



Hemiola

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

MEET OUR NEW PRESIDENT

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

PRESIDENT:

Marcus Farnsworth MA ARAM

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Susan Roper
Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Neil Taylor

ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

Joseph Judge

ACCOMPANIST:

Peter Durrant

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Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

Everyone at St George's Singers is thrilled that baritone Marcus Farnsworth has agreed to become our new Choir President. Marcus is well known to many in the Choir, as he was our Assistant Musical Director for a few years whilst he was studying at Manchester University. As well as conducting the Choir in a number of performances (the brass band version of *Messiah* and Holst's *Hymns from the Rig Vega* stand out in the memory!), Marcus also sang with us on many occasions.

After graduating from Manchester with first-class honours, he went to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London, during which time he was awarded first prize in the 2009 Wigmore Hall International Song Competition and the Song Prize at the 2011 Kathleen Ferrier Competition. He left RAM in 2011 and since then Marcus has gone on to forge an international career on the recital, concert and opera stage.

The list of his recent and forthcoming engagements is far too long to list in detail, but amongst the highlights are debuts at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and La Monnaie, Brussels with Mark Padmore and Julius Drake; concerts for the Australian Chamber Music Festival; a UK tour of Schubert's *Winterreise* with James Baillieu; appearances at Wig-

more Hall Britten Festival with Malcolm Martineau, Julius Drake, Myrthen Ensemble and Joseph Middleton, and recitals with the Carducci Quartet. On the opera stage he has sung in *Così fan tutte*, Britten's *Death in Venice* and *Billy Budd* for ENO; the title role in *Owen Wingrave* for the International Chamber Music Festival, Nuremberg; Eddy in Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Greek* for Music Theatre Wales on a UK tour, *Der Freischütz* with the LSO and Sir Colin Davis; *Albert Herring* with the BBC SO and Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with the Early Opera Company and Christian Curnyn at Wigmore Hall, whilst in the 2015/16 season he will make his debut with Welsh National Opera. Marcus has also recently sung Britten's *War Requiem* with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Jesus in Elgar's *The Apostles* at the 2014 Three Choirs Festival.

Not content with jetting round the world as a performer, Marcus is also an impresario, founding the Southwell Music Festival in 2014. Marcus grew up in Southwell and was a chorister at the Minster, and he felt this was a wonderful way of putting his home town on the musical map. As a result of the success of the inaugural festival, this year's event has been extended, and takes



place from 27 to 31 August.

Recently, Marcus has been named an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM), an award given to former students who have made a significant contribution to the music profession.

2015 is a particularly important year for Marcus. In August he marries his fiancée, soprano Alison Rose, in Southwell Minster.

You can see and listen to our new President at our *Dream of Gerontius* concert on 21 June at Gorton Monastery. We are incredibly lucky to have such a wonderful musician supporting our work, and we look forward to working with Marcus over the next few years.

Sunday 21 June 2015,

7.30 pm

**Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius*
Gorton Monastery,
Manchester**

**Tickets: £17, £15 conc,
£5 students**

Tel: 01663 764012

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

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

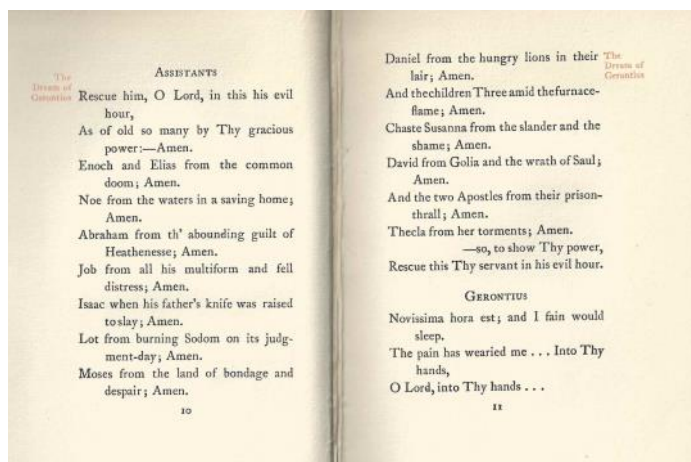
MEMORIES OF DREAMS PAST

For some Choir members, St George's Singers' concert on 21 June is not the first time they will have sung *The Dream of Gerontius*. In fact, many of us will have memories of earlier performances either with St George's or other choirs – perhaps a particularly beautiful solo from the Angel; a Gerontius who brought tears to our eyes; a semi-chorus who really sounded like angels; or Demons who brought nightmares to conductor and audience alike!

Other Singers have more tangible mementos. The score soprano Alison Gunn will be using belonged to her late father, Doug Whalley, when he sang *Gerontius* with the Choir. Alto Sylvia Johnson's score was published in 1951 and has inside it a programme from a performance that took place in 1955 at Leeds Town Hall. (We hasten to add that Sylvia was not singing in it!) Conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent, the concert was given by Leeds Philharmonic Society with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and featured soloists Marjorie Thomas, Richard Lewis and John Cameron.

We don't know how much concert tickets cost, but the programme was priced 9d (for younger Choir members that's just under 4p in 'new money'): the equivalent today of £2.08.

The programme is also interesting in that it's been signed by soprano Marjorie Thomas and tenor Richard Lewis. We're not sure where the score and programme actually came from (Sylvia picked up the score at a music sale, so doesn't have any direct connection with the event), but there are tantalising links with our forthcoming performance. Marjorie Thomas was born in Sunderland, spent most of her early life in Man-



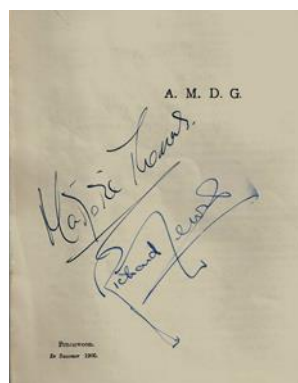
An extract from the Foulis edition of *Dream of Gerontius*

chester, studied at RNCM (then the Royal Manchester College of Music) and became professor of singing at the Royal Academy. She was a great favourite of Sargent. Richard Lewis, also from Manchester, was one of the most distinguished British tenors of the first half of the 20th century.

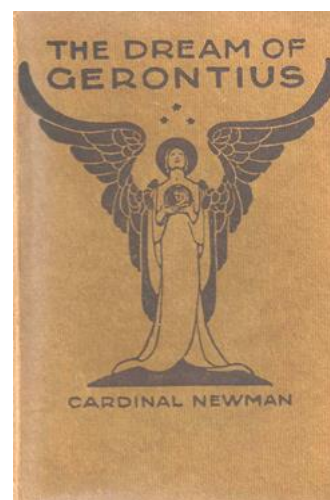
The bass in this 1955 performance, John Cameron, represents a different sort of connection. Melvyn Osborne, one of Sheffield Choral's tenors, trained at RNCM with John Cameron, who got Melvyn a number of solo 'gigs' in the area, including one with St George's Singers when they performed Bach's *Magnificat* in the

Their books were outstanding for their design, illustration and production, with coloured buckram bindings, tipped-in colour plates, an elegant Auriol typeface and rose-watermarked paper. The watercolour illustrations for *The Dream of Gerontius* were by Robert Traill Rose, an illustrator, commercial engraver, lithographer and designer of book jackets and lettering in Edinburgh during the early part of the 20th century.

Whatever your own personal memories of *Gerontius*, our performance on 21 June is sure to create its own magical moments. Anna Harvey as the Angel, tenor Josh Ellicott as Gerontius, and baritone Marcus Farnsworth as the Priest, accompanied by Stockport Symphony Orchestra and the combined choirs of St George's Singers and Sheffield Choral in Gorton Monastery. Surely, the stuff of dreams!



