



# 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](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)

## FAREWELL CONCERT FOR DAME JOAN

Dame Joan Bakewell has announced that, after six years, she is standing down as President of St George's Singers. Her final concert with us will be the Monteverdi *Vespers* at Gorton Monastery in March, when a special Friends reception will be held for her.

In her letter to Anne Francis outlining her decision, Joan writes, "I am getting older, of course, and being so far away I am not able to take part in your life as much as I would wish.

"I am so proud—foolishly because it is nothing to do with me—of the wonderful standard you attain and the great reputation you now have. I will continue to follow your interests and your programmes.

"Thank you for your attentiveness and generosity to me. I have really enjoyed the role of President and pass it on with certainty that whoever follows will enjoy it as much."

Dame Joan has been a wonderful and very supportive President of the Choir. She has come to as many of our concerts as her incredibly busy schedule has allowed, and has taken part in a number of them as reader, most notably at our *Speech of Angels* concert at Gorton Monastery, when she read a selection of her favourite poetry. She has even fought on our behalf in her regular newspaper column on the libraries issue.

'We are very sorry Joan is retir-



Joan with Terry Waite, readers at our *Speech of Angels* concert

ing as our President," Anne commented. "She has been incredibly generous with her time, and we will all miss her warmth, support and genuine interest in the Choir's activities. We do hope however that she will feel able to continue as an Honorary Vice President, so that we can maintain contact with someone whom we have all come to look on as a friend."

## LEARN TO SING PACKS THEM IN!

Our first Learn to Sing course got off to a great start on 26th January, when 200 eager singers packed into St George's Church in Poynton for the first night of a six week course.

Organised by Making Music, Choir of the Year and BABS, and hosted by St George's Singers, the course is designed to

teach absolute beginners as well as those returning after a break the fundamentals of choral singing. It is led by professional vocal coach Timm Barkworth.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the first session—proven by the fact that of the 200 registered singers, only seven failed to return for the second week.

The course continues until 2nd March, when the newly formed LTS Choir will be showing off their new skills in a performance of the songs they have learnt over the course.

We'll be running a full review of the LTS course in next issue's *Hemiola*. Meanwhile—keep singing!

## CONCERT PREVIEW: MONTEVERDI *VESPERS*



Claudio Monteverdi, 1567–1643

### Monteverdi *Vespers*

The Monastery, Gorton

20 March 2010, 7.30pm

Tickets: £16, £12 concessions,  
£2 students/children

01663 764012

[tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk](mailto:tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk)

[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)

### What is a theorbo?

The theorbo (Italian *tiorba*) is a type of lute, developed in Florence in the 1580s to accompany the voice. It is very large (up to 2 metres), typically with 14 courses of strings which are both plucked and stopped on a fretted fingerboard. It plays a chordal continuo part, like the harpsichord or chamber organ, and is sometimes moved round the building during performances. The name might have come from the Slavic or Turkish 'torba' meaning bag or turban.



2010 marks the 400th anniversary of one of the most significant publications in music history—Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (*Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*). More commonly called just *Vespers of 1610*, it is a work that bears witness to the composer's genius in creating a bridge between the Renaissance and the Baroque eras.

Claudio Monteverdi was born in Cremona on 15 May 1567. As a youth, his talent was evident. A prominent Venetian publishing house launched his first publication when he was 15, and his first book of five-voice madrigals established his reputation outside his provincial hometown and helped him find work in the court of the Duke Gonzaga of Mantua, where he was employed as a musician and composer from 1580 until 1612.

His fame began to grow, thanks largely to criticism from Artusi in a 1600 treatise *On the imperfection of modern music*. In response, Monteverdi coined a pair of terms that came to characterize the times. The older style of composition, in which the traditional rules of counterpoint superseded any expressive considerations, was the *prima prattica*, based on the use of polyphony over a cantus firmus. The *seconda prattica* by contrast used the opera-influenced *stile recitativo*, and sought to put music in the servitude of the text by what ever means necessary to express the text vividly.

The glory of the *Vespers* is that Monteverdi combined both styles, drawing on traditional techniques and introducing his own ideas, melding opera, plainsong and psalmody into

one sublime whole. In doing so, he reflected the profound change that was taking place in the spiritual and musical values of the time, as the traditions of Renaissance music, which sought to open the soul to God, were giving way to the more human-centred values of the Baroque era, which aimed to bring heaven down to earth.

In 1607 Monteverdi's first opera, *Orfeo*, premiered in Mantua and was a great triumph. But by 1610, dissatisfied with his work at the Gonzaga court, recently bereaved by the death of his first wife, in ill health and beset by financial difficulties, Monteverdi travelled to Rome for an audience with Pope Paul V. He took with him a Mass, composed in the old fashioned style. Of far greater significance, however, published in the same volume was a setting of the main movements of the *Vespers* (five psalms, a *Magnificat*, and the hymn *Ave Maris Stella*) together with the five sacred concertos for various voices that formed the rest of the work. The inclusion of these latter items has in fact caused considerable debate as to whether the *Vespers* were ever intended to be performed liturgically.

