



Conductor's Letter ...

Welcome back to the second part of the season. I hope you have had a relaxing summer break even if you haven't been away.

The summer concert was a great success and so much praise was rightly given to the fine piano playing of Christopher Boodle in his accompaniment to our singing. We found the Rutter *Magnificat* quite hard to learn in the time available but the Society persevered and the performance was a great success, thanks to your sterling efforts. The Elgar performance (*Songs from the Bavarian Highlands*) was very fine and enjoyable.

We are now looking forward to our performance of *Messiah* on November 10th in Dursley. We will be accompanied by our professional musicians of the Tyndale Chamber Orchestra and you will find details of our soloists elsewhere in this Newsletter. I know many of you have sung the work many times but there are always singers and audience to whom this performance will be a

"first". Such was Handel's genius that the words and music always come up sounding new and exciting. There was great excitement at the Three Choirs' Festival performance of *Messiah* when the bass soloist, Michael George, was not on top form during Part 1. He didn't sing the aria and an announcement in the interval told the audience that he had lost his voice. Luckily they had been able to secure the services of the Festival Secretary, Bill Armiger, to sing the bass music in Part 11. He did very well and received a fine ovation at the end. Stephen Roberts substituted in the concert the next evening and Michael George was back on form to sing the part of Judas in *The Apostles*. Several members of our choir were in evidence in the audience.

All our male soloists are former Gloucester Cathedral choristers. The tenor soloist (Peter Wilman) has recently joined the Welsh National Opera Company and there is a question mark over his appearance as he has not yet received his schedules. However I have two more tenors, both ex-choristers, up my sleeve if I

have to effect a substitution. You will be delighted with the sound of our young soprano soloist, Lisa Wilson, whose fresh, clear voice will make a great contribution to our performance.

I am looking forward to the Autumn's rehearsals with our new accompanist, Angele McKenzie - Smith. We are also inviting any suitable young singers to join us and are circulating Heads of the Music Departments at all local secondary schools to invite them to recommend young singers to us. If any members have any suggestions to make this approach more effective, Anne and I would be glad of your input.

The choir received an excellent report on the Summer Concert from the NFMS visitor and for those who missed the report in the Gazette, an abridged version of the Critique of the Concert (Editor) is given below.

Michael

The Critique was entitled:

Choral Concert is a Summertime Delight

From the opening few bars of Brother James' Air (by James Leith Bain and arranged by Gordon Jacobs) the choir was well balanced and meticulous in its attention to detail. Two pieces by Gustav Holst followed, *Psalm 148* and *This Have I Done for my True Love*, both

with Christopher Boodle at the piano. Psalm 148 was originally scored strings and organ and it was a pity the organ was not used for it, as much of the piano accompaniment was lost, particularly in the second verse.

The soprano soloist was Jillian Whitehead who performed four songs... By John Ireland, Thomas Arne and Sir Edward Elgar. Jillian's clear and confident voice and Christopher's sensitive playing were perfectly balanced and a delight to listen to.

The first half of the concert ended with *Songs from the Bavarian Highlands* by Elgar Again the choir was confident and assured, especially in the quieter movements. After the interval there was just one work, Magnificat by John Rutter It has all the hallmarks of Rutter's music, full of melodic and rhythmic writing. Again, it was unfortunate that the organ was not used in place of the piano, as the intricacies of the syncopation were at times lost completely. However, the choir gave a polished performance despite a few hesitations. They sang with great sensitivity and feeling in the quieter movements, particularly when accompanying Jillian Whitehead's solo movement, *Et misericordia*, and with vitality in the more rhythmic passages.

The whole was ably directed by Michael Power who ensured that all his forces were combined to give a memorable evening's entertainment.

(EMB)

Chairman's Message ...

