such as lily of the valley were often grown for their sheer beauty rather than any medicinal purpose.

A typical garden would have at least six planting beds, perhaps protected by low hazel fences or hurdles,

aligned along a central pathway. The physic garden could have twenty beds or more, one bed for each herb: cumin, fennel, comfrey, feverfew, rosemary, sage, rue, lavender, rose, iris, mint, lovage and pennyroyal were commonly grown.

The kitchen garden would have produced turnips, parsnips, peas and beans, onions, leeks, mint, borage, nettle, violets, rocket, endive, basil and melons, whilst the orchard would have been stocked with varieties of plum, apple, almond, grape vines, cherry, chestnut, fig,



hazel, pear, medlar, walnut and mulberry, gooseberries and strawberries.

The real centre of the community however was the cloister garden, an open green space surrounded by the cloister walk, allowing the monks to walk, pray, think and meditate in the fresh air and protected from the elements.

The simplicity, as well as the vivid emerald colour of the grass, aided the monks in their daily spiritual contemplations – the plain green lawn symbolizing renewal and everlasting life.

St Benedict was a prosperous sixth century Roman. Disillusioned with the shallow and immoral society, he retired to live in a cave outside Rome, and planted a rose bush so that the flowers could tempt his sensuality while the thorns tormented his flesh. The image of the rose, sensual temptation weighed against the pain of physical travail, epitomizes mediaeval gardening – as it epitomizes gardening today! In the mediaeval period, when life was so difficult and uncertain, the tranquility and beauty of a garden was treasured even more.

MUSIC FOR SACRED SPACES — CONCERT REVIEW



Waiting for Neil's downbeat—with accompanist Jeffrey Makinson just visible in the organ loft

Well, it was incredibly hard work but what a wonderful evening our *Sacred Spaces* concert out to be!

After weeks of trying to navigate our way through the 17 parts of the Gabrieli, twisting our tongues into unpronounceable German in the Schütz, and doing our very best not to 'come for Ted' or turn the 'children of God' into some sort of ecclesiastical regulatory body in Pärt's *Beatitudes*, it was a relief to get to Manchester Cathedral on the day of the concert.

The stage management of this concert was one of the most complex for a long time, so in order to sort out all the inevita-

ble organisational problems that were bound to arise, rehearsals started much earlier than usual. We not only had the usual staging and seating problems. This time, with the involvement of Chetham's Brass Ensemble, we also had to sort out where the band would be seated when the various groups were performing. To make things even more difficult, with the *Magnificat a 17* demanding a totally different choir layout to the rest of the programme, we had to find a way of moving the choir around without the audience noticing!

And—just to add to the logistical nightmare—we had a split rehearsal. The first session was in the Cathedral itself, then everyone moved across the road to Chetham's School of Music for a rehearsal with the band, before heading back to the Cathedral to put it all together.

But the result was well worth all the effort that Jo Bluck and Mike Mason had put into planning and stage managing the event. Under the direction of David Chatterton, the young players from Chetham's were outstanding in their own instrumental works, and when they came

to accompany the choir, were totally professional in the way they responded to Neil's direction.

Although not as grand a setting as St Mark's in Venice, singing these marvelous works in the lofty spaces of Manchester Cathedral gave us an inkling of what it must have been like four hundred years ago to sing for the Doge.

Robert Beale, the music critic of the Manchester Evening News had given a great preview of the concert the day before, but regretted that he was unable to



In the grounds of Chetham's School—waiting for Rehearsal, Part Two

come. (We guess it was a prior engagement at the Bridgewater Hall!) Bob—you missed a treat!



The wonderful trombone quartet from Chetham's



Jo Bluck master-minding the first of four different choir and band layouts

"I was called by a client of mine this morning, who had come to the concert with his wife and a music professor. The feedback was fantastic: 'a challenging programme, which was really well executed.' My client was so impressed, he's coming to the Gorton Monastery concert.
- Dave Robson

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW HAMILTON

When did the music bug bite?

When I was 5 my parents inherited my great grandfather's piano. My brother and I made such a horrible noise on it that they finally sent us to have lessons. When I was 10 I took up the violin, and that was my main instrument until I went to Oxford and fell in love with choral music. I came to Manchester to do a Masters in composition, and then started conducting the university chamber choir. Now conducting choral music is really my main focus.

Why did you move to conducting?