Herbert Howells once sat next to Elgar for a performance of *Gerontius* in Worcester Cathedral. According to Howells, Elgar fidgeted all the way through the concert – pulling up his socks, tidying his tie – until the Angel began to sing ‘Softly and gently’, at which point Elgar went still, and whispered ‘I always liked that tune.’



GERONTIUS: THE MISSING TEXT

As a devout Catholic, Elgar had enormous respect for the text of *The Dream of Gerontius* as composed by the author, Cardinal Newman.

The fact that he gave the work no label is testament to this. He refused to call it an oratorio, a sacred cantata, or indeed any other form of musical offering. It was not based on the oratorios of Handel or Mendelssohn. The work is purely a setting of the words, and Elgar's approach is entirely new.

Despite his reverence for the text, however, Elgar did omit some – indeed quite a lot! – of

the words. Newman's original poem has 912 lines. Elgar sets only 435. What happened to the rest?

Most of the cuts are to the 'afterlife' section. In the original poem, the section before Gerontius dies takes up only one-fifth of the entire poem. In Elgar's version, the balance between the two parts is more equal, with Part 1 representing one-third of the total work.

Some of the omissions and changes are done for musical reasons. Elgar makes much more of the Angelicals (all the souls who have been saved) than Newman, primarily as a means of providing a contrast to the Demons, and also giving Elgar the opportunity to create a great musical climax.

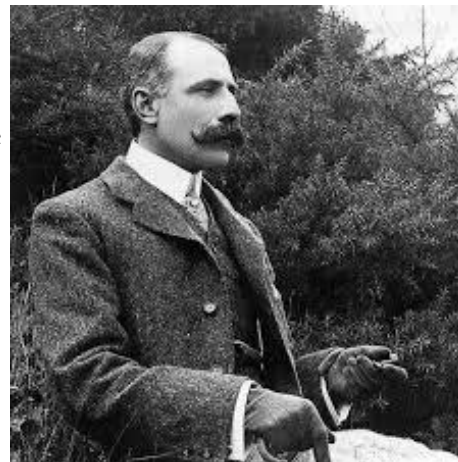
He also changes the sex of the Angel. Cardinal Newman is clear that the Angel is male; Elgar wrote the part for a mezzo-soprano, again giving him the opportunity to use a contrasting voice to Gerontius and the Priest.

On the other hand, some of the textual omissions are made on religious

grounds. As a Catholic, Elgar was aware that some of the poem's elements would not be acceptable to the Anglican community. Thus he omitted some crucial lines referring to the doctrine of purgatory, which is absent in Anglicanism. He also shortened the litany and omitted the list of saints' names in the 'Kyrie'.

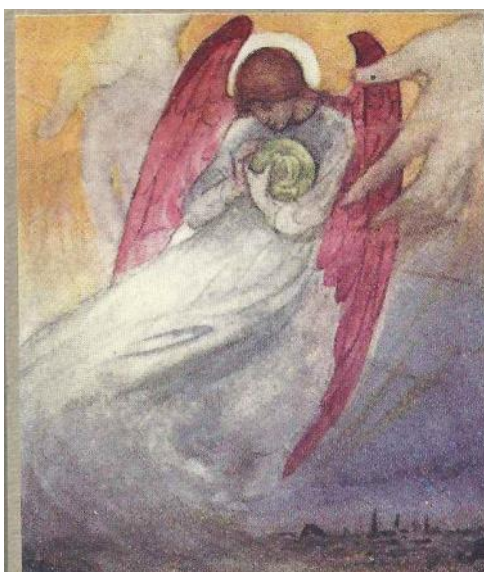
One small but very significant omission is the word 'Ah'. Towards the end of Part 2, the Soul of Gerontius says, 'I go before my Judge'. In the original poem this is followed by the single word 'Ah'. Elgar dispenses with this, and instead inserts lines from Part 1, sung by the Voices on Earth, the Assistants who still surround Gerontius on his death-bed. Whilst it may be lost in the poem, the music makes it clear that Gerontius is still on the point of death, that his friends are bidding him farewell, and that all that has passed in Part 2 of the work has taken no time at all.

In Elgar's music, time has simply ceased to exist.



Elgar in 1900, the year he composed *Gerontius*

One of the beautiful watercolour illustrations by RT Rose in the TN Foulis edition



Elgar was reputedly very worried about amateur choral societies performing *Gerontius*, particularly the non-conformist membership. He said, after listening to a rehearsal by one choir: 'The tenors knew it very well. The basses did not know it at all, and there was some buffoonery in that department.' Plus ça change ...

NAME THAT TUNE

The orchestral Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius* lays out all you need to know about the work. So listen carefully!

In the Prelude Elgar introduced all the musical themes that would be heard throughout the entire work, each of them representing one of the ideas Elgar wished to convey.

Elgar's publisher and friend, Auguste Jaeger, published an analysis of these motifs with names such as 'Judgment', 'Fear', 'Prayer', 'Sleep', 'Miserere', 'Despair' and

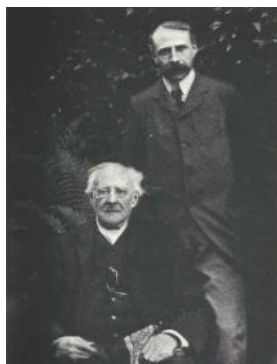
'Committal', the titles suggesting *leitmotifs* akin to Wagnerian music drama. Indeed, Elgar's debt to Wagner, especially *Parzifal*, is huge.

The work opens with the 'judgment' theme, followed by a brief shiver of 'fear' (Figure 2), which quickly turns into 'prayer' (Figure 3). 'Sleep' at Figure 4 is a gently rocking motif which gives way to the 'miserere' (3 before Figure 6). 'Despair' takes over at Figure 7, but 'prayer' returns at Figure 9. By Figure 12 it is time for the

'committal' theme, and towards the end of the Prelude, at Figure 20, 'judgment' is heard again.

Whilst interesting in itself, however, the analysis – of a type of literal labelling which was fashionable in music journalism a century ago – fails to do real justice to the true relationship between music and text, which transcends rigid analytical theory, and represents the spiritual and musical beliefs of a genius.

'Gerontius' with a hard 'g' (gun), or 'Gerontius with a soft 'dʒ' (gin)? The conductor Brian Kaye tried to settle the argument by ringing the BBC Pronunciation Unit. He received a prompt and definitive reply. 'It's "Gerontius" with a hard "g" – as in "geriatric".'



Elgar with his father

A LITTLE SHOP OF MUSIC

BY CONNIE JONES

In 1841 William Henry Elgar, a piano tuner, piano teacher and organist moved from London to Worcester. He had been born in Dover in 1821 and had served a musical apprenticeship with Coventry & Hollier of Dean Street in Soho. When this firm was approached by a member of the household of the Dowager Queen Adelaide to provide a piano tuner for Witley Court in Worcestershire where she went to live, they recommended their former apprentice, William, who had his music business in Worcester. William then received further piano-tuning commissions from other county families and became involved in the local musical activities as an accomplished pianist and violinist. William found great pleasure in the amateur musical life which flourished in Worcester.