Dear friends,

As I sit and write this welcome my mind goes back to 1965 and my first ever performance of the *Messiah*. I was singing in the school choral society at Dursley grammar School. The society was made up of school pupils aided by staff and members of the local community. How wonderful it would be if schools still had choral societies today - it would certainly aid our recruitment drive. Choral societies need young people to keep them alive and ours is no exception.

I am looking forward to singing the *Messiah* in November because every time I do sing this wonderful work I notice something new or different in it. It is very easy to think that we have sung the work so often that we know it 'back to front' but it never ceases to amaze me how every performance is different. As usual we need new singers in every part, but particularly in the tenor line. Please do what you can to find new members and bring them along to the first rehearsal in September.

As you know we need a new secretary for next season and as yet no one has volunteered to do the job! It is certainly not as onerous as it used to be because the work has been divided into two parts - Concert Secretary and General Secretary. Marion Miller is our concert secretary and I am sure that both she and Jenny Cobb would be more than willing to talk to you about what is involved. We are very pleased that Kate Reeves is going to be our new Treasurer next season. Kate joined the society recently as a

member of the altos. If you don't yet know her, you soon will.

Finally, I hope that you are all looking forward to our November concert as much as I am, I am sure that it will be magnificent!

Anne Shipton

AUTUMN CONCERT

Saturday 10th November at 7.30pm
St James' Parish Church Dursley
with the Tyndale Chamber Orchestra

The Messiah
by G F Handel

Soloists:

Lisa Wilson - soprano
Stephen Power - counter-tenor
Peter Wilman - tenor
Philip Webb - baritone

Rehearsals on the two Mondays before the concerts (29th October and 5th November) will be in Dursley Parish Church at 7.30pm. The rehearsal on the **afternoon** of the concert will be at 2.30pm.

Dress:

Ladies: Long black skirt and long-sleeved white blouse.

Men: DJ or dark suit, white shirt and black bow tie.

Soloists for the Messiah

Lisa Wilson (soprano) held a choral scholarship for four years at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and studied English Literature. She now lives in Oxford but sings in London Choirs, including the Oxford Camerata, under Jeremy Summerley, St. Margaret's Church, Westminster and St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street. She has studied with Emma Kirkby and recently sang the role of Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* with New Chamber Opera. She has also taken part in a master class with Sir Thomas Allen on the same opera.

Stephen Power (counter-tenor) was another chorister at Gloucester Cathedral with John Sanders. He also fell under the influence of the then assistant organist Mark Blatchly whose organ playing he much admired. After a period as a Choral Scholar in the Gloucester Cathedral Choir he went on to study music at Huddersfield University and switched to singing counter-tenor. He soon started singing in the Leeds Parish Church Choir as a Choral Scholar and then as a Lay Clerk under Simon Lindley. He has sung many solos in that choir and has sung with the University of Huddersfield Chamber Choir as a soloist. He graduated this summer and has been appointed organ scholar at Wakefield Cathedral. At present he studies singing with Richard Hill at York Minster. You will remember that he played the organ in our performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in his first year at University.

Peter Wilman (tenor) was a chorister at Gloucester Cathedral under Dr. John Sanders OBE and went on to study music at Canterbury. Originally making his career in piano teaching, he found further time to sing professionally as an extra in the Canterbury Cathedral Choir. He now sings as an extra singer with the BBC Singers and has sung, for several seasons with English Touring Opera, taking small roles and understudying Tamino in *The Magic Flute*. He will be performing this season with Welsh National Opera Company and I am keeping my fingers crossed that dates with them will not clash with our performance of *Messiah*.

Philip Webb (bass) is well known to Tyndale audiences having first sung in Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G. Minor* in my second season as conductor. He was also a Gloucester chorister with John Sanders and after leaving The King's School he studied music at Durham University. Later he sang Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs* with us and sang in three performances of *Death of a Martyr* by Christopher Boodle (a Tyndale commission) in 1994. He also sang in our Purcell concert in 1995 and then in our performance of *Carmina Burana*. Last year he sang the baritone solos in John Sanders' *The Cotswolds*. He is a member of the St. Cecilia Singers and lives in Gloucester with his wife and two children.