Mainly because I love the choral repertoire and the human voice. Voices together can do amazing things. That's why I love conducting St George's. It's a bit difficult only coming in and doing a rehearsal every so often, but it's fun rehearsing, and you choose very good music. I like working with big groups. I even enjoy the boring choral stuff – blend, balance, making 30 altos sound like one section - it's fascinating.

I also realised that becoming a full-time composer is not an option for me. Basically, it's not much fun. I get very frustrated sitting in a room on my own, especially when things aren't going well! What I really love is interacting with other people and doing something creative that way. I'd composed at Oxford but I'd also been doing lots of other things, and I found I needed that balance. It sounds odd, but in some ways I don't really enjoy composing – it's difficult, lonely, and frustrating. But there are other aspects of the creative process that I love, and it can be supremely satisfying – which is why I still feel the need to do it.

What's the most satisfying piece you've written?

The first piece I wrote in my second year at Oxford – an a capella setting of *Locus Iste*. It

was probably writing that piece that made me realise I like writing for voices. The way I write has changed a lot since then, but I'm still happy with that piece and it's been performed a lot. At Manchester I did some instrumental pieces that were a little more wacky, including a rather fun piece for trios of clarinets, trumpets and a saxophone, which was given its first performance in a multi-storey car-park! But I want the stuff I write to be useful – there's no point writing it if it's not able to be performed. I don't want to compose something that everyone can sing perfectly by the second week and get bored with, but I don't want to write something that the choir can't make head nor tail of after eight weeks. All singers want something that is musically satisfying and worth performing.

Who are your musical heroes?

As a conductor, my teacher Simon Halsey at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama is inspirational. He has a great gift of making singers - amateurs or professionals – achieve so much more than they expected to. Singing is such an intimate, personal thing that it's hard to criticise someone's voice without making it personal. A huge amount of getting choirs to sing well is psychological, and Simon gets it just right. On top of that, he's simply a brilliant musician, everything he does is incredibly well-informed, and his attention to detail is incredible.

I'm a huge fan of the European chamber choirs like the RIAS Kammerchor and the Netherlands Chamber Choir. Most professional choirs in the UK are made up of freelance singers, who can put on a concert at very short notice, but who may not sing and rehearse together that frequently. These European choirs, though, are made of full-time members, so they really sound like a choir rather

than a group of individuals. In the NCC, for example, the tenor section blends with the altos so well it is seamless. They can change the colour of the music from bar to bar and the way they sing Bach is extraordinary. I'm really lucky to be conducting them in a masterclass this summer.

My composing hero has to be Bach. He combines polyphonic lines into amazing harmonies in a way that you don't find with other baroque composers. Even with Handel, it's either melodically or harmonically wonderful, but not often both. I also love Lassus and other Renaissance music, and I'm a huge fan of contemporary composers like Oliver Knussen and Ligeti. Now I have to fill in the gap from 1750 to 1950! It's taken me a long time to learn to love the romantics like Brahms and Bruckner, but I'm getting there!

How did you go about the commission for St George's?

For this poem by Shelley – a search for something idyllic in terms of love and life – I've been trying to find a harmonic language with more daylight than usual, to get away from the modal language that characterises my sacred pieces. Coming from the English choral tradition as I do, there is something definitely English about what I write, but Shelley's poetry is so full of colour and intensity, and I've tried hard to convey that, and not be too Anglican about it!

What are your future plans?

At the moment I'm lucky, making a living conducting, composing and singing. I've got one more year at Cardiff and the plan then is to do more of the same, probably replacing the singing with more conducting. It's taken me quite a while to admit that conducting is the one thing I want to do – the thing I want to be judged by.



On 26 June Matthew flies out to Haarlem in the Netherlands to take part in the Fifth Eric Ericson Masterclass for young choral conductors. This prestigious event invites Europe's most talented young conductors to take part in a week-long workshop, this year under the guidance of master conductors Stephen Cleobury and Jos van Veldhoven. Following intensive auditions, Matthew is the first conductor from the UK to be selected and he will be joined by young musicians from Germany, France, Belgium, Georgia and Belarus. Matthew will be directing Netherland's two finest choirs—the Netherlands Kamerkoor and the Netherlands Radio Choir—in a repertoire including Bach, Brahms, Handel, Poulenc, Schütz and Britten. We wish him every success!

