



Hemiola

St George's Singers

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

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VICE PRESIDENTS:

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Mark Rowlinson
Stephen Threlfall
Stephen Williams

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ASSISTANT MUSICAL DIRECTOR:

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MOZART FOR ALL BY STEPHEN THRELFALL

SGS Vice President Stephen Threlfall reflects on our concert with Chethams devoted to the genius of Mozart.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of my role as Director of Music at Chets (that's Chetham's School of Music for those less familiar with our nickname) is creating a musical programme for our ensembles that will showcase the skills of our students, stretch their capabilities, broaden their experience, and – of course – attract an audience. The goal, always, is to enrich, to educate and to entertain.

For obvious reasons, we tend to programme larger scale symphonic works for Chetham's Symphony Orchestra (CSO). As well as giving orchestral experience to our students, this also familiarises them with the mainstream symphonic repertoire. Opportunities to perform

smaller, chamber orchestra and especially classical repertoire are less common, so the chance for them to work with SGS for the recent RNCM concert was one to relish.

Allow me to blow the Chets trumpet (!) in praise of our students and to acknowledge the quality of their ensemble playing. This is in large part due to the extensive, weekly chamber music activities at school which help them to develop their musical awareness, response, sense of style and intuition, whilst also enriching their own solo aspirations. Mozart is wonderful music and also wonderfully exposed and challenging! The review we received (who are these mystery writers?) was justifiably complimentary. For me, the magic ingredient was



Stephen Threlfall

ideas and possibilities with Neil and the team has led to a number of memorable musical collaborations, and the pleasure in preparing the Mass and the two companion works has been a joy. As ever, having the opportunity to work with the students is profoundly uplifting and rewarding for all, as I am sure Neil also finds. Thank you to everyone in the choir for your committed singing and for the appreciation you expressed to so many of our players, it meant a great deal to them. We travelled to Hereford the following day for a repeat performance with Hereford Cathedral Choirs, directed by David Evans, Director of Music - himself a former Chets student. Once again, with musicians ranging in age from 12 years (our second oboe player) upwards, the Mozart experience proved itself to be music for all.

(PS. Our trombone player who was taken to A& E is fine!)



Saturday 23 April
St George's Church,
Poynton
'Sounds and Sweet Airs'
A Shakespeare Celebration
Featuring music and song
inspired by the words of
William Shakespeare
with
Ella Taylor, soprano
and
Jamie Akers, lute

SOUNDS AND SWEET AIRS

It is an acknowledged fact that Shakespeare transformed the English theatre and enriched the English language. Equally significant has been his influence on composers and musicians. His poetry is both universal and timeless, so it is not surprising that almost every composer of note has set his verses to music.

In our next concert, a celebration of the great poet on the 400th anniversary of his death, we present a selection of songs from composers of all ages and many countries who have been inspired by his words.

Shakespeare was active in the theatre for only about 20 years. By 1592, aged 28, he was an established playwright in London. His last solo play, *The Tempest*, was written in 1610–11, after which he retired to Stratford.

Throughout this late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period music, and particularly singing, was the natural order of the day, enjoyed by people of all classes. It was customary for playwrights to include at least one song, and usually more, in every play, and Shakespeare made full use of his musicians even in his tragedies. Only the grimmest – *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus* – are music-free zones, whilst his comedies abound with music and song.

In addition to instrumental music – trumpets and drums for military or royal scenarios, lutes and viols for melancholy or tender musings – Shakespeare used songs extensively as a vital role in the drama: to set the mood; to reveal private thoughts and feelings, establish character or mental state, or to provide ironic commentary on

plot or character; or as a theatrical device to signal a scene shift or distract the audience whilst a new scene was being opened. Songs were always assigned to minor characters – servants, clowns, fools, rogues, drunkards, monsters, spirits and fairies. Major figures never sing, except when in disguise or

when not in full possession of their mental faculties; noble characters who want to hear music call for it from a servant, usually a young boy. The incantatory and ritual use of song is also central to plays such as *Midsummer*

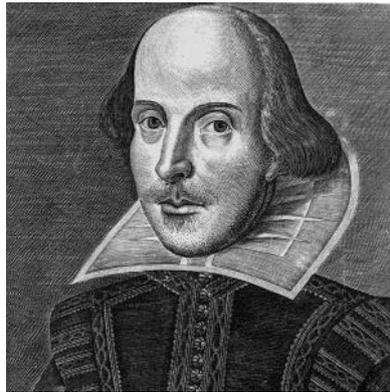
Nights Dream, *Tempest* and *Macbeth*. And above all, music allowed everyone in his audience, nobles and commoners alike, to understand his plays and relate to them more easily.

The musical forces available to Shakespeare were minimal. Whilst dramas produced at court had lavish instrumental and vocal resources at hand, professional companies such as The Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's own, had much scarcer musical forces to work with. The two plays we know that earned court performances, *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*, both contain nearly three times the amount of music normally present. A more typical Globe production would have had a trumpeter, a wind/shawm player, flute and recorders, and perhaps a lute or viol (a very popular gentleman's instrument at the time).

In total, over 90 sets of lyrics have been ascribed to Shakespeare, including more than 50 songs in his plays. However, barely a dozen scores in contemporary settings have sur-

vived, some by Thomas Morley, Robert Johnson and John (Jack) Wilson amongst them. As well as composing his own lyrics, Shakespeare also made use of well-known songs of the day, and which the audience would have known and related to immediately. There is nothing from the plays to suggest that Shakespeare had any particular knowledge or love of the 'art music' of the time: no allusion to the magnificent church music of Byrd, the brilliant madrigals of Weeke and Wilbye, or the sublime strains of Dowland. But he did have a great fondness for honest popular English and traditional songs.

