



Hemiola

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

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

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www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

'THE CHRISTMAS LIFE'—ON SALE SOON

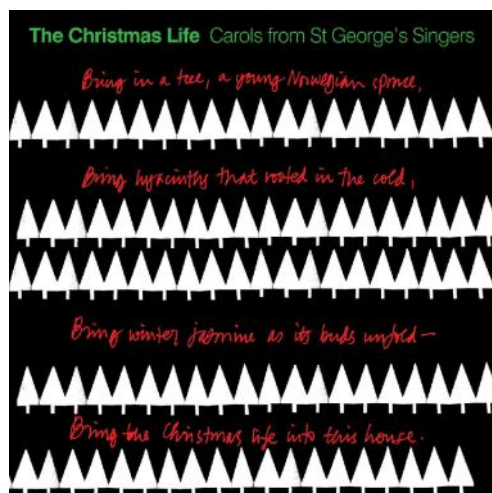
Thinking of Christmas presents? Then we have just the thing to fill up those stockings—St George's Singers' new CD of Christmas carols.

Entitled '*The Christmas Life—Carols from St George's Singers*' the CD will be available at our carol concert on 3rd December.

A wonderful selection of old favourites and lovely new works, some of which have been specially written for St George's, there is something here for everyone.

The title of the CD comes from a fabulous new carol that was written for us by Sasha Johnson Manning, to words by poet Wendy Cope to celebrate our Golden Jubilee in 2005. (Some of you may have heard it at our annual carol concerts.) With

tom-tom, triangle and recorder providing the accompaniment, this is a truly joyous work to set the tone for your Christmas festivities. Other new works include the gentle *O My Dear Heart* by David Jepson (also written for St George's), plus a new arrangement of *I Saw Three Ships* by Darius Battiwalla. Traditional favourites are not neglected though—and you'll find plenty of these to sing along with; *Ding Dong, Sussex Carol, Star Carol, In the Bleak Midwinter* amongst others. CDs are available at our con-



certs, from members of the Choir, or through our website: www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

We'll be singing some of the carols from our new CD at our 3rd December concert! Come and listen!

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

After the blizzards and freezing temperatures of 2010, we've got our fingers crossed that the weather for our 2011 carol concert will be a little



milder! This year our annual *Carols and Brass by Candlelight* concert is on Saturday 3 December, at 7.30 pm in St George's Church, Stockport. We join with our friends from VBS Poynton Brass Band to bring

you rousing choruses and gentle melodies, along with seasonal readings. Tickets are £12, £10 concessions, and £2 students and children—and the price includes mulled wine and mince pies.

Tel: 01663 764012, email tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk, or online at www.st-georges-singers.org.uk.

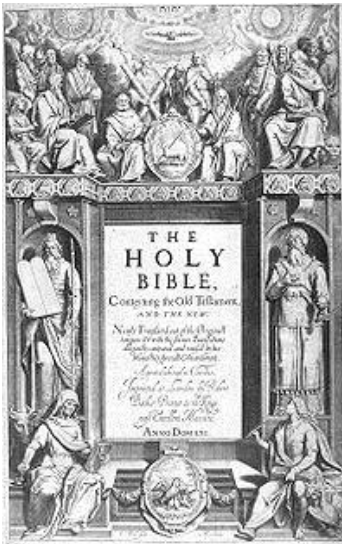
26 November 2011, 7.00 pm
Gorton Monastery, Manchester

Tickets: £16, £13 concessions,
£5 students

Tel: 01663 764012

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

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



The title page to the 1611 first edition of the Authorized Version Bible by Cornelius Boel shows the Apostles Peter and Paul seated centrally above the central text, which is flanked by Moses and Aaron. In the four corners sit Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, authors of the four gospels, with their symbolic animals. The rest of the Apostles (with Judas facing away) stand around Peter and Paul.

To find out more about the anniversary of the King James Version, visit www.kingjamesbibletrust.org

MESSIAH AT THE MONASTERY— MORE TEXT PLEASE, WE’RE ENGLISH

Choirs can usually find a good reason to do Handel’s *Messiah*. This time St George’s has come up with three.

The first is the anniversary of the King James Bible, on which Handel based the text for his oratorio. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church had a rigid control over the Bible and would not allow it to be translated from Latin into the vernacular. But in 1376 the Oxford theologian John Wyclif argued that the Church should not have wealth or possessions and that the Pope had no right to claim sovereignty over kings. Maintaining that all authority derived from the scriptures, he worked on an English translation of the Bible, so that everyone could have direct access to the word of God.

Wyclif completed his translation of the New Testament in c1380, and the Old Testament in c1384. The Church condemned the translation as inaccurate and opinionated, but as the first full version in English, it proved very popular.

In 1401 Henry IV outlawed the translation as heresy, and made heresy a capital crime, punishable by burning at the stake. Although Wyclif had died in 1384, in 1415 he was declared a heretic, his bones were exhumed and burned along with his books.

Fast forward over 100 years to Luther. In 1521, the Pope condemned Luther’s writings, and there were public burnings of his books in London, under Henry VIII. The ban on translations still stood, however, a ban flouted by William Tyndale when he published his English version of the New Testament in Germany in 1526. Some

copies were smuggled to Britain—but many were burned, as was Tyndale in 1538, his last words being “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes”.

And indeed, the King’s eyes were opened. Furious that the Pope refused to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon, Henry established the Church of England, claiming he was no longer answerable to the Pope.

Henry had a Church of England, but no English bible. So in 1539 he gave approval for a translation by Myles Coverdale, who had worked with Tyndale. Completed in 1540, it became known as the ‘Great Bible’, and Henry decreed that it should be available to everyone in every church in England.



Other versions of the bible followed: the Geneva (Calvinist) bible in 1560, the Bishops Bible in 1568. Then in 1604, King James I decided that a new bible was needed. He abolished the death penalty attached to English bible translation, and commissioned a new version that would use the best available translations and sources, and be free of biased commentaries. A translation committee of 47 scholars drew on many sources, especially Tyndale (as much as 80% of Tyndale’s translation was reused in this

new version), and the result, the King James Bible, also known as the King James Version (KJV) or Authorised Version, was published in 1611.