2009-2010 SEASON — MASSES, MOTETS AND MONTEVERDI



Claudio Monteverdi

It's that time of year again. Almost at the end of the season, the question everyone asks is: what are we doing when we come back in September?

For 2009/2010 Neil has chosen a programme that has something for every choral taste. In November we'll be singing the *Mass in Blue* by Will Todd, an upbeat setting of the mass that blends jazz with great choral writing. If you remember the Ellington *Sacred Concert*, you'll get an idea of what fantastic thrill this will be. Joining us will be Tina May, one of the UK's most expressive and talented jazz singers, and the RNCM Jazz Collective.

Then for something completely different. For our spring concert we return to Gorton Mon-

astery, this time to perform Monteverdi's *Vespers*. We're delighted to say that Marcus Farnsworth will be amongst the massed ranks of soloists (six in all!) for this performance, and Chetham's musicians so enjoyed playing with us in *Sacred Spaces* that they're playing with us again, this time fielding their Baroque Orchestra. 1610 is the 400th anniversary of this great work, and whilst it is likely that it will be performed more than once over the course of the year, we can think of no better place to hear it in than the Monastery.

For the final concert of the season we return to more traditional choral fare, with a programme of German 'Masterworks'. Neil has not yet finalised the complete pro-

gramme, but it will include works by Bach, Brahms and Mendelssohn, and possibly others.

We haven't forgotten Christmas of course, and our regular date with the VBS Poynton Brass Band at St George's in Stockport, this year adding some *Messiah* to the carols and readings. Finally, the work for the Singing Day will be Dvorak's *Mass in D*.

Other events during the 2009/2010 season will include another broadcast on the BBC Daily Service, not forgetting the Choir tour which is currently in planning stage—France being the favourite at the moment.

It promises to be an exciting season!

Pick up a copy of our Season Brochure by joining our Mailing List or visiting www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

BLUFFERS GUIDE TO MUSIC: NO 4: THE ROMANTIC AGE (1820-1910)



The saxophone was invented by Adolphe Sax in 1841. He wanted to create an instrument that would both be the loudest of the woodwinds and the most versatile of the brass, and would fill the middle ground between the two sections. It is considered a member of the woodwind, but is usually made of brass with a single-reed mouth-piece similar to the clarinet.

After the classical era, music became more expressive, with greater variation in harmony, texture, dynamics and tempo. Middle-class people became regular concert-goers, meaning music-making was no longer just for the aristocracy.

Composers started to write programme music that would tell stories, with instruments representing characters, or just music that was supposed to be *about* something (the night, the sea, love etc).

And opera went bonkers. Stage sets got bigger, works became longer, louder and more dramatic, opera houses were built to seat hundreds and generally performers waved their arms around more. There was a feeling of 'anything goes', and

composers started to look backwards as well as forwards, incorporating folk music of their own and other countries, as well as older musical styles like Renaissance polyphony.

Romantic composers include Beethoven (later stuff only!), Liszt, Berlioz, Brahms, Puccini, Verdi, Wagner, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Dvorak, and Vaughan Williams.

Whilst the instruments didn't change much (though the saxophone was invented, and the tuba got deeper and fatter!), the music got bigger and longer. If you wanted the entire last section of your symphony to feature two huge chords getting louder and louder (Beethoven) you could. If two hours for an opera was simply too short

(Wagner) then add a few. Days that is. If you knew that your piece needed 30 violins all playing the same melody (Vaughan Williams) then no-one was going to stop you.

The melodies were memorable but more complex, with less reliance on simple background chords. The orchestra still used dynamics, but the range was even greater. Towards the end of the era, Wagner and Liszt were starting to question whether you had to use regular chords and tunes anyway.

And simple tempo markings (andante, largo) gave way to 'suggestions' that were more emotional (like *dolente*—weeping, *appassionato*—passionately) and more..... er, romantic.

NERO (WITH PROFOUND APOLOGIES TO T S ELIOT)

Let us go, then, you and I
 When the morning turns from grey to blue,
 Or maybe grey of lighter hue,
 To dark brown temple of the crazy king
 Who wrote his songs and tried to sing
 And caused embarrassment all round;
 Remembered now with coffee, ground,
 Americano and warm milk.
 And cappuccino, just like silk
 It slips down through your throat,
 Whilst I divest me of my coat
 And watch the ladies come and go,
 And picture Michelangelo
 Slipping espresso or just snoozing
 While the Stockport Shuttle, cruising
 Empty past the window. Bach,
 Vivaldi, Mozart, Handel.
 Muzak cannot hold a candle
 To the sounds that charm my ear.