Above all, he understood very well the Renaissance idea of the 'music of the spheres' and the profound effect of music on the human spirit: 'Since naught so stockish, hard and full of rage / But music for the time doth change his nature' as he says in *The Merchant of Venice*. The same sentiment occurs time and again throughout his plays, and there are estimated to be over 2,000 musical references in his works.



This is the image of Shakespeare that appears in the First Folio, published by the poet's friends. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it looks a bit like him, even though it dates from just after Shakespeare's death



Our concert on 23 April is not just Shakespeare's birth and death day – it's also St George's Day. A fitting date on which to remember our national poet.

The man that hath no music
in himself.
Nor is not moved with
concord of sweet sounds.
Is fit for treasons,
stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are
dull as night.
And his affections dark as
Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted.
Mark the music.
The Merchant of Venice, V: 1



THE SISTERS ARE COMING!

OK. Who's your favourite composer? Odds on it'll be Bach, Mozart, Britten, or any one of a dozen other household names. Odds on too that the one thing they will all have in common (except genius) is that they'll all be men.

But with Shakespeare's help St George's Singers will be doing something to redress the balance. Our concert on 23 April will be unusual in that not one but two of the composers featured are women. The Choir will be singing Emma Lou Diemer's *Three Madrigals*, whilst soprano Ella Taylor will bring us two songs by Madeleine Dring.

Emma Lou Diemer was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1927, into an intensely musical family. She played the piano and composed at a very early age and became organist in her church at age 13. She studied at Yale and the Eastman College of Music, went to Brussels, Belgium on a Fulbright Scholarship and spent two summers of composition study at the Berkshire Music Center. She taught in several colleges and was organist at several churches in the Kansas City area during the 1950s, and from 1959–61 she was composer-in-residence in the Arlington, VA schools and composed many choral and instrumental works for the schools, a number of which are

still in publication. She then taught at the University of Maryland, before moving in 1971 from the East Coast to teach composition and theory at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she founded the electronic/computer music programme. In 1991 she became Professor Emeritus at UCSB.

Through the years she has fulfilled many commissions (orchestral, chamber ensemble, keyboard, choral, vocal) from schools, churches, and professional organizations. She is an active keyboard performer (piano, organ, harpsichord, synthesizer), and in the last few years has given concerts of her own music. Emma Lou lives in Santa Barbara, California, five minutes from the Pacific Ocean.

An important tenet in her philosophy is that a composer 'should be able to write for the non-professional as well as professional, to write easy as well as difficult music, and should be able to make all of it interesting to the performer and the listener.'

English composer Madeleine Dring also came from a musical family. Born in 1923 in Haringay in London, she showed talent at an early age and took lessons in the junior division of the Royal College of Music

beginning on her tenth birthday. She attended on a scholarship for violin, though her talent for the stage was also noticed, and she performed in the children's theatre. She continued at the Royal College for senior-level study in music, where her composition teachers included Ralph Vaughan Williams, Herbert Howells, and Gordon Jacob; she also studied mime and drama. Dring's two loves of theatre and music would coexist happily; many of her compositions were for the stage, upon which she often sang and played piano. Her composing career was cut short in 1977 when she died of a cerebral haemorrhage.

Madeleine Dring's style is typically light and unpretentious. She admired the idiomatic and rhythmically vibrant writing of Francis Poulenc, which is echoed in her works. Her harmonizations are often jazzy; her writing has often been compared to that of George Gershwin. She wrote many of her songs for herself and as such made no particular effort to make them easy to sing, melodically, as she herself had perfect pitch. As family responsibilities would keep her from completing large-scale works, most of Dring's output was in shorter forms; she wrote a good deal of solo piano and chamber music, as well as many pedagogical works.



Emma Lou Diemer



Madeleine Dring

BOOK REVIEW

It's quite a coincidence that just as we're about to feature two female composers in our next concert, a book has just been published on 'The forgotten women of classical music'. It's also a coincidence that the title of the book is the same as our concert, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*. (Oooh ...!!)

Ill-informed musicologists (usually men?) have for centuries declared that the apparent absence of women composers from the classical 'hall of fame' arises from their psychological

and even physiological incapability to compose great music.

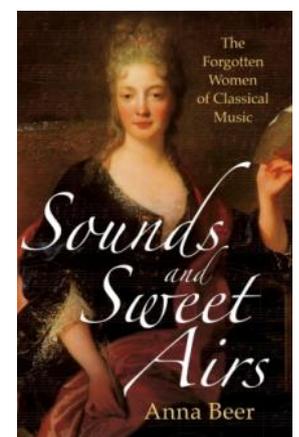
Author Anna Beer considers why so few female composers have gained recognition, and investigates the challenges that held back their musical ambitions: family life, health, the need for perceived 'propriety', or lack of educational opportunities.

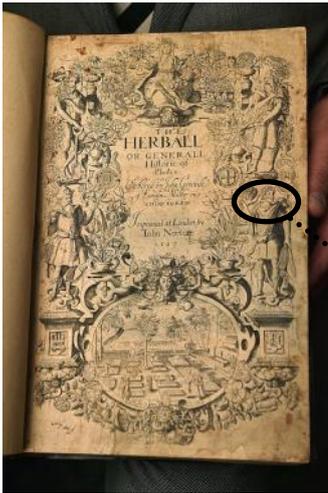
Even women who lived in musical environments struggled to make their voice heard. Mendelssohn and Schumann both proved less than enthusiastic

about their respective sister's and wife's composing than might have been thought.