In the event, the Pope did nothing for the composer. Rome's loss was Venice's gain however, and Monteverdi was summoned to an audition at St Mark's in 1613. Was this the first performance of the *Vespers*? We don't know, but whatever he performed, the Venetians were impressed, and in August 1613 Monteverdi was elected to the post of first organist and

Maestro di Capella at St Marks, Venice, the most highly regarded musical appointment in Italy, which he held for the rest of his life.

The *Vespers* is the richest and most substantial single work of church music before Bach's *Passions*. Considering it is 400 years old, it is also one of the most vibrant choral works in the repertoire. The exuberance is astonishing; the energy and concentration needed to perform it exceptional.

We're delighted to be performing again with the young musicians from Chetham's, this time their Baroque Orchestra, supplemented by some of the more unusual members of the instrument family, amongst them the intriguing theorbo.



Members of Chetham's Brass Ensemble at our *Sacred Spaces* concert in Manchester Cathedral

Six soloists will be on stage, including our very own Marcus Farnsworth (see the interview with Marcus on the next page!).

And, to make the event a real occasion, we get to sing this magnificent work in the one building in Manchester worthy of it—Gorton Monastery.

A fitting way to mark the 400th anniversary of a true masterpiece.

## INTERVIEW WITH MARCUS FARNSWORTH

*What's life like at the Royal Academy?*

I've completed the two year vocal studies course, and have moved into the Opera School, studying with my teacher Glenville Hargreaves, and my coach Audrey Hyland. On the vocal studies course I had classes in Lieder, French melodie, English song, acting, movement and performed opera scenes. In the opera school I have fewer classes, and more time on stage in full operas. I probably do at least 3-4 hours a day singing on average, in rehearsals, coaching, and private practice. On top of that I have preparatory work – translating texts, memorising music and words, acting and movement lessons, and lots of other stuff. And the admin! There is constant emailing! I work very anti-social hours, and very rarely have an evening off. I'm doing a lot of work with the RAM Opera and the Song Circle (a group of RAM singers who put on recitals), as well as recital work with Elizabeth Burgess my collaborative partner, and I'm working with people such as Julius Drake and Iain Burnside. My schedule depends very much on others, but when you get to this level you have to take the opportunities that arise, and your time is theirs.

*It sounds hectic! How do you relax?*

One of the things I do to relax, often before recitals, is to play some jazz. If there's a piano somewhere around, it helps me centre myself and relax. I also like cooking for my friends – though I don't have a signature dish as yet! Otherwise I like reading, walking and going to films.

*You have both a teacher and a coach. How does that work?*

It's vital to get the right teacher at this stage in my career. If the relationship with your teacher works, the world is your oyster.

At the Academy you're under constant surveillance, so if something isn't going well, it's spotted early. Audrey is the most inspiring person to work with. Between them Glenville and Audrey are key to my success. If Glenville thinks something isn't quite working, Audrey may be able to fix it by working on the psychology or repertoire. They can get down to the core of what you're trying to do.

*You finish at the Academy in summer 2011. What then?*

I want a rich and varied career that combines recital, opera and concert work, all feeding into and informing each other. The most exciting artists are doing just this – like my absolute hero, Simon Keenlyside. When he sings, you don't think about the singing, or the technique. He just communicates with the audience. In the long term, I would like to apply for the National Opera Studio, and then one of the Young Artists programmes with an opera house. My dream would be to get to Covent Garden into their Jette Parker Young Artists Programme.

Whatever I do though, I do for my Mum. She died 18 months ago, and was my greatest supporter. Without her I would not have been doing what I'm doing now. She deserves for me to make her proud.

*Are you still conducting?*

When I finished university, I had two years of freelance work, with a lot of artistic control. This gave me the chance to work out what I really wanted to do. I realised I didn't want to teach! I had also got to the stage of knowing that whatever I did I wanted to do it to the highest possible level. I had to make a decision, and chose singing. The question I asked myself was: if you had to stop one of these now, what would

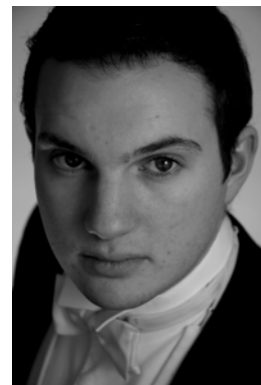
you do? I knew that I would never stop singing, so that was the choice – though I knew I could keep conducting on the back burner! I also instinctively feel that conductors benefit from being older. The most inspirational conductors I have met have had a successful performance career behind them, either as an instrumentalist or singer. You can't convincingly lead a group of musicians until you know how it feels to do it yourself.

*You recently won the Wigmore Hall Song competition. How significant was that?*

Competitions are not essential to a singer's career, but they are certainly very helpful. It's too early to gauge what impact the Wigmore Hall competition will have for me, but it has certainly elevated me to a different level. The most positive long-term impact has been the exposure I got to various agents, and I have now signed with Maxine Robertson. I did not expect to have an agent for quite a while yet, but this gets me one step ahead. Maxine has a small but highly prestigious list (Sally Matthews, Mark Padmore, Andrew Foster Williams to name a few) and she'll help me audition to the right people. It's actually a surreal experience being on the same list as these singers! But it shows that people have confidence in my abilities. I actually work harder now than ever before, because the expectations are so much greater, which is slightly scary. I'm only 26 – a baby in professional singing terms!