The KJV remains the most widely published text in the English language. British sailors took the Bible on voyages around the globe; through the work of the East India Company it was taken to India and to the colonies in Africa, Australia and New Zealand: one reason why English is the world language that it is today.

The second anniversary is that of Watkins Shaw (see page 3). And the third (albeit a little premature) is the 50th anniversary of Coventry Cathedral. In 2012 Coventry Cathedral will

be celebrating its Golden Jubilee - a landmark occasion recognising the rebuilding of the Cathedral after its destruction in the Second World War,

50 years of service to Coventry’s community and the world, both through its unique international mission of peace and reconciliation, and as a cultural centre for the performing arts. In recognition, Graham Sutherland’s magnificent tapestry of ‘Christ the King’ features on our concert posters for *Messiah*.

Of course, there is one other obvious reason for doing *Messiah*—it’s just a wonderful piece of music, and one which St George’s Singers has not performed in its entirety for some years. That’s sufficient reason for anyone.

WATKINS SHAW—THE CRITICAL EDITION

The King James Bible is not the only anniversary this year. Harold Watkins Shaw was born in Bradford in 1911, and died in Worcester in 1996. Best known for his extensive writings on and editing of church music, and closely associated with the Three Choirs Festival, Shaw is remembered by choirs mainly for his editing of *Messiah*. *The Times* obituarist described Shaw's edition as being in "universal use" - though we're not sure if the angelic hosts actually need a music score.

Shaw was the only child of non-conformist schoolteachers in Bradford, and discovered his love of music from singing in chapel choirs. He studied at the Royal College of Music, where he was encouraged to combine his loves of history and music. He held a teaching post in London, was music organizer to Hertfordshire County Council, and a lecturer at Worcester College of Education from 1949 until his retirement in 1970.

In 1948 Shaw became honorary librarian of the Ouseley Choral

Foundation at St Michael's College in Tenbury. When the college closed in 1958, Shaw ensured that all the manuscripts in this important collection reached the Bodleian Library—including Handel's conducting score of *Messiah*, used by the composer for the first performance in Dublin in 1742. In 1959 Shaw published his edition of the vocal score, followed in 1965 by the full score. Fondly known simply as 'the Watkins Shaw', his edition remains by far the most popular with choirs around the world.



Harold Watkins Shaw

MARCUS FARNSWORTH—ANGRY YOUNG MAN

We're thrilled that four outstanding young soloists are joining us for *Messiah*. Two of them are new to singing with St George's: soprano Ruth Jenkins and alto Laura Kelly will be singing with us for the first time. The gentlemen are well known to us though: tenor Richard Dowling has joined us in many fantastic performances, particularly at the Monastery; and baritone Marcus Farnsworth has sung with us many times, and of course was our Assistant MD before heading for London.

Since he left us, Marcus has started to make a big noise (though with great musicality of course!) in the concert and opera worlds. In 2009 he won the Wigmore Hall International Song Competition and the Patricia Routledge Competition, followed in 2011 by the Song Prize in the Kathleen Ferrier Competition.

His biggest 'hit' to date though has probably been on the opera stage, where he's recently been performing the role of 'Eddy' in Mark Anthony Turnage's opera *Greek*, for Music Theatre Wales and on UK tour.

Those of us used to seeing Marcus as totally charming, lovable and entirely well-balanced will be in for a shock. His performance as Eddy has won rave reviews:

"...the most convincing Eddy I've ever seen: he embodies the anguished, violently truth-seeking youth in a riveting performance." - *Hilary Finch, The Times*

"As dangerous Eddy, the award-winning young baritone Marcus Farnsworth is electrifying. He ... conveys the character's anger, panic and perky charm with intensity and empathy. He has instinctive musicality that never makes the vocal line

sound over-studied or phony. He must have a great career ahead of him." - *Rupert Christensen, The Telegraph*

"Eddy is dark, dangerous yet strangely likeable..." - *George Hall, The Stage*

"As the angry East Ender, Marcus Farnsworth is fiercely compelling, virile yet tormented ... his downfall conveyed with a memorable howl of horror." - *Jay Richardson, The Scotsman*

"From the moment he burst into the auditorium, abusing staff on the door, Marcus Farnsworth's angry young Eddy commanded attention." - *Rian Evans, Opera*

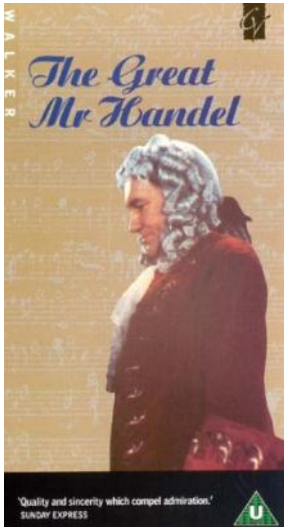
Not surprising, really. Eddy has just murdered his father and married his mother, after all. Still—we would ask Marcus to bring a little more subtlety and decorum to *Messiah*. They didn't know about the Oedipus complex in 1742.



Marcus—before he left St George's ...

...and after





HANDEL—YOU'RE A STAR!

We all know composers are usually mad, sometimes bad, and frequently dangerous to know. We've also probably seen some of the films that have sought inspiration from this Byronic triple whammy. Ken Russell made a career out of Tchaikovsky, Mahler and Liszt; Tony Palmer saw off Berlioz, Brahms, Dvorak and Wagner; others mangled the lives of Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt (again!), Mozart, Schumann, Strauss, Verdi, Wagner and poor old Tchaikovsky (again!).

You probably thought George Frideric was far too sane to be fed to the hacks of Hollywood. Well, you'd be wrong. Handel's 'filmography' contains no fewer than seven film and TV 'masterpieces'. He first appeared on the silver screen in 1942, in *The Great Mr Handel*, played by Wilfrid Lawson. Beset by creditors and ill-health, has-been composer GFH goes to work on his greatest work: *Messiah*. Conceived as a war-time morale booster, and as a

tie-in to the 200th anniversary of the first *Messiah* performance, the film was deemed so important that J Arthur Rank gave the production his favourite director and actor, and splashed out on Technicolor. Sadly he forgot to provide a decent script, and audiences hated it. Even J Arthur thought it 'needed more Rita Hayworth' (in the trouser role perhaps?) It probably didn't help that in the midst of a war against Germany, the hero of the film was a grumpy guy with a thick German accent.

