



Hemiola

St George's Singers

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SCORES IN PERIL— LATEST NEWS

In the last issue of *Hemiola*, we reported on the problems St George's and other local choirs were having with Cheshire Library Service, who was threatening to limit the number of scores available for hire to 60—far from enough for a choir the size of St George's.

Following representations from St George's and other regional choirs—not to mention the intervention of our President, Dame Joan Bakewell, who

immediately took up the fight in her regular *Times* column—the Library Service has come up with a compromise plan.

For a trial period of a year, the limit on the number of scores that can be hired will be removed, as will the restrictions on scores for singing days and workshops. In return, charges will increase by around 36%.



This will mean that, for example, to hire 100 copies of a score through the Interlending Unit will cost £70; hiring 120 will cost £90.

So for a year at least, our scores are safe. Watch this space for more news next year!

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

'LEARN TO SING' COMES TO POYNTON

Against very strong competition, St George's Singers has been chosen to host one of the seven national 'Learn to Sing' courses that will take place around the country during 2010. The venture is a partnership between Making Music (the National Federation of Music Societies), the British Association of Barbershops, and Choir of the Year.

The course will run for 6 weeks, and will be held on a Tuesday evening in Poynton, the same night as St George's Singers' rehearsal. The aim is to attract complete beginners and those returning to singing after a gap.



Photo: Keith Tysall

St George's Singers' Chair, Anne Francis, was thrilled to hear that our application had been accepted ahead of many other regional choirs. "This is a marvellous vote of confidence in the Choir, and a recognition of the tremendously hard work

that all our members put into singing and performing. We're looking forward to welcoming singers from all over the North West to Poynton."

More details will be available early in 2010.

Mass in Blue

Sunday 8 November, 7.30 pm

Royal Northern College of Music

Tickets £16, £12, £5 students/
children

Tel: 01663 764012,

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

Tina May

What Is Jazz?

Man, if you have to ask what it is,
you'll never know

— Louis Armstrong

It's the group sound that's impor-
tant, even when you're playing a solo

— Oscar Peterson

It don't mean a thing if it ain't got
that swing

— Duke Ellington

As long as there is democracy, there
will be people wanting to play jazz
because nothing else will ever so
perfectly capture the democratic
process in sound

— Wynton Marsalis

MASS IN BLUE—PREVIEW

In 2006 St George's Singers astounded clergy, critics and audience alike (and maybe even a few members of the Choir) when we rocked Manchester Cathedral in Ellington's *Sacred Concert*. On 8 November 2009 we'll be back with another jazz work—Will Todd's upbeat jazz setting of the Latin mass, the *Mass in Blue*.

Will Todd is one of the country's most exciting young composers. Born in 1970 and brought up in County Durham, Will began teaching himself the piano at age three, and started composing when he was seven. His output includes opera, musicals, oratorio, orchestral and religious works, and his music has been performed throughout the UK, in Europe and the USA by the likes of the Hallé, The Sixteen, The Royal Opera, BBC Singers and Welsh National Opera.

He is particularly known as a prolific choral composer, with works ranging from large scale oratorios (*Saint Cuthbert* and *The Burning Road*) to smaller scale sacred and secular works. Will also leads his own jazz trio.

The *Mass in Blue* was commissioned by Hertfordshire Chorus, and received its premiere in July 2003, with Will at the piano and his wife, jazz vocalist Bethany Halliday, taking the soprano solo. Since then, it has received over twenty performances in the UK, Europe and the USA, and has entered the choral repertoire to stay.

When Neil first suggested we should tackle the *Mass in Blue*, the Committee's first thoughts were to approach Jacqui Dank-

worth again. But then John Quinn suggested Tina May (see article over page) and we were delighted when she agreed.

Since forming her first quartet in the early 1990s, Tina May's astonishing vocal ability and hypnotic stage presence has won her worldwide acclaim. Nominated for *Best Vocalist* at the *BBC Jazz Awards*, she is also winner of the *Best vocalist* award and (on several occasions) *Critic's Choice* award at the *BT British Jazz Awards*. The Observer has described her as 'one of the best jazz vocalists anywhere today'.

Music lovers know her as the astonishingly gifted vocalist famous for performing standards to contemporary song, from Kern, Ellington and Gershwin, to Paul Simon and Chick Corea. A gifted lyricist, consummate jazz artist and sparkling entertainer, Tina's wonderful three-octave, dusky soprano voice will already be familiar to TV viewers from the catchy theme tunes of the popular series *Infidelity* and *Airline*, and television commercials for *Easyjet* and *Dove*.

The line-up at RNCM will be completed by the College's very own Jazz Collective under the leadership of Mike Hall, who will be performing jazz standards with Tina in the first half of the concert.



Will Todd

(photo: ©Robert Carpenter-Turner)

TO SWING OR NOT TO SWING

For weeks Neil has been banging on (Ed: sorry, that should read 'gently reminding us') about when we should and shouldn't be 'swinging' in the *Mass in Blue*.