Eight women are featured, ranging from Francesca Caccini in seventeenth-century Florence to Elizabeth Maconchy, who was born in Hertfordshire in 1907, and died in 1994.

If you've never heard of Strozzi, Jacquet de la Guerre, Martines, or Lili Boulanger (sister of the more famous Nadia), then you can read all about them now.





Above: The frontispiece to the volume
Below: the cipher



It is a little strange that, as a new image purported to be of Shakespeare is uncovered, ground-penetrating radar reveals that the poet's head is missing from his grave.

WHO IS WILLIAM?

No accredited image of Shakespeare survives. The image that is generally regarded as being the closest to life is the engraving by Martin Droeshout, which appears in the First Folio and which you can see on page 2. Although this post-dates the Bard's death, as it was published by Shakespeare's fellow actors, it is assumed that the image bears a close resemblance.

Now, an image claimed to be the only **contemporary** portrait of William Shakespeare has been discovered in a 16th century book about plants.

Botanist Mark Griffiths claims to have identified this image of the Bard when he was studying *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes*, written in 1598 by John Gerard, botanist and garden designer to Elizabeth I's chief minister, Lord Burghley.

The title page features an image of an unnamed, bearded man with a laurel wreath on his head. Beneath it is an Elizabethan cipher which Griffiths claims means 'William Shakespeare'. Symbols included in the portrait are said to be coded references to the playwright.

Mr Griffiths was researching a biography on Gerard and identified three of the men in the illustration as the author, Lord Burghley and a Flemish botanist named Rembert Dodoens.

But who was the 'The Fourth Man'? Griffiths solves the riddle as follows. The man in the illustration is standing on a plinth that bears a code which incorporates:

- the number four + the letter 'E' – translating in Latin as 'quater-e', meaning 'to shake';
- the letters 'OR' – the heraldic term for gold, a reference to the Shakespeare family coat of arms;
- the code can also be read from left to right, top to bottom, as 'quat-e-or', a Renaissance spelling of 'quator', meaning 'I shake';
- a rebus representing a spear – put together these say 'shake-spear';
- a letter 'W' to represent William;
- the man is holding an ear of sweetcorn, a fleur-de-lys and a fritillary – references to *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI Part I* and *Venus and Adonis* respectively.

In the latter, Adonis is turned into a purple flower that Mr Griffiths says is identifiable as a snake's head fritillary.

The find has been verified by Edward Wilson, Emeritus Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, who said his academic instinct had been to disprove the theory. But he has conclud-

ed that the Shakespeare claim is 'absolutely safe, it is sensational, and we do not think anyone is going to disprove it at all'.

Some Shakespeare scholars were more doubtful. Dr Paul Edmondson, Head of Learning and Research at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, said: 'I haven't read the full report but I'm always sceptical about any theory that relies on secret codes being broken. I can't help just seeing a generalised portrait of a classical poet.'

Prof Michael Dobson, director of the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham,



also poured cold water on the theory. 'It's a man in a toga holding a little bit of corn on the cob. It's nice that people are so fond of Shakespeare that they see him everywhere, even in a botany textbook. But it's hallucination.'

Based on an article in The Daily Telegraph and Country Life

SHAKESPEARE: THE ASHTON CONNECTION



Another recently discovered image of the Bard, thought to have been painted during his 'Lost Years' when it is claimed he was a member of the infamous 'Renaissance Rappers'

From 1578 when Shakespeare left grammar school, until 1582 when he married Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare disappears from written records, a period known as the 'Lost Years'. We know that his father, John, fell into financial difficulties at this time, probably necessitating young William having to leave school. But what did he do then? Did he join one of the travelling troupes of actors who regularly visited Stratford? Did he become a schoolmaster, or a soldier? Did he help his father

in the family business? One theory is that William went to serve a wealthy Catholic family in Lancashire, and that he himself was actually a recusant Catholic. The theory is based on a reference in the 1581 will of Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire, along with mention of theatrical costumes, and a request to his kinsman Thomas Hesketh to take care of this 'William Shakeshaft, now dwelling with me ...'. Other circumstantial evidences comes some 20 years later when London goldsmith Thomas Savage

named Hesketh's widow as one of his beneficiaries. Lord Strange's Men, a company of players linked with Shakespeare's early career, regularly performed in Lancashire and would have been well known to the Hoghtons and the Heskeths. Finally, there is a local legend in Ashton-under-Lyne that the young William sang at Ashton Parish Church. Records show that in 1591 a boy called 'Shakeshaft' was a member of a choir who sang there. Sadly, the dates don't quite match – but it's a good story!

PRAISE FOR *ELIJAH* FLOODS IN

Our 2016 January Singing Day was another storming success, musically, financially and gastronomically. Some of the comments we received from partici-

'I came to the Singing Day on Saturday and just wanted to say what a great time I had!'

pants are featured here, whilst many other singers came up to Choir members afterwards and congratulated us on putting on a splendid day.

Of course, the highlight of the day was the singing. For most of the SGS members there it was a day to relive the memories of 2004, when we performed *Elijah* at The Bridge-water Hall.

Opening our copies of the score brought memories flooding back. Particularly the memories of memorising, 'Open copy here' on page 12 – did we really sing the first 12 pages from memory? It didn't stop there. 'Memory next two pages', 'Memory this page', 'Memory', 'Memory', 'Memory 79-80' ...

For heavens sake, how much of this did we actually sing off-copy?!

Twelve years on, however, the scores were definitely necessary

and remained open throughout. Neil got everyone off to a grand start with some warm-ups, but pretty soon we were into the music proper. We quickly realised we had an especially good soprano section this year, though the other sections were no slouches, and the tenors and basses held their own well.