In 1848 William married Ann Greening and their first three children were born at 2 College Precincts in Worcester. The family then moved to the vil-

lage of Broadheath in a more rural setting. Ann was the daughter of a Herefordshire farm labourer and loved the countryside. It was here in Broadheath that on 2 June 1857 Edward William Elgar was born. Eventually when Edward was barely two years old the family moved back to Worcester as William had been offered a shop and accommodation for a growing family and where people could try out pianos before buying them.

The business was successful and William invited his much



younger brother, Henry, to join him. Henry had worked for Kirkham's

of London and Hime & Addison in Manchester where he had tuned pianos for Sir Charles Halle. In 1860 William and Henry took over a vacant shop at 10 High Street, Worcester and were known as Elgar Bros. Difficulties in their relationship meant that eventually Henry left to follow an independent piano-tuning career and William worked alone once

more, well known for riding to his piano-tuning engagements on a thoroughbred horse.

William recognised his son's musical talent when Edward extemporised on the pianos in the shop and arranged for Edward to have his first lessons. Soon William was taking Edward on his rounds and allowing him to extemporise on the pianos once the tuning was completed. It was, too, in his father's shop that Edward had unrestricted access to music scores and textbooks.

When Edward was knighted his first thought was to go and tell his father, by now old and ill and a widower. Most fitting of all was Edward's gesture in September 1905 when he walked in procession along High Street in Worcester on his way to receive the Honorary Freedom of the City. As Edward passed Elgar Bros shop he bowed his head in salute to his father who watched the scene from an upper window – no doubt a very proud man.

With acknowledgements to Michael Kennedy's 'Portrait of Elgar' and Gerald Northrop Moore's 'Edward Elgar: A Creative Life'.

OUR 'GERONTIUS'

The role of 'Gerontius' is one of the choral repertoire's big sings. In action for a fair percentage of the whole work, a Gerontius tenor has to have stamina (as befits a dying man!), superb dramatic abilities, and a lyrical voice that conveys every human emotion from terror to humility. So we're delighted that the tenor for our forthcoming performance has all these qualities, and many more.

Joshua Ellicott represents an extraordinary talent, effortlessly crossing genre from song to opera to concert repertoire with his sweet-toned, flexible yet powerful, lyric tenor voice. His versatile musicianship is apparent in the wide repertoire

in which he excels and the comprehensive list of conductors and ensembles with whom he works.

Joshua was born in Manchester and is a graduate of York University where he read music. From there he progressed to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he studied singing, aided by a full scholarship. In 2006 he was the overall winner of the International Vocal Concours in 's Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands, as well as taking four of the remaining nine prizes for song, musical interpretation and opera. Since then he has gone on to sing in the world's premier concert halls with some of the finest artists of this generation, and under the

world's leading conductors (Harnoncourt, Christophers, McCreesh, Elder, Salonen amongst them). One of his greatest successes of recent years has been a programme devised around the First World War letters of his Great Uncle Jack in which his dramatic readings of letters and interspersed song have left audiences deeply moved. A particularly special performance took place this year at the Cologne Early Music Festival where some of the letters were translated into German and read by Joshua.

We're delighted to welcome him to St George's Singers and look forward to what we know will be an enthralling performance.



HIMALAYAN ADVENTURE

BY PENNY ANSON

A few weeks ago I returned from a holiday and singing experience of a lifetime in Nepal and India, organised by Concerts from Scratch and Specialised Travel. We arrived in

Thamel, in Nepal late in the evening of 22 March after leaving Manchester in the early hours. Little did we know that some of the sights we were going to see in Kathmandu would no longer exist two weeks later when the tragedy of the earthquake was to strike and this historic area and its inhabitants would suffer such a crisis and loss.

We spent our first full day sightseeing in Kathmandu, listed since 1979 as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Poor roads, chaotic traffic, sacred cows, other animals, rickshaws and pedestrians all fight for space amid blaring horns of six-abreast motorbikes. The coach journey was chaotic but fascinating! Our first stop was the Buddhist Stupa of Swayambhunath, perched on a hilltop with breath-taking views over the Kathmandu Valley. We then moved on to the heart of the old city, Durbar Square, where some of the monuments date back to the 12th century. Tragically many of these sites are now unrecognisable – ancient temples and buildings are just piles of rubble. The people, who already had so little, are homeless with few resources. They need all the help we can give.

The rough roads are crowded with few 'rules' and our guides frequently joked about the most important: 'leave 4 cm between you and another vehicle, but if

that's not possible then 2 cm will do'. Also, it is OK to drive on the wrong side to avoid the unbelievably large holes, rickshaws, pedestrians and unfinished roadworks. The blaring of



Durbar Square before and after the earthquake



horns from cars, lorries and the many motorbikes is constant and loud.

Our second day took us to Patan, a city of artists, Buddhist monuments, Hindu temples and ancient palaces, all also tragically affected by the earthquake. After lunch we were taken around Newari, a medieval village where life is very, very simple.

On Thursday a few of us took a VERY early morning flight over the Himalayas. This was 'at our own risk'! With only 10 on the plane, we all had a window seat and each of us was taken into the cockpit to observe unbelievably breath-taking views of Everest.

At midday we flew to Delhi for our singing experience. Mavinder Rattan is inspiring, thorough and good humoured. He is Musical Director for John Lewis (with 22 choirs) and adjudicator for choral competitions including BBC Choir of

the Year and Gareth Malone's The Choir. During the next few days we combined quality singing with more sightseeing. Old Delhi from a rickshaw was a highlight – yet more chaos and noise: markets, shopping, camel rides, the Taj Mahal and much more. Sadly our elephant ride was cancelled because it was a religious holiday and elephants aren't allowed to work on such days!

All our hotels were of excellent quality, culminating in the Samode Bagh where we stayed in luxury individual 'tented' rooms in the garden of the unbelievably luxurious Samode Palace, where we enjoyed our final evening. We felt very ethnic in our national

costumes which we had been given to wear. We were entertained by fireworks, dancers, musicians and were treated to a superb meal within the Palace. The contrast between our accommodation and that of local people couldn't have been more extreme.

Our hard-working singing experience culminated in Delhi in a wonderful performance of Haydn's *Insanae et Vanae Curae* and Schubert's Mass in G in the multicultural Cathedral Church of the Redemption, an impressive building tucked away from the hustle and bustle of New Delhi. Our large audience was very appreciative and gave us a warm reception – concerts by western performers are rare in New Delhi.

So much happened during the time we were away, too much for me to recount here. Every day was an experience and I felt both humbled and uplifted. I made good friends, learned so much, and cannot wait to go back.

A family in one of the old protected villages



Crazy drivers!



Our luxury tented village



The much photographed Taj Mahal



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



**Hot off
the
press!**

Joe gets new job

Our Assistant MD, Joe Judge, has been appointed to the position of FCM Chorister Tutor at Bradford Cathedral. Joe works with the boy and girl choristers and also gives 1:1 tuition in music theory, singing and piano. The funding for the appointment comes from the Friends of Cathedral Music (FCM) to enable graduate tutors to assist with vocal training and development of cathedral choirs.

Proms debut

If you missed some SGS members singing with the Hallé in the *Missa Solemnis* recently, then catch up with them at the Proms concert on 30 July, when they sing Vaughan Williams' *Sancta Civitas* with the Hallé Choir and Orchestra, under Sir Mark Elder. The work, which has been neglected for many years, is an ecstatic vision of post-apocalyptic salvation. (Just the thing after *Geron-tius!*) But you'll have to listen

carefully – the Hallé Youth Choir, the Trinity Boys Choir, and the London Philharmonic Choir are also joining in the fun. The concert also features Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Elgar's Symphony no 2.