“What was that you said, my dear?
 I have measured out my life in coffee-spoons?”
 I’ve sat and read so many moons.
 “You’re quoting Eliot again”.
 And, oh! I think it’s going to rain.
 So let us leave then, you and I,
 With anoraks against the sky.
 Leave the muffins, and good-bye
 To plush brown seat and Daily Mail
 Before the babies start to wail.
 Merseyway is to our left.
 So let us face the modern world
 With um-ber-ellas now unfurled
 To venture forth to shop and bank
 In Boot’s and Smith’s and Underbank
 Remembering to warmly thank
 Oh thou who set old Rome ablaze
 And eases these, my olden days.

- Reynold Higginbotham



The Emperor Nero having just heard that his favourite coffee shop has burned down

TENORS—HEROES OR VILLAINS?

Tenors are spoiled. That’s all there is to it. For one thing, there are never enough of them, and choir directors would rather sell their souls than let a halfway decent tenor quit, while they’re always ready to unload a few altos at half price. And then, for some reason, the few tenors there are are always really good—it’s one of those annoying facts of life. So it’s no wonder that tenors always get swollen heads. After all, who else can make sopranos swoon? The one thing that can make tenors insecure is the

accusation (usually by the basses) that anyone singing that high couldn’t possibly be a real man. In their usual perverse fashion, the tenors never acknowledge this, but just complain louder about the composer being a sadist and making them sing so damn high.

Tenors have a love-hate relationship with the conductor, who is always telling them to sing louder because there are so few of them. (No conductor in recorded history has ever asked for less tenor in a forte passage.) Tenors feel threatened in some

way by all the other sections—the sopranos because they can hit those incredibly high notes; the altos because they have no trouble singing the note the tenors would kill for; and the basses because, although they can’t sing anything above an E, sing it loud enough to drown the tenors out. Of course, the tenors would rather die than admit any of this.

And it is a little known fact that tenors move their eyebrows more than anyone else while singing. (Neil—can you corroborate this?)



Three of our former tenors who got asked to leave for constantly gesticulating at the conductor

BOOK REVIEW: THE REST IS NOISE

Not keen on modern music? Consider anything after Brahms to be tuneless and (even worse) pointless? If so, try reading *The Rest is Noise* by Alex Ross, and see if it changes your mind.

Music critic with the *New Yorker*, Ross provides a valuable guide to classical music in the

twentieth century. He has a preference for composers who address popular audiences rather than those who experiment mainly for themselves and small audiences, so Stravinsky, Strauss, Sibelius and Britten get rather more attention than Steve Reich, Philip Glass and the like.

Ross has a great ability to explain how the music works, and why it matters, combining technical analysis with metaphorical explanations that don’t require a detailed knowledge of musical theory to appreciate. Providing a cultural as well as a musical history, this is well worth reading.

“If this word ‘music’ is sacred and reserved for 18th and 19th century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound”

- John Cage

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



The Szmirok choir in concert at St George's Church, Poynton

On Friday 27 March, St George's Singers joined with Poynton Male Voice Choir to welcome friends from afar, when the Szmirok choir of Erd in Hungary visited the town.

Erd is Poynton's twin town, and played host to St George's Singers when we toured Hungary in 2006 and gave a joint concert. So the Choir was de-

lighted to be able to return the hospitality with a special concert at St George's Church in Poynton.

Szmirok Choir, an all female ensemble, sang a selection of songs from their homeland, mostly in Hungarian, though they also did break into English at one point (and probably did better than we would have done with our Hungarian!)

Poynton Male Voice Choir provided us with some lighter fare, including show tunes and even a hymn or two.

For our two sets, St George's performed some of the works in

preparation for our concert at Manchester Cathedral a few weeks later (*The Beatitudes*), as well as some old favourites, and the lovely new work by Sasha Johnson Manning, *The Divine Image*, which we premiered at Christmas. In Neil Taylor's absence, Matthew Hamilton

conducted the Choir, often bringing a new interpretation to well-known pieces.

A good audience turned out on an appallingly wet night, and everyone agreed it was

a highly enjoyable end to Szmirok's first visit to their twin town of Poynton.