A few undistinguished TV appearances followed for our hero, then in 1985 Trevor Howard starred in Tony Palmer's *God Rot Tunbridge Wells*, portraying the composer shortly before his death, reflecting on his life, against the background of his own music. As a youth he is a prodigy, attractive to women and to patrons. He travels from Halle to Italy then on to London, where he feels at home. He composes constantly. He pleases princes and dukes; he displeases prel-

ates and critics. He defends his copyright, makes and loses money and starts a cat fight between two divas. At the end of his life, he observes that he helped the English with their religion. With James Bowman, Emma Kirkby, Simon Preston and Anthony Rolfe-Johnson amongst the musicians, this at least had the merit of being musically worth listening to.

Next up was *Honour, Profit and Pleasure*, a made-for-TV film with Simon Callow as GFH, Hugh Grant as Lord Burlington (to whom Handel dedicated two of his operas), and (once again) James Bowman as Rinaldo. A brief appearance was accorded to Handel in *Farinelli*, a film about a famous castrato. And most recent of all is a Canadian/Slovakian entry entitled *Handel's Last Chance*, of which nothing whatsoever is known (and probably just as well).

So, what does this tell us about the state of musical screen biography? Only that if you want to learn more about a composer, listen to the music, and forget the video.



Well, Keith Richards never passed his Grade 5 either, and he did OK

Another fact about Handel: his birth name was Georg Friedrich Händel, which he changed to George Frideric Handel when he became a naturalized Briton

HANDEL: A LITTLE-KNOWN FACT BY MARY HOULT

Not many people know this but it's absolutely true (and I am not making this up). There's something you need to know about George Frederick Handel: *he never passed his Grade 5 Theory*. Shock, horror!

There is proof of this in writing, and from the ABRSM, no less:

"We are sorry to inform you that we have no record of George Frederick Handel having passed his Grade 5 Theory examination. He is therefore not eligible to be entered for Grade 6 Piano."

Poor Handel. How could this be? Was it the ornaments that unhinged him? Did he have a breakdown over a diminished

4th above an F double-sharp in the tenor clef?

Was it then simply revenge that caused him to lace those lengthy semiquaver sequences with such tricky vocal manoeuvres?

Well, the answer is this. A few years ago, when my son George Frederick was entered for his Grade 6 piano exam, the ABRSM had some trouble

verifying his eligibility, claiming that he had never passed his Grade 5 Theory.

It seems that his piano teacher had a senior moment when filling in the application form

...

Theory GRADE 5

As in preceding grades, with the addition of:

- Irregular time signatures of $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{7}{8}$ and the grouping of notes and rests within these times. Irregular divisions of simple time values.
- Tenor clef (C-clef centred on 4th line). The identification of notes in the four clefs in any of the keys set for this grade (see below), and the transposition at the octave of a simple melody from any clef to another. The writing at concert pitch of a melody notated for an instrument in Bb, A or F, and vice versa (the interval of transposition up or down will be given). The writing in open score, using treble and bass clefs, of a passage for SATB written on two staves, and vice versa.
- Scales and key signatures of all major and minor keys up to and including six sharps and flats. All simple and compound intervals from any note.
- The identification of the $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{4}$ forms of the tonic, supertonic, subdominant and dominant chords in any of the keys set for this grade. The identification of the progression $\frac{6}{4}$ $\frac{5}{4}$ (Ic-V) on the dominant note in any of the keys set for this grade. The choice of suitable chords, using any recognized method of notation, at cadential points of a simple melody in the major key of C, G, D or F.
- The composition of a simple melody of not more than eight bars, using a given opening and writing for a specific instrument (some choice will be given) or, at the candidate's choice, the composition of a melody to given words. Appropriate performing directions relating to tempo, dynamics and articulation will be required.
- More terms and signs. The recognition of ornaments, including the replacement of written-out ornamentation with the appropriate signs, but not vice versa. Questions about a passage of music written for voices or instruments appropriate to the grade will include questions on the types of voice and names of instruments, the clefs they use, instrument family groups and the basic way by which they produce sound, as well as points of general musical observation designed to test the candidate's ability to apply theoretical knowledge to actual music.

ABOVE: THE SAD AND LOWLY PLANES— OUR CD RECORDING WEEKEND



For an entire weekend at the end of October, Christmas came early to Stockport, when St George's Singers recorded their latest CD, *The Christmas Life*.

The venue was St Thomas's Church in Stockport, a lovely 19th century building with wonderful acoustics, but which through no fault of the original architects and builders now sits under the flight path of Manchester Airport. A grade 1 listed building, St Thomas's was opened in 1825, one of a hundred churches funded by government grants as a thanksgiving for victory



over Napoleon—and hence the name "Waterloo" Churches.

Rehearsal started at 7.30 on Friday evening with some of the less demanding tracks (*Ding, Dong!* is always a good warm-up), and by 9.30 three tracks had been recorded. The really tough work started on Saturday morning: first, the finishing touches to *Past Three a Clock*, then into Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium*, followed by *A Babe is Born*.

With Neil on the podium direction vocal operations, producer Calum was in the booth with recording engineer Daniel Locke listening intently and giving immediate feedback on our efforts via the loudspeaker.

His disembodied pronouncements were awaited with some trepidation: "It sounds quite primitive" (take 2); "It's very fuzzy in the middle

parts" (take 25); "I can hear one of the tenors very distinctly" (takes 34, 56, 97....); "have we got Pavarotti there somewhere?" (take 101); until we got the final accolade (take 112), "That's so Christmassy, I feel like I'm wrapped up in tinsel!" Meanwhile Jeff, ably assisted by Lorraine Lighton's daughter Ellie as page-turner (giving up her entire weekend for St George's!) was doing battle with the organ, which refused to cooperate with his attempts to play an E natural.