*Your performance of Britten's *Poison Tree* at the competition was hailed as one of the highlights. Is Britten a favourite?*

I love Britten. Of all English composers, he had a great understanding of the voice, and it is music I adore. My aim as a singer is tell a story. I want people to listen to what I'm



- **Marcus became a chorister at Southwell Minster when he was 8**
- **His father was a musician, and his mother a dance teacher**
- **He was once a member of a big band called the Brassery – and when he was 13 he was running his own jazz band**
- **He originally went to Chetham's to study trumpet and piano, before realising he was a better singer!**
- **Marcus is appearing with Clonter Opera (near Congleton) in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* from 24-31 July.**  
**See [www.clonteropera.com](http://www.clonteropera.com) for details**

saying rather than how I'm saying it. On the stage with other performers it's slightly easier, whereas in a recital it's just you and the pianist. You are more exposed in a recital, but that's not to say opera any safer. A safe performance is a boring one!

*Are you looking forward to coming back to Manchester?*

Of course! I miss the North West, though right now but I need to be in the place where it all happens, and London is unrivalled in the world of music. I'm looking forward to the Monteverdi tremendously. He was a great operatic composer, and he brings all the drama of *Orfeo* and *Poppea* into the Vespers. For a singer it is wonderful!



## MASS IN BLUE: REVIEW

BY ROBERT J FARR, MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL



Tina May

Photos: Derek Jones



Composer Will Todd (centre) taking the applause with Neil Taylor and Tina May

**"As good a performance of the *Mass in Blue* as I've heard anywhere" - Will Todd**

I have extolled the virtues of the St. George's Singers in the great choral classics such as Bach's *B minor Mass* and *St Matthew Passion*. This time the choir tackled a recently composed work in the jazz genre, which whilst new to me, was a rare event for a group who sang Ellington's *Sacred Concert* in 2006. However, I hardly expected a jazz version of the Latin mass, but then that's my limitation, since it seems that in contemporary church worship almost anything goes musically, particularly in the Evangelical wing.

Will Todd's *Mass in Blue* was premiered in 2003 and has received over twenty performances in the UK as well as others in Europe and the USA. The concert's first half involved the RNCM Jazz Collective and also gave the audience the benefit of hearing Tina May sing some jazz classics with the Collective's backing before taking the demanding solo part in the Mass.

The RNCM Jazz Collective largely comprises of new undergraduates strengthened by one or two more experienced players. What struck me most was the sheer enjoyment of the Collective's membership in making music, as well as their obvious skills. Many of them are eighteen and nineteen year olds, yet to benefit extensively from the specialist teaching within the College. This is a pleasing indication that music and instrumental teaching in UK schools is somehow managing to survive the constraints of the National Curriculum and budget cuts.

The Jazz Collective was prepared and conducted by the saxophonist Mike Hall. Their performance, with some members changed for the Mass, was of a very good standard indeed, with rhythmic vitality and instrumental verve being the order of the day.

Tina May, who has sung all over the world, started off with the Peggy Lee favourite *The Folks who Live on the Hill*, following with Johnny Mercer's *Autumn Leaves* - in French as to the manner born - and concluding with *Kansas City Blues*. By the end of her virtuoso performance, her strong mezzo-ish voice, with its free top extension, left the audience in no doubts about her capacity to deal with whatever Will Todd's version of the Mass had in store.

After that first half with the silent St. George's Singers sitting behind, and a full Concert Hall in front, the second half's involvement of the choir in the Mass was eagerly anticipated. The Kyrie opened with piano, bass and drums with the choir's altos and then the men in counterpoint joining in before the full choir gave it their all - as they needed to do when the brass was a little strident and the soloist came in to ride the vibrant beat. In the Gloria, the sound of the full choir and the beat was viscerally exciting after which Tina May sang out strongly across her extensive vocal range in the very jazzy Credo. We all needed a breather at that point and it was

as well that the Sanctus began quietly with bass, piano and small drums before a solo clarinet led the choir into a particularly expressively sung section with a solo flute soaring above the choral phrases; a quite magical musical effect. The vocal solo for the Benedictus was like a song without words as Tina May's voice soared on and above the melody; I was very much reminded of *Carmina Burana* at this point. The Agnus Dei and its Credo reprise, with the latter's phrases from the soloist echoing from the choir, concluded the evening except for the extensive applause and the introduction of the composer who had been present in the audience.

St George's Singers, now under the direction of Neil Taylor, Organist and Musical Director of Sheffield Cathedral and regular broadcaster, lacked none of the quality that so distinguishes their work in the classic oratorios. As a non-singer, I would hazard that the demands on the choir in this piece were as arduous as anything in the classic repertoire and I am pleased to report that they were fully up to all of them, a fine reflection of Neil Taylor's work on rehearsal nights and elsewhere.

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St George's Singers in full voice with Tina May and the RNCM Jazz Collective

## MANCHESTER LIBRARY CLOSURE

Manchester Central Library is scheduled to close on 1st April 2010, marking the start of a 3-year refurbishment programme. During the closure, the service for orchestral and choral societies will continue from a temporary new location. No further musical scores will be issued until September 2010.