New members

Welcome to new SGS members: soprano Helen Weedon, alto Rosemary Broadbent and bass David Thomas. We hope you enjoy your time with St George's.

Choir Friend, John Weir, enjoyed Gwyneth's article in the last issue of *Hemiola* about 'missing' library books so much, he thought we might find this piece amusing.
Thanks John!

ON THE RETURN OF A BOOK LENT TO A FRIEND

I GIVE humble and hearty thanks for the safe return of this book which having endured the perils of my friend's bookcase, and the bookcases of my friend's friends, now returns to me in reasonably good condition.

I GIVE humble and hearty thanks that my friend did not see fit to give this book to his infant as a plaything, nor use it

as an ash-tray for his burning cigar, nor as a teething-ring for his mastiff.

WHEN I lent this book I deemed it as lost: I was resigned to the bitterness of the long parting: I never thought to look upon its pages again.

BUT NOW that my book is come back to me, I rejoice and am exceeding glad! Bring hither

the fatted morocco and let us rebind the volume and set it on the shelf of honour: for this my book was lent, and is returned again.

PRESENTLY, therefore, I may return some of the books that I myself have borrowed.

From *The Haunted Bookshop*
by Christopher Morley

PETE BEATS TIME



Our new accompanist, Pete Durrant, is no slouch on the piano. But he's even faster on the road.

In this year's Manchester Marathon in April he ran a personal best of 3h28m and is now in training for even tougher challenges.

'Two years ago I ran my first marathon in London and ran out of gas at mile 18 to stagger home to a 4h12m28s time.

'Manchester Marathon was my second attempt and I was attempting to break 3h30m. The first 6 or so miles I was going along happily on target pace

and hit the 10k mark at 50m25s. I got a bit of time in the bank in the middle half of the race and by 20 miles I was inside my target time by nearly 2 minutes at 2h38m02s.

'My pace slowed towards the end as my legs became fatigued but I was able to hold on to get the sub 3.30 ending up with 3h28m39s. It was a great day, the support from the spectators was amazing and it really helped late on when the going got super tough!'

Pete has got a fairly busy race schedule for the rest of the year with the Manchester 10k in early May, the We Love Manchester 10k in early July, the

Salford triathlon in late July, the City of Salford 10k in September and a half marathon in mid- to late autumn! His eyes are set on something even bigger though.

'My long term plan is to complete an Ironman in probably 2017 which involves 2.4 miles of swimming followed by a 112 mile bike ride and then running a marathon! And yes, I have already starting thinking about finding a destination race somewhere in Central America in summer 2017 too – to tie in with the SGS Costa Rica tour!'

Well, we're going to Costa Rica for the singing, Pete – we'll catch you up in the bar!

AS I SAID TO THE QUEEN ...

On 2 April the Queen visited Sheffield Cathedral to distribute the traditional Maundy Money. This was the first time a state occasion had taken place in South Yorkshire, and Neil and his Cathedral musicians were in the national spotlight.

The music, which is always approved by the Queen in advance, included *Preces and Responses* by Bernard Rose; Psalm 138 with chant by Walter Alcock; Bruckner's *Christus Factus Est*; *Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake* by Richard Farrant/John Hilton; Wesley's *Wash me thoroughly*; Casals's *O vos omnes*; and the traditional *Zadok the Priest* by Handel.

The Royal Maundy ceremony has its origins in the commandment (a 'mandatum' Christ gave after washing the feet of his disciples the day before Good Friday: 'that ye love one another'). The Maundy ceremony of washing the feet of the poor, accompanied by gifts of food and clothing, can be traced back to the 4th century. However, the involvement of the king or queen dates back only to the 13th century. By 1363 Edward III had developed the service

into the current ceremony, then Henry IV began associating the number of recipients of gifts to the sovereign's age. At that time, the monarch was still washing the feet of the poor receiving the gifts (but only after three preliminary foot

scrubs by servants and court officials). Some of Henry's successors were keen on this than oth-

ers: Bloody Mary washed the feet of 41 poor women,

remaining on her knees throughout, whilst the profligate Charles I rarely bothered to attend at all! Feet-washing stopped in the 18th century, and in the 19th monetary allowances replaced the gifts of food and clothing.

The Maundy money used today has remained in the same form since 1670: a specially minted set of four coins – a four, three, two and one penny piece. Recipients are given two purses: a white purse with an amount equivalent to the sovereign's age (this year 89p) made up from the four coins, all of which is legal tender; and a red purse with a standard £5 and

50p coin. Historically, this represents £3 for clothing, £1.50 for food, and £1 for redemption of the sovereign's gown – an early form of capital gains tax.

The purses containing the money are carried by Yeomen on silver dishes, held above their heads. This tradition might date back to the times when food was distributed, and the poor tried to grab the food before their neighbours, though some believe it was to disguise the smell of the fish. For the monarch of course this wasn't a problem, as they always carried a nosegay made of sweet-smelling flowers and herbs – a tradition that survives today.

The Sheffield Maundy service went off splendidly, but as the Queen was introduced to the musicians at the end she apologized to Neil for taking longer than expected to distribute the money, disrupting the music schedule. His first reaction was: 'Well, if you'd been watching me Ma'am, you'd have finished at the right time.' Instead, he merely said, 'It wasn't a problem at all, Ma'am'. Good job Her Maj doesn't sing with St George's!



Members of the Cathedral Choir waiting in the Cathedral corridor between rehearsal and the service



WALES COASTAL PATH BY BRIDGET OVEY

We have been walking on the Wales Coast Path, from Rhyl, down the mainland, then all around the coast of Anglesey, then a little more mainland, then all around the Llyn Peninsula which was amazing. The path there and on Anglesey was often on the very edge, high up, like a little ledge cut into the cliff with quite steep drops down into the clearest sea I have even seen, really sea green. The wild flowers were stunning and we saw so many birds, including some fairly rare

ones. The weather was windy every day except two, with lots of showers, plus two days of non-stop heavy rain. The day before our return home was one of these wet days and the wind was so strong we needed to walk with our heads bent forward! Very exhilarating! But sadly, from the little train home through the salt marsh where the sheep and lambs graze, the stormy wind combined with a very high tide had been too much for the livestock and we saw about 40 dead sheep

washed up beside the train. There was an announcement that the track was flooded and we would need to get off and get a bus, but fortunately, a second announcement said the water had subsided enough for the train to continue. Having really enjoyed seeing all the sheep and lambs over our 300+ miles, we were saddened to see that they hadn't survived the tempestuous weather.



THE 2015 MÜNSTER DIARIES (BY VARIOUS PEOPLE!)



Tours wouldn't be complete without one alfresco rendition of *Locus iste*

Friday 22 May

It's Manchester Airport on Friday afternoon of the tour weekend. We all congregate in Terminal 3 round tick-list keeper Pam Craig, then make our way through what turns out to be the most incredibly slow

check-in. Pam has a text from Jeff to say he's stuck in traffic, but should be there by 4.30 pm. After two hours hanging around the airport we finally take off – minus our organist.

The plane is called a Dash. Two propellers, a couple of wings, and five rather small tyres. More of an amble than a dash, but it gets us to Düsseldorf safely, and we hang around the airport some more. Ah, Alison McLay's luggage gone missing. Has she got her music? Yes. Well, that's OK then.

Onto the coach and after an hour's drive we get to our hotel in Münster about 11 pm. Lovely big rooms, comfy beds, great showers. Gute Nacht!