In total, we did 151 takes of 20 items, including re-takes for overhead planes, noises from the central heating system, and (inevitably) the tenors getting ahead of Neil, the rest of the Choir, and occasionally, even themselves. But everyone agreed that the weekend was a most enjoyable and stress-free experience. We hope you like the finished product!



Was that the basses, or the 12.25 Emirates flight from Abu Dhabi?



Jeff searched in vain for a carol that didn't need an E natural

WE ALMOST CALLED IT ...



I can't believe it's not Rutter!



**Wrapped in Tinsel -
*It's SO Christmassy!***

*Now bring in the
Chocolate Moo...oose ...*



ONE HUNDRED YEARS—AND STILL CAN'T GET THAT TOP G

Woman's Weekly, the venerable and still very popular publication, was 100 years old on 4 November, and celebrated with a reproduction of the very first issue back in 1911. Amongst the adverts for 'Horrockses' Flannelettes', Dr Starbucks' remedy for removing superfluous hair, sewing patterns for combinations, advice on bust enlargement, and how to earn 'pin money', was the following rather more cultured article.

"HOW TO SING AND PLAY— BY A LONDON ORGANIST.

"Women sing more than men, and there are undoubtedly more competent lady pianists than men. This column is intended

to be of practical interest to all my music-loving readers. Its main idea will be to help you to sing and play better.

"In my first paragraph I want to give you a few useful hints as to learning a new song. First of all, sit down at the piano yourself and just play over your voice part, and hum it over several times. Be careful to correct any mistakes you make *at once*, for if you allow yourself to sing a passage incorrectly and unchecked, you will find that it is very difficult to break yourself of the habit later on. When you know your part, get someone to play the accompaniment and persevere until you feel yourself note perfect.

but always without effort.

Then strike D flat on the piano, and sing the notes D flat, E flat, F, G flat (just half a tone higher than before). When you can do this comfortably, strike the note D, and sing D, E, F sharp, G. Perhaps you will not be able to do all this at first, but persevere, and you will succeed.

"Do you get very nervous when about to sing a song? If you do, try this simple plan. Whilst the accompanist is playing over the introduction to your song, take four or five deep breaths slowly. The very fact of this action seems to steady the nerves.

"Most of the homes to which this paper will go possess a piano. Oh, that poor piano! In many homes it seems to have but one tuning in a year, or less. Then when the poor thing is tuned, it rapidly loses its pitch again, and becomes as bad as ever. This is because the instrument has become accustomed to be out of tune. That is, the wires have grown used to being slack and will not remain at the tighter tension when pulled up by the tuner. My own piano is tuned once in three months. Keep your piano tuned."

Plenty for debate there!

Don't take it to heart Sybil—what do organists know?



"Just a word about that 'high top note' in the song. If you strain to reach it you may do your voice real harm, so if you can't sing it easily, just practice this simple exercise.

"Suppose the note you want is top G. Sing several times the notes C, D, E, F softly at first, then with more power,



Susan Hodgson won one of Sylvia's pots in the choir raffle—it not only looks good, it's lovely to handle for that late-night hot chocolate

TALENT ON DISPLAY

There are so many talented people in St George's, it's hard to keep track of what they're all up to. Just to pick two:

Sylvia Glover has an exhibition of her pottery from 25–27 November in the Garry Olson Gallery in Wilmslow. The exhibition, called 'Gifted' is now in its third year, and fea-

tures work by six local artists, utilising wood, metal, ceramics, textiles and collage. Just the place to browse for your Christmas gifts. Information from: www.sylviaglover.co.uk, or www.garryolson.co.uk.

Jacqui Smith's husband, Paul, is actually an accountant, but his real passion is photography,

particularly of local landscapes in the Peak District. Paul likes to get up before dawn to capture the early morning misty light, and as a result has some stunning images of well-known local views. Paul currently has an exhibition of his work at the Bollington Arts Centre entitled *Visions of the Peaks and Beyond*, finishing on 13 November.

I USED TO BE A CHOIR BOY, THEN I DISCOVERED ...

COOKING

Simon Hopkinson started out as a chorister at the age of 8 when he joined the choir of St John's College, Cambridge. He ultimately became a famous chef, and is now a best selling cookery writer. His book *Roast Chicken and Other Stories*, the book of recipes he wrote 11 years ago, was recently voted the most useful cookery book of all time.

CRICKET

For five years Alastair Cook was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, sang for the Queen and provided backing vocals for Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. He hung up his ruff when his voice broke at 13, by which time he'd scored a century in the big choir school derby against Westminster Abbey and decided he'd rather hit a six than a top A. He went on to become the youngest Englishman to reach

1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 and 5,000 Test runs, and is also the only Englishman to score seven Test centuries before his 23rd birthday. His nickname in the dressing room is The Chef (not to be confused with other culinary choir boys).

JOURNALISM

Jon Snow, the Channel 4 newscaster (and son of the Bishop of Whitby), was a boy chorister at Winchester Cathedral, where the bones of King Canute lay in a box on a screen above his head. He made a career in journalism, winning many awards, and currently presents Channel 4 News.

ACTING

Actor David Hemmings was a boy soprano who sang frequently for Benjamin Britten, and took the part of the very first 'Miles' in *Turn of the Screw*.

SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK'N'ROLL

Keith Richards attended Dartford Technical School, where he was recruited by the choir-master into a touring trio of boy sopranos who, among other events, sang at Westminster Abbey for Queen Elizabeth II. In 1959 Richards was expelled for truancy, and transferred to Sidcup Art College, where he devoted more time to playing guitar than his studies. Then he met Mick Jagger on a train as Jagger was headed to classes at the London School of Economics. The rest is ancient history.

TELEVISION STARDOM

Gareth Gates, winner of *Pop Idol*, was head chorister at Bradford Cathedral. He sang solo for the Queen in 1997 on her visit to the city. He was awarded a place at the Royal Northern College of Music, but decided to go onto *Pop Idol* instead.



