



60th Anniversary Season *Hemiola*

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

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ST GEORGE'S SINGERS

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

Registered Charity no 508686

Member of Making Music, the National
Federation of Music Societies

www.st-georges-singers.org.uk

TEN YEARS ON BY NEIL TAYLOR

The years since joining St George's Singers as Musical Director in 2006 have flown by. I can clearly remember the exact day, in Manchester, when I was walking past the Bridgewater Hall and saw the SGS poster for the *St Matthew Passion* and making the decision that I would apply for the MD position as I knew of the Choir's high reputation.

The Choir is, and I've said it on numerous occasions, quite simply one of the most enterprising groups I've ever had the pleasure of working with. The singers relish a challenge, and it's a real joy and a pleasure to see new and unfamiliar pieces become just as cherished as the more familiar repertoire.

But there is so much more than merely music-making to a high standard; we continue to develop our work with local young musicians, helping to foster their development; we can attract world-class soloists to perform in internationally-renowned venues; we perform an incredibly vast range of

music to a diverse and engaged audience. We attract and encourage singers from far and wide to our annual Singing Day. The Choir is a team, and we work hard to achieve these ambitions and make them real.

There have been many highlights: our appearances at the Bridgewater Hall; working with Manchester Camerata, Chetham's, Nicholas Kraemer, Stephen Threlfall, Elizabeth Watts, and our own President, Marcus Farnsworth. The list is seemingly endless. You will, I hope, have your own special times and memories, be they organisers who miss planes, or dazzling Singing Day lighting!

The *esprit de corps* when we go on tour is palpable, with seven trips at home and abroad since 2008. I have many memories of high-quality singing in superb venues, as well as having the chance to chat and mingle (often into the small hours) with lovely people.

I have loved to see ideas form, be it at a committee meeting, on tour, in the Tuesday break, in the pub, over dinner, and then to have been part of the process which brings them to fruition and completion.



Neil conducting St George's Singers in Notre Dame, Paris

I consider myself very fortunate in having such a reliable, supremely musical and able accompanist as Pete Durrant. He's a lovely guy too. I feel similarly blessed that we have as versatile a conductor, singer and coach as Joe Judge as Assistant MD.

St George's Singers have a tangible and genuine passion for singing. They are as fine a group of singers as I could wish to work with, and are a lovely bunch of people: I am looking forward to the rest of this and many more seasons of great and inspiring music-making.



Saturday 22 April, 2017
7.30pm

Royal Northern College of Music

DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY
CONCERT:

Six centuries of song

Featuring works by:

Byrd, Purcell, Bach, Handel,
Mendelssohn, Parry, Holst,
Randall Thompson, Pärt,
Whitacre, Prauliņš and Dove

Tickets £12, 10 conc,

£6 students/children

Tel 01663 764012



From Byrd ... to Dove



A little bird (what, another one!) tells us that there may also be a surprise piece from the dynamic duo of Neil and Pete. Let's hope it's not a Dud.



I see the soprano's late again.

SIX CENTURIES IN 60 YEARS: DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY CONCERT



In this very special year for St George's Singers, we're presenting two of the greatest choral works ever written: Brahms *German Requiem* and Verdi's *Requiem*. But between these two mighty masterpieces, we're taking time out to do something a little more informal. To put it simply: it's party time!

Our Anniversary Concert on 22 April features a tutti frutti of choral delights, a smorgasbord of song from the last 600 years, from the Renaissance to the present day.

Some works we have performed before – many times. Others are new to us. At the heart of the programme will be a work that may be unknown to many of our audience. Uģis Prauliņš' *Missa Rigensis* is an astonishing work that has its origins in chant, Renaissance polyphony, Baroque dance – and rock music. Must be experienced live!

Around the Prauliņš Neil Taylor has programmed a selection of works to delight our audience, as well as giving the Choir great enjoyment and a chance to demonstrate our versatility.

Our journey through time begins with one of England's greatest composers, William Byrd. A recusant Catholic in Elizabeth I's court, Byrd succeeded in clinging to his personal beliefs (and his head) whilst navigating the dangerous waters of reformed England. His *Laudibus in sanctis* is an ebullient setting of Psalm 150 that gets even the most hardened choral singer swaying to the rhythm. Or as Neil prefers to put it, 'It's Renaissance beat-boxing – what you might call Byrd-boxing.'

A hundred years on and Henry Purcell, another of England's greatest composers, was living through one of the most fruitful periods for music, as cathedral



choirs were re-established after the Puritan ban. We'll be singing his glorious albeit brief anthem, *Hear my Prayer*, which, although never completed, gains in expressive power and intensity what it lacks in length.

No celebratory choral concert would be complete without Bach, and Neil has chosen one



of JSB's great motets to put us through our paces. *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden* is a most mysterious piece. We don't know when or why it was written, but

that hardly seems to matter: the music speaks for itself.

Two of the pieces in the programme offer wonderful showcases for individual sections. The ladies of the Choir will be singing Holst's beautiful *Ave Maria*. Written for eight parts, the beautifully flowing lines are immensely satisfying to sing, and even more satisfying for the audience to listen to.



The tenors and basses come into their own with a piece by early 20th-century American composer Randall Thompson. A setting of a poem by Robert Frost (something of a theme for this concert), *The Pasture* provides the gentlemen with a marvellous tune: something they rarely get offered, so make the most of it chaps!

A number of soloists from amongst the Choir will be featured in the Prauliņš *Missa Rigensis*, but there are also solo spots in two other works. Mendelssohn's *Hear my Prayer* is known mainly for its solo 'O for the wings of a dove'. The work was written when Mendelssohn was at the height of his



creative powers, and was premiered in London in 1845.