The lunchtime soup kitchen is always eagerly anticipated on our Singing Day, and this year was no exception. All the old favourites were there: spicy parsnip, mushroom, carrot and coriander, vegetable, with some new introductions this year such as smoked haddock, and Peter Marcus's revamped (and

totally delicious) chorizo, tomato and bean.

Back to work in the afternoon, and then at 4pm our quartet of soloists arrived: El-

eanor Garside, Cara Curran, Adam Temple-Smith and Terence Ayebare, nearly all of them good friends from previous concerts.

'My thanks to everyone concerned with the organisation. It was a memorable day.'



Neil rehearsing the soloists, with Pete 'torrents' Durrant on piano

And so to the concert at the end of the day, and another triumph. One participant commented afterwards that they'd have been thrilled to have sung like that in a 'proper concert', let alone a singing day.

Congratulations to everyone at St George's – musicians, kitchen staff, music handlers, stage managers *et al.* Not forgetting our guests, without whom we wouldn't have a Singing Day.

'The singing was so enjoyable. Even though I don't know *Elijah* that well, I felt well supported and able to keep up. I needn't have worried beforehand about coming on my own. Your hospitality was very warm and St George's Singers and other guests were so friendly.'

Next year: Vivaldi + Vivaldi, Saturday 21 January 2017. Put it in the diary NOW!

'What a great day yesterday! Must say, I was pretty whacked once it was all over but I had had a wonderful time, back with St George's Singers. From the very start, I was welcomed back, as though the eight years since leaving had never been. So many friends still there – and, as ever, the organisation was immaculate, with all-day FOOD for a mere £4!! Thanks again – and perhaps 'til next year? if only the church was a bit warmer (although not as freezing as I can remember from a previous DAY!). With very best wishes to everyone.'

Alan Brown (2003/07)



The jolly ladellers



A couple of shots Jean took at the afternoon rehearsal for the Mozart C minor Mass. We're not sure if Neil is pointing out the exquisite detailing on the new RNCM balcony, or appealing to a higher power for inspiration.



ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



**Hot off
the
press!**

Come and Sing!

On Tuesday 26 April at 7.30 pm St George's Singers is holding a 'Come and Sing' evening. Anyone is welcome to come along to our usual rehearsal, and join in with the Choir for the evening. We'll be rehearsing works from our forthcoming summer concert, Vaughan Williams *A Sea Symphony*, Holst's *Hymns from the Rig Veda* and *Ave Maria*. If you're interested in seeing what it's like to sing with us, just come along, or ring Jacqui Smith (01625 533779) for more information. Scores provided.

Library woes

As our Librarian, Gwyneth, reported recently, plans have

been drawn up for the closure of Yorkshire Music Library, which means that one of our important sources of affordable music scores is at risk. However we've now heard that that this prestigious collection of over 300,000 choral scores will be housed at Leeds Central Library. Thanks to all SGS members who wrote to Making Music asking for action to be taken to stop this precious resource going to waste.

Get well soon, Ann!

All our good wishes go to long-serving SGS alto, Ann Young, who has been unwell for some time, but hopes to be back with us soon.

Lincoln tour

St George's Singers will be on tour to Lincoln from 27 to 30 May, singing at Lincoln Cathedral, Boston Stump, Louth and Southwell Minster. If any readers happen to be down in the region for the Bank Holiday weekend, do please come and listen to us. You can find details of the tour on our website.

Christine McConkey

Former SGS member Christine McConkey passed away recently. Many of us remember Christine from concerts, tours and social evenings. Our sympathies go to her family.

FAREWELL TO A GREAT SUPPORTER



It is with sadness that we have to report the death at Christmas of Jack Hutchcroft, husband of long-serving choir member, Margaret.

Jack was 88 and had been in poor health for a while. He was a great supporter of the choir and, although not a great lover of choral music (the big band sound was definitely more to Jack's taste!) he was a regular at our concerts, supporting Mar-

garet and the rest of the choir at home as well as on tours. Margaret was a long-time member of the choir and was choir secretary for several years in the late '80s and early 90s. Together with Margaret, Jack had been a Friend of SGS for many years.

A group of Singers went to the funeral in St George's Church, Poynton, and were touched to be asked by Margaret to sing. Under the name of St George's

Chamber Choir, they performed Tallis *If ye love me*, and Bruckner's *Locus Iste* – bringing back happy memories for Margaret of the many times the Choir have sung the work on their overseas travels.

Margaret sent a most gracious letter of thanks after the service, enclosing a donation for the Choir, for which we extend our heartfelt appreciation.

DATE WITH THE DAILY SERVICE



The Daily Service being broadcast from Trinity Chapel of St Paul's Bedford, during World War Two, with Dr George Thalben-Ball conducting.

On Monday 9 May St George's Singers will be broadcasting live on radio as we take part in the BBC Radio 4 Daily Service from Emmanuel Church, Didsbury.

The programme is the world's longest-running programme of its kind, and was first broadcast on Monday 2 January 1928 from a BBC studio in Savoy Hill. It was transmitted as an experimental series of short religious services, and listeners were invited to write in to gauge response. Within two weeks 7,000 letters of support

had been received, so the 'Short Religious Service' – soon to be renamed Daily Service – gained a regular 15-minute slot. The format has changed very little over the years, with a small group of singers providing the music each morning.