Photo: kelseytracey



At the annual meeting of the Association of Former Musical Directors of St George's Singers, one member breaks with tradition and refuses to wear disguise.

FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

BY DAVE FRANCIS



The gardens and the Grand Cascade at Alnwick Castle have been re-opened after a major restoration project



Did you know that Alnwick, in Northumberland, has an annual International Music Festival? Neither did we until we discovered in July, almost by chance, that our old friends, the Flora Chamber Choir from Tallinn, were performing at the festival. So, on the spur of the moment, we decided to go up and visit them. Everywhere in Alnwick itself being full (the festival really is a big event in the town), we booked a B&B in nearby Amble -by-the-Sea and set off. We had only a

vague idea about when Flora were performing – the festival website being somewhat unhelpful on the specifics of the programme. Consequently, we arrived to find that we had just missed Flora’s first performance in the Market Hall. They had



sung at 11.00am. and had now gone. But no matter, they were performing again in the afternoon at St. Michael’s Church in the town centre. There was much surprise and joy when they arrived and found us waiting for them. It was lovely to see our good friends, Hele, Maire, Anne and Karin, plus conductor Erki Meister and the others. Dressed in national costume,

they sang for about 30 minutes, mainly Estonian folksongs. The next morning they were performing in the grounds of Alnwick Castle (‘Hogwarts’ castle). We spent a super time with them reminiscing about our trip to the Estonian National Singing Festival in 2009. Of course, we wangled an invitation to the next festival in 2014. So with any luck we will see them all again before too long.



TELLING LIVES A HIT AT BUXTON

ALSO AT BUXTON:
The Ladybrook Singers, with whom Eileen Halsall and Jean Egerton both sing, won a Recognition of Excellence award at the Buxton Fringe. Well done ladies!

In the last issue of *Hemiola*, Eric Northey described his new play, *Telling Lives*, a drama based on historical records discovered in the archives of Prestwich Asylum. The play was performed as part of the Buxton Festival Fringe event in summer, before going on to Manchester city centre.

The play received great reviews:

- ◆ “5 out of 5”
- ◆ “A chilling insight into the nature of madness”
- ◆ “I recommend you see what is a challenging and often disturbing piece of theatre”
- ◆ “The lyrical beauty of one of the later songs was particularly effective”

◆ “Well directed and choreographed and the acting brilliantly done. See it if you can.”

Those of us lucky enough to see the play can confirm this was a powerful, thought-provoking and beautifully written work whose human tragedies stayed long after in the memory.

DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Desert Island Discs has just published the top tracks chosen by its castaways over the years. We thought we'd find out what *St George's Singers'* selection would be, starting with our MD, Neil Taylor.

Bach *Mass in B minor*—all time favourite choral piece

Frank Sinatra *Ebb Tide*—a superb song, great arrangement, special to Mary and me

Mahler *Adagietto (Symphony No 5)* - the association with 'Death in Venice' always makes me weep

Richard Strauss *Morgen, op 27*—

just an exquisite song from this great composer

Britten *War Requiem*—the consummate bringing together of texts, and such great music, plus the association with Coventry Cathedral

Judy Garland *Live at Carnegie Hall*—what a performance!

Brahms *Requiem*—the Requiem to leave all others standing

Elgar *Dream of Gerontius*—a close second to the B minor

Luxury item: unlimited download capabilities (but absolutely no email!), or (if that isn't al-

lowed) endless supplies of Molton Brown

Book: Henning Mankel's *Walden* novels.

And if only one piece survived? Bach.



Honestly Mary, I never mentioned Bali. I said Belgium.

Want to share your own Desert Island Discs? Send them in, and we'll publish the most interesting, erudite, or weird choices!

JAMES MACMILLAN WORKSHOP

BY DAVE ROBSON

On 13 August a number of us who perhaps knew a little about James MacMillan's music, but were interested to find out more, travelled to Shrewsbury for the day for a singing day to be held at Shrewsbury School.

It was obviously madness to be leaving Sale at 7.30am on a Saturday morning and some of us could have done with an extra hour's sleep. But the sun shone and the Singing Day was led by the composer himself - a definite plus!

What a great setting for a workshop - extensive and leafy school grounds, old Victorian buildings as well as more contemporary architectural styles. Really excellent facilities which I suppose you would expect of such an expensive fee paying school.

We sang primarily liturgical pieces of the composer, many of which had been composed for his local church choir in

Glasgow specifically to match their ability and capacity to learn quickly. But we also sang one of his settings of a love poem.

James MacMillan guided us through his pieces patiently and with some humour, if a little quietly at times for everything to be heard. It was above all interesting to be introduced to a style of composition which is accessible and in many ways quite straightforward to learn.

The day ended with a short performance of a number of the pieces to a select audience, many of whom were there for a week's musical summer school.

It was a good day musically. However - and this was a real surprise - the organisation left something to be desired - not enough music to go around, seats which tipped backwards and a rather perfunctory warm-up. But there you are! *St George's* does this a lot better.

My view is that it would be great for the choir to perform a concert of music from around the United Kingdom - this to include some of James MacMillan's work. A full concert would be for me too heavy and serious minded to attract a good audience. But something for the Choir and its committee to mull over.

PS: Alison McLay was (almost) speechless when James MacMillan agreed to sign her own personal score of his work. She quickly recovered though, and the two of them embarked on a lengthy chat about things Scottish—at which point we left them to it!

"We have to bring music back, to make it one of the basics of our culture again. We cannot afford to allow music to move to the periphery. It will devalue and diminish our civilisation if it becomes simply a concern for the specialist."

James Macmillan



James MacMillan

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

NEW ARRIVAL!

Many congratulations to Jacqui and Paul Smith on the arrival of Thomas Peter at 6.10 am on 24 June, weighing in at 8lb 7oz. Thomas has already unofficially joined St George's Singers, coming along to a committee meeting over the summer. He made some valuable contributions during the meeting (though did fall asleep during the Treasurer's report), meaning that Jacqui had to hand over minute-taking to Peter Marcus.



