



Hemiola

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

NEXT SEASON'S PROGRAMME ANNOUNCED

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Brigit Forsyth

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Sue Roper
Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Calum Fraser

ACCOMPANIST:

Jeffrey Makinson

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National
Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

The programme for our 2011-12 season has just been finalized and promises to offer something for everyone.

For the first time for some years we'll be performing the whole of Handel's *Messiah*, with the added bonus of singing it in the fabulous surroundings of Gorton Monastery. Soloists include our very own Marcus Farnsworth, with Richard Dowling and two newcomers to St George's—Ruth Jenkins and Laura Kelly.

Christmas would not be the same without our traditional carol concert with VBS Poynton Band, and this is then followed by another great choral favourite at our Singing Day—Mozart's *Requiem*. This

is the first time we will have done this iconic work at our Singing Day, and we're sure it will be extremely popular.

Onto spring, and something completely different. In *Spanish Gold*, we will be travelling south to Spain and across the Atlantic to the Americas, with an intriguing programme of music ranging from the Spanish renaissance masters to modern-day American composers.

Finally, we close the season with a bang—a concert to celebrate the Queens' Diamond Jubilee, featuring royal music through the ages, helped by one of the country's greatest brass ensembles, Fine Arts Brass. The new season brochure is now available, either in hard

copy or to download from the website. See you in September!



NIGHT OF PASSION AT THE BRIDGE- WATER

Neil Taylor, the soloists and Nicholas Kraemer take the applause after our performance of Bach's *St John Passion* in March.

Read the reviews and see more pictures on pages 3-4.

EASTERN VOICES—CONCERT PREVIEW



Janáček as a young man

For our final concert of the season we travel eastwards to the Carpathian mountains and the great plains of Eastern Europe, lands fought over for centuries by invading armies, but which in the early 20th century saw an uprising in the musical culture of its native peoples. The concert features works by some of the composers that led this revival.

Most of Leoš Janáček's life (1854-1928) was spent in depression, obscurity and a loveless marriage, and he received scant recognition for his gifts as a composer until he was into his fifties. The son and grandson of Moravian schoolmasters and organists, he studied, and then joined the staff, at the Prague Organ School, spending the next 30-odd years in relative obscurity in Brno. Gradually his music began to be influenced by Moravian folk-songs, which he had started to collect in 1885. The fruits of his research were reaped in his first real success, the opera *Jenufa* written in 1904 but premiered only in 1916, belatedly establishing his national and international reputation. He is now recognised as a Czech composer worthy to be ranked with Smetana and Dvořák, and as one of the most original and immediately appealing opera composers of the 20th century.

As an atheist, Janáček wrote very little church music. The *Mass in E flat* from 1907-8 was left unfinished by Janáček, dictated to his pupils at the Brno Organ School as a model for setting Latin sacred texts. Twenty years later he incorporated most of it into the first draft of the *Glagolitic Mass*, though this was later drastically revised, leaving little of the original. Fortunately, the incomplete original was preserved and completed by one of his former pupils.

Janáček completed *Otce Nas*, a setting of the Lord's Prayer in Czech, in 1901 and scored it for an unusual combination of harp, organ, tenor soloist and mixed choir. It was inspired by a set of paintings by the artist Krzesz-Mecina, which were staged as a series of 'tableaux vivants' by the Brno Home for Women. Although the text is pious, Janáček's interpretation is less concerned with religion than with social consciousness, and shows deep empathy for rural people and their lives. This wonderful work, which could be seen as the choral equivalent of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, deserves to be much more widely known.

Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967) was born in Kecskemét, Hungary, now home to the Kodály Institute of Music. In 1900 he went to Budapest to study modern languages and composition, and in 1906 obtained his doctorate with a thesis on Hungarian folk music. He collaborated with his friend Bartók in collecting folk-song and creating a style on the basis of the rich Hungarian folk tradition. His love of the human voice was inextinguishable, however, and all his life Kodály regarded song as the basis of all music. The *Missa Brevis* was written during World War II, originally as an organ mass, later rearranged by the composer for mixed choir and organ. During the siege of Budapest Kodály and his wife took refuge in the cellars of the Budapest Opera

House, where the work received its premiere in a cloak-room February 1945, with harmonium and distant gunfire accompaniment.

To complete the programme, the Choir will be performing Kodály's beautiful *Pange Lingua*, and Górecki's haunting *Totus Tuus*. And as no concert of Eastern European music would be complete without Dvořák, tenor Richard Dowling joins in with the



The Moravian Teachers' Choir (poster by Alphonse Mucha) was founded in 1910 and was an inspiration to Janáček. Some of his choral works were written before the choir was formed and then rewritten for them; others took their nature from the group's extraordinary techniques, rooted in Moravian traditional singing.

romantic song cycle *Zigeunermelodien*, whilst Louise Thomson will be setting the rafters of the Monastery ringing with a beautiful harp sonata.

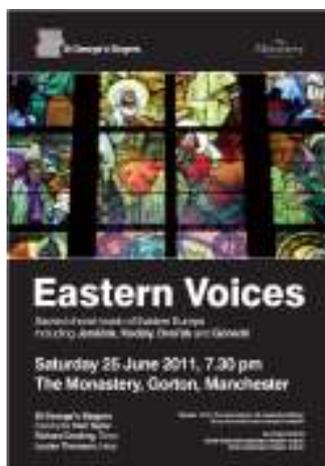
If some of this music is unknown to you, then come along to the Monastery, and be prepared to be astonished! Coach transport is available from Poynton/Hazel Grove as usual. £5, or free to Friends of St George's Singers.

Eastern Voices
Saturday 25 June, 7.30 pm
Gorton Monastery

Kodály: Pange Lingua, Missa Brevis
Janáček: Mass in E flat, Otče Náš
Dvořák: Zigeunermelodien
Górecki: Tutus Tuus

Tickets: £12, £10 concs,
£2 students/children

Tel: 01663 764012
Email: tickets@st-georges-
singers.org.uk
Online with Paypal:
www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



KODÁLY—TEACHER EXTRAORDINAIRE

The son of a stationmaster and enthusiastic amateur musician, Kodály was brought up with a love of both music and the countryside. He was born in Hungary at a time when its language and culture was subservient to German and Austrian tradition. His passion for the rediscovery of the Hungarian spirit resulted in extensive folk-song research. Kodály was an untiring writer, a powerful critic, and a lifelong folksong activist of unrivalled energy. His own musical compositions were inspired by Hungarian melody and folk-lore and works like *Háry Janos*, and *Psalmus Hungaricus* have found a home in concert halls all over the world.