Saturday 23 May

The schedule Geoff, Pam and Neil have put together is either exhilarating or exhausting, depending on one's age. The day starts with breakfast at 7.30 am. And what a breakfast! Despite the usual 'where's the ...?' and 'oh dear, I didn't see that!' buffet breakfast mutterings, this was a lavish spread. The edible jam-pots (who knew!), fresh honeycomb, fantastic bread selection, and delicious fruits and yoghurts were just some of the delights that awaited us. Not to mention the sausage...

Ali in the meantime was busy borrowing clothes. Her luggage still hadn't turned up, but collectively we managed to kit her out for the concert.

At 9.15 we were ready to leave for rehearsal. But first – a warning from Geoff. Münster is the bicycle capital of Germany. Bicycles have right of way in the red zone; pedestrians must keep to the grey zone. (Or was it the other way round?) Very cautiously we made our way in a crocodile out of the hotel and along to our rehearsal venue – St Lamberti church hall. We're bang on time, we ring the bell – no reply. What to do now? Sing *Locus iste* of course – much to



The audience gathers in St Lamberti Church

the bewilderment of passing Münster folk. Eventually the organist arrived to open up the hall, and in we went.

With no Jeff (still trying to find a flight) Neil had to take over on the piano whilst Joe had a quick promotion up to conductor. After a rather

hectic rehearsal we trooped round to the beautiful St Lamberti church, in the centre of the town.

Münster is famous for (among other things) its dangling Anabaptists. In 1534 the Anabaptists took power in the Münster Rebellion and founded a democratic proto-socialistic state. They renounced all property, promoted polygamy, burned all books except the Bible, and required all citizens to be naked in preparation for the Second Coming. Fortunately, the town was recaptured in 1535; the Anabaptists were tortured to death, and their corpses were in metal cages, which can still be seen hanging from the tower of St Lamberti church.

Here we met up with Galaxy Brass, the university brass ensemble who were going to join us in the concert,



The Anabaptists cages hanging from St Lamberti steeple

and who would be accompanying us in the Gabrieli *Jubilate Deo*. A quick rehearsal with them, and we found out that the acoustics in the church were wonderful for this type of music. All was looking promising!

Meanwhile Neil was searching for a score of the Bach piece Jeff had been going to play, and which currently lay in Jeff's luggage somewhere en route. The St Lamberti organist finally found one, handed it over to

On Saturday morning, Joe unexpectedly found himself in charge



Neil, who headed off up into the organ loft. It was now nearly concert time. Galaxy Brass were playing outside to attract an audience, and soon the



The great St Lamberti organ

TAYLOR'S TAGS

Here in this room where the Treaty of Westphalia was signed, there will be a Treaty of Bruckner between the sopranos and the tenors.

Basses - you look completely miserable, very *Bürgerisch*!

I've just seen a postcard with a picture of a mole peeping up out of the ground. Altos, you sound just like that.



Left hand up a bit Phil ...



Concert in St Lamberti

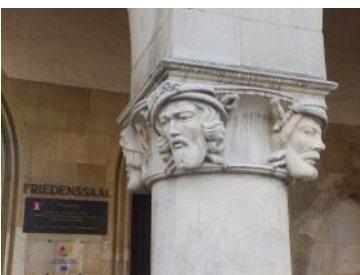
church began to fill up. In addition to the local audience, we also had friends of choir members: Andrew Charlton's wife, Anna, who is German, brought some of her family, and one of Mark Warrington's German friends also travelled to Münster to hear us.

We got ready for the first item: *Greater love hath no man*. Before we sang, however, Neil had planned to introduce the concert. But as he was miles away in the organ loft, Christian



Fröhlich kindly read out Neil's welcome script – and got the first audience laugh of the tour.

The concert was a tremendous success. Joe did brilliantly, Neil was phenomenal – and the choir was pretty good too, staying in tune almost throughout! The young players of Galaxy Brass were stunning, and in the final piece, *Jubilate Deo*, everything fell into place. At the end, the audience gave us tremendous applause, and then – to our utter amazement – a standing ovation! Well, if this what German audiences were like, we'd be in for a great weekend.



After the concert, lunch was called for. Being Saturday, the market in the main square in Münster was in full swing, full of flowers and delicious local produce: herbs, fruit, vegetables, meats. Then it was onto the sightseeing bus for a tour of the city. Nearly 70 per cent of Münster had to be rebuilt after the second world war, but they have done a remarkable job in restoring and rebuilding most of



the older buildings. Back to the Domplatz, and just time for a quick visit to St Paul's Cathedral (13th century, completely rebuilt after the war) and its famous medieval astronomical clock, adorned with hand-painted zodiac symbols, which traces the movement of the planets, and plays a Glockenspiel tune every noon. The cathedral also boasts a gigantic statue of St Christopher (Forshaw's take note!) and some beautiful modern stained glass windows.

Just time for a quick rest (and cake!) before we had to get ready for rehearsal again, this time in the Petrikirche. Jeff had at last arrived, so normal ser-

vice on the conductor's rostrum could be resumed. The church was much smaller than St Lamberti, and the layout and acoustics very different, so there was quite a lot of shuffling and re-arranging. The initial plan of having the brass stand right in front of the choir was fortunately ditched, and instead they were positioned down the side aisles. Well – we do need to see Neil from time to time!



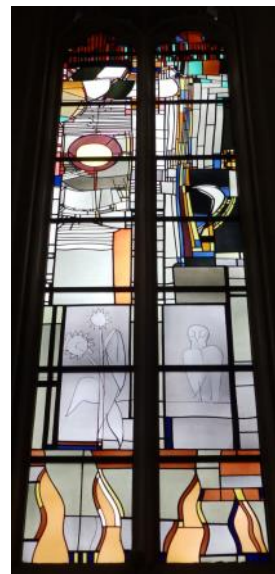
'We have to pay HOW MUCH to sit on the chairs!'

The evening's concert, also with Galaxy Brass, was longer than that in the morning, and if the audience was smaller than in St Lamberti (an *Elijah* across the road was a rival attraction!), they were equally enthusiastic, and gave us our second standing ovation.

We all watched Galaxy Brass with interest at the end: they had an extremely good 'bowing' technique which they demonstrated to very good effect. Could we do something similar without looking like idiots? Mmm ... A delightful late supper, then it was back to the hotel to get ready for Day 3.

Sunday 24 May
Another early breakfast start, then off again, this time to the Rathaus (Town Hall) where we were to sing in the

Rathausfestsaal: the venue of the signing of the treaty that brought about the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which saw the end of the Thirty (or Eighty, depending on which bit of Europe you lived in) Years War. A very significant



One of an amazing series of modern windows in the Cathedral



Late supper in the Domplatz



The Germans have such musical ears

The Cathedral





Münster on a sleepy Sunday morning



The Rathaus – inside and out



Our delightful hosts at Roxel church



THE MÜNSTER DIARIES (CONT/...)

place in European history, and we were warned, on pain of considerable financial penalties, not to scuff the floors, damage the tapestries or the chairs, or spill any liquids.

This was a short *a capella* lunchtime concert, and by 12.15 was all over. We did however introduce a new skill: bowing. Neil felt there was no reason why we couldn't learn to bow gracefully, à la Galaxy Brass. So after a few practice sessions, with Neil doing some semaphore and us trying to bend low enough, we produced our 'bows' – to great acclaim.

We were then given a tour of the Friedenssaal (Peace Room) where pictures of all the main characters involved in the Peace Treaty were hung. The room, which was primarily used as a court room, still had its original furnishings, including the bar behind which defendants had to stand during trial (being called 'to the bar' clearly means something different in Germany!) as well as some boxes containing various body parts. Our guide explained that defendants had to be faced by their accusers. As it was impractical to bring dead bodies into the courtroom to face their alleged murderer, it was deemed sufficient to bring in just an appropriate part: often a finger would do.