From one dove to another: Jonathan Dove's *Seek him that maketh the seven stars* begins with a soprano solo before opening out into a dialogue between the organ and the slowly evolving choral lines.

Two of the most prolific and popular choral writers of the modern era are the American Eric Whitacre, and the Estonian Arvo Pärt. For this concert Neil has selected Whitacre's evocative *Sleep*. Originally setting Robert Frost's poem *Stopping by woods on a snowy evening*, the composer failed to get permission from Frost's estate to



use the text, so had to ask another poet to provide alternative words to the tune. How glad we are Eric

simply didn't put it away in his desk drawer for 70 years!

St George's Singers has had close links with Estonia, ever since we went on tour there in 2004. A singing-mad nation, Estonia has some wonderful choral composers, of which Pärt is the best known internationally. His work *Cantate Domino* is a simple, chant-like melody that undergoes a number of harmonisations, expressing the composer's 'love for every note'. Simply wonderful.



And finally, it wouldn't be a celebration without those two English masters of the special occasion: Handel and Parry, whose music book-ends the evening.

There is something for everyone in this concert. Come and celebrate with us.

PRAULIŅŠ AND THOMPSON: NAMES TO REMEMBER

Amongst the ranks of the revered, mainly English, composers featuring in our anniversary concert, two names may cause the odd furrowed brow? Who on earth is Uģis Prauliņš (and how do you pronounce his name!)? And remind me who Randall Thompson was again?

The eminent American composer, Randall Thompson was born in New York in April



Randall Thompson

1899 but lived much of his childhood and adult life in New England. He attended Harvard University in 1916, where he developed an avid interest in choral composition and in 1927 was appointed assistant professor of music and choir director at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. After gaining standing in the music world, he taught and conducted at Harvard, Princeton, Juilliard, Curtis, the University of Virginia, and Berkeley, ending his career as Emeritus Professor of Music at Harvard.

In 1959 Thompson was commissioned by the town of Amherst, Massachusetts to write a piece commemorating its bicentennial. The town was known for its association with Robert

Frost, who had lived there for some years. Frost and Thompson knew each other well, the

poet being an admirer of Thompson's music, so it was decided that the commemorative work would be a setting of Frost's poetry. Thompson chose seven poems to set variously for ladies, men's and mixed voices, with piano accompaniment, and entitled it *Frostiana*.

He wanted the piece to be accessible to all, especially because it would be premiered by amateur choirs, and made his points directly and simply. He also made a palpable effort to match his music to Frost's poetry, particularly in terms of the themes of everyday life, rural tradition, and nature that Frost highlights in his work. Frost, present at the première, was so delighted by the performance that, at the conclusion of the piece, he stood up and shouted, 'Sing that again!' In fact, Frost was so impressed by the composition that he banned any other composers from setting his poems to music (to Eric Whitacre's chagrin!). One of the seven settings is *The Pasture*, which will be performed at our anniversary concert by the tenors and basses.

In complete contrast to the cloistered academic world of Thompson, Latvian composer Uģis Prauliņš has embraced music of all genres.

He was born in Riga, Latvia in 1957, was a member of the choir at music school, and went on to study piano, conducting, composition and education at the Latvian Academy of Music. Alongside his formal studies, he also played keyboard with the progressive rock band Salve in the 1970s and the folk/rock group Vocās mājas in the 1980s. Then for several years he was a sound engineer at Latvian Radio, where he introduced

multi-track recordings of folk music.

Since then his musical career has embraced film and television, ballet, concert and 'crossover' music. He has won awards for Best Album and Best Folk Album in the Grand Prix in Riga in 1999. However, he is perhaps best known for his choral scores, which include *Odi et amo* for boys' and men's chorus, guitar and samplers; the *Te Deum Laudamus* for soprano, boys' and men's chorus, organ and orchestra; the *Magnificat* for soprano, mixed chorus, organ and tubular bells; and *The Nightingale* for mixed chorus and recorder.

Prauliņš' *Missa Rigen-sis* (Riga Mass) was written for the Riga Cathedral Boys Choir, and premiered in the vast acoustic of Riga's medieval cathedral at Easter 2003. The composer stated that his desire in composing the piece was 'to retain attention by

the singers' voices alone' and to compose a work in the spirit of the great Renaissance Masses 'without overwhelming force or volume'. The music is delightful, accessible yet modern, and full of imaginative innovations put to great emotional effect. We think you'll enjoy it enormously.



Inside Riga Cathedral

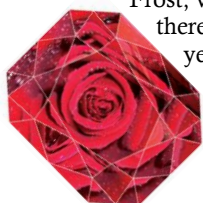


Outside Riga Cathedral



Uģis Prauliņš

The Baltic state of Latvia sits between Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south. Its capital city is Riga, and its language is one of the only two remaining Baltic languages (the other being Lithuanian). Latvian is spoken by around 1.75 million people around the world. The written language is littered with inflections such as the inverted circumflex and the cedilla which change the way the sounds are made. We think the composer's name is pronounced 'Ugeis Prowlingsh.' But if there are any Latvian speakers out there, please let us know!





BRAHMS *REQUIEM*: A BEAUTIFUL PAINTING

The first concert of our Diamond Anniversary Season was a resounding success. A packed RNCM concert hall on 26 November was treated to an unforgettable evening that combined lyricism, great pathos and serenity.

Our annual pre-concert reception was held for all SGS Friends, and we were delighted to see so many of our supporters there. Thanks to a number of Choir members organising transport Margaret Adshead, one of the founder members of St George's Singers in 1956, was able to come, and meet up with old friends from the Choir.