But although he became a well-known composer, it is as an educator that Kodály is revered. He became increasingly concerned with musical education, developing a school music curriculum which ensured that every child learned to sing at sight, and writing an enormous quantity of choral music for children and amateurs.

Kodály is arguably the greatest music educationalist of the twentieth century; the astonishingly high standard of choral singing and musical achievement in Hungary was attained thanks to his innovations and teaching methods. These are the inspiration behind an approach to music education, which has gained world recognition.

Kodály's approach to music education is based on teach-

ing, learning and understanding music through the experience of singing, giving direct access to the world of music without the technical problems involved with the use of an instrument. The musical material which has proved to be the most potent and effective is a country's own folksong material and the finest art music. Music is heard first of all and then learned using 'relative solfa', derived from John Curwen's Tonic Solfa which in turn was based on Sarah Glover's Norwich method, and inspired by and simplified from the French rhythm solfa system of Galin, Paris and Chev e.

Relative solfa reduces all major and minor scales to one common pattern, meaning that singing in solfa is just as simple in any key and in any clef. Each solfa name has a function: **do** is the home note in a major key, **la** is the home note in a minor key.

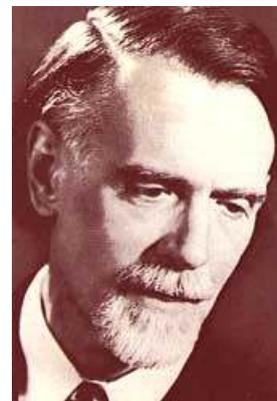
One of St George's Singers' tenors, David Crossfield, wrote about his experiences with Tonic Solfa a few years ago. "Where did it come from? In the 10th century Guido d'Arrezzo, a Benedictine monk, devised his own system of teaching young choristers to sing reliably and in tune, by marking the pitches on their hands, and using the singing names **ut, re, mi, fa, so, la**. The basic idea has been adapted many times in the cause of better singing.

"There is no doubt that, for training in solfa to be fully effective, it needs daily five or ten minute sessions, throughout at least a year of junior education. In Hungary solfa has long been established as the basis of the

Kodály method, in which ear-training was central. Kodály also used a system of hand-signs, which takes us back to John Curwen, the Congregational minister who established Tonic Sol Fah firmly at the centre of the Choralist movement in the mid-19th century. These signs have crept back into education, although usually as a sort of infantile approach, to be superseded by written notation as soon as possible. However, hand signs are a great help in aiding concentration and perception, including the teacher's own perception of when pupils have 'lost it'."

Other elements of the Kodály approach include 'rhythm names' to convey the length of musical sounds. They are not meant to replace 'actual' names but to make a more logical approach. For example, the word 'crotchet' has two syllables, but the meaning of a crotchet is easier to understand by using the word **ta**—which only has one.

The basic Kodály philosophy—train the ear before the eye, you cannot sing without first hearing the sound in your head—may be difficult for experienced choral singers to come to terms with, accustomed as we are to depend on written notation, and reluctant to abandon the comfort blanket of the score. Whilst it is probably too late for us to become adept at reading solfa, there is no reason why we can't improve our listening and hearing—invaluable qualities in any choir.



Zoltan Kodaly

The Kodaly philosophy:

"Everyone who learns an instrument should sing first. Singing, independent of an instrument, is the real and profound schooling of musical abilities."

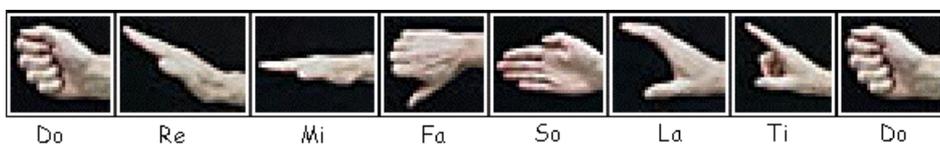
"Is there anything more demonstrative of social solidarity than a choir? Many people unite to do something that cannot be done by a single person alone, however talented he or she may be."

"We should read music in the same way that an educated adult will read a book: in silence, but imagining the sound."

"Teach music and singing at school in such a way that it is not a torture but a joy for the pupil; instill a thirst for finer music in him, a thirst which will last for a lifetime."

For information:
www.britishkodalyacademy.org

SGS soprano Barbara Gajda has done a postgraduate course at the Kodály Institute in Kecskemet, Hungary and offers lessons in the method. Email: Barbara.gajda@gmx.com



Do

Re

Mi

Fa

So

La

Ti

Do

ST JOHN PASSION—THE CRITICS' VIEWS

"A huge thank you to you and all of your colleagues. The whole performance felt like a real experience and is still ringing in my ears".

**—Bob Riley,
Chief Executive,
Manchester Camerata**

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS:

"The joint promotion by Manchester Camerata and St George's Singers of Bach's *St John Passion* at the Bridgewater Hall was not only a success at filling the building – it was also a great achievement in musical terms, under the expert hand of Nicholas Kraemer.

"Borrowing good ideas from other quarters in staging the work, with the male solo singers on one side of the platform when 'in character' as Evangelist, Jesus Christ or Pontius Pilate, but moving to the other for the contemplative arias, and using lighting to focus on the chorus when necessary, it em-

phasised the near-theatrical quality which animates it.

"The chorus – trained by Neil Taylor, who also played the chamber organ for the performance – were superb in those fugal interjections as Jesus is crowned with thorns and robed in purple before the hostile crowd.

"There is much more to the *St John Passion* than drama, however, and the contrasts of dynamic and colour obtained by Kraemer from his large army of singers and players – by today's canons of Bach practice – were remarkable and effective. There was intimacy, too: I particularly admired Andrew Staples, not just for his fluid recita-

tives as Evangelist but for the quality of his aria singing, particularly in the meditation after the scourging.

"The female leads were equally impressive. Julia Doyle the soprano, and Clare Wilkinson, who made the alto's *Es ist vollbracht* a near-operatic scena.

"Impact hardly faltered in the course of the long evening, and Kraemer brought it all to a deeply moving conclusion, ending the final chorale with a surging crescendo of praise."

*- Robert Beale,
Manchester Evening News*



Bass's eye view of Nicholas Kraemer during rehearsal

"I thought the choir were great and look forward to further collaborations.

Thanks for your hard work."

- Nicholas Kraemer

"A terrific show—and very impressive singing."