The general term 'swing' is used to describe playing that has a strong rhythmic groove or drive, and is usually applied to jazz from the early 1930s onwards.

However, there is a much more specific and technical definition of swing, which is where our rehearsal pencils come in. 'Swung' notes are notes with equal written time values but which are performed with unequal durations. The length of the notes is inexact, and depends on the speed, the genre, or even the individual tastes of the performance. In the *Mass in Blue*, the composer has indicated very carefully which notes are to be swung, and which are to be 'straight'.

So—now we know what swing is, take it away Neil

TINA: A DREAM CAME TRUE

BY JOHN QUINN

I first became aware of Tina May in 1992 when I bought a copy of her first album 'Never Let Me Go'. At that time I'd never heard her sing but on the album I recognised several favourite players, including Don Weller (saxophone) and David Newton (piano). Straight away I liked her style and choice of material. She sang Jazz Standards but also adapted less known pieces and wrote her own lyrics. She quickly became one of my favourite singers.

In May 1993 I went up to Durham to see the Duke Ellington *Sacred Concert* performed in the Cathedral by the Cathedral choir with the Stan Tracey Big Band. Tina sang the soprano solo part.

Later in 1993 I went to Theatr Clwyd in Mold to see Tina singing with her band. I can remember asking her if he would do a song from her first album called 'A Rose Without A Thorn' which was originally an instrumental piece by Stan Tracey with lyrics written by Tina. She couldn't find the music and so they couldn't do it. She asked me if they could do another song instead so I suggested 'Damn That Dream'.

The following year I attended the Wavendon Jazz Summer School (established by Sir John Dankworth and Dame Cleo Laine) as a piano student and Tina was teaching the Jazz vocal students. I was amazed one night when chatting that she remembered me requesting 'A Rose Without A Thorn' from the previous year. From this point onwards whenever going to see Tina perform in concert she would always have a chat and over the years since I've got to know her reasonably well.

Since those times I've seen Tina perform at places as diverse as Rochdale, Grimsby, Worcester Cathedral (again doing the Duke Ellington *Sacred Concert*), Wakefield Jazz Club, The Wigmore Hall, Bracknell, Clonter Opera, the RNCM, Wigan, Nantwich, The Crucible Studio Sheffield and Wavendon near Milton Keynes (in Sir John Dankworth and Dame Cleo Laine's back garden).

A couple of years ago I had a significant birthday (no not 21!). I decided to mark it by putting on a charity Jazz concert in Macclesfield in aid of the Martyn Donaldson Music Trust

(www.mdm.org.uk), which is a charity set up in memory of the son of my old music teacher, who died tragically in September 2002.

Who better to get to come and do it but Tina May? I approached Tina and she was pleased to come and do the concert. The band consisted of favourite Jazz musicians hand-picked by me. Tina's regular pianist Nikki Iles came to play and the rest of the band was made up of favourite players from the north. Mike Hall (director of the RNCM Jazz Collective) played Saxophone. The evening was a great success and the church where the concert took place was filled to capacity. People travelled from as far as Southport and Harrogate to attend. In the end we raised over £2,000 for the Music Trust.

I'm pleased that Tina is coming to sing with the St George's Singers for *Mass In Blue* and I'm excited about the prospect of finally getting to perform with her in a venue as prestigious as the RNCM.



John and Tina after his birthday concert

"Good jazz is when the leader jumps on the piano. Great jazz is when he heaves a piercing note for 32 bars and collapses on his hands and knees. A pure genius of jazz is manifested when he and the rest of the orchestra run around the room while the rhythm section grimaces and dances around their instruments."

— Charles Mingus

"The only thing better than singing is more singing"

— Ella Fitzgerald

SINGING DAY 2010: DVOŘÁK AND KODÁLY

A reminder that St George's Singing Day will be on Saturday 16th January 2010, and will take place as usual in St George's Church in Poynton.

The works this year may be slightly less familiar than usual—which makes it all the more exciting to come and sing something different.

Neil has chosen a wonderful setting of the Mass by Czech composer, Antonin Dvořák. Of his three mass settings only this *Mass in D* survives, and is an exceptionally beautiful choral piece. We'll also be singing a short work by Kodály, the *Pangue Lingua*. As usual, the day finishes with a concert perform-

ance of both works.

The Singing Day is always very popular, so book your place early by contacting Gillian Banks, tel 01925 213949, email Gillian.m.banks@tesco.net, or download an application form from the website at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

**Annual Singing Day -
Saturday 16 January, 2010
St George's Church, Poynton.
£20 including music hire, tea
and coffee during the day.
Home-made soup and
sandwiches available for lunch.**

BASS TALES FROM THE BACK ROW

BY MICHAEL CALAM



Bryn Terfel

The Hallé recording of *Dream of Gerontius* with Bryn Terfel, Alice Cooté and Paul Groves has just won the Choral Award at the 2009 Gramophone Awards, and was described by the Sunday Times as ranking 'with the greatest ever committed to disc'. A number of St George's Singers took part in this—so it's bound to be good!