Conductor, soloists, chorus and orchestra taking applause at the end of the *Requiem*

baritone, and he did not disappoint in *Verzagen* and *Nicht mehr zu dir zu gehen*, two of Brahms' most agony-riven and heart-rending songs. By contrast, *Wir wandelten* and *Von ewiger Liebe* tell of love and happy memories, and Liz gave a spell-binding and glowing performance that had everyone in the concert hall not just silent but totally motionless in their seats. Accompanied by sensitive and brilliant word-painting on the piano from Pete Durrant, this was a recital to remember.

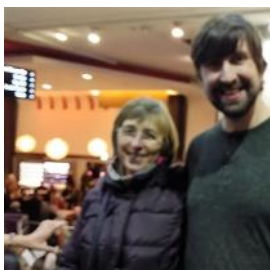
Finally, it was the Choir's turn, and to conclude the first half we performed Brahms' beautiful miniature *Geistliches Lied*. Although a standard in St George's Singers' repertoire, this evening the work took on a special character, an intensity and serenity that owed much to the *German Requiem*, for which it served as a prelude.

The second half of the concert was devoted to Brahms' *German Requiem*. With sensitive playing from the orchestra and

beautiful singing from the soloists, the Choir rose to the occasion magnificently, expressing the words of the Requiem with intensity and sincerity. Marcus and Liz both said later that it was the best amateur chorus performance of the work they had ever sung in. And Neil himself wrote to the Choir afterwards:

'What an incredible concert we had at the RNCM on Saturday... a fabulous, lively and engaged chorus, who responded to nuance, shading and colour throughout the evening. I think it will go down as certainly my best concert with the Choir. The atmosphere in the hall was just what I'd hoped for, and much of that was created by you. The reaction of everyone I spoke to, audience, orchestra, soloists was unanimous. You have a passion for singing. It's palpable, and never more than on Saturday night.'

SGS Chair John Smith with Honorary Life Member Margaret Adshead (left) and some of our SGS Friends at the reception (right)



Jean Egerton and son John at the Friends reception before the concert, which was given in Phil's memory



Marcus, Liz and Neil at the pre-concert Friends reception - with glasses of water!

'The choir sounded superb. The taking of the seats was so quiet the sound just "emerged". The men particularly were "as one voice". The best I've ever heard them! Each section of the Brahms was like a beautiful painting exhibition with Neil able to add highlights. It was a cultural triumph which we were privileged to absorb.'

Ann Young

SGS President, Marcus Farnsworth, and soprano soloist Elizabeth Watts also popped along to the reception before going off to warm up for the performance.

The concert opened with a marvellous, invigorating performance by the Northern Chamber Orchestra of Brahms' *Tragic Overture*. The orchestra then disappeared, the piano was wheeled in, and our two world-class soloists, accompanied by Pete Durrant, gave a recital of four Brahms Lieder. This was a real treat for both audience and Choir members, who were sitting silently in their seats, waiting to sing. We have all often heard Marcus's rich, expressive

GLORIA! IT'S SINGING DAY

This year's Singing Day on 21 January was a great success – musically, socially and financially. Vivaldi's *Gloria* and *Magnificat* will always bring a smile to the dreariest winter's day, the home-made soup warmed up voices and feet alike, and Neil ensured that everyone went home feeling that they'd given a great performance.

Bass Richard Taylor prowled round all day with his camera,



capturing the spirit of a great day's music-making. Thanks Richard!



MICHAEL MAKES A HOUSE CALL

Amongst the visitors at our Singing Day was a very special tenor, who was making a return to St George's Singers after nearly 60 years. Michael House, who now lives in Kent, was amongst the audience at the Choir's very first concert (*Messiah*) in 1956. Aged only 10, he was taken to the performance by his parents, and enjoyed it so much he returned on his own to the next concert, Bach's *St John Passion*, and from which he has particular memories of the dramatic high tenor evangelist.

Michael lived with his parents on the other side of the cross-roads from St George's Church in a flat above what was then the Trustees Savings Bank. His father Albert was the head administration officer at Stockport Infirmary, and his mum Kathleen was the school secretary (and nurse) at Clumber Road Primary School. Michael was too young to join the Singers, but as soon as he could read well he joined the church choir when Mr Verney (SGS's first MD) was choirmaster. He left Poynton in 1968 to study maths at Sheffield University, return-

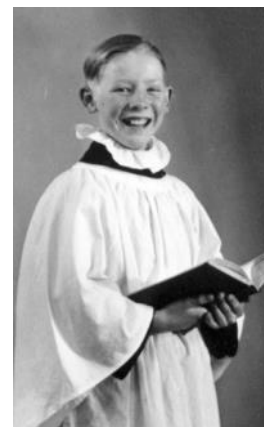
ing only for vacation jobs at a local Adlington farm, and ultimately moving to Kent to work at the East Malling Research Station as a statistician. From there he had a varied career working in the agricultural, oil and utilities sectors.

Singing took a back seat whilst he was at university, but the move to Kent saw him singing once more when he joined a madrigal group, then Maidstone Choral Union, where he met his future wife, Evey. Michael now sings with Ashford Choral Society, sings with his local church choir, and is a regular member of the Stour Festival Chorus, which performs at the annual Stour Music Festival in East Kent – an early music festival founded by Alfred Deller, and now run by his son Mark Deller.

Our Singing Day in January was the first time Michael had been in Poynton for a while, as he no longer has a particular reason to visit. He has kept in touch with a few people through the Old Poynton Photos Facebook page, and has followed the Choir over the

years through the website. When he saw that it was SGS's 60th year he thought that it would be fun to join in the singing day. And he is delighted he did.

