



# Hemiola

St George's Singers

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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

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

## MEMORIES OF ALDEBURGH

2013 is a special year for fans of Benjamin Britten, as the nation celebrates the 100th birthday of one of our greatest composers. For St George's Singers, our 'Britten at 100' concert on 23 February at RNCM also brings back happy memories of the Choir's tour to Suffolk in 2005, when we performed *St Nicolas* in Britten's own church in Aldeburgh. Geoff Taylor organised the tour, and wrote the following for *Hemiola*:

'On Saturday morning we travelled through the Suffolk byways to Snape Maltings where Esther Platten, who works for the Britten-Pears Foundation, gave us an informative tour of the fabulous concert hall, home of the Aldeburgh festival, created by Britten and Pears. We sang *Locus Iste* (of course), conducted by Jeff Makinson, to claim it for St George's.

'We had all too brief a time to explore the pretty town of Aldeburgh before a rehearsal in the church. Our Musical Director [Stephen Williams] stood up in front of orchestral players he had never met, not to mention the Pickled Boys. With the help of *St Nicolas* another miracle was wrought as singers and orchestra came together in a remarkable way. The special

atmosphere created by performing *St Nicolas* in the church where it was first performed and recorded, where Britten's funeral had included the two hymns from the work, and beside the Piper memorial window, intensified the emotion of the occasion. In the first half Marcus [Farnsworth] sang *Let the Dreadful Engines* and *Evening Hymn* by Purcell, and *The trees they grow so high*, arranged by Britten. Jeff played a Bach prelude and Britten's *Prelude and Fugue on a Theme of Vittoria* brilliantly. We sang *Zadok the Priest*, *O Quam Gloriosum*, *Beatus Vir* and, of course, *Locus Iste*.

'After the interval Stephen introduced *St Nicolas*, reminding the audience of all the happy associations between the church and the work, and encouraging them to sing the hymns lustily as a tribute to the composer. The orchestra (you would have thought they had been playing together for years), Jeff's magical accompaniment, Mike Bennett's bravura *Saint*, the brave young *St Nicolas*, the angelic semi-chorus sound floating down from the gallery ("where Ben always put them"), the



John Piper's memorial window to Benjamin Britten in the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Aldeburgh

fabulous pianists, the bold young percussionists, and us, all responding to Stephen's inspirational conducting, not to mention the Pickled Boys, produced an experience for which the word "memorable" is far too tame. The church was packed and the audience responded enthusiastically, applauding us all the way out.

'Rosamund Strode, Britten's music secretary and personal assistant for many years, told Stephen and Mike that it had been terrific and that, "Ben would surely have loved it".'

**Saturday 23 February, 7.30pm**  
**Royal Northern College of Music**

***Britten at 100***

**featuring**

***Hymn to St Cecilia,***

***Hymn to the Virgin,***

***Te Deum in C, Jubilate Deo,***

***Antiphon, Rejoice in the Lamb***

**and orchestral works**

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All photos courtesy of [www.britten100.org](http://www.britten100.org)

## BRITTEN—THE FOURTH ‘B’

Edward Benjamin Britten was born on 22 November 1913, the day dedicated to St Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians and church music. He was the youngest of four children born to Edith and Robert Britten, a successful dentist who really wanted to be a farmer. Ben's health was not robust; he nearly died of pneumonia at three months, and had a congenitally weak heart that ultimately led to his premature death aged 63.

Edith was the music lover in the family, and recognised and encouraged (some say ruthlessly) Ben's obvious talent, telling friends that her son would be 'the fourth B' after Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. He was composing by the age of 5, and by 11 he was producing enormous quantities of music. A school essay on animals, turned into an attack on hunting and all forms of aggression, was an early indicator of his

composers. As well as experimental pieces, however, he was also writing works more characteristic of his mature style, amongst them the *Hymn to the Virgin*, written at the age of 16 in a few hours while recovering from another bout of illness.

In 1930, aged 17, following a selection interview with Ralph Vaughan Williams and John Ireland, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. The RCM proved a disappointment, and in 1959 he reflected that that he had found, 'the attitude of most of the students

... amateurish and folksy.' He was already having success however: his work *A Boy is Born*, was broadcast on the BBC on 23 February 1934—the very day Elgar died—and the *Phantasy Quartet* was performed at the ISCM Festival in Florence.



Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)  
 At Crag House  
 Photo: Roland Houpt



Edith with her four children, young Benjamin in the centre

scientific objectors. One of the first works he composed on his return was *Hymn to St Cecilia*, to words by Auden. But most of his energy at this time was concentrated on *Peter Grimes*. The opera was immediately hailed as the first indisputably great English opera since Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and Britten's reputation was made. He went on to establish the Aldeburgh Festival, was heaped with honours and awards from around the world, and was made a life peer in 1976, just six months before his death.

In the 30 years after *Grimes* Britten wrote more great operas, instrumental and vocal works. Indeed, he was unique amongst his generation in writing music across a wide spectrum of genres, and for performers of all ages and abilities, including children. However, it is his choral music that we particularly celebrate in our 'Britten at 100' concert.

He had been educated at Gresham in the Anglican choral tradition, and in his early years was a member of the English Madrigal Choir (though his bass voice

commitment to pacifism and sympathy with the 'outsider', which was to reappear in his music throughout his life.

In 1928 he went as a boarder to Gresham's School, and whilst still at school, Britten studied with Frank Bridge who introduced the teenager to contemporary

Escaping from the RCM, Britten wrote music for a small documentary film company, then met and began to collaborate with WH Auden, who took on the role of intellectual and political mentor to the young composer. Then in 1937 Ben met the tenor, Peter Pears, who became his lifelong artistic and domestic partner, and inspirer of much of his vocal music. They sailed to America in the spring of 1939, following in Auden's steps, but homesickness and the war persuaded them to return in 1942 as con-

Britten with Peter Pears at Snape Maltings



was somewhat uncertain!). From these beginnings, he wrought a distinctive sound world, with an impeccable sense of timing and word-setting. He said, 'One of my chief aims is to restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell.' Britten chose his texts with enormous care, and this perfect match of words and music is one of the delights of performing his works.

The other great joy is the feeling that he knew how to compose for singers. Britten famously said, 'I want my music to be of use to people ... I do not write for posterity.' He

wrote music for real people, always keeping performers as well as listeners in mind. He considered the power and range of their voices, the occasion and environments in which the work would be performed. He delighted in providing music for specific occasions or venues: *Jubilate Deo* was written for St George's Chapel, Windsor;

*Antiphon* for St Michael's College in Tenbury; *Rejoice in the Lamb* for Walter Hussey at St Matthews in Northampton.

For this celebratory concert, Neil Taylor has chosen works from every stage of Britten's career. The youthful *Hymn to*

*the Virgin*, the *Te Deum* from 1934, the rarely performed *Antiphon* from 1956 when he was 43, and *Jubilate Deo* from the year before the *War Requiem*.

**You're 50 this year. I can say that when you and I are no longer here, millions of ordinary people will still be celebrating your birthdays—your 125th, 150th and 200th birthdays.**

**Mstislav Rostropovich on the occasion of Britten's 50th birthday.**

The Choir will be joined at the RNCM by our wonderful accompanist Jeffrey Makinson on the organ, and we welcome the Eblana String Trio and oboist David Curington to join the celebrations. During their time at the RNCM they won all the major chamber music prizes, notably the 2010 RNCM chamber music award and audience prize for their performance of Britten's *Phantasy* Quartet with David Curington—a performance they repeat for us.