MEMORIAL FOR RAY

On Sunday 4 March 2012 at RNCM, St George's Singers will be joining with Amici and Stephen Threlfall to put on a special memorial concert for Ray Lomax. Ray, who was Musical Director of St George's Singers from 1987 to 1996, died aged 47 in 2002. The concert is being organized by his widow, Judith Lomax, and the performance will be conducted by our Vice-President, Stephen Threlfall. More information will be available nearer the time on St George's website.

NEW MEMEBRS

A big welcome to St George's Singers for the following: Rowan Cancino Bailey, Becky Lambert, Rebecca White, Hannah Bloor and Sarah Lionheart (sopranos); Alice Fox and Katherine Dibbs (alto), and Tim Lambert (bass).

FAREWELL TO KATH

Kath Wood retires from the Choir this Christmas, after many years singing with St George's. We'll miss you and your delicious marmalade Kath, and hope to see you at future concerts.

LAWYER GOES VIRAL!

Our very own singing barrister, Peter Marcus, hit the big time recently with the publication of his letter to *The Times* about the closure of St Paul's Cathedral and the camping protesters. Within minutes the letter went viral on Facebook, and was spotted by Tim Lambert, Mel Rimmer and Andrea Millington amongst others.

Peter himself was taken aback at the reaction.

"I just threw it out on e-mail last Sunday and then forgot about it. Since then it has apparently attracted a huge amount of support amongst the protestors and been circulated round Facebook at an alarming rate. People I haven't heard from in decades have been in touch to ask me about it. A bit of an over-reaction if you ask me, but fun nonetheless. There goes the judicial career."

The story incidentally is abso-

lutely true (well, lawyers don't make things up do they!) "There were a couple of mums and several children, so they couldn't

benefit from the fairly prescriptively-defined family rates. They absolutely couldn't afford to go in. I understand that St Paul's has to get the money from somewhere, but it was well beyond these people's means, and consequently they couldn't experience one of London's most beautiful buildings."

Sir, The last time I was at the entrance of St Paul's Cathedral, I met a rather disappointed family with young children on a day trip to London, who were upset that they couldn't get in. Not because of any protesters, but rather because of the admission prices (currently £14.50 per adult, and £34.50 for a 2+2 family).

It wasn't the forces of anti-capitalism which had closed the cathedral to those visitors. Quite the opposite.

PETER MARCUS
Leeds

Peter's letter beautifully encapsulates the situation. Well said—we're all proud of you.

(Incidentally, this viral business is nothing to do with Gwyneth Paltrow's performance in *Contagion*. That's just a case of bad acting.)



No Peter—going viral doesn't mean you have to sneeze over the soloists

WEDDING BELLES

Lots of ringing the changes this summer for three Choir members. Jennie Smallwood and John Nicol got married on August Bank Holiday weekend in



Much Marcle, Herefordshire. "It was a very small wedding of close friends and family only - no formal hire permitted! I walked in to *Lark in the Clear Air*, which I had recorded a cappella as a surprise for John. Instead of a reading we played a recording of Christopher le Fleming's *Strings in the Earth and Air* (words by James Joyce) - a beautiful duet that I have been singing with my mum since I was very small. Mum re-set it for violin accompaniment so that my dad could record it with us - a real family effort! During the signing we played *This Marriage* by Eric Whitacre, and we walked out to the Bagpuss *Marvellous Me-*

chanical Mouse Organ - which the children loved!! It was a gorgeous sunny day that had a very relaxed and rustic feel to it - from the surprise horse and cart ride to the venue for the delighted bride, to the geese wandering about on the lawn. It couldn't have been more perfect."

A few weeks earlier, on 18 June, Phil Smith had married Andrew Newby in the wonderful surroundings of Bramall Hall's Tudor mansion. During the ceremony and signing of the register Phil chose to play recorded music, including *As torrents in summer* from St George's 'Our Spirits Sing' CD, and a beautiful recording of *My love is*

like a red, red rose. The "best woman" was Lynn Knowling, whom many will know as she was a member of St Georges for many years.

The third beautiful bride was Jenny Thomas who married Mark Hesketh on 15th October at St James' Church, Taxal. Members of SGS formed part of the choir for the ceremony, singing Finzi's *My Spirit Sang all Day* and it was a real joy for them to share in their happy day. Jenny and Mark used the classic car offered by Sue Mason and her husband to raise funds for St George's and it looked splendid.



Finally, a quick word of congratulations to Neil Taylor, who celebrated his third wedding anniversary in October by taking Mary to Brussels. Now, there's romantic!

Many congratulations to all our wedding belles, and all good wishes for your respective future lives together. And you all looked absolutely stunning!

MARY SHINES AT TATTON



Mary in front of the water feature in her garden

Mary Hoult achieved one of her ambitions at this year's Tatton Flower Show in July—winning a Silver Gilt medal for her SHINE show garden.

The garden supported Cancer Research UK by celebrating the charity's sponsored city walk, Shine Manchester. It portrayed a mini-walk through Manchester at night, with nocturnal contrasts of darkness and light represented by dark-leaved perennials and swathes of brilliant white bedding plants. The buildings of the city were suggested by angular shapes of black brickwork and glass block walling. Four clipped conifers

combined with the walls to create the skyline, and a tall cypress referred to the iconic Beetham Tower. Winding between the walls, a black pathway led to a shining water-feature set in a quiet pool, the triangular shapes inspired by Cancer Research UK's arrow logo.



they threw into the pool—changing the base of the pool during the show from dark to light.

Mary was thrilled with her Silver Gilt medal, though rather disappointed that she didn't get the coveted gold. "The judges came round the day after torrential rain, and I hadn't had time to get the planting finished just as I wanted it." Also, she was heavily reliant on voluntary donations from suppliers, many of which didn't arrive until very late—causing a few last minute panics. Still—there's always next year!

Visitors to the garden were invited to make a donation of £5, which was exchanged for shiny 'silver' tokens which



CHURCH HALL ANNIVERSARY BY DAVE ROBSON

On 4th September Cath Bryant and I attended the 'Give Thanks for 10 Years of the Church Hall' party on behalf of St George's Singers.