'The whole day was terrific. The inspiring musical direction of Neil Taylor, the accompanist, the singing, the delicious and plentiful food, and the slick organisation needed to cater efficiently for 200 people. We all felt so welcome, and everyone – guests and choir members – were so friendly. I met some really interesting people, including a tenor who was a retired anaesthetist who had travelled all the way from Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides, and another former St George's Church boy chorister who had sung for Geoffrey Verney.' He had especial praise for Neil, whom he described as 'as good a musical director as I've ever known. I don't know how he maintained his energy, enthusiasm and sense of humour all day. Everything he said was focused and relevant, and to get that sort of immediate response from 200 people is a huge achievement.'



Michael as a youngster in his St George's Church choir robes

Michael's home just across the road from St George's Church





The Tyrian Plum of Edward VII is one of the rarest stamps from Britain, issued in 1910 to replace the existing two-colour, two-pence stamp bearing the profile of King Edward VII. The new stamp also featured the king. In total 24 million stamps were printed, but following the unexpected death of the king later that year, almost all the stamps were destroyed. A few still exist, though their number is unknown. The only known used stamp is in the Royal Philatelic Collection. So, if you happen to have one of these in the attic ...

STAMP OF APPROVAL FOR SGS

Bass Peter Farrington has been urging Choir members for a number of years to pass on to him their used stamps. Some of us were never really sure why he wanted them, other than a vague idea that it was for a charity.

In response to his most recent despatch of stamps, Peter received a reply from the Macular Society (that's the charity he collects for) as follows:

'Thank you for forwarding the donation of stamps to help people affected by macular disease from the St George's Singers. Please thank all those who collected and cut stamps. Thank you also for sending us a copy of your *Hemiola*. It was very interesting.

'The stamps that are collected are sent to a company called Fundraising Stamps. They purchase the stamps per kilo from the Macular Society and sell them to collectors.

'The income generated from these stamps will help ensure that vital services are available when they are most needed. For example, our network of over 300 support groups across the UK provides friendly support locally to several thousands of people who might feel alone with the condition. Our busy helpline provides up to date information to thousands more.

'Your donation will also support out exciting research programme. We are determined to defeat macular disease, finding new treatments and eventually a cure. To reach this goal, we fund

innovative research projects and work to attract bright young scientists into the field of macular research through out grants to PhD students.

'You can now support the Macular Society by sending your recycled stamps to Fundraising Stamps free of charge by ordering their envelopes from their website: www.fundraisingstamps.com/macular-society.

'Thank you, once again, for your kind contribution towards our work through collecting stamps.

'Graeme Davis, Assistant Fund-raiser.'

Well, now we know.

Peter would also like to thank all SGS members who bring in their used stamps, which are going to such a good cause.

Taylor's Tags

Basses: you have 4 notes to choose from. Like Indiana Jones and the Holy Grail, choose wisely.

Gentlemen, the words are 'perplexed and bewildered' – as you so ably demonstrated.

DILEMMAS BY AN ANONYMOUS ALTO

Surely rehearsal etiquette says that a commitment to eight rehearsals before a big concert is binding? And isn't that the more so if you are just a humble 'extra' as opposed to a regular choir member? Having agreed to the schedule, then wouldn't it be thoroughly unprofessional to miss a rehearsal deliberately?

The trouble is that sometimes other things, such as supporting your offspring, can get in the way. What mother would not want to hear her cellist son play

be a live broadcast from the Bridgewater Hall. What to do? It's mother-love versus sense of duty.

But there could be a solution – perhaps no one would notice if I just slipped out after the first half of the rehearsal, and then I could hurtle across the Pennines and should just make it in time to hear the concerto...

And the next dilemma is about concert etiquette. Isn't it rather bad manners to leave a concert at the interval because you only wanted to hear the concerto? So following the Brahms, the second half of the programme consists of Bruckner's Third Symphony. As it happens, I heard this piece last summer, played by the CBSO in Birmingham, but unfortunately this experience left me with a rather pungent memory.

[Health warning – do not read on if you are of a delicate disposition.]

While comfortably seated in the gallery at Symphony Hall this is what happened half-way

through the slow movement: the man behind me was suddenly and very violently sick. This occurred three times in quick succession. Yes, my coat was splattered and no, we couldn't escape, so the resultant nasal impact did somewhat overwhelm the aural effect of the remaining two movements.

I don't much care for Bruckner anyway but, through no fault of his own, he has now sunk even lower in my regard and what's more, I really don't want to hear that piece ever again!

Thank you, Hemiola, for providing me with the opportunity to agonise over these tricky matters. Not only has it has been therapeutic, it has also helped me to sort out some decisions ...

Editor's note

St George's Singers would like to make it clear that the Choir in no way condones such heinous behaviour, and anyone attempting similar subterfuge will be denounced and made to listen to (*insert appropriate name*) complete works within a 24-hour period. You are warned!

Rock ... hard place ... geddit?



a concerto, especially if it's the Brahms double? But this auspicious event clashes with an important rehearsal, and the forthcoming performance just happens to

GEORGE BUTTERWORTH, AE HOUSMAN – AND TENORS, NATURALLY BY ERIC NORTHEY

As I was said in a recent issue of *Hemiola*, not all tenors are just pretty faces. And this includes John Pears. He has recently gained his Grade 8 in singing and given a recital in Prestbury parish church. In both, he chose one of the most beautiful of English songs to display his vocal talents - George Butterworth's setting of *Is My Team Ploughing*. I wished I'd been there as it's a particular favourite and brings back poignant memories.