With readings from Britten's own letters and speeches, this concert offers a true tribute to one of our greatest composers.

**STOP PRESS!**  
**The day before 'Britten at 100', Friday 22 February, St George's Singers will be appearing on BBC Radio 3's 'In Tune' programme, performing extracts from the concert and other works. Don't miss it!**

### Britten *BALLAD OF HEROES*

**On Friday 5th July at the Bridgewater Hall, St George's Singers join Chetham's Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in a performance of Britten's *Ballad of Heroes*, part of the Britten 100 celebrations.**

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



The rose Benjamin Britten

## BLESSED CECILIA

St Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, was born in the second century (some say in Rome, others Sicily), and given in marriage to a young nobleman, Valerian. But Cecilia loved only God, and had made a vow of perpetual virginity. She told her husband that an angel watched over her to ward off anyone who would touch her. Valerian asked to see the angel, but was told he could only see the angel if he were baptized.

So Valerian went off to be baptized, and when he returned, he saw Cecilia praying in her chamber, an angel standing by her holding two crowns of roses and lilies, which he placed on their heads, and then vanished. Tibertius, Valerian's brother,

heard the story, and also consented to be baptized. The two brothers then devoted themselves to burying the martyrs slain daily by the prefect of the city. They were arrested, and executed. Then Cecilia was arrested, and condemned to be suffocated in the baths. She was shut in for a night and a day, and the fires were heaped up, but Cecilia survived. Then they tried to behead her three times, again without success. She survived for three days, bleeding to death, all the while singing praises to God.

In 1599, the body of Saint Cecilia was discovered in a case of cypress wood, laid in a marble tomb. Pope Clement had a magnificent shrine of silver made for the holy relics.

Although there is a church dedicated to St Cecilia in Rome dating from the 5th century, her designation as the patroness of music goes back no further than the 15th century, and it may have been painters who were responsible for spreading the belief that she was a musician by depicting her with harps, organs and other musical instruments.

St Cecilia is celebrated on 22 November. The first record of British celebrations of the day date from 1683, but they had been held annually for some time before that. Purcell wrote a number of anthems and odes in her honour, before he died prematurely at the age of 35 on 21 November 1695—the day before St Cecilia's Day.



**Connie Jones, one of St George's Singers' longest-serving altos, is not the only musician in her family. Her brother Chris is a well known composer and record producer. We're delighted he's taken time to give us this insight into what it takes to produce a professional choral CD recording.**

## DIARY OF A RECORDING BY CHRIS HAZELL

In June 2012 I travelled to Los Angeles to produce a recording for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, a professional choir of from 50 to 150 singers and one of the best in the USA.

Two years ago I produced their first international release of works by the young New York composer Nico Muhly. The recording was to take place in the amazing Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the repertoire was the choral music of Henryk Górecki – the *Miserere*, the *Marian Songs* and *Lobgesang*.

It is unusual for me to attend rehearsals for recordings but, as previously, they asked if I could be there as it would be helpful in discussing choir layout, recording running order and any technical issues.

Although CDs are still issued 16-bit 44.1 kHz sampling rate, these days high resolution recordings are required for YouTube so we recorded at 24-bit 96kHz. This means a lot of computer number-crunching and a lot of hard drive space.

Earlier this year I did a project which required 36 tracks of music and it needed nearly 200Gb of hard drive.

The sound engineer was Fred Vogel who is something of a legend on the West Coast. We emailed each other such basic but important things as how many rows of chairs and what sort of layout would be best for the music. We agreed to run two different recording systems. Fred uses ProTools while I am used to the Pyramix system which I use for editing recordings.

I arrived in LA for the choir's second rehearsal. Their conductor is Grant Gershon and I had a really warm welcome from Grant and the choir. The Walt Disney Concert Hall is stunning both inside and out and has a great sound.

The next day was the dress rehearsal for the concert and for the recording. Mics were put out for archive recording. Fred and I agreed that they looked too close for the disc. I think the music should have an open sound with quite a lot of ambience round it. Disney Hall is a good sound but doesn't have a long reverb time so we decided to move the mics back to give the sound some space, but we will add a bit of electronic ambience to it. Purists, don't hold up your hands in horror! This happens quite a lot and with current very clever equip-

ment you really are unlikely to notice.

Overnight I had been thinking about the choir layout in the 30-minute long *Miserere* and some changes were necessary. However, everyone was happy with this and I moved into the control room backstage. After the rehearsal I was asked to stay behind with the conductor and his assistant as the choir had laid on a question and answer session with the choir's patrons and sponsors.

Sunday 10th June was concert day. No rehearsal but an opportunity for me to go through the music and prepare a guide schedule for the recording. I allow 15 minutes at the start of the recording to get the balance right and adjust mics as necessary. The union rep confirmed that the choir has a break of 15 minutes in every hour. I factored this in and ended up with about 8 minutes of recording time for every minute of actual recorded music.

Tuesday 12th June was a big day with the larger choir to do the *Miserere* in two 3-hour sessions. I announced 'Take one', the red light went on and we were away. In the second section it is nearly all in 3rds between Bass 1 and Bass 2. It looks easy on paper but try singing scales in thirds with every one smack in tune, quietly and molto legato! A good chunk of the recording was completed, it had gone well and everyone went home happy.

Wednesday 13th June. I listened to some of what we had recorded yesterday in the cold light of day and in a bland hotel room. It sounded good which

The Walt Disney Concert Hall



## DIARY OF A RECORDING CONT/...

was very encouraging. I didn't work on it for long as I had to keep my ears fresh for the afternoon session. We started with the *Lobgesang* and then onto the final collection, the *Marian Songs*. At the end of the session we are more or less on schedule.

Thursday 14th June. The final day of recording. Again we only had one session in the afternoon which may seem an extravagant use of time, but, given the intensity of the recording, especially with the slow and very exposed singing, the choir really have to put every ounce of concentration and energy into it and it is very draining. Try singing three or four major chords for two hours without changing the pitch, mood, volume, voice balance and doing it on demand! It is tough. Finally I said 'Well done, I'm happy', a cheer went up, and I went out into the hall to congratulate everyone.

Friday 15th June. My final day. I have been invited to a dinner on stage in the Concert Hall with the Board of the choir – sponsors really, who all contribute huge amounts of money towards the choir's projects. It isn't possible to do this type of recording as an economic proposition as there would never be enough sales, but while there are people who believe in it and have the financial means to do it, I'm pleased to say it can, and does, happen.

I spent part of the day rough editing. Then it was time to get changed and walk over to the Concert Hall for canapés and champagne and introductions to some of the great and good citizens of LA. The President of the Board introduced me and



Chris Hazell (on piano), with Aled Jones and Bryn Terfel at a recording session

told everyone I would like to say a few words! I panicked slightly as I hadn't expected this. I am quite happy to stand in front of the LSO and say my bit but I am out of my comfort zone when it comes to after-dinner speaking.

However, I told them of some of the people I have been fortunate enough to work with over the years – Pavarotti, Sutherland, Solti, Ashkenazy, Rattle, Joshua Bell, David Zinman, 20 years with King's College Cambridge. I told them what a joy it had been to work with them all and that the Los Angeles Master Chorale is right there at the top.