If the programme hasn't changed, its surroundings have. In 1932 it moved to Broadcasting House and its own specially consecrated studio. During the war it moved again, first to Bristol, then to Bedford, returning to London in 1945. However, the experience of broadcast-

ing from a church during the war had persuaded the production team to continue this tradition, so All Souls, Langham Place was used. In 1993 the BBC Religious Department moved to Manchester, and the Daily Service took up residence in its present home, Emmanuel Church, Didsbury.

The Daily Service is broadcast live each morning from 9.45 am to 10.00 am on Radio 4 Long Wave, and digital radio. Do listen to us on 9 May! We'll all be getting up at 6.00 am to be there!

BREAD AND HEAVEN

When Sue Taylor's mother died a few years ago, Sue and her sister Sarah were faced with the sad task of clearing out the family home. But hidden away amongst her mother's possessions was a treasure trove that would lead Sue into an exciting new career.

It was Sarah who first came across the sheets of foolscap paper on which their mother Hilda had recorded the family memoirs. Hilda, born in 1915, was the last of her generation, and as a history graduate she didn't want the family history to be lost to future generations. So she compiled all the stories she had heard about the various members of the family, beginning with her grandparents (Sue's great-grandparents), the quiet, book-loving minister, Rev Morgan Jones, his feisty, ambitious wife Margaret Ann who ran the local post office/bakery, and their nine children.

Sue initially wasn't sure what to do with the documents until she showed them to a writer friend who felt there was mileage in pursuing the stories. So about three years ago Sue set to work to turn her mother's 30,000 words into a publishable book of over 100,000 words. 'Originally, it was just a series of anecdotes about various family members,' Sue says. 'There was no setting or description and the characters were two-dimensional, and there was no understanding of why Margaret Ann was such a driven person, or of the relationship between her and Morgan. There was a mystery here about how the marriage had come about and how it survived.'

Sue began stitching the anecdotes together into a coherent story, finding some parts of the writing process easier than others. 'The easy part was making up new stories! My mother's innate sense of reserve, and the fact that this older generation would never discuss emotions or anything personal meant there were gaps that had to be filled. For example, there was a lot about William (my mother's

father) but nothing about how he met my grandmother. And there was nothing at all in the original stories about the middle brother Morgan James. I knew he was artistic, but that was all.'

The hardest part was overcoming scruples about interfering with what her mother had written. 'I asked myself whether I really ought I to do this. I was also concerned about making the author's voice consistent by ensuring that the South Wales idiom and speech patterns were maintained. The new material develops the characters and actions, and provides the backdrop against which the action takes place. I think the integrity of the book does not waver.'

A fair amount of historical research was also necessary. One of Sue's great-uncles, Edgar, was elected Liberal MP for Merthyr in 1910, along with Keir Hardie, and (according to family lore) was responsible for inventing the tank in the First World War.

He was also given a knighthood, but there was nothing in her mother's writing to substantiate this, so Sue set about trying to verify the facts. 'I couldn't find his name on the post-war honours list, and rang St James's Palace who hold the Honours Lists Archives. They confirmed the knighthood and the dates of the entry in the *London Gazette* and the investiture at Buckingham Palace.'

And the tank? 'No, he didn't invent it but Edgar headed up the Department at the Ministry of Munitions and chaired the committee which commissioned and named the tank. His portrait is in the National Portrait Gallery. It's not currently on view, but may be exhibited for the 2018 celebrations marking the end of WWI.'

Sue worked on the book whilst she was working part-time, writing on the train up and down to Cardiff and Swansea and in odd hours here and there. She began the final rewrite in January 2015 when she

retired. creating what she describes as a work of 'faction', chronicling the lives, hardships and successes of the family, against the often tragic background of a South Wales mining community.

The book, entitled *Bread and Heaven*, was finally published in January this year and to Sue's delight has been very well received. It has been accepted by the Welsh Book Council whose function is to distribute and publicise selected Welsh writers. It has been bought by a number of libraries and more orders are in the pipeline. A book signing has taken place and an appearance at the Rhondda Book Fair is in the diary! A reprint is already underway, and the book can now be ordered in any bookshop, whilst Sue can also provide copies. Disley Library has also booked her for a talk!

An especially gratifying outcome has been the receipt of letters and emails from readers, Welsh and non-Welsh, known and unknown, who have enjoyed *Bread and Heaven*. One even wrote that his mother's house is visible on the cover!

Sue would now like to write a sequel, taking the family story past 1925. But having got the writing bug, she's also keen to try writing a proper novel. And then there is always the possibility of turning the book into a screenplay. Next stop Hollywood ...



Margaret Ann Evans on her engagement to Morgan Humphrey in 1876



The colliery at Wattstown in the Rhondda Valley, where the Jones family lived

The Jones family in about 1905. Morgan and Margaret Ann front centre, Edgar back left, and William (Sue's grandfather) back centre



AN EVENING WITH MAGGIE MCDONALD BY ERIC NORTHEY



Who's that sitting in my chair!

'Them as can, both do and teach!'

It's always good to be reminded of how to do things properly!

Maggie McDonald, voice coach with the Hallé (amongst many other choirs) came Tuesday the 8th of March, to show us what we'd probably once known, but had perhaps long forgotten.

Her *Vocalease* session started by reminding us of that most basic of things – that we all have a body. We need to know how it works if we are to sing in a voice-friendly way and produce the best sound that we are capable of. Maggie's teaching seems to draw on a wide range of

traditions but with the clear aim to get us thinking how we integrate mind and body into the miraculous act of singing. There were posture hints which came from Alexander Technique and breathing

practices that wouldn't be out of place in a yoga class – all done to make us aware of the whole mechanism of mind and body, working together towards making a beautiful sustained, and sustainable, sound.