Butterworth, was one of the many tragic victims of the First World War, killed by a sniper's bullet on the Somme, 15 August 1916. He was 31. Housman, unfortunately, lived till he was 77, but luckily for posterity, wrote little poetry after *A Shropshire Lad*. (This might not be an entirely unprejudiced account of the merits of composer and lyricist.)

Both were Oxford men, Housman going up to St John's in 1877, Butterworth to Trinity in 1904. Butterworth was a teacher, composer, musicologist, stalwart of The English Folk

Song and Dance Society, keen to preserve our rich heritage of rural song and dance. Housman failed his Greats and spent years as a clerk in the Patent Office. He didn't like musicians, claiming 'musical people are more plague than profit'.

Luckily for him, composers saw his simple verses as ideal material for song cycles.

They're usually ballads, eight syllables in the first line and six in the second, with an ABAB rhyme scheme. They're all about young 'lads', occasionally 'lasses', who are dying, already dead, *should* be dead, or will be dead very soon. The obsession with death is strange, as Housman lived a life of undiluted tedium; much like I find his poems.

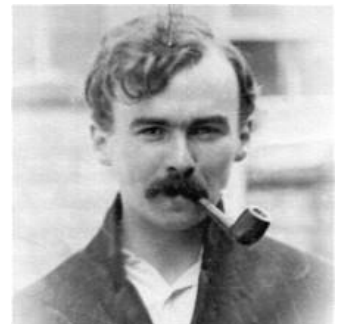
It was perhaps this simplicity, that attracted composers. Strong beats in spoken verse lend themselves to strong beats of bar lines. There's potential for marking up irony through underlying harmonies or through repetition. Butterworth saw the potential even in his

twenties when he first tackled *A Shropshire Lad*. The songs are spare, under-written in the accompaniment, leaving the voice to carry long melodic lines. They give the singer considerable scope for dramatic performances, with options for characterisation and a wide range of tonal colours.

John's choice of *Is My Team Ploughing?* is one of the more popular Housman settings despite the awkward second stanza with its bathetic references to football. It's a simple dialogue between a ghost and a living friend, who talk about the ordinary things of rural life – horses, football, village girls. Gradually, out of the banter, comes a sense of cynicism, realism perhaps, and of betrayal. On the page, these undercurrents are not immediately apparent, so I have set them out to make the drama of the two voices more distinct.



Detail of a drawing of AE Housman by William Rothenstein, 1906



George Butterworth

<i>Ghost</i>	<i>Living Man</i>
Is my team ploughing, That I was used to drive And hear the harness jingle When I was man alive?	Ay, the horses trample, The harness jingles now; No change though you lie under The land you used to plough.
Is football playing Along the river shore, With lads to chase the leather, Now I stand up no more?	Ay, the ball is flying, The lads play heart and soul; The goal stands up, the keeper Stands up to keep the goal.
Is my girl happy, That I thought hard to leave, And has she tired of weeping As she lies down at eve?	Aye, she lies down lightly, She lies not down to weep: Your girl is well contented. Be still, my lad, and sleep.
Is my friend hearty, Now I am thin and pine, And has he found to sleep in A better bed than mine?	Yes, lad, I lie easy, I lie as lads would choose; I cheer a dead man's sweetheart, Never ask me whose.

ST GEORGE'S SINGERS' NEWS



New Life Friend

Ann Young, who was awarded her 40-year star at the end of last year, has been made a Life Friend of the Choir. Ann, who was formerly a Chair of St George's Singers, has been an ardent supporter of the Choir as well as a stalwart of the alto section. Whilst she is now unable to get to rehearsals, we're delighted to welcome her to the ranks of our Life Friends, and

hope to see her at future concerts and events.

Welcome

A warm welcome to new SGS members: alto Lynn Winspear, tenors Ian Cape, Phil Hilton, Dave Shield, Isobel Singleton and Brian Westhead (where have these tenors suddenly sprung from!), and bass Nic Holt. We hope you enjoy singing with us for many years to come.

More stars

We've had a lot of members reaching anniversaries this year, and the latest are Alison Gunn (30 years), Gwyneth Pailin and Geoff & Sue Taylor (20 years).

New arrival

Many congratulations to bass David Morris and his wife Elizabeth on the arrival of Benjamin James. Weighing in at 8lb 15oz, young BJ may well have the makings of another bass!



The sorcerer ...
and his apprentice



Editor's note:
Neil's accompanist at Keele is Pete Durrant. The previous Artistic Director of Keele was Matthew Hamilton. All roads lead to St George's!

NEW JOBS FOR THE BOYS

Both St George's Singers' musical directors are in great demand at the moment.

In January Neil Taylor took up a new appointment as Artistic Director of the Keele Bach Choir. Although named after the university, the choir is open to anyone within and outside the academic community. A small, auditioned choir (30 people spotted on their website photo), Keele Bach Choir was formed 40 years ago and has a wide-ranging repertoire from Renaissance, through Bach and Brahms, to Bob Chilcott.

'I'm looking forward to working with a smaller choir and enjoying the challenges and experiences this will offer, and

to engaging with choir and audience members alike', said Neil. 'I also look forward to seeing SGS members at the next concert on 8th April. See keelebachchoir.org.uk for further details.'

Meanwhile, our Assistant MD, Joe Judge, has been appointed Director of the Hallé Choral Academy. The Academy is open to anyone aged 18+ who loves singing, and who wants to improve their singing and sight-reading. It provides a unique choral singing and music education opportunity in the North West for amateur singers of mixed abilities.

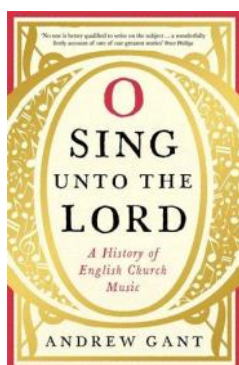
Through rehearsal, small group, one-to-one sessions, and using a variety of repertoire,

members of the Academy are receive guidance to develop their score reading, vocal technique, and aural awareness skills.