*Miserere* OP 44 (1981)  
*Marian Songs* Op 54 (1985)  
*Lobgesang* Op 76 (2000)

The recording, released on Decca in September 2012 and entitled '*Górecki Miserere*' by Grant Gershon and the Los Angeles Master Chorale, is available on Amazon.

Chris Hazell studied composition at the Royal College of Music, Herbert Howells being one of his teachers. He joined Decca and was with the company for 25 years, latterly as Senior Producer. Following the closure of the entire recording department he became freelance. He continues to work with international musicians and orchestras as well as arranging music for singers such as Angela Gheorghiu and Renée Fleming. He has a long-standing friendship with Bryn Terfel for whom he has made many arrangements for CDs and concerts, including a Folk Song Medley premiered on the Last Night of the Proms in 2008.

# CHRISTMAS CONCERT WITH BELLS ON



This season's carol concert, on Saturday 8 December, was overwhelmingly voted the most successful for years! As usual, the Choir was joined by our friends from the VBS Brass Band in Poynton, but the emphasis of this year's concert was very much on children—in the audience, on the stage, singing, playing and clapping along with all the music.

The highlight of the concert was undoubtedly the choir from Bradshaw Hall Primary School, who treated us all to some fabulous singing—complete with actions! The confidence, enthusiasm and talent displayed by these young singers was astounding, and bodes well for the future of choral singing in the Manchester area.

Children in the audience also had a chance to participate in the music-making. Large quantities of triangles and bells of all sizes and types had been begged, borrowed (or stolen!) from local schools and colleges, and the children were invited by Neil Taylor to come up to the front and help themselves to whatever they wanted to play. It might not have been rhythmically accurate, but it was

certainly entertaining, and hugely enjoyable.

The band joined in the fun, with their usual highly polished performance of Christmas favourites, but saved the best to last with a storming performance of a piece called *Schnee-waltzer*, an Austrian oom-pa-pah piece that had everyone swaying in the pews (though it was the second half, and quantities of mulled wine had been consumed!)

St George's were not to be outdone however. The concert opened, with all the lights dimmed, with *Once in Royal David's City*, with Jacqui Smith taking the solo soprano in the first verse, and beautifully setting the scene for the evening.

Neil had chosen a mixture of traditional and new carols, and thrown in a few new arrangements of well-known favourites. New to this year's programme were *Twelve Days of Christmas* (complete with pictures flourished by children in the audience at the appropriate time), and a new arrangement of *Ding Dong*.

The other main attraction of our 'Carols and Brass by Candlelight' concert is of course the mulled wine and mince pies at the interval. Andrea Millington masterminded the refreshments with military precision, resulting in everyone being served in record time—



despite the fact that we had an almost full house. The children were not neglected either, and Choir members had generously baked and provided special biscuits for them.

The serious side of the festive season was not forgotten, with readings by Chris Shelley, Kath Dibbs and Sarah Lion-



Mulled wine mastermind, Andrea Millington



A couple of Santa's elves somehow managed to sneak in amongst the basses

heart, reminding us of the true message of Christmas.

A splendid evening was enjoyed by all. Hope we see you at next year's event!



The children of Bradshaw Hall Primary School joining in the fun with the *Twelve Days of Christmas*



And the band played on

## SINGING DAY WORTHY OF LA SCALA

The third weekend in January saw the worst weather of the winter, with blizzards across the country and shops selling out of snow shovels. But we singers are not to be kept from our choral fix, and nearly 200 braved the snow and icy conditions to get to this year's Singing Day. As a reward, we were treated to a heart-warming day's singing of Puccini's youthful masterpiece, the *Messa di Gloria*.

This year we were back in St George's Church in Poynton, following its lengthy refurbishment. The church looked lovely, with new, comfortable seating, and fancy electronically controlled lighting—which (predictably) proved to be beyond human understanding, but did provide an entertaining *son et lumière* show. Eventually Neil emerged from the gloom and the day started with a warm-up, only for the new heating system to start playing up. However, the singing kept everyone warm until lunchtime, when we moved over to the

church hall for a soup and sandwich lunch—provided as ever by members of St George's Singers.

Jo Bluck, this year's miracle worker in the kitchen, had cajoled 11 gallons of soup and hundreds of sandwiches out of choir members for our visitors, who devoured almost everything. One gentleman anxiously enquired if there would be left-overs for later on—which there were—just! Then back to the church (now thankfully warmed up) for the afternoon session of music-making.

And what music! As ever, Neil guided us with precision, patience and inspiration through this wonderful work. 'You're on the stage at La Scala—enjoy yourselves!' he exhorted as one section after another let themselves go in operatic mode—so different from our own dear choral tones. Jeff was magnificent on the piano, whether playing 'heroine on the trainline' or simulating an entire orchestra.

One of the things we love about our Singing Day is that we always finish with a complete performance, with professional soloists, to show off our hard work. For that we were joined by two fabulous young singers: tenor Timothy Langston and baritone Terence Ayebare, whose voices blended beautifully together.

Thanks to them, to Neil, Jeff, the army of kitchen volunteers, Peter and Mike for streamlining the tea and coffee service—and of course all our visitors for whom we put on the day. And so to next year, and Beethoven's *Mass in C major*. Never sung it? Now's your chance.



Is there anybody there?



Irene finally realised who'd been eating all the cakes

## TOP OF THE POTS

Amongst the star soups at this year's event were Gwyneth's Celery, Apple and Carrot, Bridget's Tomato, the Roasted Vegetable and the Chairman's Chorizo Special. The winner of the Singing Day bake-off was Shirley Berry's scrumptious Ginger and Sultana cake. Shirley baked her cake five days before the Singing Day, then delivered it to Jo Bluck for safe-keeping whilst it matured. Thanks for saving us some Jo!

### Ingredients

250g SR flour  
2 level tsps ground ginger  
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon  
Level tsp bicarb of soda

Pinch of salt  
200g golden syrup  
2 tbs syrup from the ginger jar  
125g butter  
3 lumps stem ginger in syrup  
2 heaped tbs sultanas  
125g dark muscovado sugar  
2 large eggs  
240 ml milk

### Method

Line a square 20-22 cm tin. Sift flour with ginger, cinnamon, bicarb and salt. Put the golden and ginger syrups and the butter into a saucepan and warm over low heat. Dice ginger finely, add to the pan with sultanas and sugar. Let the mixture bubble gently

for a minute, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking.

Beat the eggs and milk gently. Remove butter and sugar mixture from heat and pour into the flour, stirring smoothly and firmly with a metal spoon. Mix in the milk and eggs—the mixture should be sloppy, with no trace of flour.

Bake for 35-40 minutes. Allow to cool, then tip onto greaseproof paper. Wrap in foil and leave to mature for a few days.

Kitchen divas: Anne, Jacqui and Jo doing their usual impeccable organising stuff



## ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS

### New members

A warm welcome to quite a few new members this term: Linda Campbell, Joanna Williams and Kate Atherton (sopranos), Diane Walker, Judy Tomlinson, Andrea Miller and Barbara Forshaw (altos), and David Morris (bass).

### Hamperful of success

The altos' fund-raising efforts in the autumn term culminated in a splendid hamper, which was raffled just before Christmas, raising £212. Altos raised a



massive £792 for choir funds over the three months, including £130 from Rhiannon Becque from sales of concert CDs. Thanks to section rep, Anthea Slater, for organising activities, and to all the altos for their

generous support, imaginative ideas, and just for being wonderful people generally. (What do you mean, editorial bias...)