We started off with some very lively physical warm-ups to what sounded like 80s dance



No Lorraine, the other left

music. Up our arms went, to the left, CLAP, to the right CLAP; down to knee level left CLAP, to the right CLAP. A few minutes of that and we could feel the pulse beginning to quicken, oxygen going into the lungs and adrenalin pumping round the system. (I heard a few creaks and gasps from the some of the younger basses; they clearly need to get out more.) After that, we were up for anything.

Maggie built the awareness quite slowly, getting us to feel the movement of that lower triangle of muscles held in the hip cage as we breathed in and

enough to keep that larynx down a little.

Then when the air passes the tiny shimmering vocal folds and comes into the mouth, we start to sing. (If you're not squeamish, have a look at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYpDwhpILkQ>).

Maggie then got us to do some yawning to stretch the pharynx or soft palate before concentrating our minds on the tip of the tongue the teeth and the lips. A few ahs, ees, oos, ayys soon got us extending the vowels as carriers of the sounds we made, to be cut off neatly with clear and well-formed consonants,



out. It reminded me of what the yogis call pranayama, learning how to be aware of the breath and how it integrates with all the other bits of us that need to move together in concert, if we are to make a focused and lovely sound.

She then got us to be conscious of the muscles on top of that triangle – in the tummy, the rib cage (back and front), the diaphragm and round the lungs, till that column of air we generate by breathing, finally gets to the larynx and the vocal folds. We all placed our fingers on the larynx and felt it move up and down in response to our yawning. The vocal folds lie just behind that larynx and operate more freely if we can be aware

made by the dexterity of the tongue as it touched the alveolar ridge, the teeth and the lips. It was quite a thrill to sing again with a clear sense of the magic of what goes on when all the parts of the body unite in the act of singing. And, it was a privilege to be taught so skillfully and enthusiastically by such a gifted coach. We should book her every year for a refresher!

And if you want to hear Maggie sing, go to her website, <http://www.maggiemcdonald.co.uk/thesoundbites/>, and listen to her sing *Amazing Grace*. It's just gorgeous!



HEEDLESS OF THE WIND AND WEATHER

BY GWYNETH PAILIN

'Deck the hall with boughs of holly' we carolled huddled together in the colonnade at Lyme Hall. Anyone watching as we reached the end of the third verse – 'heedless of the wind and weather' – would have seen a wry smile on our faces. Except that there was no one watching – by then any visitors had disappeared to somewhere warmer and drier.

The prognosis for the weekend hadn't been good – the hourly forecast for Disley revealed a line of little black clouds all with two attached raindrops and an indication of high winds. Not a good weekend for visitors, said the man on the gate who cheerily wished us good carol singing. Two friendly ladies on duty at the National Trust office in the car park seemed relieved to have any

visitor at all to speak to and radioed for the minibus so that the mud and puddles on the steps up to the hall could be avoided.

But by 1pm we had over 30 singers ready to go and as it was then not raining we assembled on the steps inside the courtyard to brave the wind. It was impossible to put a music stand up and carol books had to be firmly held to stop pages turning. For 30 minutes we sang with gusto to a small but appreciative audience.

After a break and a warm drink we were back for more carols but it was not long before the first raindrops fell and very soon we had to move to the colonnade. We kept going for our allotted time even though the visitors had all gone and it



was finally to an empty courtyard that we sang 'We wish you a merry Christmas'.

And yes we did enjoy ourselves! – 'heedless of the wind and weather' just about summed up the spirit of St George's Singers!

RENAISSANCE ITALY COMES TO MANCHESTER

St George's Singers' Assistant MD, Joe Judge, is a very busy chap. As well as his hectic schedule as a Fellow with the National Youth Chamber Choir, and his posts as FCM Chorister Tutor at Bradford Cathedral and Lay Clerk at Manchester Cathedral, he is also Director of the Turton Consort, a quintet of professional singers specialising in renaissance music. The group consists of Léonie Maxwell and Aimee Presswood (soprano), Joe Judge (countertenor), Alex Banfield (tenor) and Robert Brooks (bass). Both Alex and Robert are well known to St George's: Alex sang with us in the Mozart C minor Mass, and Robert has conducted The Cheshire Consort.

On Thursday 7 April a number of St George's Singers went along to St Ann's Church in Manchester to hear the Turton Consort gave a brilliant performance of Monteverdi's Fourth Book of Madrigals. Published in 1603, the collection of 20

madrigals proved immensely popular, being reprinted seven times by 1644, both in Italy and abroad. The works were influenced by Monteverdi's personal experiences of travelling with the Duke of Mantua to join the Holy Roman Emperor's crusade against the Turks, visiting Trent, Innsbruck, Linz, Prague and Vienna, where they received great hospitality. Whilst Monteverdi and his singers were employed mainly to sing the Catholic liturgy, they also entertained guests at the Duke's lavish (and far more profane) banquets. So it is no surprise that the texts Monteverdi chose for these madrigals deal with more secular matters: unrequited love, separation, despair all figure prominently.

The concert began with the five members of the Consort in the balcony, moving to the nave aisle for the next two madrigals before taking up their positions on the steps of the chancel for the remainder of the concert. And what a tour de force this

was! For an hour and ten minutes they sang without a break, taking a few seconds only to take a note from Joe in between madrigals. The five voices blended beautifully, sometimes seamlessly, at other times weaving the lines into intricate sound patterns. The text was provided in Italian and English, but even without the written words in front of us, the singers' intensity and clarity of expression made Monteverdi's imagery spring to life, making it quite clear what they were singing about: despair, joy, longing, hope, or just lust!

It was a wonderful, uplifting performance and we hope to hear this fabulous group again soon.