A new temporary City Library will open in Elliot House on Deansgate, with a reduced Music library. According to Gwyneth Pailin, our Choir Librarian, the choral music may be going to be stored in the old Great Universal Stores building in Ardwick. However, arrangements for ordering and collection have not yet been confirmed, so we just have to wait to find out how we're go-

ing to get hold of all the music for next season.

The renovation project will restore the building and create an ultra-modern city centre community library. Since the library first opened in 1934, more services have been introduced requiring more space. The building itself is also in need of specialist renovation. When it reopens in 2013, the new library will have improved access, storage, interpretation and display facilities, a cinema, learning area, performance space, and extensive book collections for private study. The closure will also enable the UK's biggest ever retrospective cataloguing project to take place, adding over a million books to the digital catalogue.

Whatever the difficulties though, we can all rest assured that Gwyneth—our very own Wells Fargo—always gets through. This year she ploughed through the

very worst of the snow and ice into Manchester to collect the Singing Day music. On opening up her trolley suitcase to load the music inside, she discovered her sun hat, left there since her last holiday in Vietnam. Just the thing for keeping off those snow showers on the way home!



## BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO MUSIC: THE MODERN AGE (1910—2010)

Music of the Modern Age (it was called 20th century until very recently!) is the most difficult to categorise, because musical change has happened so much faster in the last 100 years. For a start, recordings could be made, so not all music needed a score.

In some cases, composers tried to get away from melody and harmony altogether (atonalism). World and folk music, used to a great extent by the Romantics, was used as a basis for composition by Stravinsky and Bartok. And Europe was no longer necessarily the home of all creativity. Americans such as George Gershwin, Aaron Copland and Charles Ives started to incorporate jazz into popular compositions.

And then there were the really mad ones. John Cage composed for wind-up gramophones, pianos with bits of screws and nails stuck into them, and his famous 4'33" which consisted of a silent piano. Harry Partch divided the octave into 43 microtones and built instruments that could play the scale he'd invented. Composers tried anything to get away from the music of the past. Since the 1950s we've had electronic music, used in classical music to challenge traditional musical ideas. Music for microphone inside pig's intestine is not unheard of.

Apart from the sousaphone, there weren't any changes made to the instruments of the Romantic orchestra. The Theremin was invented in Rus-

sia (played by moving your arms around without touching it), and the synthesizer, MIDI sequencer and multi-track studio have radically changed the way music is composed.

Atonal music sounds like it isn't in a key and doesn't have a tune or chords as diatonic music does (the idea is that your ear's not being 'told' how to feel by major and minor chords).

Avant-garde or experimental music can sound like anything, but commonly does not use regular instruments or even musical notes. Minimalism is actually quite listenable to the average person, as it frequently consists of mesmerizing loops which change very gradually.

**Because atonal music doesn't give us anything to latch on to as listeners, its effect can be quite frightening. For this reason, it was used by horror film soundtrack composers of the 1960s to create tension—just watch any old Hammer Dracula movie to hear atonal music in action.**



The Theremin, invented by Leon Theremin in 1928. Two metal antennas sense the position of the player's hands and control frequency with one hand, and volume with the other. The electric signals are amplified and sent to a loudspeaker. The Theremin produces an eerie sound, and was used in films including *Spellbound* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.



## THANKS A MILLION! FROM CORRIE VERDUYN



Dear fellow Singers,

Many of you will know that I have returned from a two year absence from the choir whilst I was working in Tanzania.

I was working as a volunteer for VSO as a gynaecologist at Mvumi hospital. This is a rural hospital about 40km from the Tanzanian capital Dodoma. Mvumi is a large village, with most houses made of mud with straw roofs, no electricity and no water mains.

The hospital and houses connected to it did have those amenities, albeit with interrup-

tions. Caesarean Sections were indeed sometimes done by torchlight!

My experiences have been plentiful, both good and bad, and can fill many pages. But today I want to focus on the money you all kindly raised and sent to me.

This amounted to a sum total of one million Tanzanian shillings, the only time in my life that I have been and will be a millionaire! As Tanzania is mainly a cash society I physically had this stack of cash in the house.

After discussion with the hospital management it was initially decided to try to buy an oxygen concentrator, a machine that converts fresh air into air with higher oxygen content.

Unfortunately this proved to be well above budget. So after further deliberations it was decided to buy two new maternity beds, ie beds which are suitable for deliv-

ery, especially when assistance is required. The old ones had mattresses on them with torn covers, so all body fluids were soaking into the foam. Not very hygienic I can assure you. The new beds were delivered a few weeks before my departure.

On the picture below you see the matron of the hospital, Rehema, sitting on one of the new beds. The other picture shows the hospital entrance.

On behalf of the women of Mvumi and the midwives of the hospital a BIG THANK YOU to you all!!