'I'm delighted to be directing the Hallé Choral Academy', says Joe. 'It's also a huge pleasure to be working again alongside former St George's Assistant MD, Matthew Hamilton, now Hallé Choral Director.'

Academy rehearsals will culminate in a performance at the Bridgewater Hall on 23 June, as part of a mass Come and Sing rush-hour concert, with the Hallé Orchestra. For more information about the Academy, www.halle.co.uk/the-halle-family/halle-choral-academy/.

BOOK REVIEW: O SING UNTO THE LORD



In this our 60th anniversary season, and with a concert coming up comprising English sacred music dating from 1500s to the present day, it is an ideal time to get up to speed with the history of English church music by reading Andrew Gant's masterly but highly readable *O Sing unto the Lord*.

The book opens with words from a Vespers hymn attributed to the Venerable Bede: 'Hymnum canamus gloriae' – 'Sing we triumphant hymns of praise'. This first chapter, describing the birth of the choir

up to the tenth century, is of necessity short (did the Vikings really introduce two-part polyphony?), but by the time we get to the fifteenth century musicians had begun to lay down a distinctive, genuinely English sound. The next 600 years, right up to Maxwell Davies and MacMillan, are documented by Gant in a lively, informal and sometimes irreverent tone. Amongst some of the things we discover: Why do we still call parts of the liturgy by their Latin names, even though we started praying in English centuries ago? How did Tallis and Byrd

manage to keep their heads during the dangerous years of the Reformation? Which composers deserve more recognition than they now receive? And which drunken composer scandalised the Dean of Chichester from the organ loft?

There is one question the author never really answers. What is the purpose of sacred music: to make clear the word of God, or simply to bring pleasure through joyous sound? The author's response: does it really matter? Let's just enjoy the pleasure of singing.

ALAN AND GRACE: DIAMOND DUO

St George's Singers are not alone in celebrating 60 years. Grace and Alan Swain reached their 60th Wedding Anniversary on 29 December 2016, and threw a luncheon party for family and friends to help them celebrate. The weather (and the car park) was icy, but the warmth of feeling expressed for the 'happy couple' more than compensated.

After a glass of champagne, a rolling slide show of photos from Grace and



Alan's marriage, and a scrumptious lunch, it was time for speeches. First from some of their children who related anecdotes about their childhood, and then Alan himself stood up to give a very amusing account of his courtship of Grace (involving missed buses and angry parents), events from their long and very happy marriage, sustained by Grace's rice puddings, and including the amazing fact that he and Grace have never had a

row: totally believable!

Amongst the other highlights of the luncheon was the letter from HM The Queen, congratulating Mr and Mrs Swain on reaching their Diamond Wedding Anniversary.

Alan has long been one of the mainstays of St George's Singers: carpenter, builder, electrician, acoustic engineer, sculptor, and much more – always ensuring performances went without a hitch. But behind every great man is an even greater woman. So, congratulations to Alan and Grace from every one of us.



Grace and Alan

A STAGING POST BY ALAN SWAIN

When I joined the choir in 1995, the staging was just 6 plywood boxes 3ft sq x 1ft high, kept in the wooden shed outside the altos' emergency exit, and one of the boxes was used as the conductor's rostrum. At that time, most of our concert venues like Stockport Town Hall had suitable platforms.

When the church built our present rehearsal hall we were asked to vacate the shed, so I transported the boxes to and from alto Nancy Booth's unused garage near Poynnton High School. But we needed a conductor's rostrum, so I made the present unit able to be folded up for minimum storage.

For our concerts at St George's Stockport we needed to complement our boxes with Q-Build units borrowed from various schools. One evening a committee member gave me some Q-Build brochures and asked me to draw up a list of our requirements with a view to applying to the Lottery for a grant to build our own staging. My estimate was about £8,000 which 10 years ago seemed rather a lot. The Q-Build system was good but the dimensions of the unit tops were either too small or too big for our requirements. In a moment of

madness I thought: how about making some, to my own dimensions? All I had to do was see how to make one unit then make another 43 with different sized legs.

First my arc welding set needed replacing with a MiG welder. Next I had to get the steel stockholders to cut the iron accurately to my dimensions. I didn't tell anyone in the Choir what I was doing and went ahead and ordered the iron.

My first attempts at MiG welding were pathetic, so I made a welding jig for holding the pieces in position for welding. Finding progress good I told our then stage manager Kate Taylor. She seemed surprised and pleased. However not so long afterwards I was asked by the committee to abandon this project as it wouldn't be possible to insure something 'home-made'. I ignored the request as I knew that if the Choir didn't want it, other organisations would be delighted.

After a month all the welding was complete and an electroplating company in Salford said they could chrome passivate

the units for me. Next the tops. B&Q in Stockport had just the machine in their timber department to do repeat cutting, so at a quiet time I supervised the cutting of 14 8ft x 4ft MDF sheets. Having got all this home it was then time to drill all the holes in the corners, 206 altogether, round off all the corners and chamfer the edges.

The tops then needed two coats of Bourne Seal, each one taking about 30 minutes to dry. By now I was running out of time for the coming concert so asked Elfed Hughes to help me finish the painting and drill all the holes in the polycarbonate links. Finally, I made safety backs, two pairs of steps and two heavyweight trolleys for transporting everything. I collected the iron plating from Salford, banged in all the plastic 'feet', then bingo – all done with one day to spare.