### Choir broadcasts

Reminder that we'll be appearing on BBC Radio 3's **In Tune** programme on 22 February, 4.30 pm, the day before our 'Britten at 100' concert, singing extracts from the concert, plus other items from our repertoire. And we're singing **Daily Service** on 24 April on Radio 4 (LW), 9.45 am.



Hot off  
the  
press!

Anne Francis was recently going through the SGS archives, and unearthed all sorts of interesting and extraordinary tales from the Choir's history. Here are just a couple of them.

## TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

In 1993 the Choir advertised for a new accompanist, and received 11 applications.

Amongst them was one from a certain Zoe Rahman—now regarded as one of the finest young jazz musicians and composers in the UK. (She didn't get the job incidentally!)

Another gem is this letter dated July 2002, from Mr Michael Lee of Huddersfield, addressed to the then chair, Helen Korndorffer.

'I am writing to you as part of my quest for an unusual item: namely the acquisition of a "human dawn chorus" here in the garden of my home in Huddersfield.

'Despite the fact that English summertime involves numerous days that begin very early in the morning with the first hint of light at 4am and magnificent dawn choruses provided by every neighbourhood bird with an ear and beak for music, I inevitably sleep through such entertainment and wake around 7am. Should I wake up earlier

I fear that my sleep deficit would interfere with my demanding work and make the already stretching challenges a more difficult burden to bear.

'Unfortunately, this has meant the development of a profound and ongoing sense of loss as far as missing out on what I believe can be a most uplifting and almost spiritual winged concert and has encouraged me to look for viable and more conveniently timed reproductions. It is in this regard that I write to your good self at St Georges Choir [sic].

'I wondered if there might be a chance that the accomplished members of your choir put some time aside early one morning in the next few weeks, travel over to my garden in Huddersfield and sing a selection of appropriate harmonious songs to which I might awake with pleasure and contentment. Perhaps the choir could begin with *Morning has broken*, move on to the old favourite *Sunshine on my Shoulder* and finish the

medley with a traditional Cheshire folk tune.

'Although I cannot offer any financial reward for such a favour I can guarantee endless coffee and croissants and presume many of the neighbours will join with me in astonished applause as they look out of their bedroom windows to the sight of 116 choir members singing to their hearts content on my back lawn.

'I have no doubt that you are inundated with many requests of this kind and so I thank you for your time and kind consideration in relation to this matter and look forward to hearing from you.

'PS There is usually ample parking for your coaches at the top of the cul-de-sac. Please let me know approximately how many croissants you will require.'

**Memo to Calum and Sue Taylor: is there an opportunity for Cheshire Consort here? Any volunteers?**



Are we doing this as a canon, or what?



## A NOT-SO-SILENT NIGHT BY JEFF MAKINSON

If you have been following the Booth Centre Sleep-Out campaign, you will know that the great event took place on Friday 9 November. And it was a great success, with over 100 people turning up, including 14 members of Cathedral staff, to spend one night out in the cold and damp, in order to raise funds for the charity. Among those taking part was Helen Varley, who works for CBBC in Salford Quays. 'It was an amazing experience but also a harsh insight into the life some people have to lead. I felt the winter chill in my bones, my sleeping bag was soggy and the hard ground and noise made sleep pretty impossible—think I got 30 minutes kip all night! I don't think anyone who was part of the Sleep-Out will ever take a warm bed for granted again and I'm proud and pleased that we have all come together for such a great cause.'

Although the Sleep-Out gave participants a glimpse of some

of the hardships homeless people have to face each night, organisers were committed to showing the positive changes that the work of the Booth Centre can make in the lives of local homeless people. The evening's entertainment was provided by members of the charity's opera group (weekly singing workshops are run in conjunction with Streetwise Opera and Opera North) who proved just what people can achieve when given the opportunity. Ray Goodwin spoke of his personal experiences of sleeping rough in the city centre and how, with the help of the Booth Centre, he had got his life back on track.

Hot soup was provided courtesy of Henry J Bean's Bar & Grill, made with the fresh vegetables grown in The Printworks' roof garden. Fred Booth, Centre Director for The Printworks said, 'I'm happy that The Printworks can get involved in such a great cause. There is no denying that we need to help the homeless and it's great that our vegetables

can go towards something good.'

Since the event the Cathedral office has been buzzing with positive comments about the night. Staff feel that they gained a small insight into the daily struggle of the homeless of Manchester, and look forward to participating in the event next year! The Cathedral's grand total, including Just Giving donations and off-line sponsorship, came to £2,698. The generous response from the Cathedral community and further afield has been greatly appreciated.

Over £22,000 has been raised in total; funds that will enable the Booth Centre to help more homeless people get away from life on the street, re-settle in the community, and return to work. At such a challenging time of year, as the nights grow colder and wetter, the money raised will make a huge difference to the charity's work.

Thank you!  
www.boothcentre.org.uk

**Jeff personally raised over £350, largely due to the generosity of St George's Singers. Well done us—but especially well done to Jeff, for doing something few of us would probably wish to do, and braving the dreadful weather for such a great cause.**

## WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY COMMENT ...

The saving of Yorkshire Libraries Service has been a great relief to us all—particularly Gwyneth. However, we do wonder if, in putting together a plan for future development, the library service has been taken over by civil servants or (even worse) management consultants, as the following extract from a recent letter suggests:

'Whilst the basis of functionality concerning the library's operations has sustained no significant permutations dur-

ing the relocation and transition of management, the "front-of-house" conveyance has undergone multiple modifications in order to invest in an online service in response to your recent overwhelming customer feedback.'

We think they're setting up a new website—but if anyone has any better ideas ...



Our leader

## NAME THAT TUNE—MUSICAL CRYPTOGRAMS

A musical cryptogram is a sequence of musical notes which can be taken to refer to an extra-musical text by some 'logical' relationship, usually



Music—it's so uplifting  
(Spotted by Mary Houlst)

between note names and letters.

The most common and best known examples result from composers using ciphered versions of their own or their friends' names as themes or motifs in their compositions.

From the initial assignment by Western music theorists of letter names to notes in the 9th century it became possible to reverse the procedure and assign notes to the letters of names.

However, this does not seem to have become a recognized technique until the Baroque period, and

from the mid-19th century it became quite common.

Since the note names only cover letters A to G, the problem arises as to how to cipher the rest of the alphabet. Historically there have been two main solutions.

In the German-speaking world *B-flat* was named 'B' and *B-*

*natural* was named 'H'. The best known musical cryptogram is the B-A-C-H motif, used by Bach himself, by his contemporaries and by many later composers.

Other note names were derived by sound, for example *E-flat*, 'Es' in German, could represent 'S'. Composers less fortunate than Bach usually seem to have chosen to ignore non-musical letters in generating their motifs. For example, Schumann has just Es-C-H-A (*E-flat*, C, *B-natural*, A) to represent himself in *Carnaval*, whilst Brahms used B-A-H-Es (*B-flat*, A, *B-natural*, *E-flat*) for his surname in the A-flat minor organ fugue.

By contrast, the French method of generating cryptograms was more complex and closer to encipherment, with one musical letter standing for a number of other letters. The most popular version involved writing out the letters H-N, O-U and V-Z lines under the original diatonic notes A-G, as follows:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
V	W	X	Y	Z		

The many-to-one mapping of this method makes it more difficult to extract possible motifs from the musical score than the one-to-one correspondence of the German system.