Corrie Verduyn



## BRUSH UP YOUR EARLY MUSIC VOCABULARY



**Antiphonal:** leaving your answering machine off all the time

**Augmentation:** delicate surgery for sopranos involving the implantation of falsettos

**Basso continuo:** when the conductor can't get the fools to stop singing

**Cantus firmus:** a singer in good physical condition

**Cadence:** the short name of the rock group Cadence Clearwater Revival

**Chorale partitas:** small choir get togethers that are frequently interrupted by the police

**Contralto:** an alto who's been convicted of a felony

**Dominant:** in a choral relationship, usually the alto

**Grand pause:** when the conductor loses his place

**Polychoral motet:** six parrots singing *Exultate Justicia*

**Sackbut:** a choral singer over 65

**Score:** basses 8 , tenors 0

**Tonic:** a smooth liquid generally enjoyed over ice after choir rehearsal

## FOLK TRAIN, FOLK TRAIN, GOING SO FAST ..... BY ERIC NORTHEY

It was an idea of my son's. That alone should have made me suspicious. (The longing of Oedipus – to kill off the father.) "Let's take the train" he said casually," to Hathersage. Have lunch (me to pay, of course,) and then we'll cycle back to Stockport." "Cycle?" I say. "Back to Stockport?" "Yeah. It's a piece of cake."

I point out that between Hathersage and Stockport, are hills. Mountains even. Mam Tor. Winnats Pass. I only have little legs. "No problem," he assures me. "It's pretty well all downhill. Come on. It's now or never. Live a bit. Don't forget, you're sixty-four. Pension's coming soon. If you live that long."

He's an encouraging, diplomatic sort of lad. So, having never cycled much further than Didsbury, I find myself one Saturday morning on Piccadilly Station, quarter to twelve - ie crack of dawn – waiting for the train to Hathersage. There's quite a crowd. And amongst the crowd, people with musical instrument cases. I'm told it's the *Hope Mountain Band*. The 11.45 to Sheffield is, apparently, also known as the Folk Train. I'm intrigued. I overhear a grumpy guard say to the driver, "They should hire their own bloody train!" Always pleasing to see men, dressed in a little brief authority, savagely disgruntled.

So we lug the bikes aboard, get a couple of seats and watch, as in the last compartment, the four members of the *Hope Mountain Band* immediately get out guitars, mandolin, banjo, bass guitar. The second that the clutch goes in, the train gears crunch and the wheels squeal on the tracks, the band are

away, singing of their old home in Tennessee – as distinct from Glossop – and the girls who've broken their hearts, clearly on more than one occasion.

They're rather good and slick and, despite my snobbery and better judgement, I'm tapping my feet along with everyone

else in the carriage. It's Bluegrass music, complete with faux American accents and nasal whinings. Normally, it would be anathema; everything I loathe about folk music and its sentimental twaddle about

mining disasters or drowning your sister in the Mississippi. But I am actually enjoying it. Which is more than can be said for the still disgruntled conductor who brushes past the band quite rudely, whilst checking tickets. I hear this reconstituted Victor Meldrew muttering about 'elf and safety' under his breath.

And I'm puzzled as to why I'm enjoying it and my foot is tapping along with everyone else's, as we sing Tom Dooley, me providing the second tenor part. And I realise, it's something about age. They're all my age, or above. Sometimes, well above. Quite genuinely, this is the Old Folks train. The band, the punters and the organiser, Tony Wills, we're all getting on a bit. Wills is a relaxed eighty-year old and he puts together this and several other folk trains, to Glossop, Hathersage and Goostrey and there's one which comes from Sheffield station in the opposite direction towards Manchester.

Each goes about once a month and the details can be found at [www.hvhtp.org.uk](http://www.hvhtp.org.uk).

Tony's not a musician himself, but just likes country and western, bluegrass and Jug music. (No, I don't know what Jug Music is either, but there's a group called the *Ugly Mug Jug Band*, who play the trains and from their publicity shots clearly try to live up to their name.) Tony's a Londoner who retired and came to civilisation about twenty years ago and has never regretted it.

I'm very glad he did.

It all seems a bit anarchistic and hippyish and it's great that those of us who are of a certain age, can still get something pretty whacky going, keep it going and have a lot of fun at the same time. It's as if that rebellious spirit of the 'sixties is still actually in us, pushing boundaries, trying something new. And listening to live music, on a normal commuter train, seems to be a terrific way of building new audiences and introducing the music to the another generation. Could we try it? Could we do *Spem* on the way to Dinting? Gesualdo in Glossop? Tony's achievement is now officially recognised by Northern Rail itself, (if not their grumpy conductor), since leaflets are handed out advertising 'folk trains' and their links to guided walks in the Peaks.

Before you know it, we're at Hathersage and all decamp to the Little John Inn where an excellent meal was waiting for



offspring and myself, for which, of course, I pay. There's also another very pleasant session from the band. After an hour and a half or so, everyone sensible goes off to meet the returning train back to Manchester, where the band will do their final gig. We alas, stare at the bikes. With the steak and kidney pud inside us, we're both somewhat heavier than when we arrived. The bikes seem somewhat taller. Still, we mount up and start.

And I was right. There are *mountains* between Hathersage and Stockport. And it certainly ain't all downhill. Youth of today – what do they know?





## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



**Belated Christmas** greetings to everyone at St George's Singers from our SGS Friend, Gill Smethurst. Gill lived in Poynton before emigrating to Canada, but keeps in regular touch with the Choir through Jean Egerton, and tries to get along to rehearsals whenever she comes back to the old country. She sends us all best wishes and a wonderful musical New Year.

**We say goodbye** to Beryl Pearn, who has retired from the Choir after 12 years. We'll all miss her on the front row of the altos, and wish her well.

**Then we welcome back** a few old faces. Corrie Verduyn (soprano) has returned from Tanzania, Peter Marcus (bass) couldn't find a choir he liked in Oxford or London so has returned to civilization, and Jonathan Gort (bass) has also been spotted in the vicinity.

Amongst our new members, Sue Mason has joined the altos, and John Heaton, Andrew Charlton and Bob Harris are with us just for the Monteverdi.

**Did you all hear** Anne Francis on BBC Radio Manchester last

month? Anne was invited on to talk about the Learn to Sing course, which was due to start the following week. Years of dealing with recalcitrant primary school children obviously stood her in good stead, as she deftly batted aside some very odd questions (the interviewer clearly knew nothing about choral singing!), 'fessed up to a passion for *A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square*, and got to the heart of the matter—a plug for the Monteverdi *Vespers* concert. Nice one Chair!



Spotted in an in-flight magazine, the Berlin Seals are a group who go skinny dipping in Berlin's Oraniensee Lake every Sunday throughout winter. At Christmas and New Year events are themed—this year it was Greek gods. The names of the intrepid swimmers were not divulged, but we think Dave F has been keeping something from us all about his aquatic exploits. We believe the choir has a right to know—what have you done with your trident Dave?

## AUDITIONS: SURVIVAL TIPS

**It's audition time for altos and basses again. But don't panic—here are some tips on how to avoid choral oblivion!**

*On messing up spectacularly in your prepared piece:*

"I've been practicing the Queen of the Night aria for weeks, but the budgie ate the score. This is all I could find this morning...."

"I've been in bed with swine flu, but really didn't want to miss my audition!"

*On criticism for your phrasing:*

"Well, I modeled my interpretation on Angelika Kirschlager's recent recording. Has she got it wrong then?"

*On failing to recognize any of the four notes of the given chord:*

"Could you play that again? I've had my ears syringed and I've still got water in them."

*On failing to get through the sight-reading test at the third attempt:*

"Personally, I've always sung this in the Novello edition. Far

more musically authentic don't you think ....."

"I probably should have told you before, Neil, but I've got a medically recognized phobia about the key of G major."

"I was so nervous I took a couple of Valium. But I think they've reacted with the beta-blockers ...."

"Oh dear, picked up the wrong glasses again I'm afraid!"

*On struggling to get to top A:*

"Well, I did it without any trouble for Mark Elder. Is your piano in tune?"

*And if all else fails:*

"My new boss is a great arts lover. He's got a few thou he'd like to put into a deserving musical group. Do you know of anyone ....."

### AUDITION:

**The act of putting oneself under extreme duress to satisfy the sadistic intentions of someone who has already made up his mind.**



## MATTHEW MOVES ON

St George's Assistant Musical Director, Matthew Hamilton, has to leave us in March to take up a new post as Musical Director of the Reading Bach Choir.

Matthew has only been with us for just over two years but in that time he has become an important member of St George's Singers. In addition to helping Neil with preparing the Choir for our regular concerts, he has directed many of the performances given by The Cheshire Consort, St George's wedding choir, and has taken

some concerts himself. Matthew is also a talented composer, and we were all thrilled to sing one of his compositions, *The Overhanging Day*, at our summer concert at Gorton last year.

In addition to his new post at Reading, Matthew has also been appointed Director of the Royal School of Church Music's 'RSCM Voices'.

Matthew takes over at Reading from the conductor JanJoost van Elburg, and his first concert with his new charges will be a

programme of American music.

In his final rehearsal with us, Matthew thanked the choir for their help and support, and for allowing him to come and make all his mistakes! "I would never have got the job with Reading if I hadn't had this wonderful opportunity with St George's. I'll miss you all."

Everyone at St George's is sad that Matthew has to leave, but we wish him well in his career and hope he'll come back and see us again soon.



Matthew at the *In a Monastery Garden* concert when we performed his work *The Overhanging Day*

## THE WELL-TAYLORED CHOIR

Emails had gone out. Choir notices were full of it. Everyone (and that meant everyone!) had to tune into BBC Radio 4 on 9th December to listen to Choral Evensong, which on this occasion was coming live from Sheffield Cathedral, under the masterly baton of Neil Taylor.

For Neil, this was nothing out of the ordinary of course. An experienced broadcaster, he has taken numerous Choral Even-

songs, and is a regular on the BBC Daily Service.

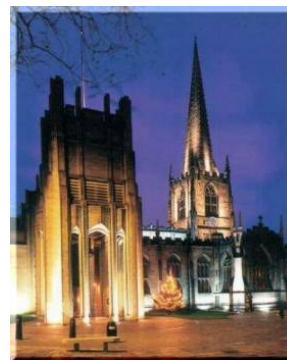
This was something of a special event though, marking the 75th anniversary of the death of Edwin Lemare, formerly organist at Sheffield Parish Church (now the Cathedral).