- Stephen Threlfall

MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL:

"Currently the choir has a membership of over one hundred, and ninety of them gave yet another vibrant and committed performance of one of the great choral pieces.

"I first heard them performing *Elijah* and later Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and then his *B Minor Mass*. It was evident to me from that time that the Manchester area was home to another truly great amateur choir comparable with that associated with the Hallé Orchestra. It was with interest that I noted

that this performance was a joint venture with the specialist Manchester Camerata, the two organisations sharing the burden and, hopefully, the benefits, artistically and fiscally, of their combined support. The well-filled Bridgewater Hall points to success in that field. Not to be ignored is the association with Nicholas Kramer, a world-renowned baroque specialist working with Chorus Director Neil Taylor.

"If the LSO Chorus opened Verdi's *Otello* with strength and vibrancy on Saturday night, St

George's Singers matched them in the opening Chorus *Herr, unser Herrscher* (Lord, our ruler). They maintained that high standard throughout the work, not merely in strength, but in verbal nuance and sensitivity, each section of the choir, whether in unison or counterpoint, articulating the words as well as the meaning, the concluding Chorale (Ah Lord, let your dear Angels) being particularly well contrasted in its plaintive appeal.

"Nicholas Kramer and the Manchester Camerata played an equally important part with the choir and the excellent soloists to give a memorable night for lovers of Bach's creation as we approach Easter."

*- Robert Farr,
Musicweb International*

ST JOHN PASSION—THE SINGERS’ TALES

“My very first landlady (in London many years ago) was Nicholas Kraemer’s mother, and being a musician herself, and mother of same, we could not have wished for a kinder and more accommodating landlady as we launched ourselves into the exciting but uncertain waters of the music profession! NK and I used to pass like ships in the night, bound for our respective musical trysts..... We were all so young then!!!” - *Charlotte French*

“I popped down to the stage door during rehearsal break to ask where the car park machine was—and found Sir Mark Elder talking to the stage door receptionist. (Presumably not discussing

car parking arrangements.) He turned, I smiled, he looked wary but smiled back before disappearing rapidly upstairs. He obviously gets accosted by strange women all the time and was taking no chances. Having spent so much time on the day ‘assembling’ in front of his portrait backstage in the Bridgewater Hall, it was pretty surreal seeing him in person!” - *Susan Hodgson*

“I have wonderful childhood memories of the *St John Passion*. Mother used to practise her solo part a lot – ‘Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples?’ but Father didn’t practise his much – ‘I am not’, not to mention ‘I am no-ot’. At least I must have learnt about appoggiaturas at an early age and in fact ‘I am not’ was always quite a handy catchphrase in our household. I was deemed old enough to join the audience of a particular performance in Dorking Parish Church, which has remained clearly etched in the memory (although it was very long and my sweets ran out too early...). However, when the conductor was no less



Guests at the pre-concert reception, including the Mayor of Poynton, Mary Taylor, Elaine Griffiths of Gorton Monastery (with Eric Northey, our non-singing host for the evening), Choir President, Brigit Forsyth, and Friends

a person than one Dr Vaughan Williams, this experience has remained very special over the years!” - *Mary Hoult*

“I was thrilled to know that Andy Staples was to be a soloist with us in *St John Passion*. We have a mutual friend in Nick Smith, the conductor of International Festival Chorus (IFC) Beijing. I had sent the concert flyer to Beijing, and Nick asked me to say hello to Andy which of course I did and then found out that he was going to the party in London to celebrate Nick’s OBE. The party was at the home of Richard Savage, another singer, known to Nick and also to St George’s. It sometimes seems as if all the musical threads of my life are weaving together in a lovely cosy blanket familiarity. But it’s probably because I failed to listen to my Mother’s words not to speak to strangers. My life would have been very empty had I followed her instructions.” - *Sue Mason*

“I cried at the end. Relief, exhaustion, exhilaration, the emotion of that final uplifting chorale after the sadness of the previous chorus—or just desperation for a drink? All the above! What a wonderful night.”

“A dazzling performance in all respects. We thought the choir sensational as did others we talked to after the performance.”

“Last night’s performance was wonderful. The choir was on top form as were the soloists and the orchestra, a truly memorable evening. Thank you so much for inviting us.”

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

“We were so grateful for sharing the Bach evening on Tuesday. We must congratulate the choir on a splendidly controlled yet also dramatic performance. (It is quite an experience singing *St John’s Passion*, isn’t it!).”

“I cannot recall hearing *St John’s Passion* before, so I came to it completely new. I just want to thank you for a truly amazing performance; it was quite superb and I enjoyed every minute of it – right to the very end! “

“As a German speaker, I thought your pronunciation was excellent. I could hear every word.”

“Best concert I’ve ever been to at the Bridgewater Hall!”



Choral manoeuvres in the dark



George modelling this year's must-have accessory—multi-function tour souvenir bags overprinted with the Choir logo

"My idea is that there is music in the air, music all around us, the world is full of it and you simply take as much as you require."

"This is what I hear all day. The trees are singing my music—or am I singing theirs?"
- Sir Edward Elgar

Friday 27th May

I'm so excited! It's tour time again, and my housekeeper and companion, Helen, had made sure my hand-tailored Hungarian coachman's hat and coat were brushed, and my boots sparkling, ready for getting on the coach in Poynton to depart for the region of England known as the Malverns, or to music aficionados such as myself, 'Elgar country'. The journey was uneventful (not even much singing, so I suspect all the Singers were tired after their exacting jobs), and we arrived at our hotel on time, our excellent driver Ian navigating the dangers of the M6 expertly. Knowing that the next three days would be action packed and intense, I went to bed early, leaving the rest of the coach party to meet up with those who had travelled by car. Hopefully all had arrived safely!

MALVERNS TOUR —GEORGE'S DIARY

Saturday 28th May

After a simple breakfast (I have never found the 'full English' to my liking—give me a plate of grass and leaves any day!) it was upstairs for rehearsal. I was pleased to see that Neil had taken note of my request NOT to have those dangerous mobile rehearsals, as we did last year in Prague, and had scheduled an extra static rehearsal before we got on the coach. The hotel guests still having breakfast must have been astonished to hear angelic sounds floating down into the dining room at 9.15 am! Then we were off for one of the tour highlights: a visit to Elgar's birthplace, a cottage which had been turned into a beautiful museum. The Choir members were captivated by it, especially by the statue of Elgar sitting at the bottom of his garden looking out over the hills. The garden was a delight, and I spent a happy few minutes browsing amongst the flowers and shrubs until I was advised that this was frowned upon by the Museum staff.