If anyone had told me two years ago that I would sing with the Hallé, I would not have believed them. I was a first bass in the Manchester University Chorus and enjoying the leadership of Marcus Farnsworth, and had just been accepted by St George's Singers to sing in the *B minor Mass* at the Bridgewater Hall—a first for me.

At the time, the University chorus was rehearsing Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, and at one rehearsal someone from the Hallé appealed for augmenters. This was clearly way outside my league so I took little notice, but our performance went so well that I was persuaded by a Hallé member to audition. To my surprise, I was accepted and gradually it dawned on me that I would now be in two concerts at the Bridgewater, and that the Hallé would also be recording their *Gerontius* and that the soloists would include Bryn Terfel!

Both concerts were great, and I thought they marked the pinnacle of my humble choral experience. However—Marcus wanted the University chorus to broaden its horizons. Britten's *War Requiem* with Amanda

Roocroft would be a grand climax to his time as our conductor, and I wanted to be part of it. So in October I was again rehearsing twice a week, with SGS and with the University chorus on *Elijah* plus taking part in the 'Sing with the Hallé' of Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony*, a personal favourite, with 850 other singers.

After all that, a Christmas break at my brother's in Canada was welcome (except that I was conscripted into his church choir for a Nine Lessons carol service on one rehearsal). Then it was back to 'Music for Sacred Spaces' and the *War Requiem*.

Then, about the time of the BBC Daily Service (another first for me) the Hallé asked for associates to join them in a concert version of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. This meant rehearsing three or even four times a week with the various choirs, and on the day of the 'Sacred Spaces', concert I even attended half of Marcus' University chorus rehearsal. The *War Requiem* was on the following Sunday, and *Götterdämmerung* the next weekend.

All three concerts were triumphs. I loved 'Music for Sa-

cred Spaces' and the audience did too. The *War Requiem* was a sell-out, and *Götterdämmerung* received a 15 minute standing ovation. After that preparing for the Monastery Garden concert was almost a relaxation!

Except—an email arrived from the Hallé. They wanted to boost the choir for Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* at their Prom at the end of July. The rehearsals consisted of a long weekend and were mainly for alumni of the Hallé Youth Choir. The concert was a great success, Sir Mark Elder looked delighted, and there was just time for me to rush back from London to give my stepdaughter away at her wedding that weekend.

So that is definitely it. SGS has started on *Mass in Blue*, the University chorus has a new choir master, Rob Houssart, who I want to sing with (he's doing the *Sea Symphony*), and that's enough—except that another email has arrived, with a rehearsal schedule for a Hallé performance of Elgar's *Kingdom* in mid-October. Inevitably I've said yes, which means I'll be singing three nights a week for a while longer.

MUSICAL HEIRS

A new report suggests that the 'Mozart effect' may be a fraud, and that playing Mozart to babies may not improve their IQ after all.

Of course, we're all better off for listening to Mozart, purely for the pleasure of it. However, one does wonder what would happen if other composers were played to little Britney or Jason during crucial developmental periods.....

Liszt effect: child speaks rapidly and extravagantly, but never says anything important.

Bruckner effect: child speaks very slowly, repeats himself frequently, and gains reputation for profundity.

Mahler effect: Child continually screams at great length and volume that he's dying.

Schoenberg effect: Child never

repeats a word until he's used all the other words in his vocabulary. Sometimes talks backwards. People stop listening to him, and child blames them for their inability to understand him.

Birtwistle effect: Child gibbers nonsense all the time. People stop listening to him, but child doesn't care because all his playmates think he's cool.

Glass effect: child repeats himself over and over and over and over and over and over

Brahms effect: child speaks beautifully in sentences with a multiple of three words, but sentences with 4 or 8 words are strangely uninspired.

Cage effect: Child says nothing for 4 minutes, 33 seconds.

MARCUS TRIUMPHS AT WIGMORE HALL

Many congratulations to Marcus Farnsworth, our former Assistant Musical Director, who has just won the £10,000 first prize in the prestigious Wigmore Hall/Kohn Foundation International Song Competition.

The competition attracted 142 singers from 41 countries, and Marcus made it through to the final with three other young singers from UK and America. His winning 30-minute recital

included works by Schubert, Strauss, Loewe and Poulenc (whose rowdy French drinking songs *Chansons Gaillardes* Marcus delivered to great guffaws from the audience), and closed with English songs by Butterworth, Gurney and Britten's *The last rose of summer*. As the youngest of the finalists, Marcus was praised by the jury and commentators for his wonderful expressiveness, his performance of the English songs being described as particularly beauti-

ful. The jury members included Sir Thomas Allen, Dame Anne Evans, Dame Margaret Price, Ann Murray, and Iain Burnside.

Marcus is one of the soloists in our Monteverdi *Vespers* at Gorton Monastery on 20 March 2010.