The service featured an Elgar Anthem (*Benedictus*) and Canticles by Arnold Bax, as well as Lemare's *Fantasia on Hanover* (an organ voluntary that started

out as the old warhorse 'O Worship the King' before disappearing into the Cathedral rafters!).

But the highlight of the service was the Cathedral choir. With lovely blend and tone, and beautiful diction (every word of the psalms could be heard), the choristers sang with real feeling, understanding of the words and great sensitivity.

Jolly glad we all tuned in!



Sheffield Cathedral

## THE CHOIR INVISIBLE ..... (DISCOVERED BY CATH BRYANT IN AN OLD HYMN BOOK)

Immortal, impossible, God only knows  
How tenors and basses, sopranos, altos  
At service on Sunday are rarely the same  
As those who on Thursday to choir practice came.

Unready, unable to sight-read the notes,  
Not counting, not blending,

they tighten their throats.  
A descant so piercing is soaring above  
A melody only a mother could love.

They have a director, but one wonders why  
No one in the choir deigns to turn him an eye.  
It's clear by his flailing, he wants them to look

But each singer slouches with nose in the book.

Despite the offences, the music rings out.  
The folks in the pews are enraptured, no doubt.  
Their faces are blissful, their thoughts appear deep:  
But it is no wonder, for they are asleep.

# THE STORY OF MARY WAKEFIELD

## BY ANNE FRANCIS



Coniston Water

When Gwyneth asked if anyone could collect some copies of Dvorak's *Mass in D* from Eversley Choral Society based near Kendal we were happy to volunteer. Dave had recently retired and we planned to combine a day's walking in the Lake District with some 'choir work'.

Unfortunately, November 20<sup>th</sup> was the day of the great Lake District floods. Clearly walking in the central Lakes was out of the question, and we were not sure if we would even make it to Levens which is southwest of Kendal. The journey up was wet of course and when we left the motorway we drove through swathes of water with the fields on either side of the road completely submerged. We finally located the house of Dermot Barton, the librarian of Eversley Choral Society and after ringing the bell turned to look at the valley behind us. It was as if another Lake had

been created in the Lake District.

As we collected the music from Dermot we commented on the great number of choral societies in the area. He told us about Mary Wakefield, famous in the Lakes, and celebrated every other year in the Mary Wakefield Westmorland Festival.

Mary Wakefield was born in 1853 at the Old House, Kendal, the daughter of a local banker, and lived later at Sedgwick House, near Kendal. She was a talented singer who trained with notable London teachers, gave many concerts and was acclaimed by many eminent critics. Barred by the conventions of the day from pursuing a career as a professional singer, she poured her love of music into a desire to make music more available to rural communities. She founded and trained a number of choirs in the villages round Kendal travelling round in her horse and cart.

In 1885 she organized a choral competition in the grounds of Sedgwick House to raise money

for her local church. The idea took hold and very quickly the Festival grew into an annual event. The format that evolved involved competitions in the day with a concert at night involving massed choirs drawn from the competitors. As the local village choirs became established it was important to get the right balance of voices, so much so that it became common practice in wealthier houses, when advertising for staff, to specify singing ability as one of the requirements, 'Wanted: stable boy – must have tenor voice'.

Several of the choirs founded by Mary Wakefield still thrive and the Kendal Festival continues to this day. The idea of the choral festival also spread to other parts of the country - according to the Mary Wakefield Westmorland Festival website - *'the whole music festival movement can truthfully be said to be derive from the original Festival in Kendal.'* Miss Wakefield encouraged other Festivals to start and so successful was she that her findings were produced in an article called *'The Aims and Objects of Musical Competitive Festivals and How to Form Them'*. At Mary Wakefield's death, after long service in the

field, medals were struck in her memory and given to the existing Festivals. Derby Festival holds such a medal.

Mary Wakefield died in 1910 but her name and her festival live on.

Well we didn't get our walk...but we did come across a fascinating story.



Sedgwick House



## RECIPES FOR SINGING SUCCESS

The 2010 Singing Day was a great success, with around 140 guests braving the treacherous snow and ice to join members of St George's Singers for a wonderful day's singing. This year Neil really put us to the test with Dvořák's lovely *Mass in D* (early practice for the Choir tour to Prague in May!), and Kodály's *Pange Lingua*. Very few people knew the Dvořák, and nobody had heard the Kodály, but both works turned out to be utterly charming and exciting works to sing. Many of the guests will be taking them back to their own choirs with suggestions for future concerts.

As usual, though, however good the music (and inspirational Neil's leaping about on the chancel steps!) one of the highlights of the Singing Day is the food. This year the good cooks of St George surpassed themselves, with heart warming soups for lunch, followed by even more mouth-watering cakes for tea.

Lots of people asked for recipes at the end of the day, so over the next few issues we thought we'd print some of the more popular recipes.

And don't forget, next year's Singing Day is on Saturday 15th January 2011. Get it in your diary now!