Matthew Hamilton with the Szmirok choir interpreter

ROAD MUSIC BY GWYNETH PAILIN



Where we're off to today then, Eddie?

Staff at Hazel Grove Post office refer to me as 'the music lady' – not only returning borrowed music but increasingly sending out music belonging to the choir.

We have a modest library—the list is on the website—currently housed with various members and friends (to whom grateful thanks) and including such diverse pieces as Bach's *St John Passion* (old edition), Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert* and Richard Rodney Bennett's *Spell of Sleep*.

Number one in the charts is definitely Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna*, popular both for concert programmes and for choral

workshops. During the last two seasons, eight sets have been lent out and a further five requests have had to be turned down!

The *Ellington* has been out four times, the last with the Sheldon Singers in Devon. Tavener's *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* has made a few journeys lately, sometimes twice to the same choir and Gorecki's *Totus Tuus* has done the journey to the Edinburgh Choral Union twice as well as going down to the Camden Choir in London.

The Langford *Christmas Fantasy* has been used in Alnwick when we haven't needed it.

Even the orchestral parts we bought for *Elijah* have been out again – recently to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Most requests come through the Gerontius website and fees are based on the cost of the music, with the group hiring it paying all postage costs.

This has been the busiest season so far and now we can lend out the Lauridsen *Les Chansons des Roses* and even the Gabrieli *Magnificat a 17* as well!

This year the choir has generated over £600 from hiring out scores. A very good incentive to keep them tidy and rub out pencil markings!

FAREWELL TO MARGARET

Margaret Adshead joined St George's Singers in 1956 after seeing an advert in the local paper asking for people to form a new choir. She came along to the first rehearsal with husband Eric—and now more than fifty years later is finally handing in her choir folder and retiring after our summer concert.

Margaret was the choir's Librarian for over 40 years and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the choir's history. Gwyneth, who took over from her as librarian, recently rang Margaret to ask about a piece by Weber that Gwyneth thought we'd sung before. Margaret not only knew the year we sang it, but who bought copies, how many we hired, and the state the scores were in when they were returned!

Although Margaret remembers

the early years as enjoyable, they got really exciting when Ray Lomax became MD. "The world turned upside down when Ray arrived. Duncan (our previous conductor) did a lot of note bashing. But Ray was bursting with energy and enthusiasm. Music was his life. He started doing avant garde music, and putting on more concerts—which meant the librarian's job suddenly became more difficult! Some people didn't like the new stuff, but I'd much rather do something different than repeating things over and over again."

In all the time Margaret has sung with St George's, she has missed only two concerts! Once when she had flu, and once when a family wedding intervened in Yorkshire. (And even then, she and Eric tried to

get away in time to sing!)

She also has some great memories. Of the trip to the Royal Albert Hall to take part in the Berlioz *Grande Messe des Morts*, or singing *Gerontius* with Alexander Young at RNCM. And even the concert when the choir came in in totally the wrong key—and Ray just put down his baton and waited!

We'll all miss Margaret very much, thank her for her loyalty and service to the choir, and hope she'll continue to come along to concerts. We promise to keep our scores tidy!



Margaret and Eric on the choir trip to Hungary in 2006

EXERCISING THE TONGUE

Keeping the front of the tongue resting on top of the front teeth, or on the lower lip, move the back of the tongue along the back molars, keeping it as loose as possible. You can check by feeling under your chin that there is no tension at the base of the tongue, or if the tongue pulls on the larynx.

Vocalise with different consonants: YAH, KAH, LAH, THAH, SAH. Repeat with different vowels. Check that the tension needed at the point of contact for each consonant is no more than necessary to articulate the consonant.

Begin so that the vowel tone is

gentle and gradually increase the dynamic level, ensuring that none of the increase of effort increases the tension of the jaw and tongue. You should instead feel an increase of effort at the level of your support.

Taken from David Mason's Masterclass in The Singer magazine

ONLINE TICKETS NOW AVAILABLE

St George's Singers' online ticketing system is now working, which means that tickets to all our concerts can be bought easily over the internet.

The system uses Paypal, which (for those who aren't regular online buyers) enables payments to be made with a debit or credit card, but without hav-

ing to divulge the details of card numbers to the vendor. For those who don't wish to use Paypal direct payments with credit cards can also be made.

Techno-phobes should not worry though! Tickets are still available by telephone, by post, by email—and by asking choir members.