After a delicious lunch, it was on to Pershore Abbey and more rehearsals. This involved some extremely complex choreography involving rows of singers standing up, moving forwards and backwards, sitting down, being shouted at, standing up again, turning round—it went on for some considerable time, and I must admit to being rather confused as to its purpose. Fortunately I spent the time chatting with young Megan Smith, who was utterly charmed by my velvet antlers and furry coat, and who I



must say was the best behaved little girl I have ever met.

Then more food—Singers do eat a lot!—this time a very nice tea made by the good folk of Pershore for us, and where we sang happy birthday to Eric Northey, and presented him with a cake. The concert was lovely and our three soloists (Jacqui, Tim and Mike)

sang beautifully. We all set off for the hotel in good spirits and full of food. A few of the choir members went down to the hotel bar afterwards, and I heard afterwards that there had been 'legal representations' to the hotel management to open the bar for a little longer, though to no avail. I also heard that there had been a football game this same evening of some consequence, but that the result had not been favourable.



That may have explained the rather pained expressions from some of the basses the following morning.....

Sunday 29th May

Ledbury today, a delightful market town. The more energetic choir members strode off on a 5 mile walk into the hills, others went on a leisurely guided walk around the town



(the lady guide was dressed in clothing similar to my own style—very chic!), and others visited a local castle. The concert was in a lovely church in the centre of the town, and afterwards dinner was an excellent barbecue in a local tavern. And so to bed!

Monday 30th May

The last day—and it's raining. We elks do not like rain: we are creatures of the snow and ice. So I stayed in the coach whilst the choir went on a walk around Worcester, before setting off for Malvern Priory. Here we had a fascinating and instructive talk by a very learned gentleman on Elgar's life, his many homes and his music. The concert was due to begin at 6pm, but at 5.35pm the



choir was still rehearsing and the audience was arriving. I was anxious that the Choir wouldn't have time to perfect everything in time, but I needn't have worried. Another great success (with our best audience of the tour!) - except that Jeff didn't seem able to get out of his organ box very easily to take his applause.

Finally, it was over. The car drivers set off, and the rest of us headed back home on the coach after another brilliant St George's tour. Till next year!

GOLF—THE ELGAR WAY

We know that Elgar was a football fan, a cyclist, a kite flyer and a scientist. Did you know he was also a golfer? Elgar first played golf at Christmas 1892, and was taught the game by Richard Baxter Townshend (RBT of the Enigma Variations). In March 1893 Elgar joined Worcestershire Golf Club, and played regularly from then on. He enjoyed playing golf in an enthusiastic rather than partic-

ularly successful manner being quoted in the *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review* magazine of November 1903 as saying "... golf. *Splendid game. The best thing about it is this, when you are playing you cannot think of anything else.*" He also said, "*golf is the best form of exercise for writing men, as it involves no risk of accident, is always ready without much preliminary arrangement, and has the inestimable advantage of being solidly*

respectable, inasmuch as it is seldom worth seeing and rarely worth reading about." In honour of Elgar's golfing tradition, John Hodgson and Phil Eger-ton (AKA The Dragons) played three rounds on Worcestershire courses during the tour, thoroughly enjoying the experience (apart from the summer torrents on the last day), and playing golf of a standard that fully lived up to Elgar's description.



THE TALE OF EDDIE'S BALUSTRADE

At the end of the tour, organisers Dave Francis and Pam Craig were presented with lovely prints to remind them of the weekend. Pam's was a print of Elgar's birthplace, and Dave's one of Worcester. But this was Worcester with a difference.

It was painted from the viewpoint of Marl Bank, Elgar's last house, in which he died. The house itself was demolished in the 1970s, but the

artist (David Birtwhistle) had chosen to paint the city from this perspective for a particular reason.

Whilst Elgar was living at Marl Bank in the 1930s, the city council widened the old bridge over the river, and threw away the old bridge balustrades. Elgar was outraged, as he regarded the originals as far superior to their modern replacements. So he bought one of the discarded



balustrades and set it in his garden overlooking the city. Touched by the story, the artist decided to paint the balustrade, Elgar, and his dogs, into the scene.

CONCERT REVIEW

We don't normally have our tour concerts reviewed, but this was an exception—the music reporter from the Worcester Times came along to Pershore Abbey to see who we were. We think he may have missed the beginning of the concert (no mention of the Finzi in his review!) but he seems to have enjoyed the rest:

"THERE are two possible reasons why Saturday night's concert at Pershore Abbey was not well attended: the football match was possibly one reason why and the second could be the unfamiliar name of the choir performing.

"But while concert-goers may not have recognised the St George's Singers - the North of England choir so-called because they were formed in 1956 at St. George's Church in the small town of Poynton in Cheshire - the choice of repertoire was rather more well-known to the local area.

"Early on in the programme, choices included works by Elgar, a fast-tempo rendition of *As Torrents in Summer* and the famous *Chanson de Matin* (played by organist Jeffrey Makinson as a solo organ arrangement.)

"*Psalms 148* was set to a famil-

iar hymn tune by Holst at the close.

"The group also excelled in their account of Charles Villiers Stanford's *Heraclitus* and the six movement *Songs of Farewell* by Hubert H Parry, conductor Neil Taylor giving a decisive lead.

"Although arguably not as affecting as Elgar, the Stanford and the Parry works may remind local audiences (if they indeed really need reminding) that Elgar is by no means the only English choral music of stature."

- Lucas Ball, 30 May 2011

A lady at the concert in Ledbury spoke to Joe Kearney afterwards. "My own choir is doing two of the Parry *Songs of Farewell* at our next concert. Sitting here listening to you tonight was a bit like watching Manchester United and Barcelona—and you were Barcelona."

MALVERN TOUR—WE CAME, WE SANG, WE LOST THINGS



The Pershore Wave (1): A vigorous hand signal from a conductor towards sections of a choir during performance, designed to convey agitation, despair, fury, resignation or other appropriate emotion

Another fantastic tour behind us, with memories of great performances, stunning venues, beautiful countryside, fine food and drink, entertaining

lectures, and—most importantly—good company. It was great to have Tim Kennedy with us, Jeff worked wonders with a series of variable quality organs, and Neil’s patience was (as usual) inexhaustible.