There was some singing (including *On Top of the World* and a little bit of John Denver, as well as a song inspired by one of the vicar's sermons), and there was quite a bit of praying, including standing hand in

hand around the outside of the church hall and shouting out the numerous activities that go on there. I should note that Cath had to shout out "Pancake and Light Parties" (which I read as Panties - oops!!). There was cake, sandwiches and much tea to fortify us, though at times we did feel we needed something a lot stronger.

The assistant curate and Susan

Warrington came over and had a word and made us feel really welcome as most people there were from St George's congregation. Above all, it was good to know that they recognise our contribution as a Choir to the local community and beyond and that they really value the full and varied use of the hall - including by us - in the life of the church.

CULTURAL VANDALISM THREATENS LIBRARY

Towards the end of October, St George's Librarian, Gwyneth Pailin, received a letter from Yorkshire Libraries and Information (YLI) informing her that a decision had been made to close Wakefield Music and Drama service. It is likely the decision had been triggered by the imminent move of the library from its existing premises and the likely corresponding costs of the move and new storage facilities.

A horrified Gwyneth immediately informed the Committee, and drafted out a letter of complaint.

Wakefield houses one of the most important music collections in the country, with over half a million items of music available to organisations throughout the UK. It is used by thousands by choirs, making it possible for hundreds of thousands of people around the country to enjoy music. Gwyneth reckons that St George's would have been unable to put on many of our recent concerts without the facilities at Wakefield—often the only place in the country with the scores we need.

Next, Gwyneth contacted Making Music (our 'trade association') and was encouraged and relieved to hear that they knew all about it, and that a campaign was being launched to reverse this cultural vandalism.

Choirs and orchestras around the country were asked to write to the YLI to protest at the decision, and to ask some crucial questions: What was going to happen to the music? Would it be broken up, or housed outside of the public domain? Why did the online survey supposedly carried out some time ago not include the International Association of Music Librarians (IAML), public libraries who use the Wakefield service? And why were users not informed until just two weeks before the Council was to meet to make the final decision—leaving little time for protests and consultation.

Many members of St George's rallied to the call, and sent emails of protest, as did other choirs around the country, and the *Guardian* newspaper added its voice to the campaign. The following email from Robin Osterley, Chief Executive of Making Music, sets out the

current situation:

"Thank you so much for your overwhelming response to this campaign. We have received copies of **over 1,250 emails and letters** sent to the YLI Council to protest its decision - a staggering number. That must surely be the tip of the iceberg, and it's fair to say that the YLI Council has been bombarded by people from all over the UK expressing the strength of feeling that this critical national resource must not be lost.

"Thanks to lobbying from Making Music and others, the meeting of the Council on 3 November to discuss the future of the service is now open to the public, and our Chief Executive Robin Osterley will be attending. We are hopeful that Making Music will be involved in helping to find a solution to this situation."

Let's hope we can change YLI's minds, or this great resource could be lost for ever.



STOP PRESS!
At the 3 November meeting, YLI acknowledged the strength of support expressed for the continuation of the collection, and are requesting expressions of interest by 30 November from groups with proposals to maintain the service.

Follow the campaign's progress on the Making Music website (www.makingmusic.org.uk/saveyorkshirerusiclibrary) and follow updates as they happen on Twitter, #saveyorkshirerusiclibrary.

GILL'S LOSS IS OUR GAIN

Alto Gill Holt has recruited the support of the entire Choir in her efforts to lose weight, by asking people to sponsor her. The funds will go to St George's Singers as part of our current fund-raising efforts (which this term are being led very efficiently by the altos.)

An injury to her leg meant that Gill has been unable to exercise as much as she would have liked, hence the need for her to

lose weight. She hopes that the incentive provided by the close scrutiny of her sponsors will make it a little easier to stick to the diet.

Gill wants to lose 20 lbs in 20 weeks, with a target date of 27th March 2012.

Coinciding with the diet is Gill's decision to change her name to Rhiannon. This came about after some research she

did into her family tree, one side of which is Welsh. She wanted to keep a much closer connection with her Welsh roots, particularly her grandfather Llewellyn Jones, and chose the name 'Rhiannon' as an ancient Welsh name.

So, let's support Rhiannon, and raise some money for future concerts at the same time.



Gill's official weigh-in at choir practice

The social evening at the end of last season was, as usual, full of elegance, urbane wit, sophisticated humour and cultured performances. Mm ...



One of our young members, Hannah Bloor, and her friend Francesca Slater gave a spirited performance of *For Good* from the musical *Wicked*



Eric Northey gave a sneak preview of his new play, *Telling Lives*, presenting a very realistic portrayal of a homicidal maniac



Another masterpiece from Dave Francis, offering a fresh perspective on Bach

LATE ARRIVALS AT THE SINGERS' BALL

Mr & Mrs Eggro and their son Al

Mr & Mrs Lees and their hirsute daughter Furry

Mr & Mrs Watches and their goody-goody son, Always

Mr & Mrs On and their daughter Eunice

Mr & Mrs Ntando and their son Raleigh

A drum-roll please for Mr & Mrs Pani and their son Tim

All the way from Australia, please say 'Kodaly' to Mr & Mrs Brevis and their unmarried daughter Miss Anne

Mr & Mrs Kyri and their daughter in need of a lift home, Val

All the way from Russia, Mr & Mrs Orksky and their shy daughter, the modest Miss Orksky

Mr & Mrs Canto and their daughter Bel

And here's Rachman in off the street

Mr & Mrs Dictus and their son Benny

Mr & Mrs Day and their daughter Agnus

Mr & Mrs Maisonette who have just moved to a double flat

Mr & Mrs Tuned and their naughty son Bad Lee

Mr & Mrs Tua and their daughter, Gloria

Mr & Mrs Bee and their two sons, Bee minor and Bee major

Mr & Mrs String and their unfortunately named daughter Gee

Dr & Mrs No and their very quiet daughter Pia

Dot & Ed Minim

Mr & Mrs Quaver and their triplets

Mr & Mrs Foney and their daughter Polly

Mr & Mrs Verdi and his aged father Monty

Mr & Mrs Weill, and their very bad-mannered son, Kurt

Mr & Mrs Din and their profligate son Borro

Mr & Mrs Retzki and their voluptuous daughter (gwhoar!)