PS: Note for St George's Singers – although the English madrigal was certainly influenced by its Italian forebears, Thomas Morley *et al* wrote in a much lighter vein. Less despair, more fa, la, la!



HEROIC MARCUS TO THE RESCUE



I really don't think the 'Queen of the Night' is in my range. Can't I do the Britten?

SGS President, Marcus Farnsworth, was having a lie-in one Monday morning after a particularly hectic few days of recitals and concerts. Wandering downstairs at about 10 am, he noticed a lot of messages on his phone, gradually increasing in frequency as the morning progressed. One particular caller, pianist Joseph Middleton, was especially keen on speaking to him.

Cup of coffee in hand, Marcus called Joe back and his leisurely morning was shattered. Soprano Lucy Crowe was ill and couldn't make her recital at the Wigmore Hall, which was due to be broadcast live at 1pm that

day. Could Marcus stand in for her? Well, yes, as long as he didn't have to become a soprano for the day!

So off Marcus set for the Wigmore Hall in central London with concert gear and accompanist's scores. A rapid discussion with Joe, the BBC production team, and presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch – and he was on Radio 3 live!

Marcus had chosen works with a strong Shakespearean theme. He opened with Britten's arrangement of Purcell settings, followed by Ireland's *Sea Fever*, Finzi's *Let us Garlands Bring*. He ended with the lovely Britten arrangements of English

folk-songs, *Salley Gardens*; *Sally in our Alley* and *The Plough Boy*.

At the end of the recital, which garnered an enthusiastic and highly appreciative applause from the audience, Sara Mohr-Pietsch declared Marcus to be 'heroic' for his last-minute performance.

Marcus's recital from Wigmore Hall on Monday 28 March is available to listen to on BBC iPlayer. And his latest CD, Songs to the Moon, with the Myrthen Ensemble has just been released.



As part of our drive to recruit a few additional tenors and basses, we're adopting a new publicity campaign.

NOT THE DAILY SERVICE!

One thing we won't be doing at the Daily Service is 'deaconing'. No, it's not some form of obscure clerical ritual humiliation, but refers to the ancient practice of reading out and singing each line of a hymn before the congregation sing it.

The practice, also called lining out or in Scotland 'precenting' the line, was widespread in the 1600s, and was for the benefit of those in the congregation

who could not read.

However, as literacy and availability of texts and tune collections improved, the practice fell into disuse, as clerics disliked the ragged singing that resulted as the congregation struggled to remember words and tunes at the same time. (The same problem still occurs at football grounds up and down the country every weekend!)

Lining out is still in use in some parts of the world, such as the Gaelic psalmody on Lewis, the southern Appalachians in the USA, and for informal worship in some African-American congregations.

The procedure has been memorably described by one critic as 'praising God by piecemeal.'

TALES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM



Tenors, when the marking says 'misterioso' it's got nothing to do with the notes or the rhythm.

One day Aaron Copland was in a bookshop when he noticed that a woman was buying two books: a volume of Shakespeare, and Copland's *What to Listen For in Music*. As the customer turned to leave, he stopped her and asked, 'Would you like me to autograph your book?' The woman looked blankly at the proud composer and asked, 'Which one?'

I'm a bit concerned about your ding, basses.

Jazz pianist George Shearing was born in Britain and went to the USA in 1947.

He was blind from birth. Asked by an admirer whether he had been blind all his life, Shearing replied, 'Not yet.'

One afternoon at rush hour, Shearing was waiting at a busy intersection for someone to assist him in crossing the street. Another blind man tapped him on the shoulder and asked if Shearing would mind helping him to get across. 'What could I do?' said Shearing later. 'I took him across, and it was the biggest thrill of my life!'

I'd like it formally recorded that this evening, Tuesday 15 March, the basses actually watched me when we got to bar 8.

SO YOU WANT TO BE... A CONDUCTOR!

Conductors. Love em or hate em – you can't ignore them. (OK, the basses may try, but even they capitulate in the end!)

We're incredibly fortunate to have such a wonderful conductor as Neil. His beat is impeccable, his hand gestures clear and understandable, his entry instructions always precise, his phrasing and dynamics always transparent, and his jokes ... well, let's not go there. The important thing is that when we stand up on the day of the concert, we're confident that we're in impeccably competent hands. All we have to do is watch!

Some members of the Choir are of course already proficient conductors. Then there are others who (though they might not admit it) would love to have a go but don't have the ability or the nerve to stand up in front of a critical mob of jeering choral singers. But that needn't stop you! If you have a CD player and an understanding family, you can learn to be an 'armchair conductor', and become the maestro of choirs and even entire symphony orchestras in the comfort of your own home. But first, some basics.

What you need to become a conductor

Besides the obvious – incredible musical talent and a dinner jacket – you must be able to do more than one thing at a time, physically and mentally. You have to be able to make totally different gestures with both arms simultaneously, whilst thinking about the notes that are being played now, **and** the notes that are coming up on the next page. Then you need a baton.

The baton: your weapon of choice

The first recorded use of a baton dates back to 709BC, when Pherekydes of Patrae, 'giver of rhythm', waved his golden staff to ensure all the musicians started at the same time.

The earliest form of conducting, called 'cheironomy', goes back to the Middle Ages, and used hand gestures to indicate melodic shape. In church circles, the person making these gestures usually held a staff to signify his role. Gradually, as music became more rhythmically involved, the staff began to be moved up and down to indicate the beat.

By the 17th century, the large staff had often been replaced by rolled-up sheets of paper, or smaller sticks. This may have been as a response to the tragic death of Jean-Baptiste Lully, who injured his foot with his staff whilst conducting a *Te Deum* for the King. The wound became gangrenous, Lully refused amputation, and died two months later.