Marcus with his accompanist Elizabeth Burgess

BIZARRELY BAROQUE BY SUSAN HODGSON

One of the definitions of 'baroque' is 'extravagant, complex or bizarre'. A pretty good description of a day spent by a small group of St George's Singers at this year's International Summer School of Music (ISSMUS) in the beautiful city of Shrewsbury.

We had come to take part in a workshop given by Jeffrey Skidmore—Musical Director of Ex Cathedra, and renowned early music specialist. It was also a good opportunity to meet up with an old friend, as Stephen Williams was one of the tutors on the 7-day event, and kept an eye on all our efforts from the back of the hall!

We were of course all familiar with early music ('Sacred Spaces' was still fresh in our minds.) But this was early music with a difference. The title of the workshop was 'South American Baroque Music' and the day gave us a fascinating insight into a choral world we had never encountered before.

Before setting foot in South America, though, Jeffrey warmed us up with slightly

more familiar baroque conventions, with improvised harmonization. The basses lay down the bass line, the sopranos sang the tune, the altos were invited to provide the polyphony (which we did brilliantly of course!!) and the tenors ornamented the bass line.

So far, so ... baroque. But then perspective shifted 6,000 miles from the stately courts of Europe to the jungles of South America. And immediately, baroque dropped its formality, took to its heels and danced. Latin gave way to Spanish, and by lunchtime we were getting our tongues round Nahuatl and Quechua, the ancient languages of the Aztecs and the Incas.

We sang processional chants, exquisite miniatures, and exuberant songs that exhorted everyone to get up and dance, either the 'jugete' for the elderly (bunions and chilblains being no excuse!) or the 'gauchete' for the young and more energetic. Then onto Christmas carols, accompanied by a weird array of hairy drums, seed pods and shell sticks.

Interspersed with the singing, Jeffrey gave an entertaining presentation on how his interest in this music was sparked by a discovery in the British Library of a manuscript fragment—the first polyphony published in the Americas in 1631. This set him off on a tour of the Americas, collecting long-forgotten manuscripts from churches, missionary stations and universities, and meeting up with native musicians as he criss-crossed Central and South America in a variety of planes, boats, helicopters and jeeps.

The names of the composers from this era—Araujo, Zespedes, Bocanegro, Padilla, Hernandez—are probably unfamiliar to most choral singers. But this repertoire is so exuberant, so enjoyable and so much fun that it deserves to be more widely performed and heard.

Information on ISSMUS can be found on their website at www.issmus.org, Tel 01981 241 003.



Xochipilli, the extremely busy Aztec god of love, games, beauty, dance, flowers, maize and song

A BLOOMING GOOD SHOW—ALL THE HIGHLIGHTS FROM *IN A MONASTERY GARDEN*

“My friends and I greatly enjoyed the Singers’ performance on Saturday: a powerful and well-rehearsed choir singing cherished folk songs. A marvellous night out! The performance of Britten’s settings for English poets was lovely but for me, the highlights were the Rilke fragments which touched on a particular spirituality within the hallowed walls of this beloved Monastery. I genuinely did not want these gorgeous songs to end”
— Anthony Holt



John Pears after his solo in *Brigg Fair*

All photos courtesy of Graham North



The choirs of Cedar Mount High School (above) and Poynton High School (below)



It was almost standing room only at our last concert of the 2008/9 season, when St George’s Singers returned in June to the Monastery at Gorton. The opening of the concert had to be delayed whilst Monastery staff rushed to find extra chairs to cater for the larger than expected audience.



The Monastery looked beautiful, lavishly decked with masses of flowers that choir members had generously donated from their gardens, and perfectly complementing the floral theme of the evening’s musical offerings.

The concert opened gently with Rutter’s *Sprig of Thyme*, followed by Neil and Jeff’s first duet of the evening, *In a Monastery Garden*. This was delivered with panache, style and not a little tongue in cheek, and was duly cheered by the audience in the same manner.

The stage was then handed over to the first of the two school choirs, Poynton High School, whose all-girls ensemble gave rousing performances of songs from popular musicals.

The mood turned rather more serious then, as St George’s joined forces with the two schools to give the premiere of Matthew Hamilton’s newly commissioned work, *The Overhanging Day*. With only three weeks to rehearse this complex but beautiful work, there had been little time to perfect all the nuances

of the piece. The children had looked nervous in the afternoon rehearsal, but Neil had passed on to them the choral singer’s first commandment: when in



N: *Do you think we could make a living at this?*

J: *Only if you try and remember that pianos don’t have organ stops.*

trouble, keep going! And that’s just what they did. There was one slight hiccup towards the end of the work, but we were all delighted when Matthew said at the end of the concert how pleased he had been with the performance. Let’s hope we can do this intriguing work again in the near future.



A proud but relieved composer taking a well deserved round of applause

The second half began on a slightly more sombre note, with selections from Lauridsen’s gorgeous *Chansons des Roses*. (And which many of us would love to do in their entirety in the future). Then the spotlight fell on SGS tenor John Pears who took the solo part in Grainger’s *Brigg Fair*, blending seamlessly with the Choir. Cedar Mount High School

choir were next up, bringing amazing energy and enthusiasm to their music-making that was totally infectious. The audience, and St George’s Singers, loved it.