Cryptograms were less common in England, but Elgar, who was interested in all things cryptic, wrote an early *Allegretto* for his pupils the Gedge sisters using G-E-D-G-E, whilst part of the 'enigma' in the *Enigma Variations* involves cryptograms.

Of more immediate interest to St George's Singers is the motif used by Britten in one of the works in our next concert.

Britten was a good friend of Dmitri Shostakovich, who used the German scheme for his personal motto D-Es-C-H (*D*, *E-flat*, C, *B-natural*), representing DSCH (as his name would be written in German), and which appears in many of his most characteristic works. Britten honoured his friend by including this motif in *Rejoice in the Lamb*, where the organ repeats the notes with increasing intensity, against the chorus line 'For silly fellow ...' An expression of sympathy and solidarity with his oft denounced friend.

## A CHORAL SINGER'S CONFESSION



Dave wanted to make sure he'd marked his score in good time this week

Almighty and most merciful Conductor,  
We have erred and strayed from thy beat like lost sheep;  
We have followed too much the intonations and tempi of our own hearts;  
We have offended against thy dynamic markings;  
We have left unsung those

notes which we ought to have sung,  
And we have sung those notes which we ought not to have sung,  
And there is no support in us.  
But thou, O Conductor, have mercy upon us miserable singers;  
Succour the vocally challenged;

Restore thou them that need sectionals;  
Spare thou them that have pencils.  
Pardon our mistakes, and have faith that hereafter we will follow thy directions.  
Amen

# THE STAGING PARTY

Every member of St George's Singers puts a lot of hard work into practising the music at



I think he picked this bit up at Aintree

home and in rehearsal. But at the concert, it would all be in vain if we had nowhere to stand, the audience couldn't see or hear us, and we couldn't see Neil. So we're incredibly fortunate in having our own staging—which means that we can perform anywhere, even if the

venue doesn't have in-built staging. Many Choir members, and certainly recent members, won't know that our staging

was designed and built by our very own engineering genius, tenor Alan Swain. He designed it to be easily transported and assembled,

and it's flexi-

ble enough to cope with different sizes and shape of church or hall. He also made or supplied every single nut, bolt, handrail, support and rail cover used in its assembly.



Sue decided this was not her idea of a party

But Alan is always thinking of improvements. His latest is an ingenious storage rack, so that the staging boards can be stored securely and moved safely and easily (even by the most feeble of helpers!) across the bumpiest of church floors.

However, it still takes time and effort to erect the staging for our concerts, so it's wonderful that a small group of people turn up a few hours before every concert to help. Thanks to them, and Alan, we all get to put on the best possible performance—wherever we are.



Alan ponders his next invention—a hydraulically operated podium



Yet another engineering triumph

# CHINESE NEW YEAR

New Year's Eve 2012 was a gala night for St George's Singers, as we joined Manchester Camerata on stage at the Bridgewater Hall to start the new year festivities.

Things kicked off early—an afternoon rehearsal at BBC Media City the day before, in the studios where the BBC Phil normally perform, and where we were introduced to the conductor for the event, the American Robert Ziegler. We'd never sung with him before, but realised quickly that he liked to get through rehearsals promptly, and with just a few comments directed at the choir, we finished on time. A few anxious looks amongst the choir—didn't the Tchaikovsky need a bit more time? All that Russian is really tricky! But he seemed happy, so off we went.

Next day was New Year's Eve, and afternoon rehearsal. This time a little more attention to *Eugene Onegin* (thankfully), then off to get changed for the big night. The soloist for the concert was American soprano, Rebecca Nelsen. We hadn't really had a chance to hear her at rehearsal, but in the concert she gave it everything—a beautiful voice, and some fabulous dresses! Bringing operatic glamour and theatricality (flirting on stage with the second violins isn't normal procedure at the Met!) to the evening, she sang barnstormers by Puccini, Verdi and Gounod, then changed into modern dress for Cole Porter's *Kiss me Kate*.

In the first half, the Choir sang old favourites: 'Hebrew Slaves', 'Anvil Chorus', 'Triumphal Scene' from *Aida*. But the sec-

ond half was the tricky one—the waltz and chorus from *Eugene Onegin*, then the men delivering the 'Soldiers Chorus' from *Faust*. But all went without a hitch, and everyone on stage—and in the audience—thoroughly enjoyed the evening. We finished with *Auld Lang Syne*, and some rather large party poppers were set off by the Camerata.

How to top that? Well, a large group of us went on for a Chinese meal and brought in the New Year in Chinatown. A great way to bring in 2013.



## A PILGRIMAGE TO LEIPZIG BY GILLIAN BANKS

In June last year we travelled to Germany to visit our daughter who was studying at Leipzig University. First we had a few days in Berlin.

There are so many things to see in Berlin that we only had time for a few highlights. We visited



The famous image of a 'Trabi' breaking through the wall

the Reichstag (the German parliament building) with a dome designed by Norman Foster and the DDR Museum showing what life was like in the former East Germany. It is incredible to view this with our western eyes and realise that this was happening during our own lifetimes.

There is a Trabant to sit in, a listening room, and a section on 'FKK' (look it up!) A small stretch of the Berlin wall (about a mile and a half) has been preserved and sections painted with iconic images. It is chilling to see it

now and imagine the no man's land on the east side with its razor wire and automatically triggered machine guns. Anyone interested in learning more about life in East Germany would enjoy a couple of German films (available with English subtitles): *The lives of others*, and *Goodbye Lenin*.

On a lighter note we visited the musical instrument museum. As well as the traditional selection of Strads and ancient harpsichords was Mendelssohn's organ, a Wurlitzer organ (pure bling), an Aeolian harp (looks like a rough wooden box with a couple of strings on the outside – it's played by the wind, a haunting sound), a glass harmonica (the sound of which is meant to cause madness) and several musical long case clocks (just why...?) Headsets allow you to listen to most of the instruments being played.

Leipzig is an interesting city with an important history. Earliest records of it date back to around AD1000, and it developed as a

thrive for developing calculus at around the same time that it was also being developed by Isaac Newton – a topic of some controversy to this day.

At around the time they were doing this Leipzig's most famous resident was born.

JS Bach became Cantor at Thomaskirche in 1723 and spent the rest of his working life there, looking after the music also for Nikolaikirche and the university church, Paulinerkirche and teaching at the choir school.

The Paulinerkirche, a beautiful medieval church, survived WW2 bombing only to be dynamited during the communist DDR to make way for new university buildings, a terrible act of cultural vandalism. Incidentally the university was re-named 'Karl Marx University', a name that thankfully has not survived reunification.

A new Paulinerkirche has been built on the old site, a rather lovely shared purpose building with different coloured stone



The old and the new Paulinerkirche

thriving place of commerce and then a university town. The mathematician Leibniz attended the university. He was fa-

and clearly inspired by the old church. It was inaugurated in 2009 for the 600<sup>th</sup> centenary of the university, but still needs a bit of work before it is finished.

## A PILGRIMAGE TO LEIPZIG CONT/...

Nikolaikirche, another ancient Leipzig church, saw the premiere of the *St John Passion* in 1724.

Rather more recently, in 1989 a quiet revolution that led to the fall of the Berlin wall started here. Each Monday after the evening service people gathered outside the church to protest, carrying candles. There had been increasing clamping down on the East German borders as

the people' spread all over East Germany.

On 4 November over half a million took to the streets of East Berlin and, helpless against this tide of people, the Politburo resigned and the wall which had gone up in a day in August 1961 fell on 9 November 1989 in scarcely longer time.