Then we were off again to hunt out some quick lunch, before getting on the bus to Roxel for the evening concert. (By this time incidentally most of us had been in choir dress non-stop for nearly two days. At some point we'd get a chance to change surely??) There were some complicated arrangements for getting non-singers to the concert venue involving cars, taxis and buses, but Joe Keaney, intrepid as ever, finally decided to set off on foot. Would he be the next

tourist to go AWOL? We awaited his arrival at Roxel with interest!

The coach to take us to Roxel was parked directly opposite the hotel, about 5 ft from the



The judge's bench with elaborate carving, and the prisoner's bar at the end of the Friedenssaal



pavement. Did we cross the road to get on it? Of course we didn't! On strict instructions from the coach driver, we walked 100 yards along the pavement on our side of the road, waited at the lights until the green man appeared, crossed, walked 100 yards back up the other side, and then got on the coach. Truly we are turning into good German citizens!

Roxel is a small suburb to the west of Münster, a charming little village which on this holiday weekend seemed even more sleepy than it usually is. We had a wonderful welcome from our hosts at the church, who led us into the church hall where refreshments had been laid out. They were clearly worried in case we didn't get an audience at all, and kept explaining that it was holidays, that there were lots of other things going on, and we couldn't expect a lot of people.

Most of us were already dressed in our by-now rather tired concert gear, but Ali turned up sporting something entirely

different, lent by another of her choir chums. (NB: should we instigate a 'shared wardrobe' approach to future tours? We could cut down on packing!)

We also had technical matters to deal with. Geoff had identified on one of his pre-tour visits that there was no video link to the organ loft. So Alan had packed up all his video equipment, handed it to Dave and Anne to load into their car, and was now busy setting up a complete video link between Jeff and the conductor.

And so to our final concert – and we needn't have worried about the audience. The church was packed. Jeff, having missed his big moment on Saturday, played the wonderful Duruflé 'Veni Creator' variations, which, interspersed with the choir's plain chant, sounded sublime – and had been a special request from the Pastor who wanted something appropriate for Pentecost. The audience adored everything, but particularly the Geraint Lewis and the Dove, and after the by-now expected standing ovation, we actually gave them an encore: a second helping of Tallis.

Having said farewell to our splendid hosts in Roxel church, we headed off to the traditional choir dinner at a small restaurant just round the corner. After a celebratory glass of something fizzy outside in the sunshine, we went in to the dining room. Geoff had been talking about



Jeff in his usual place





asparagus for months, and here finally we'd get to eat some. In fact, lots of it. The dinner was based around *Spargel*, and before we ate, the chef came out and explained the menu to us (with Christian as interpreter). Starting with asparagus soup, then onto salads including asparagus, followed by a main course accompanied by asparagus and a variety of sauces, and finally the dessert of – well, no asparagus, but it was the same sort of colour. To accompany it we would be drinking a specially chosen wine from Bavaria which went especially well with asparagus! The food proved to be as delicious as it sounded – and everyone went back for seconds.

Finally, the speeches. Geoff thanked everyone and anyone who had been involved in organising the tour. Anne presented Geoff, Pam and Christian with gifts, though admitted it had been a little difficult to find anything as the shops had been shut most of the holiday weekend! Alfred Holtmann of Galaxy Brass congratulated the choir on their dynamic range, breathing and phrasing in particular, and gave a special thank-you to Joe, who had stood in as conductor on the first day. Christian thanked us for putting

him in touch with Will Todd, whom he has invited to be the chair of his international choir competition. He looks forward to seeing us in Costa Rica! Pam gave out her usual tour

'awards' (see p. 13). And finally, Andrea thanked the choir, remembered those who couldn't come with us, and welcomed those new to touring. So ends another touring day. Next stop, Cologne!

Monday 25 May

It's our last day, but before we 'Dash' home we have one more appointment: a short recital in



Cologne Cathedral. We all piled into the coach again (Ali's bag had finally arrived from its holiday in Manchester Airport!) and set off in the rain for Cologne, a two-hour journey down the motorway. The Cathedral came into view when we were still on the outskirts. The statistics of this building are mind-blowing. It is the largest Gothic church in northern Europe, and its two huge 515 ft spires give it the largest façade of any church in the world. The choir has the largest height-to-width ratio of any medieval

church. It is Germany's most visited landmark, attracting 20,000 people a day. We were duly impressed. At least we'd get an audience!



Rhine bridge art

After a lot of pre-tour email discussion between Geoff and the Cathedral, we'd been allowed only 10 minutes in which to perform, so Neil had selected just

three pieces (very wise – there were a number of hangovers hanging around!) which we had duly placed in our folders. When we get into position however the verger said we could have as long as we wanted. How to expand three short items? An off-copy rendition of Tallis *If ye love me*, and two *Radiant Dawns* did very nicely.

Finally, the music was all over, leaving us a few hours before we had to board the bus for the airport. Some headed for the river, and took a boat trip along the Rhine; a couple of the more energetic walked (!) up the spire of the Cathedral; other more cultured Singers visited the Romano-German museum; whilst others just headed for the wine festival in the old town.

And so the tour was over. Back to the airport to catch our Dash again, arriving back in Manchester on Monday evening, tired but very proud.

Enormous thanks to Geoff and Pam for their brilliant organisation; to Neil for preparing us so well, getting us to sing quietly and step 'onto the escalator', and teaching us to bow; to Joe for taking over so superbly in an emergency; to Jeff for his valiant efforts in getting to join us. And most of all – to ourselves for being so wonderful!

So – Lincoln next year, then Costa Rica the year after. But they'll have to go some to beat our German tour!



Joe and his new friend



Cologne Altstadt (Old Town)



After scaling Cologne Cathedral, Alison Gunn and her Rhine Maidens took to the water



Alan Swain had an interesting conversation with a member of the audience in Roxel.

'Between rehearsal and the concert at Roxel on Sunday evening, I was entering the church together with many local folk. when a lady came up to me and said, in excellent English, that she had enjoyed our concert so much the day before in Münster that she had to come and hear us again. How kind I said, and are you from this area? No, just visiting. Where from? Cheadle Hulme!'

WE'RE NOT SAYING WE'RE STEREOTYPING ANYONE, BUT ... BY GILLIAN BANKS



My daughter, Rebecca, when she was living in Germany, sent me a link to an item entitled *How to be German in 20 Easy Steps*. Written by a Brit living there it is an affectionate observation of cultural differences. I've picked a few excerpts that will ring bells following our recent trip. I think it's been turned into a book.

German breakfasts are not meals, but elaborate feasts. If it's a weekend, every square inch of the table will be smothered in an assortment of meats, cheeses, fruits, jams, spreads and other condiments. It'll look like someone broke in and while hunting for valuables just tipped the contents of all the cupboards out onto the table.

I think our breakfast in the Mercure was somewhat more elegant than this, but followed the same basic principle. Wasn't it wonderful!

I think the often exaggerated stereotype that Germans love to follow the rules all comes down to one little illuminated red man. Guardian and God of the crossing pedestrian. To dare challenge his authority and step gingerly out into a completely empty road when he is still red, is to take great personal risk. Not of getting run over, the road is completely empty after all. Bar being struck by an invisible car, you're safe.