Almost at the end now, but not before another blockbuster from Neil and Jeff in Grainger’s *Country Gardens*. And then onto the finale—

Britten’s wonderfully evocative *Five Flower Songs*, bringing the concert to a rumbustious end with the ever so slightly naughty *Ballad of Green Broom*. The audience gave the massed choirs a great ovation, and our hectic 2008/9 Season came to a triumphant end.



CHRISTMAS CONCERT PREVIEW

Our 2009 'Carols and Brass by Candlelight' concert with Vernon Building Society Poynton Brass Band is on **Saturday 5th December** at St George's Church in Stockport, and this year has an extra special treat for our audience.

In addition to the traditional carols and Christmas music from the Choir and the band, we will be performing extracts from Handel's *Messiah*—including the ever popular *Hallelujah Chorus*, as part of a nation-wide BBC event called 'Sing Hallelujah'.

This project has been launched

by the BBC to encourage people to find their voice and discover the joy of singing through this most famous of choral works, and in the year that marks the 250th anniversary year of Handel's death.

The project also has another aim: to raise money for 'Children in Need', in recognition of Handel's work as a governor of the Foundling Hospital in London, Britain's first home for abandoned children.

This year's concert also sees the debut of Poynton Brass Band's



new Musical Director, Kevin Gibbs, at our Christmas concert.

So, if you want to get your Christmas festivities off to a great start, sing some Christmas carols, listen to a thrilling performance of the world's favourite choral work—and enjoy the mince pies and mulled wine!—come and join us at our carol concert in the beautiful St George's Church.

Carols and Brass by Candlelight
Saturday 5 December, 7.30 pm
St George's Church, Stockport.
Tickets now on sale priced
£12, £10, £2 children/students
Tel: 01663 764012
Email: tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk
Online: www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HANDEL AND *MESSIAH*

1 Handel was born in Halle, Germany on 23 February 1685—one month before Bach.

2 *Messiah* (there is no 'The' in the title) was composed in 24 days by Handel in the summer of 1741.

3 It received its premiere in Dublin on 13 April 1742 at Neal's Music Hall in Fishamble Street.

4 The Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Jonathan Swift, cancelled the premiere for a period, demanded that it be retitled *A Sacred Oratorio*, and insisted that revenue from the concert go to local mental hospitals.

5 The word 'Messiah' means 'anointed one' and is derived from the Abrahamic concept.

6 Tradition has it that Handel wrote the work whilst staying at the country house of Charles

Jennens', who wrote the libretto for the work, at Gopsall Hall in Leicestershire. It was completed in a garden temple, the ruins of which have been preserved and can be visited.

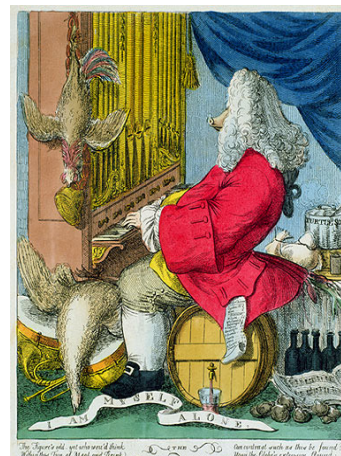
7 The work is divided into three parts: Part One deals with the Advent and Christmas stories.; Part Two with Christ's passion and resurrection; and Part Three with the events in the Book of Revelation, from which the *Hallelujah Chorus* is taken.

8 Handel often altered the music to suit the needs of the singers and orchestra available. As a result, no single version can be regarded as the 'authentic' one.

9 The tradition of standing for the *Hallelujah Chorus* started when King George II rose to his feet at this point in the performance. Various theories

have been put forward for his actions. The more religiously inclined think that the King was acknowledging the position of Christ as the King of Kings, and thus stood as a mark of respect before the Lord. Those of a musical turn of mind believe that the King was simply so moved by the performance he stood to applaud the composer. The more cynical however believe that after an hour's performance, the King's gout acted up and he rose to relieve the discomfort.

10 Handel was a Governor and benefactor of the Foundling Hospital in Brunswick Square, London, for which annual performances of *Messiah* provided vital sources of income. The Hospital is now a Museum, with an internationally important collection of material relating to Handel.



'The Charming Brute' — caricature by Joseph Goupy of Handel, who was noted for his large appetite.

LAULUPIDU 2009: ESTONIA IN SONG

BY DAVE FRANCIS AND GEOFF TAYLOR



Try to imagine what it would be like to live in a country where choral singing is the main national pastime; where every town, village and neighbourhood has a choir; where singing is as popular with teenage boys as it is with girls; where composers and conductors are national celebrities; where the Minister of Culture is herself a noted choral conductor; where, once every five years, a singing festival takes place in which one quarter of the entire population of the country take part; and at which a choir of *twenty-six thousand people* stand on a stage and sing together for several hours (all watching the conductor!). Can't imagine such a place? Well, it exists, and it's called Estonia.