To buy your online ticket, log on to the choir website at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk, then click on Online Ticketing on the left hand menu. Full instructions are given on how to order and pay for tickets.

Many thanks to Peter Giles for researching and setting up the system.

CHEAP TICKETS!

We have two new types of tickets for next season:

- Discounts are now available for groups of 5-9 and 10+
- Season tickets covering our four main concerts provide significant reductions.

More information can be found in our new Season Brochure.

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



This amaryllis was bought by Jean Egerton as a bulb when the Choir toured to the Netherlands in 1999. As you can see, it's still flowering ten years later!

We're sorry to report that a number of Choir members have been quite ill this year. At various times of the season the sick list has included **Ursula Birkitt**, **Kath Wood**, **Clare Jackson** and **Richard Huddy**, all of whom have had to take many weeks off from rehearsals to recover. Fortunately all are now on the mend—and we're delighted to see that both Clare and Kath have been able to come back to rehearsal recently.

We've also missed **Penny Anson** and **Jean Egerton**, both of whom have been hobbling around after knee or leg surgery. We wish all our walking wounded a speedy recovery, and hope to see you all back to full fitness for the start of next season.

Welcome to **Lorraine Lighton**, who has joined the altos this term and sings in her first concert with us at Gorton. And a welcome return also to **Jacqui Smith**, who has torn herself away from her new daughter on Tuesday evenings to come and sing with us instead, and to **Jennie Smallwood**, who returns after the birth of her baby son. Both got a big welcome back from the sopranos!

And a sad farewell to **Michael Kertesz** who not only leaves St George's, but leaves the country to take up a professorship at Sydney University.

Peter Marcus, who had to leave the Choir when he changed job, was spotted recently on a return visit to Manchester. He misses the Choir

enormously (he can't find one that's good enough in Oxford!) but puts Neil's pre-rehearsal warm-ups to good use. He gets his law students to sing *My Bonnie lies over the Ocean* before class begins, standing and sitting at appropriate places. It's fun, gets rid of tension at the end of a hard day, and energises them for an evening of legal debate!

And finally, St George's fame has now spread to the other side of the world. Our broadcast of the Daily Service on BBC Radio 4 in February was heard there by **Irene Gibbons**, who was visiting family in New Zealand at the time, and who tuned in on the internet. Apparently we sounded great. (We weren't singing 'We all like sheep' were we?)

SCORE SHAREHOLDERS



St George's Singers has for many years been keen to encourage young musicians by commissioning new choral works from composers.

There is something tremendously exciting and empowering about singing a work that has been written especially for you, and the chance to give first voice to something that has existed only in the composer's imagination is thrilling.

So to find a composer, Matthew Hamilton, actually in our midst was too good an opportunity to miss.

The Choir's summer concert at the Monastery, with choirs from two local schools taking part, was an ideal opportunity.. Could Matthew write some-

thing that St George's Singers could perform with the youth choirs? The answer was yes, but then we faced the big issue—how do we pay for it?

Part of the cost was met by the monies raised by our wedding choir, The Cheshire Consort. The Consort has raised a considerable amount for St George's Singers over the last twelve months, and has built a reputation for the quality and sensitivity of their singing at weddings. The rest of the money however had to come from the choir.

Choir members were asked to sponsor the commission by purchasing a 'score' of shares in the new work. Each share cost £25, and contributors could purchase as many shares as

they wished. In return, shareholders will receive a personal copy of the work, signed by the composer.

In total, the scheme raised more than enough to pay for the composition itself, the remainder being spent on better quality printing to turn the original working scores into items that our Score Shareholders will treasure for many years to come.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the creation of a wonderful new piece of music for us to sing.

Matthew's composition, *The Overhanging Day*, receives its premiere at Gorton Monastery on 20 June.

SEA DRAGONS SWIMATHON TRIUMPH

BY DAVE FRANCIS

On Sunday 8th March a team from St. George's Singers, named the 'Sea Dragons' (!), took part in a charity Swimathon at Macclesfield Leisure Centre. The team consisted of Jo Bluck, Richard Taylor, Dave Francis and Mark Warrington. The event was organized by Macclesfield Castle Rotary Club. Over forty teams took part, with the proceeds raised by each team being divided 50/50 between two children's charities nominated by the Rotary Club and charities chosen by the team itself. In our case, we decided to use our half of the money we raised to support Corrie Verduyn's work as a VSO volunteer in a hospital in Tanzania.