No, what you really risk is the scorn, the tutting and the shouts of 'Halt!' from nearby Germans. Who will now consider you an irresponsible, possibly suicidal, social renegade. Halt! Await the green Ampelmännchen. Consider it an elaborate exercise in self-control.

Rebecca confirmed this. Her boyfriend, walking home alone in the dead of night with no cars and no witnesses, would still stand and wait for the green man. A separate note of interest: in Berlin you can tell you are in what used to be the former East Berlin by the Ampelmänn - Neil had a postcard of a red one that he held up in rehearsals a while ago. He has a hat on.

Germans fear any beverage that doesn't fizz. It brings them out in a cold sweat. It's a great comedic joy to live in a country where you can watch tourists and foreigners buying 'classic' water, thinking that since for millions of years now 'classic' water, you know, the kind that has fallen from the sky since the dawn of time, was still, uncarbonated water, it would be the same here, right?

Oh no. Millions of years of water history have been conveniently forgotten. 'Classic' means carbonated, of course. You big silly. Learn to like it. If not, when visiting the

homes of your new German friends, you'll request tap water and they'll look at you like you are some primitive savage they just found in the woods covered in a blanket of your own hair.

We were refused glasses of tap water at the end of a meal in a restaurant in Leipzig. We'd already drunk beer and several bottles of quite expensive wine so we weren't being stingy, just thirsty. They did bring it in the end, with much shaking of heads. I'm sure we embarrassed Rebecca's boyfriend hugely by this faux pas, but he was too polite to say anything.

Finally, an extract from a long section about Würst:

Here, meat is the linchpin of every meal. The other notable time of year is Spargel Saison (asparagus season), where the country goes gaga as the almighty Spargel is being waved around everywhere, like a sort of culinary magic wand, which coincidentally it does rather resemble.

Wasn't the Spargel great?



What we lost on tour:

1. One organist.
2. One car.
3. One piece of luggage.

What we learned on tour:

1. How to bow beautifully.
2. How to get the basses to hit the C in *Seek Him ...*
3. How to cross the road like Germans.
4. The words to *Totus Tuus*.



KUCHEN: THE ALL-DAY, EVERYDAY TREAT!



Wendy Flavell has provided a recording (taken on an iPad) of us singing *Jubilate Deo* in St Lamberti. It's a little fuzzy, but you'll be able to listen to it soon on the choir website members' page. Lovely memento Wendy, Thanks.

THE ACCIDENTAL TOURISTS

The 'most unlucky tourist' award has to go to Barbara and Peter Forshaw for their fortitude, resilience and commitment to the choral cause!

The trouble started even before they'd left the UK. On the way to Harwich to get the ferry across the Channel, an accident with white van man took their car out of action. (Fortunately no one was hurt.) Green Flag towed the car away for repair and provided a hire car, which they then drove home, thinking that was the end of the tour.

But after a few hours sleep, they decided this was pretty wimpish behaviour, so they got into Barbara's little 'run-around' and at 2 am headed back to Harwich to catch the ferry they were originally intending to take.

Safely arrived in Münster, all was well on the Saturday, and Barbara joined the rest of the

choir for rehearsals and concerts, whilst Peter hired a bike to explore Münster and surroundings. In the evening he said he'd come along to the concert at Petrikirche, and before setting off he asked at the hotel reception where the church was. They kindly circled the exact spot on his map, and off he strode, found the church they marked, went in and was surprised at the size of the audience. Then the first strains of *Elijah* met his ears and he realised this wasn't Petrikirche and they certainly weren't St George's Singers. (Though he did say the choir weren't bad!) Onto Sunday and, playing the safe game, Peter decided to accompany Barbara to the Rathausfestsaal concert, then had a quiet lunch. Barbara set off on the coach to Roxel and Peter was intending to drive out later. He just had to get the car

out of the car park ... but couldn't find the ticket, assumed Barbara had it with her, so had to get a lift to Roxel with Christian. And the ticket? In the hotel room, of course.

At this point, all was well. Barbara was in the choir, Peter was safely installed in the right audience at Roxel. The first half went splendidly and the choir trooped off stage for a short interval. Then Barbara slipped getting down the steps and fell heavily. Fortunately (again!) no serious harm done. Judy kindly supplied arnica tablets in the interval, and apart from some lurid bruising on Barbara's knee and arm, all was well.

The final tour day they travelled to Cologne by car, and met up with the rest of the choir in the cathedral. They were last seen after the recital heading off for Ghent ...



The altos decided Barbara needed a couple of minders on the sight-seeing bus tour



The patron saint of travellers (St Christopher) in Münster Cathedral – try dangling him from the car windshield!

FINED! THE LATEST PAM CRAIG PRODUCTION – FEATURING 'THE HORRORS BEHIND THE TOUR'

This year Pam was in unusually obstreperous mood. She'd had so much grief from various tour members that she decided she wasn't going to give out her usual 'Georgies' – the much coveted tour awards – but instead would impose fines on all those who had IN ANY WAY annoyed her.

First on the list: Penny Anson, for being the only one not to pay her tour fees on time. Next, alto Jenny Limond. On being asked if she minded sharing a room with (Radiant) Dawn Garfitt. Jenny had replied, 'But she's a soprano!' Happily, they settled their differences without resorting to violence, and a new soprano-alto alliance was forged.

Alison McLay had to be fined (of course!) for losing her luggage on the way over. And the Forshaws – well, it goes without saying that a significant sum of money changed hands over their exploits!

Then it was Joe Judge's turn. Pam decided he had to be fined for making us big-headed. We can't possibly be that good all the time Joe! Tell us what you really think!

Neil's fine was imposed for being overwhelmingly brilliant. When Jeff failed to appear for the first concert, Neil handed over his baton to Joe, went up to the organ loft, and accompanied us throughout the concert. The highlight was his tremendous totally unrehearsed performance of the Bach piece as listed in the programme (any deviation from the programme is NOT permitted of course!). He was also fined for getting us to step onto 'the moving escalator' so effectively.

Next, more alto trouble. Bridget Dunbar was fined for discovering the best cake shop in Münster and persuading her colleagues to try out some of the more calorific varieties. Then a joint fine for Andrea, Chris, Ali, David and John for their

beautiful and inspiring solos.

Jeff's turn next – obviously, a massive fine for his missed flight. One good thing though – we know he won't be late for our next tour, 'cos we're going to Lincoln!

Pam was really getting into her stride now, and no one was safe. Christian was her next victim, fined for giving – and encouraging the rest of the audience to give – us not one, but three standing ovations. No Teutonic standoffishness about our audiences!

And finally, Geoff. Pam found it difficult to limit the number of fines Geoff should pay, as he'd given her so much grief over the last few months. From his obsession with asparagus, his appallingly un-PC comments, and finally for making Pam laugh so much, he was forced to pay the biggest fine of the night. Which he did – most graciously!



Don't be fooled by the kindly tour guide facade: behind the glasses lurks a fiend in choir dress.



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CHOIR MEMBER IN SHOCK DRUGS BUST!

Getting through security at airports is always a little unnerving. But Peter Farrington had an experience that qualifies as not only unnerving but definitely alarming!

He was going through the security check at Düsseldorf airport on his way to boarding the plane for Manchester when he was stopped by a security guard. They'd spotted something in his luggage. Small white packets containing some sort of crystal. Could he explain what this was? Well, yes, it's obvious, isn't it. It's sugar.

Clearly not used to the Englishman's desire for a good pot of tea with all the trimmings, the German guards led him to one side and called for the sniffer dogs.