The tour was also remarkable for the number of things that went missing: the



‘reserved’ signs on the choir’s pews were forgotten in Pershore; the MD’s music stand was left behind in Ledbury—fortunately Malvern Priory rustled one up; a pair of shoes was abandoned in Malvern (kindly posted on afterwards); and we were constantly in fear of losing tourists, as people forgot to tell Pam who was



going by car and who should have been on the coach. However, this year we managed not to lose Eric and Margaret Adshead! But the



most important thing we left behind were happy, appreciative audiences. And that’s what it’s all about!

TOUR HEROES!

Joe Kearney—for tirelessly collecting entrance money, handing out programmes, and selling merchandise—whether people wanted it or not!



Dave Francis and Pam Craig—for organizing such an interesting, action-packed and logistically complex tour.

Jacqui Smith—for coming on tour at all, and then singing solo so beautifully—whilst eight months pregnant.

Mark Warrington’s Mum—for putting concert leaflets in every shop, gallery and eating establishment in Ledbury—then collecting the music stand we abandoned in the church.



THE PERSHORE WAVE (2): a stage manoeuvre in which successive rows of singers step down to the next level of staging before sitting down in the space vacated by the previous line of singers. Requires accurate timing, intense concentration, and responsiveness to conductor’s signals. System invented by St George’s Singers in Pershore Abbey, May 2011. Development work continues.

For the entire three days of the tour we sang (in a rather baffled fashion) about pelicans in Finzi’s *Lo the full final sacrifice*. Peter Marcus decided to do some digging into this bird fetish, and unearthed a sermon from 2007 by Revd Canon Jeremy Fletcher of York Minster. Here is an extract.



WHAT’S ALL THIS WITH PELICANS THEN?

“I do not know what led Gerald Finzi to Crashaw’s work when commissioned by the Revd Walter Hussey. I do know that Finzi exercised the composer’s prerogative and changed the words: specifically he took elements of two of Crashaw’s poems and interweaved them. Musicologists would say that Finzi retained the words which were most singable. So, I ask myself, why did he retain the pelican?”

*O soft self-wounding Pelican!
Whose breast weeps Balm for wounded man.*

“The words are not Crashaw’s

invention: specifically Crashaw draws from two of the hymns of St Thomas Aquinas about Communion and the adoration of the sacrament.

“The pelican was thought to care for its young so much that, in times of drought it would wound itself and feed its young with its own blood. This symbol of sacrificial care was used before Christian times, but was seized upon by the church as a way of showing the love of God for his children, and, as the doctrine of Holy Communion was developed, as a way of reflecting on how Christ feeds us

with his own blood in Holy Communion. Many people meditated on this, and pelicans were used in medieval church imagery: they are to be found in the Minster still, if you look carefully.

“So even if Finzi couldn’t attach the word to a memorable musical phrase, it needed to be there for the poetry to make sense.”

The full sermon can be found at www.yorkminster.org, then follow the links to Worship and Spirituality/Minster Sermons, page 15.

THE TOUR IN SONG



"They told me Man Utd, they told me you were dead.
They brought me bitter news to hear, and bitter tears to shed."



"Tired pilgrims' limbs"



"Ever blooming"



"Dismal yew"



"For rain has been falling"



"One of Nature's little kings"



"Lay a garland"



"The least and vilest things"



"Rich, royal food, bountiful bread!"



"Scattered bodies go!"



"My life's a pain"

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



Following the sad passing of Beryl Pearn, we were overcome to learn that she had left a bequest to the Choir of £2,500. The Committee is currently considering how best to use the money for the benefit of the Choir, and to commemorate Beryl's enormously generous gesture.

Beryl's son Richard will be our guest at the 'Eastern Voices' concert at Gorton Monastery on 25 June.

Very many congratulations to alto **Phil Smith**, who gets married to Andrew on Saturday 18th June at Bramall Hall. They're then off on honeymoon to Andalucia for two weeks—missing the 'Eastern Voices' concert, but under the circumstances it's forgivable. Andrew has been coming to St George's concerts for over three years, but this year he decided to take the plunge ... and join us on his first choir tour to the Malverns. He really enjoyed the trip, and

we were delighted to welcome another good friend to the party. We wish Phil and Andrew every happiness for the future.

A reminder of our **Twitter** feed: @stgeorgessinger. And if you want to send us a message or let us know what you thought about our concerts, log onto the **Visitors Book** on our website at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

A PLACE TO REMEMBER BY GWYNETH PAILIN



Being retired and able to grab good weather when it happens, David and I went for a walk in the Hayfield area one day in March. We stopped to rest on a seat, and found it was dedicated to the memory of Betty Strutt and Margot Young.

Betty was a member of St George's Singers for many years, and when she died in 2003 a group from the Choir went to sing at her funeral in Hayfield. Margot lectured in French at Manchester Universi-

ty and was often at our concerts.

The seat is in a beautiful spot near Bowden Bridge on the way to Tunstead Clough—and has a fantastic view.



Not everyone loves opera
"In opera, there is always too much singing"
- Claude Debussy

'Oh how wonderful, really wonderful opera would be if there were no singers!' - *Gioachino Rossini*

"An unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English speaking audiences."
- Edith Wharton (The Age of Innocence)

PEARLS FROM THE PODIUM

Basses—that's a completely new note you've sung there! I don't think that's ever been heard before.

Sopranos, leave this entry as late as you can. Imagine you're a bass for a day.

The phrase is 'for which I languish'. At the moment, I'm not

feeling the languish: just the anguish.

I thought we were in Southampton Dock there—who sang that bottom D?

We're not singing about female wrestlers here. The words are 'Triumphant Text' not Triumphant Tess.

SOLAR POWERED SINGER

The Royal Society's Summer Science Exhibition 2011 takes place from 5-10 July in London. Amongst the distinguished exhibitors this year is SGS alto Wendy Flavell, better known amongst her work colleagues at Manchester University as Professor of Surface Physics in the Photon Physics Group of the School of Physics and Astronomy.