Diary Dates and Other Matters ...

New Members

Please try and encourage potential new members to come along to rehearsals at the start of the season, in particular, and make sure you introduce them to the Secretary Jenny Cobb or the Chairman, Anne Shipton.

Sales Stall: The stall will again be in operation throughout this second part of the season. It makes an important contribution to the funds, so bring along books, plants and other produce, records, tapes and anything else that is saleable, and in any case visit the stall and buy.

Saturday 10th November - help will be needed to erect staging and to dismantle it after the concert, so please contact the Concert Manager (John Ewer) and Asst. (Mike Chambers) with offers of assistance - *they need your help as they can't do it all on their own.*

Subscriptions: The rate was £31 if you paid before 28th May. It is now £32 (see card). The Treasurer, Geoff Whiley (bass) will be pleased to assist.

Thursday 15th November - **Annual General Meeting** in the Parish Centre, Dursley at 7.30pm.

DIANA COLLINS

As some of you will already be aware, Diana died on Sunday August 5th after battling with cancer for some time. Diana was our accompanist for many years taking on the job not long after joining the society. She was a most sensitive and accomplished player and helped the singers out of difficulties in many concerts.

Diana also enjoyed singing and when she was not accompanying she sang with the altos. She also belonged to the Oriana Singers in the early years with David Austin and returned several years ago to sing with Sheila Cranshaw and Delyth Mayhew

Diana was a member of Dursley Church Choir, joining when her husband David took over as organist and choirmaster. It was at David's instigation that ladies were first introduced into the choir, a thing unheard of at Dursley, and Diana and I joined together.

She will also be fondly remembered by the members of the Ewelme Singers, a group she thoroughly enjoyed singing with. There are many other musical events which she took part in, too numerous to mention, which no doubt many of you will recall.

All those who knew her will remember her with great affection.

Anne

*A rather appropriate item selected by
Wendy Richardson from the
Daily Telegraph December 2000.*

Passions polished and perfected

By Susan Elkin

(Sittingbourne Orpheus Choral Society).

Look for me on a Tuesday evening and you'll find me in a grungy, gloomy 1970s school hall in Sittingbourne, Kent singing. I've been a member of the local choir for years. OK, our less-than-leafy, socio-economically depressed corner of the garden of England is not known as a hotbed of highbrow culture, and the Orpheus Choral Society isn't quite up to the standards of the boys at Westminster Cathedral. Yet here we are, gathered to explore the joys of Bach, Vaughan Williams, Mozart and Handel in preparation for some forthcoming concert. Travel a few miles south, west or east and you'll find three other lots doing the same thing. And that's before you get to the more traditionally musical cathedral cities of Canterbury or Rochester.

In our mumsily amateurish way, we are England's Great Choral Tradition. And there are tens of thousands of us. Making Music, the recently renamed National Federation of Musical Societies, which was founded in 1955, has 1,146 choirs in its membership. "But of course there are many others," says a spokesman, explaining that choral singing used to be associated largely with churches, before it erupted into a craze in the 18th century when Handel arrived with his *Messiah*. But it was in high Victorian Britain that

it really took off. Working-class people in the industrial centres of the North such as Huddersfield - whose famous choral society is over 150 years old - gathered to sing. Few of them could read music (most relied on the old tonic sol-fa system); it was a "wholesome" community recreation which factory- and mill-owners encouraged.

Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was an instant success at the Birmingham Festival in 1846, and on the back of it he revived the great Bach masses and passions across Europe. Soon, Elgar was writing what was to be the perennially popular *The Dream of Gerontius* and, hey presto, choral societies and choral unions were springing up everywhere like mushrooms after a damp night. Today, nearly every town or large village has its choir.