There is a small Bach museum in Leipzig with an interesting

sual to say the least. As you would expect most of the pews face the east (altar) end of the church with a few in the centre and on the side balconies facing sideways.

However the organ, orchestra and singers are on the balcony at the back. So most of the audience either has their back to the performers or like us, were underneath them! However, the church has a *very* lively acoustic which meant there was no difficulty in hearing and enjoying the music.

There was a Japanese choir and orchestra, Bach Collegium both of which were excellent, and a wonderful group of soloists including Robin Blaze. Bliss.



'We are the people'

holes had been springing up in the Iron Curtain and people had been escaping to the West. The country was again haemorrhaging its talent to the West.

The Monday demonstrations started with a few thousand in September 1989 but the numbers joining in increased exponentially until by 23 October it was estimated that over 300,000 took part – well over half the population of the city.

It was by no means certain at the beginning that those taking part would not be arrested or worse, but the wholly peaceful approach of the protestors asking for democracy, free elections, and freedom of movement with the slogan 'We are

exhibition (fortunately for me in English as well as German) about Bach's life, family and times. They have comfortable sofas with earphones and touch screens so that you can listen to virtually everything he wrote, old and new recordings and excellent sound quality. I want one of those machines!

We managed to time our visit to coincide with the Bachfest. There was a great buzz about the city which takes its music very seriously. Rebecca had managed to get us all tickets for a performance of *St Matthew's Passion* at Thomaskirche.

The church was completely full. The set up for a concert is un-



Thomaskirche



Concert in the Thomaskirche

More information can be found on the website at [www.bapam.org.uk](http://www.bapam.org.uk)

Other fact sheets include tips on keeping fit on tour, and managing drink—any tips there for our forthcoming Paris adventure? BAPAM also produces a very handy warm-up programme, available as a small concertina booklet, or an A2 poster.

## FIT TO SING

The British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) provides specialist health support to all full-time and part-time professional and student performing artists. They also publish a series of fact sheets, available to anyone, on healthy musicianship. One of these is entitled 'Fit to Sing', with tips on vocal health—of the mind and the body as well as the voice.

- 1 Always warm up physically before you sing. In particular, stretch and loosen up your neck, shoulders, and upper back. This doesn't



Ronnie was intrigued by Mick's new vocal warm-up routine

have to take a long time, but should be before your vocal warm-up. Repeat this after singing, to allow cooling down.

- 2 Ensure your technique is sound—poor technical habits may lead to tension and muscular strain. Seek professional advice, whatever your level of experience.
- 3 Check your posture when singing, using a mirror or video camera. Look at the overall balance of your body,

and for signs of tension around your neck and shoulders. If you regularly sit to sing, use a chair that is as comfortable as possible, that supports your lower back, and is at the right height for your body build.

- 4 Where is your music? If on a stand, check the stand height and sight-lines, eg to your accompanist. If you are holding the music, feel its weight and consider a stand if it is heavy or bulky.
- 5 Vision and hearing can affect your neck and upper body posture; have them checked periodically. If you need glasses or lenses to see the music or the conductor, use them!
- 6 Plan practice sessions to allow frequent short breaks in singing. The biggest risk factor for a breakdown in your vocal health is a sudden increase in the quantity or quality of practice, eg in the run-up to a concert or audition. If something starts to ache, stop and loosen up. Use a kitchen timer to remind you if a break is due—every 20 minutes or so.

- 7 Your overall health, physical build and voice type may make some repertoire more uncomfortable for you. Respect your limitations.
- 8 If you have a cold or sore throat, remember vocal rest and hydration. Vocal rest does not necessarily mean

non singing: it means no shouting, no whispering, no forcing, and limit your phone calls. Hydration means water, not tea, coffee or alcohol! Avoid atmospheric pollutants such as cigarette smoke, overheated or air-conditioned rooms.

- 9 Your general lifestyle can affect your singing: make sure you are eating and sleeping properly.
- 10 A mixture of regular exercise (eg swimming or sport) and relaxation will help maximise our potential and maintain your vocal health. Performing is stressful and tension can cause pain and stiffness. Find something that you enjoy, it's more likely to help!
- 11 Remember that you are musical athlete and your performance depends on you taking good care of yourself. Think twice about attending a party or going to a noisy pub in the days before a con-



The tenors were suddenly having second thoughts

cert. Watch out for accidents: take care with dangerous sports and DIY.

- 12 There is a world outside music! Keep your hobbies and outside interests going to avoid getting over-focused on your singing.

## ERIC WHITACRE—WHY BRITISH CHOIRS ARE BEST

A couple of years ago *Gramophone* magazine asked an international jury to name the worlds' leading choirs, and then invited American composer Eric Whitacre to reflect on why the list is dominated by British ensembles. Here's what he said.

'At the age of 18, when I first began singing in choirs, I devoured every choral recording I could find. I collected a huge and varied number of choral discs but over time realised that I was partial to those albums performed by British choirs. Three recordings stand out in my memory: Vaughan Williams's *An Oxford Elegy*, Stephen Darlington conducting Christ Church Cathedral choir; Arvo Pärt's *Passio* from the Hilliard Ensemble; and the "Treasures of English Church Music", John Rutter conducting the Cambridge Singers. I loved these recordings, and marvelled at such perfect singing.

'Then, suddenly, five years ago, I received an email from Stephen Layton, letting me know that he had discovered a few pieces of mine in a music store in Amsterdam and would I be kind enough to send him everything I'd ever written. I did—and one year later he sent me the finished disc "Cloudburst", performed by his incredible choir Polyphony. Never had I dreamed that my music would one day be so beautifully and masterfully recorded by such a quintessentially British choir.

'Since that time I have had the great privilege to work with a number of choirs in the UK, with each experience being a thrill: writing a piece for The King's Singers and the National

Youth Choirs of Great Britain; recording my album "Light & Gold" with the Eric Whitacre Singers (all Brits) and Laudibus; and most recently, concerts with the London Symphony Chorus and the Welsh choir Cordydd. After much thought I'm finally beginning to understand what makes these British choirs so incredible.

'Tuning: perhaps the most powerful weapon in the technical arsenal of a choir, choristers in the UK are taught from a very early age not only to sing in tune but to listen to those around them. A perfect example is Alamire, David Skinner's phenomenal early music group to which I have recently been introduced, a choir that sings so in tune that the music seems to shimmer and float in front of the speakers.

'Sight-reading: the Brits are possibly the world's greatest sight-readers. In my travels I've certainly never seen anything like it. Every time I rehearse a choir here I am astonished at how quickly they parse the music and absorb it. When we recorded "Light & Gold" the Eric Whitacre Singers and Laudibus had just six hours to read through and rehearse 8 minutes of my music. Good singers here are simply expected to read.

'Tone: bright and clear, with a healthy spin and not too much vibrato. I love the warm, long, open vowels, the purity of the vowel colour being perfect for the close harmonies in my music. I love the way the women can sing in their upper registers, rich and crystalline. And when a British choir truly dedicate themselves to the consonants—

like in the line "giving their kisses like clouds exchanging foam", a line from my *a cappella* work *A boy and a girl*—there is little that's more sweet or more affecting.

'Knowledge: British choirs simply get it. I'm sure it comes from the centuries-old tradition of singing but there is a seasoned polish and an attitude about the music-making that is at once soulful and unsentimental, expressive without being maudlin. They have the beating hearts of singers and the brains of trained musicians and this places them among the most potent and versatile artists on the planet.