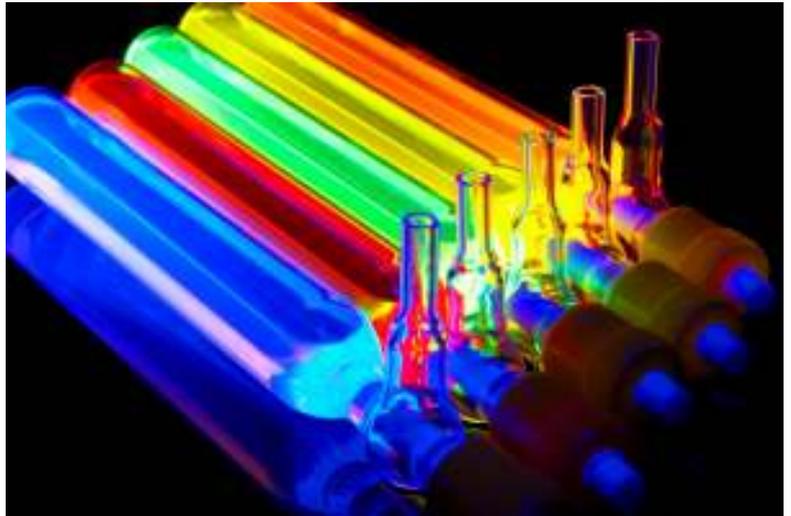
From Oxford University, Wendy moved to Imperial College London before being appointed to a Chair at UMIST (now the University of Manchester). At the time of her appointment in 1998 she was only the 6th woman in the UK to achieve a Chair in Physics.

The exhibit Wendy and her team have created shows how scientists are working to use the sun's energy directly—not to generate power, but to make 'solar fuel'. Since solar panels only produce power during the day when the sun is shining, we have to find a way of storing, shipping and using the sun's energy more efficiently at times when it isn't shining. Fuel can store much more energy than batteries, so the scientists are working to build

a solar cell that will use the sun's energy to make important fuels or chemicals needed by industry.

These cells are 'nanocells', from the word nanotechnology, which is concerned with manipulating matter at the atomic or molecular level, and is sometimes called 'molecular engineering'. At the heart of these nanocells are clusters of semiconductors, or 'quantum dots', containing only a few hundred atoms, and molecules similar to those involved in photosynthesis. The dots absorb light, and scientists can select which colour of sunlight is absorbed by changing the size of the dots. When the sunlight is absorbed, carriers of electric current are created (as in a solar panel), but in the nanocell they provide the potential to create valuable chemical reactions—such as turning water into hydrogen fuel. Ultimately, this could be a green way of making fuel for hydrogen-powered cars, instead of making them from fossil fuel.

You can find out more about Wendy's exhibit on the Royal Society website: <http://royalsociety.org/summer-science/2011/solar-nanotech/>



Phials with solutions of luminescent semiconductor clusters ('quantum dots') of different sizes. By changing the size of the dots, the colour of light changes



The only musical astrophysicist's joke we could find:

Q How are sopranos defying the laws of astrophysics?

A The centre of the universe shifts with every step they take.

On her university profile, Wendy talks about singing:

"I don't understand how it's possible to read music, watch the conductor and sing the right notes and words simultaneously – our brains really are marvellous parallel processors! When things go really well, the choir sings much better than the individuals making it up, which is a glorious thing to be part of."

NOTES FOR CHOIR PRACTICE (WITH THANKS TO ELFED HUGHES)

1 Everyone should sing the same piece.

2 If you sing the wrong note, give a nasty look at one of the other choir members.

3 A right note at the wrong time is the wrong note, and vice versa.

4 If everyone gets lost but you, follow them.

5 If the passage is difficult, slow down. If it's easy, speed up.

6 A true interpretation is realized when there remains not one note of the original.

7 When everyone else has

finished singing, you should not sing any notes you have left.

8 A wrong note sung timidly is a wrong note; a wrong note sung with authority is an interpretation.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who lugged the publicity box off and on the coach during the tour. They will be relieved to know that next year the new, self-propelling model will be available.



JO BLUCK—WONDERWOMAN!



Jo couldn't quite remember where she'd left the staging, but thought she'd better just run back to the Monastery to check it wasn't there

Jo Bluck used to work wonders as our Stage Manager. When she gave up that job, she obviously needed something even more challenging to keep her busy, so took to the next best thing—the triathlon.

The day after choir practice for the Malverns Tour, she set off for Nantwich, where the 2011 Cheshire Triathlon was being held: a 0.5km swim, a 20km bike ride, and a 5km run.

The swim was in an outdoor salt water pool, which Jo said “aided buoyancy but was a bit of a shock to the lungs, which consumed quite a lot of salty water!” Next came the bike ride out of the centre of Nantwich, round a couple of large roundabouts, then into the country and back again.

“Going out I was nervous of the roundabouts, but coming back I didn't give a monkey's toss and just threw out my arm and dared the cars to do something about it. Truly tiring”. The 5km run saw Jo pounding

4 laps round a park. “My legs were like jelly by now, and I was still spitting out salt water—so attractive!”

Jo's target was to finish in under 2 hours—and her final time was 1 hour, 49 minutes and 57 seconds. Impeccable timing as ever from the sopranos!

Jo was running for Parkinsons UK and to date has raised over £430 from the choir and other sponsors. This was Jo's first triathlon, and although nervous beforehand (“I was more worried about infringing any of the complex rules at the changeover than not finishing the course!”) she's thrilled she did it, and definitely intends to go back next year to improve on her time.



Orlando Gough

MAKING OLYMPIC MUSIC

Making Music, the national federation of music societies, of which St George's Singers is a member, has commissioned a new work inspired by the 2012 Olympics. The *Making Music Overture* is being written by Orlando Gough, a ground-

breaking composer who writes for both amateur and professional choirs. The piece will investigate the experience of being British today, and will be scored for both choral and instrumental forces in a flexible, ‘mix and match’ way.

St George's Singers will be hoping to join up with other community and music groups in Poynton to perform the Overture in spring/summer 2012. More information available in the New Year.



Nikki was concerned that the length of her skirt was not entirely suitable for *Messiah*

HOW TO WIN EUROVISION

Wasn't it great! Didn't Ell and Nikki do well? Weren't we all thrilled that tiny Azerbaijan finally won the 2011 Eurovision song contest?

Mm—well, perhaps thrilled is overstating it. (And if anyone did actually watch it, would they own up to it!) But behind all the show-biz glitter, dodgy hair-dos and dubious tuning, there may be some tips for us in planning future concerts.

Derek Scott, professor of critical musicology at Leeds University, has produced the

‘winning formula’ needed to gain maximum points in Eurovision. The ‘perfect’ song should be a solo or duet, be happy in tone and in a major key, have a moderately fast pace and a strong two-beat rhythm, give opportunities for dramatic or comic gestures, include a quirky verse followed by a tuneful 16-bar refrain, and (most critical of all) should change key during the course of the song to create a feeling of elation.