The Swimathon involved each team swimming for 45 minutes, with stewards to keep score of the number of lengths completed as team members took alternate lengths of the 25 metre pool. This may not sound very far, especially with a 2 or 3 length break before one's turn came round again. However, even the more aquatically accomplished in the team (Jo and Mark are impressively smooth crawl swimmers) were puffed by the end. The rather less fish-like members, such as yours truly (think hippo rather than shark), were finding it tough well before the 45 minutes was up.



We were quite pleased with our total of 102 lengths, though there was a feeling in the team that our scorer had missed a few. No matter. Thanks to our sponsors, we raised nearly £350 in total. This means that

£175 will be going to Corrie's hospital to help purchase much-needed equipment. We have been invited to take part again next year.



Our triumphant sea dragons (fortunately fully clothed!)

HOW GREEN ARE OUR CONCERTS?

We've decided on the concert programme, practised for weeks on end, sold the tickets—but did anyone think about making the event carbon neutral?

Some of the largest music bands have been doing this recently, and changing their

ways. The Rolling Stones were first, with their carbon neutral tour in 2003—one tree grown for every sixty concertgoers. Radiohead encouraged concertgoers to use public transport. Glyndebourne recently had plans approved for a wind turbine to reduce their

carbon emissions by 70%.

At St George's we certainly provide coach transport to city centre concerts, reducing the number of cars. But perhaps we could try a bit harder. If anyone has ideas on how we can make our concerts greener—let the Committee know!

GOLDEN RULES FOR ENSEMBLE SINGING

- 1 Everyone should sing the same piece.
- 2 Take time turning pages.
- 3 Do not worry if you do not have perfect pitch—singing is less stressful without it.
- 4 The right note at the wrong time is the wrong note.
- 5 The wrong note at the right time is still a wrong note.
- 6 A wrong note sung timidly is still a wrong note.
- 7 A wrong note sung with

- authority is an interpretation.
- 8 A true interpretation is realized when not one note of the original remains.
- 9 If you happen to sing a wrong note, give a nasty look to one of your neighbours.
- 10 If you are completely lost, stop everyone and start an argument about repeat marks.
- 11 Strive to achieve the maximum notes per second—that way you gain the admiration of

- the totally incompetent.
- 12 If a passage is difficult, slow it down. If it's easy, speed it up. Everything will work itself out in the end.
- 13 Ignore slurs, dynamics, ornaments and breathing marks. They are there only to embellish the score.
- 14 When everyone else has finished singing, you should not sing any notes you may still have left.



The basses demonstrating one of the finer points of ensemble singing.

St George's Singers

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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.

MANCHESTER SINGS— EVERYWHERE!



The Estonian National Song Festival Grounds

If you can't last out over the summer without singing, here are some choral workshops and courses to keep you going!

2-5 July 2009

The Estonian Song Festival, Tallinn. If you toured to Estonia with St George's, then you've stood on the famous stage—now sing in the festival!

3—5 July 2009

North Wales Summer School of Music. Choral course featuring Charpentier's *Mass for Double Chorus*, plus works by John Blow and Hillier.

www.singing-courses.com,
email info@nwssm.org.uk

26 July 2009

Choral workshop and scratch

performance of *Missa in Dedicazione Ecclesia* by Dohnanyi, conductor John Huw Davies. Part of the Canford Summer School of Music, held in Sherborne, Dorset from 26 July to 16 August. Choral and solo courses available.
www.canfordsummerschool.co.uk

27 July—31 July 2009

5-day choral course at Royal Welsh College of Music with Adrian Partington. Music from the Elizabethan age. Tel 029 2039 1391, www.rwcmd.ac.uk

Tuesday 11 August 2009

South American Singing Workshop with Jeffrey Skidmore (conductor of Ex Cathedra) in Shrewsbury, featuring Latin

American baroque music. Part of the Hereford International Summer School of Music.
www.issmus.org

16-25 August 2009

Solo and choral course held in Colditz, Germany, the famous prisoner of war castle in Saxony, with concerts in Dresden and Leipzig. Music studied to include works by Charpentier, Cavalli, Monteverdi, Brahms, Schutz, Rutter and Stanford.
www.singing-courses.com.

12 September 2009

The Friends of Dore Abbey annual Choral Workshop this year features Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet*. Conductor is Paul Spicer. Tel 01981 241458