It's not just that Estonians like to sing. It's that singing together is fundamental to what it is to *be* Estonian. Estonia is a small country (population 1.4 million – less than Greater Manchester) surrounded by powerful neighbours that, throughout history, have occupied and dominated it: Denmark, Sweden, Germany and, most recently, the Soviet Union. Almost fifty years of Soviet domination only came to an end in 1991, when Estonian

independence was declared. It's not surprising, therefore, that Estonians do not take freedom for granted. Even today they are keenly aware that the Russian border is only 100 miles from Tallinn. Events such as the Russian invasion of Georgia make them very nervous.

In this historical and political context the Estonian National Singing Festival is more than just an opportunity to get together and have a good time. Since the mid-19th century, the Singing Festival has been the country's major cultural event.

During the Soviet period the communist rulers of Estonia allowed the festival to continue, but with firm restrictions on what kinds of songs could be sung. Nationalistic overtones were strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, the Singing Festival became a principal expression of passive resistance to oppression, a chance for Estonians to remind themselves of their culture and history.

Passive resistance turned into active rejection in 1988. As the power of the Soviet Union be-



gan to slip, the 'Singing Grounds' on the edge of Tallinn became the venue for spontaneous gatherings of ordinary people determined to show their opposition to the regime. The Singing Festival was scheduled for September of that year. One third of the whole popula-

tion took part, turning it into a huge expression of Estonian resistance. Political speeches were interspersed with the mass singing of previously banned songs. Estonians refer to this event as 'the Singing Revolution' and proudly point out that it all happened before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Of course, it took more than singing to bring down the regime, but the role that choral music played in the movement towards Estonian independence is unique.

No wonder, then, that both the President and the Prime Minister of Estonia attend the Festival and that ordinary Estonians continue to regard it as the most important cultural event in their land. No wonder either that, when we were offered the chance by our friends in the Flora Chamber Choir to participate in this year's festival we jumped at the chance.

We joined the rehearsal on the Friday. "Everybody move back ten rows. We have another 6,000 singers to accommodate." What? 20,000 of us were already squeezed into the tiers of the Singing Ground's stage, with hardly any room to open our books. With great good humour, the impossible was achieved and 6,000 children joined us for the afternoon and evening rehearsal. There are no seats of course (hope that doesn't give Neil any ideas) so we stood and sang for over five hours, with only a short break for soup and rolls prepared by the Estonian army.

Although we had been sent the Festival Song Book months earlier we were hardly word perfect, so it was a good opportunity to learn the notes

Search YouTube for the following clips from Laulupidu 2009:

'XXV Laulupidu 2009' posted by ameliejonathan, for a 9 minute introduction

'Ta lendab mesipu poole' for our favourite beehive song. The 'high quality' clip is best

'Kodumaa', clip by kaamerasilm for a glimpse, at about 22 seconds, of the one singer in 26,000 not watching the conductor. (No prizes for guessing who!)

'Estonian Singing Revolution' for a film explaining the role of singing in establishing the nation's independence

'Tantsupidu 2009' for an 8 minute intro to the Dance Festival



four kilometres to the Singing Fields, singing all the way, with our Flora banner and the Estonian flag (a gift from the President to every choir: blue for sky, black for earth and white for hope).

The singers were in an astonishing variety of national costumes. Sue

(surprisingly easy in the middle of 6,000 basses!) and brush up our pronunciation with indulgent help all around.

Each song was rehearsed by a different conductor—it's a huge honour to be chosen to conduct. English, rather than Russian, is now the most popular foreign language at school and youngsters around us were eager to show off their skills. But no translation was needed for the conductor who shouted "Texti, texti, texti!"

The logistics of the organisation staggered us. The singers came from all over Estonia and went off in a fleet of coaches to sleep on mats in schools all over Tallinn.

The next morning our attentive and generous hosts gave us tickets for the Dance Festival which is held at the same time as the Singing Festival. The sight of 7,000 folk dancers in colourful co-ordinated costumes dancing wonderfully choreographed spectacles in a sports arena was an unforgettable three hours. We had to buy the DVD.

After the Dance Festival we assembled in the city centre for the famous procession, which was delayed for three hours. We never found out why, but no one seemed to mind. 800 choirs were processing, selected from the 2,000 which had applied. Tallinn choirs traditionally go last, and eventually it was our turn to "march" the

had managed to borrow a respectable Welsh costume, but the rest of us had raided the dressing up box at Brookside School. If our Estonian friends thought our costumes were a bit odd, they were too polite to say so! The route was lined three or four deep with others leaning out of every window and balcony, or on roofs, cheering and chanting their support for their favourite choirs. Feeling very proud we entered the arena, saluted the President, handed in our flag, and experienced what had been missing from the rehearsal: the astonishing sight and sound of a quarter of a million audience