Ouch!

By the 18th century, a member of the ensemble usually acted as conductor, sometimes using a bow as a baton, or moving the instrument (such as a lute) up and down in time

with the beat. It was also common to conduct from the harpsichord if there was a basso continuo part. In opera performances, there were sometimes two conductors: the keyboard player was in charge of the singers, the principal violinist of the orchestra.

A hundred years on and the dedicated conductor had arrived, and the use of the baton became more common, as it was easier to see than bare hands or rolled up paper. The very first to use a baton was a Belgian composer, Guillaume-Alexis Paris, whilst conducting opera in Hamburg. Early adopters of this new technology included Mendelssohn and Weber. However, Berlioz was the first virtuoso conductor, whilst Wagner was responsible for shaping the conductor's role



Paganini conducted with his bow, making the first violins and the cellos an easy target

as one who imposes his own interpretation of a piece on the performance rather than one who is simply responsible for ensuring a unified beat and entries are made at the right time.

During the 19th century, the shape of the baton as we know

it became fixed: a thin stick of wood, tapered and with a swollen or bulb-shaped handle of wood, cork, plastic or rubber. Some conductors have custom-made batons to fit the size and shape of the palm. But all conductors know it isn't the size of the baton that counts: it's what you do with it.

What to do if you haven't got a baton

So, you haven't got a custom-made, Armani-designed, carbon fibre and ebony baton. Don't let this stop you! You will certainly have a pencil (... mm). For safety, pencils should be unsharpened, and pens should be used only if out of ink. For the keen DIY-er, a screwdriver would be equally serviceable.

Foodstuffs can also be brought into service. Dried pasta is popular, with a sturdy spaghetti or linguine probably the most useful. Use fusilli, rigatoni or cappelletti only to direct slow, pianissimo movements requiring small hand gestures. French bread (in French the word for a baton is actually 'baguette'), and Italian breadsticks are also a good substitute, though resist the temptation to eat your baton before the concert ends. Vegetables are a more healthy alternative: celery, courgettes and carrots ensure you get your 5-a-day whilst practising your conducting technique.

Now all you need is someone to conduct.

Next time: assembling your musicians!



Verdi preferred a sturdy ebony baton, whilst Berlioz (below) was of the rolled-up paper persuasion.



For more detailed instruction, see *The Armchair Conductor* by Carlinsky and Goodgold. But beware: your pet dog will never look at you in the same way again.

St George's Singers

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Hemiola is sent to all Friends of St George's Singers, and a digital version goes to those on our Mailing List. To receive a regular copy, complete the Mailing List registration on the website, or contact the Publicity Officer.

St George's Singers was formed in 1956 by Rev Eric Chapman and Geoffrey Verney, organist and choirmaster of St George's Church, Poynton in Cheshire, where the Choir still rehearses every Tuesday night. Geoffrey's dream was to build a community choir, capable of performing major choral works to a high standard and which would attract singers and audiences from neighbouring towns. Geoffrey died in 1964, but his legacy was nurtured by his successors Duncan Eyre, Ray Lomax and Stephen Williams, and is continued by our present Musical Director, Neil Taylor. St George's Singers is now recognised as one of the leading and most innovative choirs in the North West of England, performing an astonishingly varied repertoire, and with around 100 members drawn from an area far beyond the community of Poynton. We present at least four major concerts a year, in venues including The Bridgewater Hall, Gorton Monastery, Manchester Cathedral and Royal Northern College of Music, hold annual Singing Days, and tour regularly in the UK and abroad. St George's Singers continues to explore and expand the boundaries of choral music, 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

23 April 2016

Sounds and Sweet Airs

26 April 2016

Come and Sing evening

26 June 106

Vaughan Williams:

A Sea Symphony

Holst:

Hymns from the Rig Veda,

Ave Maria

Ticket Hotline: 01663 764012

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singers.org.uk

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

MANCHESTER SINGS!

Thursday 12 May, Manchester Cathedral

Chetham's present a series of free lunchtime recitals and concerts by their students entitled 'Music for a While'. The next one is in May, and there will be a retiring collection in aid of the Booth Drop-In Centre, raising money for the homeless in Manchester. www.chethams.com/whats-on/

Saturday 21 May, Bridgewater Hall

The Hallé's Dvorák festival concludes with a rare performance of the composer's oratorio *Saint Ludmila*, performed in a newly revised English translation by David Pountney. The drama describes the conversion to Christianity of Ludmila and her husband-to-be Prince

Borivoj, and the ensuing triumph of Christianity over paganism throughout the Czech lands. It received rapturous applause from the audience in Leeds Town Hall at its premiere in 1886, and has melody in abundance in the form of superb arias and rousing, Handelian choruses. www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk

Sunday 12 June, RNCM

The RNCM holds a 'Day of Song' featuring art song recitals throughout the day, plus a Masterclass from Richard Stokes. www.rncm.ac.uk

Sunday 19 June, Whitworth Art Gallery

The Manchester Chamber Choir are giving a concert entitled 'Miniatures at an Exhibition' at 3pm, conducted by Jon-

athan Lo, and featuring music by Debussy, Elgar, Finzi, Monteverdi and Mendelssohn. www.manchesterchamberchoir.org.uk

Friday 8 July, Bridgewater Hall

St George's Singers once more team up with Chetham's School at the Bridgewater Hall in a concert of famous opera choruses. The Chetham's students will also be playing Nielsen's Flute Concerto and Mahler's Symphony No. 1.