Many newer members of St George's Singers probably don't know what a superman Alan Swain is. Here Alan describes just one of the many projects he's completed for the Choir.



Alan taking a well-earned rest on his magnificent staging in Emmanuel Church





Holly working with dementia sufferers

ADAGES: CREATING MUSICAL MEMORIES

A couple of months ago a surprise visitor turned up at the Choir's Tuesday rehearsal. Holly Marland had come along to tell us about her Adages project, and to invite members of St George's Singers to join with her in performing a unique piece of music, designed to help older people with dementia.

Holly is an experienced music-for-health practitioner as well as a composer, and has an established reputation as a versatile multi-instrumentalist, using the kora (a West African harp – see p 11), recorder, percussion, singing and storytelling to delight audiences of all ages and abilities. She has performed at the Manchester International Festival, on BBC Radio 4, and in 2014 went on tour to New York. As a composer she has completed commissions for Manchester Cathedral Choir, BBC and RNCM, and specialises in contemporary classical works for mixed voices and kora.

Over a 15-year period Holly pioneered the Music for Health programme at RNCM, which has now been integrated into LIME, the award-winning arts charity in the Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trusts which seeks to show how the arts can play an important part in enhancing quality of life and quality of care.

Holly's latest project, Adages, was set up to create and perform a new, extended piece of music for voices and instruments through working with

different groups of older people with dementia and their carers. It is funded by the Arts Council England, and is supported by RNCM, Manchester Cathedral, Carers Link and the charity Music in Hospitals.

Holly has been working with three groups in hospital and residential settings. Sessions were designed to stimulate the creative ideas of residents and patients and the people caring for them (staff/families). Through activities such as singing familiar songs, creating new songs and poetry, and responding to multi-sensory stimuli, musical and poetic ideas were generated. These were woven together by Holly into an extended piece of music, an oratorio, composed to be accessible to all, and which can be learnt by local community singing groups, choirs, professional instrumentalists and singers.

The reason for Holly's visit to St George's Singers was to ask for volunteers from the Choir to join with the other groups involved: Manchester Children's Choir, Carers Chorus, soloists from RNCM and the BBC Daily Service Singers, and community choirs. The oratorio has been composed in sections for performance by different groups, depending on their singing experience and note-reading ability. Volunteers' hands went up immediately, and a contingent from St George's will be thrilled to be joining in the performance.

The work, entitled *So Many Beauties*, will be performed at Manchester Cathedral on Thursday 6 April 2017 at 7 pm. The choirs and solo singers will be accompanied by Holly on the kora and a professional ensemble, and the performance will be recorded for broadcasts during Dementia Awareness Week in May 2017.

Those interested in taking part as a singer should contact Holly

by email at hollymarlandmusic@gmail.com, or telephone 07811 352102. Rehearsals for the concert will take place on Sunday 2 April (2–5 pm) at RNCM, and on the afternoon of performance day in Manchester Cathedral (2–4 pm). Sasha Johnson-Manning will be taking rehearsals and conducting the performance.

Tickets for the concert itself at Manchester Cathedral on 6 April are available from <https://adages.eventbrite.co.uk> and are priced £8, or £5 for students, under 16s, over 60s, carers and care staff, and those on disability and unemployment benefits.



This will be a unique event, which we hope lots of people will come along to support, either as participants or audience.



So Many Beauties
Thursday 6 April 2017, 7 pm
Manchester Cathedral

Tickets:
<https://adages.eventbrite.co.uk>
£8, concessions £5

For more information about the
Adages project:
www.adagesblog.wordpress.com
or email
hollymarlandmusic@gmail.com

BANNER ADVERTISING BY JUDY TOMLINSON

While singing is an interest I have followed throughout my adult life, working with textiles has been more intermittent, and usually focused on making useful objects, like clothes and furnishings. When I retired, I decided to explore these skills, inspired by a visit to the Festival of Quilts in Birmingham five years ago when I was amazed at the artistic and inspiring achievements possible.

As well as enjoying different courses which reminded me of what my sewing machine was capable of, and taught me new techniques, I looked around for projects to put what I was learning into practice. One day last summer I found myself offering to make a banner for St George's Singers to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary, and following discussions with the committee, I was given the green light.

As I am finding with many of my textile projects, the planning takes much longer than the implementation. Through the summer, having been given guidance on the SGS logo, fonts, colours, and the theme of the anniversary 'diamond roses'

I settled on the design. This included photographs printed on cotton of the different diamond roses and a list of sixty (from around a hundred) composers of works that the Choir had sung in its history. A particular challenge was producing the SGS logo from textiles, but with a bit of help from Photoshop (another new venture) I managed to print the logo with a black background to blend in with the basic fabric.

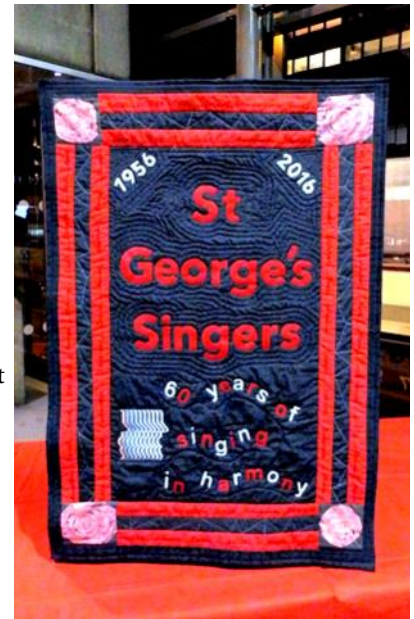
Practical work started in September. The first task was to embroider the sixty composers' names on strips of red cotton fabric. I had not used this feature of my machine before so, again, it took a few attempts before I finally had eight strips which fitted together into two borders, giving me the size of the central part of the banner.