'I certainly do not underestimate the influence of such extraordinary choral conductors as John Eliot Gardiner, Stephen Layton and Harry Christophers. What can I say? I am genuinely in awe of the British choral tradition and look forward to each opportunity that I have to listen to and work with the many and varied exceptional choirs.'

*The full article can be found at Gramophone Online, [www.gramophone.co.uk/features](http://www.gramophone.co.uk/features)*



### THE WORLD'S TOP 20 CHOIRS

- 1 The Monteverdi Choir
- 2 Polyphony
- 3 The Cardinal's Musick
- 4 The Sixteen
- 5 Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge
- 6 Wells Cathedral Choir
- 7 Collegium Vocale Ghent (Belgium)
- 8 Accentus (France)
- 9 RIAS Kammerchor (Germany)
- 10 Swedish Radio Choir
- 11 The Dunedin Consort
- 12 Choir of King's College, Cambridge
- 13 The Tallis Scholars
- 14 Choir of New College, Oxford
- 15 Les Arts Florissants (France)
- 16 Westminster Abbey Choir
- 17 The Balthasar-Neumann Choir (Germany)
- 18 Stile Antico
- 19 Arnold Schoenberg Choir (Austria)
- 20 I Fagiolini

## BRITTEN'S *SPRING SYMPHONY*: BEIJING 2012

BY SUE MASON



We did it! Kate, Jenny, Helen, Brian, Mike plus two singers from KEMS and our own groupies.

After two years of planning, our invitation to sing with the

prestigious Beijing International Festival Chorus became a reality in October.

This was no mean feat, especially as the concert was to take place only one week before the whole of Beijing became involved with the selection of the new Chinese Government: a once every ten years event leading to a lock down in the area of The Forbidden City.

We were invited to China be-



On stage in the Beijing Concert Hall

cause the conductor, Nick Smith OBE knew Richard Savage and Andy Staples: two professionals who had both sung with St George's, were friends of Nick Smith

the Beijing conductor and who could give us a good reference: we weren't just a bunch of random troubadours, after all!

The IFC is run along the British festival chorus system. The music is selected, and providing

the singers note-bash by themselves, and can come together in the week before the concert for intensive rehearsals, then they can take part. This system works well in China, where the singers all hold down very busy jobs, and cannot commit to a weekly rehearsal. This meant that St Georges' singers could be part of the concert too, providing we arrived in time for those essential rehearsals.

Note-bashing by ourselves, we then gathered at the home of Jackie and Paul Burfitt for some proper sessions with a conductor, James, who put us through our paces.

So it was with regret that Jackie and Paul were unable to come with us to China due to a family bereavement. Other singers fell by the wayside due to ill health and the rest of us almost didn't get there at all due to fog in Heathrow, making our plane from Manchester late so we missed our connection to Beijing.

Arriving a day late we hit the ground running, checking into our hotel then visiting the fabulous Temple of Heaven and finally gathering for our first rehearsal under the baton of Nick Smith.

This rehearsal, complete with orchestra, took place in the Children's Palace, a group of rooms around courtyards dedicated to the arts especially for children. The buildings are very close to the Forbidden City and are decorated in that style with beautiful blue and gold panels and pillars. The rooms however are small so it was a squeeze fitting us all in.

Nick conducts in Chinese for his orchestra Peking Sinfonietta, and in English for the choir,

though his choir consists of many different nationalities: French, German, Spanish and Italian to name but a few. We were sometimes a bit slow on the uptake if he shouted page or bar numbers in Chinese.

The children's choir and soloists joined us for the last rehearsal in the Children's Palace and the numbers squashed into the room must have contravened every health and safety rule, but that's China, where they have rules about performing Verdi's *Requiem*, but seemingly don't have any rules on health and safety.

On the day of the concert, we gathered at the Beijing Concert Hall for our final rehearsal. The hall is a vast modern auditorium seating 2,500. We were able to see and hear the young American violinist Kenneth Arthur Renshaw who had won the 2012 Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition and who would be performing Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto* in the first half.

And so to our performance: We and the soloists felt that we had done this very tricky piece justice. The audience enjoyed the concert, and I have it on good authority that there were several ambassadors present.

But we were not in China just to sing. We managed to fit in most of the must-see sights in Beijing: Forbidden City, Summer Palace and of course the Great Wall. The second city on our itinerary was Xi-An where we visited the excavation site of the Terracotta Warriors, the Big Grey Goose Pagoda and the city walls as well as experiencing delicious local dumpling delicacies in a concert of local music and dance.



From here our party split up with Michael Calam and his family going off to the hills to trace their family history around Kuling, miles away from the major cities. Meanwhile, a small group of us travelled onto Shanghai, and we had fun there exploring the Bund – its beautiful pre-war buildings including the Astor Hotel, the British Consulate buildings and the Customs House with its glorious octagonal ceiling paintings, and clock based on Big Ben.

Another must-see in Shanghai is Yu Yuan – the ‘old city’ where the best view is to be had from the roof top restaurant and Theatre above the hustling



Shanghai: a view of the east side of the Bund across the Huang Pu River

shops and crowds. We stayed at the Moller House Hotel – an iconic French concession building which features in all the guide books. I did help a lost tourist with map in hand, who was looking for this House and it turned out that he was the nephew of Sir William Mather of Whirley Macclesfield. It is indeed a small world. Meanwhile, Jenny Limond also

jumped ship and visited a colleague from Cheshire, now living in Suzhou. Jenny had also made a contact in Beijing



Xi-An: a small selection of the Terracotta warriors discovered in the first pit

Harrow School with a teacher colleague now working there. The networking on behalf of St Georges continued.

The comments from all the members of the party could be summed up by Kate Fuggle who said it was ‘absolutely fascinating’.

Things that I found fascinating: Ben, our guide in Beijing, who was prepared to talk about his

government in less than glowing terms; who loved double decker buses—and Boris Johnson, who by cycling, was an example to the Chinese mayors who swan around in black limousines.

But then we witnessed an attempt by a local woman to bring her grievance to Beijing. In a flurry of shouts and scuffles in TianAn Men Square, she

dropped a paper which we picked up. When I had it translated by an American friend, it was revealed to be complaint against the government. The woman who dropped it was last seen being bundled away by the police and secret police. During this time of political sensitivity, even taxi drivers had their window winding handles removed in case people threw such papers into the street. Fascinating though not surprising. In Shanghai a recent innovation is the Saturday ‘marriage market’ where hundreds of parents gather with

paper details of their unmarried son or daughter. This with a hope of making contacts with a view to marriage – a direct consequence of the one child policy. There were hundreds gathered there.

And because we in the West are told that religious worship in China is banned, seeing the Cathedral of St Francis Xavier, built in 1847, which is still very much in use on Sundays for Catholic worship by Chinese Nationals. Now the surrounding old streets have been cleared, the Cathedral stands out with its ‘flower fairies’ statues on the wall alongside angels.

This is just my brief account of our fabulous holiday. But don’t take my word for it: I am sure the others have things to say about this wonderful singing opportunity that we were given.



An ‘agent’ with photographs of possible marriageable people (above) and a wall of adverts (below)



# THE BEAR GOES BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN

## BY MICHAEL CALAM



Michael with brother David, sister Rachel—and bear

The Beijing trip gave the Calams (Michael, brother David and sister Rachel) a special opportunity to return to family roots, because our mother was born in China.