spread up the hill. When all 26,000 singers were in position (a good job for Jo!) a torch bearer entered the arena to huge cheering and climbed the ten stories of the fire tower. To the fervent singing of the national anthem a huge flame was lit at the top and Laulupidu 2009 was underway. After more nationalist songs by all 26,000 of us, we were able to leave the stage while different choirs—boys, girls, children's, youth, men, women and professional—performed. Time to explore several hundred food,

it, as a metaphor for Estonians longing for an independent homeland. It is sung with great emotion, swaying and waving arms, and never failed to bring tears to many eyes. It was particularly moving to watch singers in their seventies, and wonder what they had been through. An astonishing and commendable number of the songs were by living composers, some composed especially for the festival. After each encore the singers chanted the composer's name, including our friend Veljo Tormis, a national

hero, and each composer mounted the rostrum to a barrage of cheering and applause.

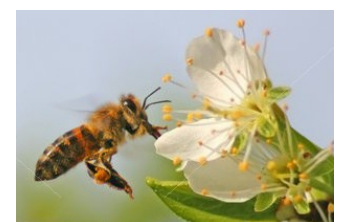
The concert reached a tumultuous and riotous climax, with each composer and conductor crowned with a huge olive wreath, and many were

drink, (Geoff and Dave), craft and souvenir (Sue and Anne) stalls around the festival site, and join hundreds in the queue for the loos. Unfortunately the weather was not in festive mood, and the second half was sung to an audience of umbrellas and the accompaniment of lightning and thunder.

tossed in the air. The fire was extinguished to the strains of an unofficial national anthem, and Laulupidu was over for another five years. After seven hours of singing we found the beer tent and, guess what, more singing.

Words cannot possibly convey the intensity of the experience, being swept up in such corporate choral excitement. The motto of the Festival was "To breathe as one" and it really felt like that. You can get a feel of what it was like from the YouTube videos. But better still, be there in July 2014. We shall be.

The weather was kinder for the second, even longer, concert on Sunday – 2pm – 9-ish, with a supper break. Both concerts were accompanied by a marvelous orchestra and brass band, who were able to sit, in the centre of the stage. We sang every song in the book, and at the end of each one the singers led the demands for an encore. Our favourite was, "Ta lendab mesipuu poole" which we would love to teach to St George's. The poem uses a bee's return to the beehive, and the thousands that don't make



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



The Score Shareholders who funded the commissioning of Matthew's *The Overhanging Day* were all presented with special editions of the score, personally signed by Matthew, at the first rehearsal of the new season.

The scheme raised over £500 towards the cost of the composition, the remainder being donated by The Cheshire Consort.

Welcome to new members of St George's Singers: John Watson (bass), Jennie Lewis and Mary Hoult (altos).

And a sad farewell to Chris Brennan, who leaves Manchester to take up a new job in Birmingham. Ah well—St George's loss is CBSO Chorus' gain! Good luck to Chris and his family.

FRIENDS DRAW



The first winner of our new Friends' Draw was Susan Warrington, who won two tickets to our jazz concert at RNCM in November. Congratulations to Susan—hope you enjoy the evening.

We have introduced this special draw for our Friends to thank them for their invaluable and much appreciated support. The draw is open to all Friends who attend our concerts, and there is a draw at every concert. So if you are a Friend of St George's

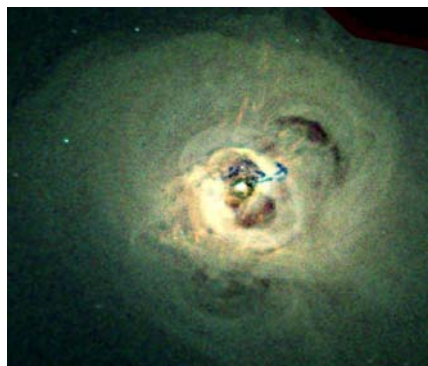
Singers, just come along to the publicity table before the concert starts, and put your name in the hat. The draw is made at the interval. You could win tickets to our popular carol concert.

It costs just £10 a year to become a Red Rose Friend, and £25 to be a Gold Rose Friend. For more information, please contact Jean Egerton, tel 01625 871371, or email friends@st-georges-singers.org.uk.

ONLINE SHOP

A reminder as Christmas approaches that you can do your Christmas shopping AND make money for St George's Singers by using our charity shop. Marks & Spencer, Waterstones, Ebay, HMV, Play.com, Amazon, Littlewoods—just a few of the dozens of high street and online shops you can visit. Every purchase you make through our online shop gets us a commission. Visit www.st-georges-singers.org.uk, and click on Online Shopping.

BLACK HOLES CAN SING



The Perseus cluster

In the dark heart of the Perseus galaxy, about 300 million light years from Earth, a massive black hole has been singing the same note for 2.5 billion years. And what is that note?

Well, according to NASA's Chandra X-Ray Center, it's a B-flat. Not quite the same B-flat that we sing—this one is 57 octaves below middle C, and over a million times

deeper than the limits of human hearing. But nonetheless, a B-flat.