Half an hour later, after the dogs had failed to find anything in the least suspicious, and after much searching (of luggage and Peter!) they eventually decided he was in fact guilty of smuggling nothing more lethal than Tesco's granulated white, for his own personal use of course. In the meantime, Peter (not one to miss an opportunity to

spread the word) regaled the guards with the entire story of the choir, our tour of Germany, the music, the venues ...

As a look of quiet despair began to spread over the security guards' faces, they decided they'd made a mistake and hurriedly let Peter go through to the departure lounge.

Well, he might have got away with it in Germany, but we know the truth: he's obviously either been mainlining Assam or snorting Earl Grey! We're watching you, Farrington!



They may look like cranes, but they're actually Cologne's latest luxury apartments overlooking the Rhine

EXPLOSIVE TIME IN COLOGNE

Just two days after SGS left Cologne, some 20,000 people were evacuated from their homes as authorities defused a one-tonne bomb from World War Two. Schools and kindergartens, as well as the zoo, remained closed during the city's

largest post-war evacuation. Hundreds of tonnes of unexploded ordnance are discovered in Germany every year, left by allied bombers targeting Cologne in World War Two. It is usually defused safely, though in 2010 three bomb-disposal

officers were killed during an attempt to make a bomb safe. The deactivation of this one-tonne device, which was found near Muelheim bridge crossing the Rhine river (did

we sail under it on Monday?!), took place on Wednesday afternoon, closing the river for shipping and the airspace.

The bomb was found the previous Friday during preparations for the construction of a pipeline. It is believed to be an American design and was buried 16ft underground. In December 2011, the biggest bomb disposal operation in Germany since 1945 was mounted in Koblenz to defuse two bombs from World War Two found in the riverbed of the Rhine.



NEIL'S NEW CAREER: STAND-UP COMIC

It's sometimes difficult to create a rapport with an audience in a foreign country, so Neil decided that he wanted to introduce all our concerts personally – in German. He did such a good job that he had the audience laughing and applauding at every single concert. So what was he actually saying?

Each concert was slightly different, but here's the gist of his speech. And who knew he spoke such good German! We'll take more notice next time he corrects our German pronunciation!

'Good day, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of St George's Singers I would like to welcome you to our concert. We are delighted to have chosen the town of Münster in which to base our tour of Germany.

'We come from a small village near Manchester, which lies in north-west England, just as Münster is located in north-west Germany. Perhaps that's why it rains in Münster as much as it does in Manchester. I've found this saying about Münster: *Either it's raining, or the bells are ringing. When both happen together, then it's Sunday.* In Manchester we say something

similar: *If you can't see the hills, then it's raining. If you can see the hills, then it's going to be raining soon.* So we feel right at home here. Though we think you've ordered better weather for us this weekend!

'I would like to thank Herr ... for his warm welcome to this beautiful church. And I must give an especial thank-you to our good friend Christian Fröhlich, who has helped us with our tour plans and who first suggested that we come on tour to Münster.

'Today our programme includes choral works which the

Choir sang in a commemorative concert in November 2014 for the fallen of all countries in the first and second world wars. Here in Münster you suffered especially extensive war damage, and we hope that you will join with us in listening to this music of consolation and remembrance.'

At the end of each concert, Neil then thanked the audience for coming along and listening so attentively, told them where to hear us next, and hoped they enjoyed our music.

Which by their applause they clearly did!

MÜNSTER: THE LAST WORD



'We all know what a great choir trainer Neil is. The experience of preparing 7- and 8-year-old boys for Evensong in twenty minutes obviously informs his training of St George's Singers. I have been in this wonderful choir for

nearly twenty years and

Geoff Taylor suffered brain fade at the Tour Dinner. It may have been something to do with the amount of young Bavarian wine he had drunk, or the excitement of yet another standing ovation in a packed church, where he had been warned to expect a small audience as many local residents were away on holiday, or visiting relatives

never remember the danger of being over-rehearsed. We also know what an inspiring choral conductor he is. What we didn't know (or at least, I didn't) is what a great organist he is. Many of you may not know the story behind his performance at the mid-day concert yesterday (was it really only yesterday!) in St Lamberti.



'Jeff Makinson's journey from Lincoln to Manchester airport, which normally takes two hours, took six. He missed the flight, and there was not another one until Saturday. He had chosen to play the Bach Fantasia on the chorale *Komm, heiliger Geist* (BWV 651) in his "spot", a very appropriate choice for the eve of Whitsun.

– a popular activity for Whit Sunday. It may even have been because he felt he had been speaking for too long (but we doubt it). Whatever the cause, he embarrassingly skipped an important part of the speech he had prepared. *Hemiola* now brings you what Geoff really meant to say: the last word on Münster.



'But on Saturday morning we not only had no organist, but no music! We explained the problem to Alexander Töpfer, the delightful young deputy Kantor who was looking after us. "I think I have that at home" he said, "I'll go and have a look." Half an hour later he was back with the music, but in an unfamiliar edition that Neil had never seen before, and which, of course, had none of his markings.



Roxel church



Concert in the Rathaus

'Neil couldn't remember the last time he had played the piece, and there was no time to practise. When we were able to get into the church, less than an hour before the concert, he was shown the splendid but very complicated and totally unfamiliar organ, 50ft up in the West Gallery. Still no time to practise as he had to accompany Joe's rehearsal of the rest of the programme. His page turner was then locked out of the organ loft by the rather fierce churchwarden. (Alexander let her in later). Yet he played a blinder which brought cries of "Bravo" from the audience.'



PS

'One of the most moving and beautiful pieces played by Galaxy Brass was a "Hymn" by an English composer, Chris Hazell. It was especially effective when played "in the round" at St Petri. Chris Hazell of course is the brother of our very own Connie Jones.



A rather tired Joe Keaney reaching Roxel

'The St George's family spreads ever wider!'



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www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



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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 CONCERT DIARY 2015-16 Season

10 October 2015

Beethoven: Choral Symphony

21 November 2015

Mozart: Mass in C minor

5 December 2015

Carols and Brass by Candlelight

16 January 2016

Singing Day - *Elijah*

23 April 2016

Sounds and Sweet Airs

26 April 2016

Come and Sing evening

26 June 106

Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony*

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012

tickets@st-georges-singers.org.uk

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NEXT SEASON PROGRAMME ANNOUNCED

It's summer time – which means it's time to reveal our programme for next season. And what an exciting and varied programme Neil has put together for us.

The season begins early with a performance of Beethoven's Symphony no 9 ('The Choral') with Stockport Symphony Orchestra. The first of our own major concerts is in November, when we will be joined by Chetham's Chamber Orchestra and a marvellous group of young soloists – vocal and instrumental – to perform Mozart's Mass in C minor, alongside another two Mozart works.

Christmas sees our traditional carol concert, but this year

with a twist, as we welcome Stockport's Youth Brass Band as well as the young pupils of Bradshaw Hall Primary School.

The Singing Day in January 2016 will provoke memories for many at St George's Singers, when we will spend the day learning and performing extracts from Mendelssohn's mighty oratorio, *Elijah*. Then in spring we offer our own tribute to the nation's greatest poet, in a concert entitled 'Sounds and Sweet Airs' to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

This year we have introduced a new event: a 'Come and Sing' evening in April, to which singers are invited to join us in performing a range of works from

our repertoire. So if you know anyone who is thinking of joining us, do tell them about this.

We end the season with a return to the Monastery to perform the great *Sea Symphony* by Vaughan Williams.

Pick up a season brochure, put the dates in your diary – and tell all your friends!