Christmas, of course, is a choral singer's busiest season. Most of us have spent the past few months earnestly preparing for performances of Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* or Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. Alternatively, or additionally, many choral societies, including mine, put on the ubiquitous mix-and match carol concert, in which the tinkling banality of John Rutter (the man responsible for, among much other rubbish, *Star Carol* and *Mary's Lullaby*) sits reasonably amicably alongside jolly Victorian hymns, medieval folk carols, the crisply intellectual, modern compositions of William Mathias or Barry Ferguson, *Jingle Bells* and *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. And we've been working on these seasonal delights since the warm, balmy evenings of early September. Work it most certainly is. But work, as we all know, never did anyone any harm, and

there's now even evidence that choral singing – like red wine and tomatoes - is good for your health. A recent study of 12,675 people aged 16-74, by Professor Lars Olov Bygren, of the University of Umea in Sweden, whose results have been published in the *British Medical Journal*, shows that people who sing together are likely to live longer than those who don't.

Certainly, singing is an energiser. Since I first chirruped in the infants' school choir nearly half a century ago, I have been almost continuously involved in amateur music-making. And there is no doubt that it makes me feel fitter and happier. You learn something new, submit to musical discipline, strive to give your very best. You're, fashionably, a "team player". It's invigorating stuff. Concentrating to the exclusion of all else on your music, hitting the right note and getting your timing accurate all of this eases work-related stress. So does the regulated breathing. Who are we? There are a lot of teachers and nurses. Many of us work in offices, and we have our share of accountants, bank staff and civil servants. One of sopranos is an undertaker.

Inevitably, pensioners are well represented. Although some of our singers are excellent musicians - music teachers and the like who can fill in as accompanist if our regular pianist is absent, others are not even music readers. They are just keen and willing to learn. Most like me, fall somewhere in between. Yet untrained, amateur or not, every choral singer gets the chance to be a temporary professional musician. After all, punters pay to hear us perform - a sobering thought. Besides, how else

could a journalist like me discover the likes of Brahms's *German Requiem*, Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony*, Mozart's *Requiem* or Elgar's *The Music Makers* from the inside, as I've had a go at doing in recent years?

Top-notch choral societies hold regular auditions so that singers who are sliding past their prime date can be tactfully "retired". But in our case, thank goodness, the only qualifications for joining and staying as long as you will are that you should like singing and that you should attend rehearsals regularly. Motley raw material we maybe, but Ray Jones, our long-suffering conductor, somehow knocks us into reasonable shape, using an odd combination of humour and rigour. Inevitably, the commitment goes beyond singing. Concerts are costly. You have to hire a venue and, usually, orchestral players. Ticket sales, even from the almost-full houses' we attract, never cover it. So, in between times we fund-raise. In my own choir that means quiz, murder and mystery, and line-dancing evenings. Occasionally, we do a bring-and-buy. There's a 200 Club and we have profit-making refreshments at our practices. Such English small-scale entrepreneurialism underpins the choral movement. Homespun it may be, but the high spots - the concerts - are quite heady events.

These days, Britain might not be much cop at building domes and bridges, and it no longer seems able to run a health service or a railway system. But there are some things we can still do and that you feel obliquely proud to be part of. Producing choirs out of communities is one of them.

NOTICE BOARD

Amberley Chamber Choir

Conductor Harry Lyall

A Concert of Choral Music
from the 16th to 20th Century
including spirituals, folk songs, madrigals
and sacred music.

Saturday 22nd September 2001
at 7.30pm
Holy Cross Church Owlpen, Uley

Free Admission with a Retiring Collection
followed by Canapes and Wine in the Manor
£2.00 on the night.

Choir Sunday **9th September 2001** **Dursley Parish Church**

Sung Eucharist at 10.30am will include music by Dr John Sanders, Organist Emeritus of Gloucester Cathedral - **Mass of the Creator**, and the first performance of the anthem **When, in our music, God is Glorified** commissioned by the choir.