### SPICY PARSNIP SOUP À LA LORRAINE (adapted from Delia Smith)

1 heaped tsp coriander seeds	1 heaped tsp cumin seeds	seeds of 6 cardamom pods
1 ½ oz butter	1 tbsp groundnut or sunflower oil	2 medium onions
2 cloves garlic crushed or chopped	1 heaped tsp turmeric	1 heaped tsp ground ginger
1 ½ pounds parsnips	2 pints vegetable stock (from stock powder or cubes)	Black pepper

Heat a small frying pan and dry roast the coriander, cumin and cardamom seeds for 2 to 3 minutes until they change colour, start to jump in the pan and smell fabulous. Crush them finely with a pestle and mortar.

Peel and chop the onion. Heat the oil and butter in a large saucepan until the butter sizzles, then add the onion and cook gently for 5 minutes, then add the garlic and cook for a further 2 minutes. Add the crushed spices along with the turmeric and ginger, and cook for around 5 minutes. Peel the parsnips and cut into chunks about 1" square. Stir the parsnip chunks into the onion and spice mix in the pan then add the stock and a few grinds of black pepper. Simmer very gently uncovered for about an hour until the parsnips are cooked through. Whizz in a blender. If the soup is too thick, add some more stock.

### JO'S FAMOUS FROSTED LEMON CAKE

6 oz soft brown sugar	For the topping:
6 oz self raising flour	1 lemon
6 oz margarine	4 oz caster sugar
2 eggs, beaten	

- 1 Sieve together the sugar and the flour.
- 2 Melt the margarine and when cool add to the sugar and flour mixture.
- 3 Add beaten eggs and mix well with a hand mixer.
- 4 Pour into a greased and lined Swiss roll tin.
- 5 Bake for 20-30 minutes, Mark 4 / 180C.
- 6 Grate lemon rind, squeeze juice and mix both with caster sugar.
- 7 When cake is cooked, immediately remove from oven and pierce all over the top with a fork.
- 8 Spread the lemon and sugar mixture evenly over top of the cake.



## PRAGUE—CZECH IT OUT WITH ST GEORGE'S

St George's Singers are off on tour again—this year to the Czech Republic. From 29th to 31st May we'll be sightseeing and singing in the beautiful city of Prague.

Pam Craig, our hard-working tour organizer, is still finalizing the concert programme. However, we hope to be performing in the Hus Chapel, a wonderful music venue in the heart of the

city, as well as singing during Sunday mass at St Vitus Cathedral. We're also very excited to be taking part in the international Nymburk festival, about 45 miles outside Prague.

Neil has chosen a lovely selection of music to (hopefully!) delight a Czech audience. Singing Dvořák in Prague is pretty well obligatory, so works include his *Mass in D* (which we

all enjoyed so much at our Singing Day). Britten's *Flower Songs* will bring a taste of England, and a selection of madrigals and part songs from across Europe should appeal to everyone.

Look out for tour reports and photos in the next issue. In the meantime, bon voyage to all our tourists—or as they say in Prague, Šťastnou cestu!



St Vitus Cathedral

## St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

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

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

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



Find us on the web at:

[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://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!

### **Verdi Requiem, Saturday 27 February 2010, 7.30 pm Chester Cathedral**

Chetham's Symphony Orchestra, Chetham's Chorus with members of the Bach Choir and soloists including Andrew Staples. £8, £12, £15, children £3, Tel 0161 838 7244

### **Learn to Sing—end of course concert, Tuesday 2 March 2010, 8.45 pm**

The Learn to Sing course reaches its end with a concert by the participants, featuring the songs they have learnt during the course.

### **Thursday 4th March 2010 Northern Harmony**

This amazingly versatile group

are experts at different vocal styles, taking in American shape-note singing and quartet gospel, village songs from the Caucasus and the Balkans, sacred and secular harmonies from Corsican and Occitan oral traditions, and South African folk and church songs and dances, as well as exciting contemporary works.

The Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall, Manchester University, 1.10 pm, Admission Free

### **Verdi Requiem, Sunday 14 March 2010, 7.30 pm**

The CLIC Sargent Singers perform Verdi's *Requiem*, raising money for the CLIC Sargent charity. Conductor Andrew Dean. Fallibroome Hall, Macclesfield. Tel: 01625 532906

### **Sunday 28 March, 7.30 pm**

Bollington Festival Choir 'Magnificat!'. Works by Bach, Vivaldi, and a new work by Donald Judge. Bollington Methodist Church. 01625 420615, £10, £5 child/student.

### **Saturday 1st & Sunday 2nd May 2010 - 7:30pm**

#### **Whitworth Hall, Manchester**

The University Chorus and Symphony Orchestra join forces for a performance of Janáček's twentieth-century choral masterpiece – his *Glagolitic Mass*, for soloists, double chorus and orchestra. They will also present Verdi's *Te Deum* from his *Four Sacred Pieces*. Conductor Robert Houssart

### **ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY**

**Saturday 26 June 2010**

**St George's Church, Stockport**

**German Masterworks—  
choral classics by Bach,  
Mendelssohn and Brahms**

**Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012**

**[tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk](mailto:tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk)**

**[www.st-georges-singers.org.uk](http://www.st-georges-singers.org.uk)**