This central piece included the words 'St George's Singers', '60 years of singing in harmony', and dates, appliqued on to the background. I then added the strips of composers' names and the black fabric, plus the corners, and had the front of the banner ready for quilting. A quilt has three layers: a wo-

ven cloth top, a layer of batting or wadding, and a woven back, combined by 'quilting', the process of sewing the three layers together.

I used different ways of sewing these three layers together: 'stitching in the ditch' (sewing along seams); and 'echo quilting' (used, for example, around the word 'St', first by sewing around each letter, and then sewing around the word in roughly equidistant lines). Finally, a binding was put around the quilt, and – a golden rule for quilters – the name and date of completion sewn to the back. The banner was finished in November in time for the first RNCM concert of the season, and displayed at the Friends' reception.

While doing something new is bound to involve challenges and frustrations I am very pleased that the Choir accepted my offer. I have really enjoyed making the banner and appreciate the support I received during the process.



Judy's banner on display at the RNCM and which will be on show at all our concerts this season

Some facts about Judy's banner:

- **Hours to design and make:** probably 60-80
- **Metres of thread used:** several hundred!
- **Colour of thread:** invisible
- **Materials cost:** c £20

THE KORA

The kora is used throughout West Africa, particularly in countries with large populations of Mandinka, such as Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso and the Gambia.



Pa Bobo Jobarteh, a famous jali from the Gambia, with his kora

It is a 21-string lute-harp, made from a large calabash cut in half and covered with cow skin to make a resonator with a long hardwood neck. The skin is supported by two handles underneath it, and has a notched free-standing bridge on top.

The strings run in two ranks, one with 11 (played by the left hand) and one with 10 (right hand). Strings were traditionally made from thin strips of hide (such as antelope skin), but now most are made from harp strings or nylon fishing line, sometimes plaited together to create thicker strings. Koras are notoriously difficult to tune, have a playing range from top

A to bottom

F, and by moving leather tuning rings up and down the neck a player can retune the kora into one of four 7-note scales, close to the Western major, minor and Lydian modes.

Most kora players came from 'griot' families – musicians, poets, historians and storytellers – also known as 'jali', predominantly from the Mandinka tribes. As an oral musical tradition, kora music was not written down until the 20th century. Nowadays scores are written on a single G clef, following notation system created specifically for the kora in the 1970s by Brother Dominique Catta, a noted composer of pieces for the kora from the Keur Moussa Monastery in Senegal.



You can hear the wonderful sound of the kora on a CD recording by the 35 monks of Keur Moussa Abbey entitled *Keur Moussa: Sacred Chant and African Rhythms from Senegal*

St George's Singers

For more information, please contact:

John Smith (Chair), 01422 359073
stgeorgessingers.johnsmith@gmail.com

Jacqui Smith (Secretary), 01625 875437
enquiries@st-georges-singers.org.uk

Susan Hodgson (Hemiola Editor)
susan.hodgson28@btinternet.com

Jean Egerton (Publicity), 01625 871371
publicity@st-georges-singers.org.uk



Find us on the web at:
www.st-georges-singers.org.uk



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ST GEORGE'S CONCERT DIARY 2016-17 60th Anniversary Season

22 April 2017
Diamond Anniversary Concert:
Six centuries of song

25 June 2017
Verdi *Messa da Requiem*

20 August 2017
Beethoven 'Choral Fantasy'

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

St George's Singers was formed in 1956 by Rev Eric Chapman and Geoffrey Verney, organist and choirmaster of St George's Church, Poynton in Cheshire, where the Choir still rehearses every Tuesday night. Geoffrey's dream was to build a community choir, capable of performing major choral works to a high standard and which would attract singers and audiences from neighbouring towns. Geoffrey died in 1964, but his legacy was nurtured by his successors Duncan Eyre, Ray Lomax and Stephen Williams, and is continued by our present Musical Director, Neil Taylor.

St George's Singers is 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, Stoller Hall, 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 SINGS – BY INVITATION!

In addition to our own programme of concerts this year, St George's Singers has been invited to take part in a number of other prestigious choral ventures in 2017.

Sunday 20 August, 7.00pm

Chetham's have invited us to join with them in performing Beethoven's 'Choral Fantasy' at their newly opened Stoller Hall concert venue. The concert also features Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3, and is part of Chetham's Complete Beethoven Concerto series this summer.

Composed in 1808, the 'Choral Fantasy' was scored for the unusual combination of piano, soloists, chorus and orchestra, and was written to conclude a benefit concert for Beethoven, which also featured two of his

symphonies and his Fourth Piano Concerto. Beethoven wanted a 'brilliant Finale' to unite the musical elements of the evening, and Beethoven himself played the piano, largely improvised!

The work bears some striking similarities with his later Ninth 'Choral' Symphony: the theme of the Choral Fantasy text – universal fraternity with the meeting of arts – evokes similar feelings as the 'Ode to Joy' text; and a sequence of variations on a theme that is widely felt to be an early version of the later 'Ode to Joy' theme.

The orchestra at Stoller Hall will be Stockport Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Chetham's Stephen Threlfall, with pianists Dmitri Alexeev and Murray McLachlan.

Tickets are £15 (£12 concession) available online at www.stollerhall.com or by phone on 0333 130 0967.

Monday 11 December, 7.30pm

We're thrilled to have been invited by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to join them in their annual Christmas Concert at the Bridgewater Hall in December 2017. Even more thrilling is that it will be conducted by none other than John Rutter. The Kings Singers will also be appearing.

More information about this will be announced later in the year. In the meantime, put the date in your diaries now!