The UK audience for Euro-

vision this year was 9.5 million (more than for the FA Cup Final earlier the same day). We don't expect quite that many to turn up at the Monastery on 25 June, but perhaps we should ask ourselves—does Kodaly deliver the necessary quirkiness? Is Gorecki happy enough? Should we transpose the entire Janacek oeuvre into a major key? Maybe our radical ‘canonization’ of *Pange Lingua* on last year's tour wasn't such a bad idea after all!

THE PLAY WOT ERIC WROTE

Hemiola readers might know that tenors—ours particularly—are more than just pretty faces. St George's tenor, Eric Northey, has had his play, *Telling Lives*, selected, in competition, for performance by Manchester's 24:7 theatre festival.

It will be performed by Eric's theatre group *Cul-de-sac Theatre*, who some of you might have seen in their prize winning version of *Waiting for Godot*.



Prestwich Lunatic Asylum ward, 1900

up—sometimes over many years, to see how they had progressed. There were family details, letters, bits of conversation, medical histories, very moving accounts of deaths etc, all written in what was sometimes quite elegant copperplate handwriting—other times in a scrawl worse than my own. It was a historical treasure trove, opening up the lives and loves of ordinary working-class Mancunians from another age. Amazing! Hundreds—thousands of them. A writer's dream.”

Eric was particularly attracted to this lady, Lily Handley, whose cause for madness

was given as ‘disappointment in love’. He went on,

“How many of us have not suffered that? She had such a hauntingly beautiful face and she stares straight at the camera lens so that you seem to get direct eye contact with someone from a hundred years ago.

“And she played an imaginary piano, whilst she was being inter-

viewed! Such a priceless detail for a musician and writer.

“She had a baby when she was twenty-one, which, of course, was taken away, so quite naturally she

suffered from puerperal melancholia—baby blues. As a result, she spent the rest of her life in Prestwich.

“I recently found her name on a list of 5,000 pauper lunatics buried in a mass grave at St Mary's Parish Church in Prestwich. It was really moving and in September we're going to read out all the names and then perform the play in the nave of the church.”



The haunting face of Lily Handley, driven to madness by ‘disappointment in love’



The manuscript detailing Lily Handley's 'madness'



Eric found the source of his new play in the dusty archives of the Greater Manchester County Record Office. He said,

“There were these great brown books, the size of paving slabs and in them every patient from the 1850s onwards had been named, photographed, weighted, their jobs, marital status and religion noted.

“They were inspected for bruises, given a ‘cause for madness’, offered a brief prognosis, then followed

If you want to catch the play this summer, it will be on first at the Buxton Fringe in the Art Gallery on 15th July and Buxton URC church on Saturday 16th July, both shows starting at 7.00 pm. Then the big one—Manchester 24:7 theatre festival, at Sasha's Hotel (just behind Debenhams) between 21st and 29th July.

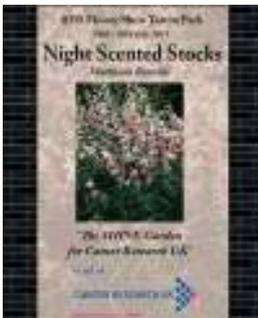
There are six performances at different times. Look at www.247theatrefestival.co.uk to pick which time suits you best. There are lunchtime performances for city workers. Tickets can be bought through the website or on the door. Do come—and bring your very large extended families!

HOW MY GARDEN SHINES BY MARY HOULT

Tatton Park Flower Show is open to the public from 21-24 July (20 July only for RHS members). Entrance £23 in advance, £28 on the day. www.rhs.org.uk/TattonParkFlowerShow



Work in progress



One of the 10,000 packets of seeds Mary will be handing out for SHINE at the Tatton show

Have you ever been to the Tatton Park Flower Show? If so, do you remember “Thyme and Money for Cancer Research UK” in 2009, the garden with the olive trees and the puns? Or perhaps “The Opera Fan Garden”? Or even as far back as 2003 when the musically-themed “Garden Quartet” scooped gold medal and best-in-show? (But that’s another story...)

That was the amazing event that sent this concept-designer-cum-charity-fundraiser-who-is-really-a-music-teacher back to college. This time however, it was to exchange the likes of *allegro con brio* for *Veronica arvensis* and to learn the fundamental principles of horticulture and garden design.

Being more used to the standards of Edexcel and the ABRSM, it does feel rather extraordinary to have your creative efforts under the public scrutiny of the RHS! Although Tatton now hosts the new RHS Young Designer’s Competition

there isn’t yet a category for new old designers...

And now “The SHINE Garden for Cancer Research UK” is about to be revealed after a year of intense planning. Build-up starts on July 4th and the show expects upwards of 90,000 visitors across its five days.

Stress? What stress? It’s not unlike preparing for a concert – audiences often have little idea just how much time and hard work goes into the preparation and practice, or how many people are involved behind the scenes, or how much it costs to put on. At least musicians don’t have to worry about such technicalities as building and painting walls in torrential rain. And what if the conifers coming from Leicestershire aren’t up to standard or the *Astrantias* are over or the *Veronicastrums* aren’t in flower by July 19th? And as for the dreaded *Heuchera* rust...

If you are wondering what all this is for, the answer is simple -

charity awareness and fundraising for Cancer Research UK.

So why not visit the Tatton Park Flower Show this summer between 20th and 24th July and see “The SHINE Garden for Cancer Research UK” on site C172. It depicts a mini-walk as if through Manchester at night to publicise the charity’s sponsored city night walks.

If you also wish to add some personal support for Cancer Research UK, you may like to sign the visitors’ book and enjoy your own mini sponsored walk through the garden - it will be much easier than the real SHINE Manchester, the marathon walk in the middle of the night!

www.shinegarden.co.uk

..... and a detail from Mary’s finished ‘Thyme and Money’ garden in the 2009 show



CORRIE'S NEXT AFRICAN ADVENTURE

In 2007 Dr Corrie Verduyn, one of St George's long-standing members, left her job in the UK to spend two years working with VSO in Tanzania, where she was in charge of the HIV and maternity services at a rural hospital. Originally from the Netherlands, Corrie trained as a doctor in Rotterdam, came to the UK in 1988 to do post-graduate training in Manchester, and currently works as a non-consultant specialist in North Manchester.

As in many hospitals in East Africa, she was the only university-trained doctor in the

hospital in Tanzania. The experience made her more aware of the need of many African countries for skilled medical staff. The rate of mothers dying in childbirth in most of Africa is approximately 50 times higher than in the UK, most of these deaths preventable with easy and low-cost interventions.