Mr & Mrs Davis and their marathon-loving son, Miles

Mr & Mrs Zafone and their daughter Sue

Mr & Mrs Doe and their son Ron

A fanfare for Mr & Mrs Anglais and their gorgeous daughter Cor

Mr & Mrs ... *[Ed: No, I'm sorry—I can't stand this any longer.]*



REMEMBERING BACH

Help, help, help! I just cannot learn these words.

It's no good. I just cannot memorise them, there's no way.

I don't speak German, and even if I did—What, what, what? It's just too hard, I just cannot learn these words, to memorise these words is just too hard.

What's the solution?

When we sing it at the Bridgewater—no scores! No scores! We will have no scores!

Bach can be performed in many ways;

Bach has been jazzed up many times;

So why not do it like the Swingles would? Who needs the words when we could sing the whole thing SCAT!

Ba dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba,

dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, do.

Ba dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, dobadoba, do,

When Kraemer brings down his baton, he'll get a big surprise. He'll get a shock, no rolled 'r's 'cos no words at all.

His face will be a sight, and when he asks us why we'll tell him ... The choice was words or notes! (da capo)

THE COLOUR OF PICCADILLY

BY REYNOLD HIGGINBOTHAM

Oh, I love you! railway station,
 Type of modern, swinging nation,
 Glossy, jazzy Piccadilly,
 With the outfits of the filly
 Of our species; every hue,
 Purple, orange, yellow, blue
 Of hair, of dress, of face,
 Microcosm of human race.
 Football fans on the trams
 And beery bar fit for star
 While from afar (Exeter's far)
 Come sleek Cross-Country, Virgin
 Pendolino, purple Northern, almost pales
 (Alongside Arriva Trains Wales)
 Beside East Midland, smart and glossy
 Looking formal, almost bossy,
 And slinky, post-modern Trans-Pennine
 Sliding into Platform nine.
 And the guys
 Buying psychedelic ties

O, the mini-skirts! It flickers!
 The garish shops selling bras and knickers.
 Up an escalator for a coffee
 Or an ice-cream, cake or toffee.
 Birds fly inside to take a look.
 At W.H.Smith's I spot a book
 Among the mags baring gorgeous torso.
 I have a feeling of elation
 (Not quite calm) then all the more so.
 'Security personnel patrol this station
 Twenty-four hours a day.'
 Yes, it's an appropriate way
 To this great Victorian city
 Famous for its nitty-gritty
 Approach to life
 (Balanced on the edge-of-knife)
 "A secular society" says the pope.
 I hope. Some hope!

Reynold Higginbotham



YOGA WORKSHOP BY DAVE ROBSON

On 3 September about 33 people, half of whom were from St Georges Singers came together at Brookside Scheme in take part in a new initiative, a programme of yoga and singing. This initiative had been many months in conception and finally was brought to fruition by Susan Hodgson.

The day had been organised in the usual efficient and effective way by Susan and was held at Brookside School in High Lane. Richard Strivens and Carolyn Ferguson put us through our singing and yoga paces - although I have to say, the yoga was far more tricky especially when the tutor realised that for a second I could not tell my left arm from my right arm - this much to Dave Francis's amusement, We spent the time sometimes in full

groups and sometimes splitting into sections doing a mix of singing and yoga, interspersed with each other, though not I have to say combined! That would have been a step too far!

So, what did we learn? - for me the important points were the importance of good posture, how to sit properly and how to place your feet. There was also a little bit about using yoga to relax which greatly aids breathing in singing.

All in all, the day was most enjoyable. Inevitably some aspects of the days could be improved. Only to be expected as this was the first such workshop that has been put on. And the feedback from members of outside choirs was by and large positive. although it was felt that more context setting

should have been provided at the start of the event. Crucially, it is important to keep on linking yoga and singing - why the former can assist the latter and can lead to improved vocal technique.

So - given the above comments - we have decided to put on the same sort of day in the near future, this time with a difference. The day will involve choir members who own dogs. The day will be entitled "Doga" - and we fully expect the day to be a barking success.



Rover demonstrating the 'dog head down' pose



St George's Singers

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www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



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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*

4 March 2012, 7.30 pm

Royal Northern College of Music
Remembering Ray—
A memorial concert for Ray Lomax

24 March 2012, 7.30pm

St George's Church, Stockport
Spanish Gold

17 June 2012, 7.30 pm

Gorton Monastery—*VIVAT!*

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

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.

2012 SINGING DAY—MOZART *REQUIEM* GIVES FOOD FOR THOUGHT

St George's Singers' next Singing Day takes place on Saturday 21 January 2012, and this year we're thrilled to be singing one of the greatest of them all—Mozart's sublime *Requiem*.

This is the first time we have performed the *Requiem* at our Singing Day, and although most choral singers will have probably sung the work at least once, we know that our Musical Director, Neil Taylor, will find some new insights to engage us afresh in this remarkable work.

The format and timings of the day will remain exactly the same as in previous years, but this year we have had to move out of our usual venue in

Poynton as St George's Church is undergoing major interior refurbishment. Instead the day will be held at Cheadle Hulme Methodist Church.

But don't worry—the venue may have changed, but the home-made soup, sandwiches and cakes will still be available.

And talking of food—

So many participants in our Singing Day ask us for the recipes for the food we serve that we've decided to pull together some of the most popular in a special Singing Day recipe book. Debra Sallaway and Cath Bryant are masterminding the publication, so look out for copies during the day itself.

A leaflet and booking form for the Singing Day can be downloaded from our website (www.st-georges-singers.org.uk), or you can email Gillian Banks at Gillian.m.banks@gmail.com. The price for the day is £20, including music hire, morning coffee and afternoon tea. Lunch can be purchased on the day, price £3.

One of the great things about our Singing Day is that we close the event with a concert performance. This year we have four wonderful young soloists joining Neil and our accompanist Jeff Makinson. So do join us for one of the great choral experiences.