Our grandparents were missionaries, and Mum and Granny told stories of the little town on

a mountain top that the westerners built 3,000 feet above the heat and pollution of the Yangtze valley, and called Kuling (because it was cooling ... )

We heard how there was no road, so everything had to be carried up the 'Thousand Steps' path by coolies. Kuling is where our mother was born and spent the first six years

of her life: and we have a photo of her there, in snow, clutching her doll, and a teddy bear which we still have.

It was not difficult to find Kuling, or Guling as it is known since the spelling reform. The mountain, Lushan, is well known to the Chinese both for its beauty (it is now a national park) and because other former residents have included Chiang Kai-Shek and Mao Tse-Tung.

There is a road up now, and the little town swarms with visitors. We found the Thousand Steps and the school where our granny taught; though the family home eluded us (a lot has changed since 1926!)

It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and we are so glad we took it. The contrast with Beijing was total: we were in country China, and saw virtually no western faces: and, with the help of our Chinese guide, we sampled local delicacies we could never have found by ourselves.

And, for old times' sake, the bear came too.



On the Thousand Steps path with Chinese guide, Nancy



A street market in Guling



## MINDFUL MUSIC

Mindful music. Er—what? According to a research study at Harvard University in 2008, when we sing or play music ‘mindlessly’ we’re trapped in rigid mindsets. On the other hand, if we sing ‘mindfully’ we actively draw on novel distinctions rather than relying on historical or past distinctions. Rules, routines and mindsets are roadblocks to creativity. Still not getting it? Listen up.

Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer undertook two studies to test the hypothesis that actively creating novel distinctions, noticing new things, and portraying them during a performance is preferable to attempting to recreate a past performance. Orchestral musicians and choral singers are ‘the assembly-line workers of the arts world’. They’re asked to execute the same task again and again—a method that may be efficient for producing consumer goods, but not one to promote inspired performances.

The answer is to ask them to stay focused, alert and open to new discoveries. The results are immediate and noticeable, not

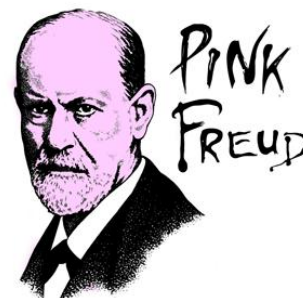
only to the musicians, but to knowledgeable listeners. According to the research report, ‘Practice, if simply viewed as repetition, does not make perfect but merely permanent. Individual attention to novel distinctions and subtle nuances appears to alter the process of creative ensemble performance and lead to music that is more enjoyable to perform and hear.’

Arizona State University music professor Timothy Russell led two performances by the ASU student orchestras of the same piece: the finale from Brahms’s First Symphony. Before the first performance he told the orchestra to ‘think about the finest performance of this piece that you can remember. Play it that way.’ Before the second, he instructed: ‘Play this piece in the finest manner you can, offering subtle new nuances to your performance.’

Members of an experienced local choir were asked if they heard a difference after listening to recordings of both. Overwhelmingly they said yes. Which did they prefer? Again, overwhelmingly, they said the

second—the ‘mindful’ one. The musicians reported that they too found the second performance more enjoyable, with more energy and wider dynamic range. In other words, recreating an ‘ideal’ performance proved stultifying, whilst looking for new nuances was liberating, did not lead to breakdown in discipline, and led to a more passionate performance.

According to the conductor, ‘By definition, an orchestral conductor tries to get everybody to do things in one coordinated way. By giving the instruction to everybody to find some nuance of their own and play it that way, you might expect chaos. But we found that wasn’t the case at all. What all the musicians pretty much did was put more effort into what they were supposed to be doing anyway.’ Ellen Langer commented: ‘When Russell told a group of people to essentially do things their own way—subtly different but still their own way—you ended up with a superior group performance.’ From the *Psychology of Music* journal <http://pom.sagepub.com/content/37/2/125.abstract>



Famous musical psychologists: No 1

In a class on abnormal psychology, the instructor was about to introduce the subject of manic depression.

She posed this question to her students: ‘How would you diagnose a patient who walks back and forth screaming at the top of his lungs one minute, then sits in a chair weeping uncontrollably the next?’ A young man in the rear raised his hand and suggested earnestly, ‘a conductor’.

## HOW MUSIC WORKS: REVIEW

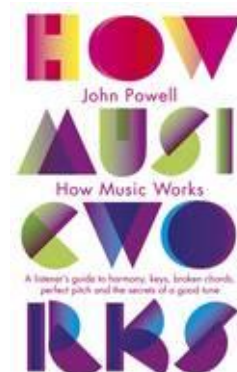
Do you know why Chinese people are more likely to have perfect pitch than Westerners? What the difference is between a musical note and a loud noise? Why the notes Mozart heard were not the same as those we hear today? Or even why ten basses aren’t ten times as loud as one?

A book by John Powell, *How Music Works*, explains all this

and much more about the physics of music. Powell, a classically trained composer and physics professor, reveals a collection of little-known facts and intriguing science behind the basics of harmony, scales, chords, keys, rhythm, and what makes a good tune. Written in a light-hearted manner that’s easy to understand for listeners and non-musicians, it also contains lots of fascinating facts

that professional musicians may not be aware of.

However, he doesn’t touch on the one particularly vexatious question that is currently engaging us as we rehearse Britten’s *Rejoice in the Lamb*. If harp rhymes are bell well, flute rhymes are tooth youth, and bassoon rhymes are pass class, what does that make the cat Jeffrey?



## St George's Singers

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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, and communicating the sheer enjoyment of singing together. Entry to the Choir is via audition, and new members are welcome to come along to rehearsals at any time.

### ST GEORGE'S 2012-2013 SEASON

**24-27 May, 2013**

**Paris Tour: concerts in Notre Dame Cathedral, La Madeleine, American Church, and St Eustache Church**

**Sunday 23 June, 7.30pm**

**The Monastery, Manchester**

**GLORIA!**

**Vivaldi *Gloria*,**

**Handel *Dixit Dominus*,**

***Nisi Dominus*,**

**Vivaldi *L'estro armonico***

**Friday 5 July, 7.30pm**

**Bridgewater Hall, Manchester**

**Britten *Ballad of Heroes***

**Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012**

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

**Online:**

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

## THE BELLS, THE BELLS ...!

The city of Paris is gearing up for St George's Singers by installing new bells in Notre Dame Cathedral. The French revolutionaries melted down the north tower bells into cannons, declaring Notre Dame to be a temple to the Cult of Reason and the Cult of the Supreme Being. New bells were installed in the 19th century, dating from different periods throughout Notre Dame's history, but are now out of tune with each other and with the one surviving Great Bell, 'Emmanuel'.

Regarded as one of the finest church bells in the world, emitting a rich, F sharp, second-octave boom, Emmanuel has hung in the cathedral since the 17th century, but is now old and frail, so can only be used on special occasions. So nine new bells have been cast to

mark the 850th anniversary of the Cathedral's founding in 1163.

The new bells, weighing 23 tons in total, and named after saints and prominent Catholics, will be hoisted into the two great towers in time for Easter and will be heard for the first time when they peal out on 23 March, the day before Palm Sunday. The harmonious bells will, in theory, recreate the sound which called Parisians to work or prayer throughout the 18th century. We look forward to hearing them on our tour to Paris!



**CAPTION COMPETITION**  
Send your captions to the editor—winning entry gets a prize (to be determined!)