You may well ask: how is this possible? Space is a vacuum, and sound requires a medium such as air or water to travel.

Well, apparently, the answer lies in the super-massiveness of black holes. Sometimes they violently expel gas and dust at close to the speed of light, which slams into the hot gas surrounding it. This generates

enormous pressure waves, like beating a drum. Although these waves are not audible, they can be seen by using x-ray observations, with regions of greater pressure (sound wave peaks) appearing brighter than troughs.

So there you are. The music of the spheres turns out to be that wretched semi-tone that causes the basses so much trouble on the way up, and even more for the sopranos on the way down. Wouldn't you just know it!

MATTHEW IN THE HAGUE

Matthew Hamilton spent the early part of his summer holiday working harder than he'd ever done, when he attended the Eric Ericson Masterclass in



Matthew with other young conductors on the Masterclass

The Hague. Along with eight other young conductors from across Europe, all under 38 years of age, Matthew was given an intensive 8-day work-out in conducting techniques by Stephen Cleobury and Jos van Veldhoven, artistic director of the Netherlands

Bach Society, and professor of choral conducting at Amsterdam Conservatory. The Masterclass is widely regarded as a major stepping stone for young conductors, with many previous participants having gone on to secure prestigious conducting positions and recording contracts.

Matthew found the workshop exhausting but felt that it gave him invaluable exposure to new conducting techniques, some of which we might see over the next few months!



Jos van Veldhoven explaining one of the finer points of conducting technique— not sure what Matthew's doing

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MUSIC

A few weeks ago Radio 4 listeners were given a treat when our President Joan Bakewell appeared on *Desert Island Discs*, and revealed a typically erudite and eclectic selection of favourites.

Amongst those we might have expected were Schubert's *Quintet in C major*, the opening *Interlude* from Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Strauss' *Rosenkavalier*, and (we

were delighted to hear) Thomas Tallis' *Spem in Alium*. There was also a reading by Judi Dench of Shakespeare's sonnet *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day*. The Bob Dylan and Peggy Lee choices were not a complete surprise, but perhaps Jimi Hendrix' *Voodoo Child* could not have been foreseen.

So, a selection that reflects Joan's remarkable breadth and

depth of artistic and musical knowledge.

It also raises an interesting question: what does your DID choice say about you?

So, if anyone in the Choir would like to send in their selection of eight discs, we'd be delighted to print them. Then we'll see if we can guess who chose them!



MODESTY THE CAT: a sonnet

(Composed by Modesty himself on April 30th 2007 and dictated to Reynold Higginbotham)

God I'm so beautiful, everyone knows
From tips of my whiskers, to tips of my toes.
My purrings a symph'ny, Mozart and Bach.
And then there's the birds:
I could murder a lark.
Curl up on the rug as snug as a bug,

A human comes in, his shoulders a shrug.
I give him my look, his heart melts like snow.
My fur he will stroke, my heart's all a-glow.
Expensive fish, how I wish for a dish
Of trout, plaice or cod, my tail I would swish.

I'm modest, I'm good; it's all in the blood.
My father's a Persian though my mother's a dud.
Today it's still April, tomorrow it's May.
Shall I compare me to a summer's day?



St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

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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!

ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY

Sunday 8 November 2009

Will Todd *Mass in Blue*

Saturday 5 December 2009

Carols and Brass by Candlelight

Saturday 20 March 2010

Monteverdi *Vespers of 1610*

Saturday 26 June 2010

German Masterworks

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012

tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

Verdi *Requiem*, Spring 2010

The CLIC Sargent Singers are looking for singers to perform Verdi's *Requiem* on Sunday 14 March. Last year the event raised almost £3,000 for the CLIC Sargent charity, and Penny Anson, who is organizing the event, hopes they will raise even more this year. They need as many singers as possible for this major work. Rehearsals will be at Hillcrest School on Monday evening, beginning 8th February, and the concert will be held at the Fallibroome Hall in Macclesfield. The conductor is Andrew Dean. For information, contact penny.anson@tiscali.co.uk, tel 01625 532906.

Chetham's *Rush Hour*

Chetham's is running a series of concerts entitled *Rush Hour*, designed to capture music lovers before they set off on the painful journey home. On 19 November it is *Baronial Baroque*, and on 25 November, *Composers' Concert* gives you a chance to hear the latest works by Chetham's composition students, two of whom recently achieved major success in the BBC Young Composers' Competition. For information, visit www.chethams.com.

Ad Solem

The University of Manchester's Chamber Choir performs works by Holst, Tavener, Jackson and Howells. Tuesday 1st Decem-

ber, 7.30 pm at the Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall.

The Tallis Scholars

A concert to celebrate 500 years since Henry VIII's accession to the throne, with works by composers associated with his times. Bridgewater Hall, Friday 13th November, 7.30 pm.

Handel/The Sixteen

The Sixteen are at the Bridgewater Hall on Friday 8th January 2010 with a programme of choral music by Handel, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the composer's death.