After her two years in Tanzania, during which the Choir raised nearly £450 for the hospital to buy vital equipment, Corrie then returned to the UK (and St George's) for a short period. But having worked in Africa, Corrie decided to devote the rest of her working life to the continent, sharing her

skills and contributing to improving the health and well-being of women and their families. So now Corrie is off on another African adventure, this time to Uganda. She travels to Uganda under the auspices of CMS (Church Mission Society), and will be working at Kiwoko Hospital in Luweru, where she will be the clinical lead for women's health, obstetrics and gynaecology.

We wish Corrie well with her work in Uganda, and hope to stay in touch with her progress.



Corrie Verduyn

WHAT'S IN A NEUME? BY SUSAN HODGSON

On a cold, wet day in early May, a small group of St George's Singers headed down to the pretty market town of Leominster, on the Herefordshire/Wales border, for an early music workshop in the Priory Church. Organised by the Borders and Midlands Early Music Forum, the workshop was run by Leigh (aka John!) Nixon, a Lay Vicar at Westminster Abbey, formerly with the Tavener Consort and Hilliard Ensemble, and now member of Gothic Voices. John sang at Kate and Will's wedding—and had some interesting tales to tell about the Rutter and the Maelor commissions. (But that's another story!)

The music was from the 13th and 14th centuries, and included secular and sacred canons, plainchant, antiphons and extracts from Masses. We started off gently with the English round *Sumer is icumen in* in both its original and its bowdlerized Latin version (*Perspice Christi-*

cola), but then things got more complicated when John introduced us to neumes—the medieval system of musical notation, which uses a staff of four rather than five lines, has no fixed pitch but indicates relationships only, and which probably was originally an attempt to describe graphically the hand signals a choirmaster might make to indicate a vocal shape. (Shades of Kodaly here!) Trying to make sense of the dots, diamonds and squiggles (not to mention the episemas, liquescents and quilismas!) was a bit confusing at first, but gradually things came into focus, and 77 singers managed to give a creditable performance of a three-part canon *Salve Regina*.

Throughout the day, John encouraged us to ask questions, which rather back-fired on him when the first question posed was, “Shouldn't this be the genitive not the vocative case?” (They really take their early music seriously at BMEMF!) Whilst some of the music was fairly easy plain-

chant, other pieces were more of a challenge. A three-part canon in old French galloped along at a frantic pace; an amazing ‘mirror’ canon by Machaut (*Ma fin est mon commencement*) was ingenious in the way the composer reversed the lines to form palindromes that meshed together to form beautiful harmonies; a ‘chasing caça’ by a 14th century Spanish composer was simply gorgeous; and Pycard's *Gloria in excelsis a 5*, with its syncopated rhythms and ‘hockets’ (literally hiccups!) was as jazzy as anything written 500 years later.

We all had a fantastic day singing works that, in a large choir like St George's, we would normally not get the chance to try. One slight drawback was the organisation. The church was freezing (though we had been told it would be heated), the tea and coffee severely rationed, and St George's trademark soup, sandwiches and cakes sorely missed! A chance to hire out our organizational services perhaps



Leominster Priory Church - founded in 660AD by the Northumbrian saint, Edfrith. The majestic Norman nave survives from the former Benedictine Priory established by Henry I. The church houses the town Ducking Stool (pictured), last used in 1809 on the unfortunate Jenny Pipes—the last ducking to take place in England

St George's Singers

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Find us on the web at:

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



To receive a regular copy of *Hemiola*, complete the Mailing List registration on the website, or contact the Publicity Officer.

St George's Singers was formed in 1956 by Rev Eric Chapman and Geoffrey Verney, organist and choirmaster of St George's Church, Poynton in Cheshire, where the Choir still rehearses every Tuesday night. Geoffrey's dream was to build a 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 and 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 100 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, Gorton Monastery, Manchester Cathedral and Royal Northern College of Music, hold annual Singing Days, and tour regularly in the UK and abroad. St George's Singers continues to explore and expand the boundaries of choral music. Entry to the Choir is via audition, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

ST GEORGE'S 2011-2012 SEASON

26 November 2011, 7.00pm

**Gorton Monastery
Handel *Messiah***

3 December 2011, 7.30pm

**St George's Church, Stockport
Carols and Brass by Candlelight**

21 January 2012, 9.30 am

**Cheadle Hulme Methodist Church
Singing Day—Mozart *Requiem***

24 March 2012, 7.30pm

**St George's Church, Stockport
*Spanish Gold***

17 June 2012, 7.30 pm

**Gorton Monastery
VIVATI!**

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

MANCHESTER SINGS!

Yoga-Sing Workshop

St George's Singers will be holding its first Yoga-Sing Workshop on Saturday 3rd September. Tutors are Richard Strivens, singer, workshop leader and vocal coach, and Carolyn Ferguson, qualified Iyengar yoga teacher. The workshop combines alternating sessions of vocal work and yoga practice, the yoga sessions designed to help singers improve their singing technique through practical demonstration. £20 for the day, including refreshments. Brookside School, High Lane, Disley, 9.30am to 4.30 pm. The workshop is now full, but if you wish to register interest in case vacancies arise, contact Susan Hodgson 0161 338 3013, email susan.hodgson28@btinternet.com

Buxton Festival

Lots of interest for St George's Singers' people at this year's Buxton Festival. As well as Eric Northey's play (see p13):

22 July, 1.00 to 1.45pm

Songs of Romance—Tim Kennedy presents a delightfully serene programme of sumptuous romantic songs, including Schumann's song cycle *Liederkreis*, and some English song. Accompanied by Catherine Hall-Smith on piano. Buxton Methodist Church. £5.

9 July, 7.30 pm, Summer Serenade

—SGS soprano Eileen Halsall is appearing with Ladybrook Singers in an evening of delightful music. Joined by talented local musicians, violinist Ailsa Hoyle and cellist Miriam Brown, they will perform

music to suit all tastes from *Panis Angelicus* to *Fields of Gold*. Buxton Methodist Church, £7 (Child Free, Conc £6). Bookings via 01663 766410

21 July, 3.00 pm

Marcus Farnsworth—recital
Marcus sings a programme of songs by Brahms, Barber, and Britten. Accompanied by Elizabeth Burgess. Pavilion Arts Centre, £12. Marcus is also appearing in Mark Antony Turnage's new opera, *Greek*, on 14 and 25 July, Buxton Opera House. £10-£47.

Main events:

www.buxtonfestival.co.uk.

Fringe:

www.buxtonfringe.org.uk