

summer newsletter 2000

Wimbledon Choral Society

A Millennium Marvel

Reflections on the past season

The 1999-2000 season which witnessed the arrival of a new millennium was full of some of the most fantastic music ever written. What's more, it was accompanied by equally fantastic performances by this great choir of ours.



It started in November last year with what can only be described as a stunning rendition of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* in Guildford's majestic cathedral. To quote a phrase, "It's been emotional". In fact, it was more than that.

With the brilliance of the wonderful Dorian Orchestra mastering this difficult work in just an afternoon, three terrific soloists, Michael in top form up front and a truly outstanding performance from the choir, the 600 or so members of the audience went home with a tingle down their backs. I think those of you who sang in it had a similar feeling.

We received countless compliments from many people, indeed including some from a few guests who had been rather dismissive about amateur choirs "doing justice" to such a musical work before they heard the concert. It just goes to show the impact the choir has when it's firing on all cylinders.

We were fortunate to have three very good soloists. In Robert Poulton we had a fine bass with a commanding presence. Margaret McDonald, as the Angel, sang magnificently and WOW!, what a costume! However, it was Robert Johnson as the Soul of Gerontius who took our breath away with a superbly sensitive performance. Margaret told me afterwards that although she had sung the piece several times before, this had been by far "the most emotionally charged" performance in which she had taken part. I received an e-mail from Robert Poulton a few days later and he was highly complimentary about the choir.



March saw a very different concert in a much smaller venue (St. John's Church, Waterloo) with us demonstrating our versatility in performing Durufle's wonderful *Requiem* followed by nine of Rachmaninov's very rich-sounding *Songs of the Church (Vespers)*, neither works particularly easy to do well. However, once more you rose to the occasion and proved you could do it.

With the express agreement of the Dorian Ensemble players, we were able to record the concert and a fine recording it was too. Both pieces (and indeed the Elgar also) had come high on your lists of favourites and "would like to do again" when we carried out the membership survey two years ago.



Although the church can only hold 380 in the audience, what is pleasing about the venue is that we sing to a full house. It makes such a difference when we know there's not a seat left in the place. Gee, I wish we could do that or get close to that at other venues. Squeaky chairs or not, St. John's is a great place in which to sing, with excellent acoustics, a wide open space in which to stage the choir and clear visibility for the audience.



The final main concert of the season was Dvorak's mighty *Stabat Mater* at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon. If you thought that the Elgar concert had been good then this was easily on a par, if not better. I sat out for part of the rehearsal to listen and I was bowled over by the power and quality of the sound coming

Don't forget !!!

Proms in the Garden

Saturday 9 Sept 2000
Gates open
6pm for 7.30pm

35 The Warren
Carshalton Beeches
Surrey

Bring a picnic!
Bring some friends!
Bring your voice!

Tickets £9 (kids free)



across from the choir, even over the efforts of the orchestra players who were trying to drown you out! It really was something special. Those of you who had guests in the audience will know just how good that performance was and Michael confirmed that later in the evening at the reception.

What a pity, then, that we sold less than 400 tickets for a concert of such quality in a hall which can hold over 1400. OK, it was on a Sunday evening but it was not late on a Sunday, and at least it wasn't on a weekday evening as we've had to do in the past and which you really did not like - you said so in the survey. Sure, it was also a hot evening but that wasn't to be known when the tickets were on sale. We don't have anywhere nearer, or better still a concert hall (yet), in Wimbledon which we could call "home" but that should not detract from publicising the concert and positively encouraging people to come. We've been in this situation for 10 or so years now so it's nothing new. It was so disappointing not to see more people in the audience. You know and I know that for those who were not there, they missed one cracking concert.



What's more, they missed a good reception afterwards as well! I must place on record my thanks to you all for keeping this a secret from Michael right up to the moment he walked in the door of the reception. He genuinely had no idea and the look of relief on

Salendar's face for not having to keep it from him any longer was obvious! It was an appropriate way of marking Michael's 21 years with us and, indeed, the music programme for the season contained many of his favourite choral works.

The choir's President, Ian Partridge CBE, spoke of our deep affection for Michael and that there was no doubt that the choir had progressed and improved substantially under his musical leadership during this period with the performances given throughout the season reflecting this so clearly.

He then passed the "baton" to say a few words on to Joan Tagg, a long-serving member, who had been part of the selection committee for a new Musical Director all those years ago. She spoke of the choir's obvious enthusiasm for Michael back then, how it had remained undiminished ever since, and concluded by presenting to him the choir's gift of a silver baton in an engraved box. It's not often Michael is caught out but he was this time. A fine end to a fine season.

It wasn't quite all. Once more this year we sang at the Dulwich Country Fayre in June, this time with the Dorian Orchestra and for much longer than in 1999. The music was a mixture of popular classics and arrangements of West End shows and musicals. The organisers were very pleased with us and said so in writing so we may well be invited again next year. The only slight downside was that the weather was so poor leading to low crowd numbers but the show went on and we delivered a polished performance.

A highly successful season with fabulous music and I really hope you enjoyed it. Next season has great promise as well but more on that later.

Many thanks to you all for your continued support and the tremendous effort that you put in to make this choir what it is.

boss@wimbledon-choral.org.uk

Personnel Pieces

This choir only runs smoothly because of a small number of people who put in a lot of time and hard work to enable the majority to benefit. Many of these people either are on the choir's committee or take on other tasks. Without them the choir just would not function effectively and efficiently.

Are you doing your bit?

Congratulations are due to Liz Holder (our Treasurer) for having been appointed to the job of Finance Officer for the Battersea Arts Centre starting in mid-September.

Many of you will know that Gil Magill is standing down as Secretary since she feels she will not be available to commit as much time to the role as may be required, following her husband's recent retirement. I did ask if anyone else would be interested to take on the job (a position the Chairman relies on a lot!) and I am delighted that Deborah Raymond, a second soprano, came forward and offered to do so. I understand that subsequent conversations with Gil hasn't put Deborah off the idea! No one else has put their name forward so I will hope you will endorse Deborah's election to the job at the next AGM.

For many years David Quinton has been our Ticket Secretary, not only organising the selling of the tickets prior to the concerts but also liaising with venues like the Fairfield Halls to make sure the tickets are ready to sell. With his small team of helpers, he keeps a track of how many we've sold and, more importantly, how many we haven't sold so that I can judge how well sales are going or not. If you don't buy your minimum set of tickets then, believe me, I know about it. I am immensely grateful to David for having handled this task so well, often with extra arrangements to take on as well (like season tickets and special deals). He feels, though, that someone else ought to have the opportunity of doing this role and Gunhild Lenz-Mulligan, a first soprano, has offered kindly to take over. I trust you'll support her in this task.

Finally in this section, Dennis Barrett, the Independent Examiner who examines our accounts and verifies that they are a true and accurate record of the Society's accounts, has recently stood down from this role. In his place Emma Grundy, a second alto and a qualified accountant, has taken on this job and has already examined (and approved!) the accounts for the past season. Even though she is a member of the choir, this appointment falls within the rules of independent examination and I'm very pleased that she has accepted to do the job. We are very grateful to Dennis for having done the job so well for many years.

Many Thanks, Brian

Brain Lodde, a first alto, is a long-serving member of the choir. In addition to his contribution of a great singing voice he has also been our Assistant Musical Director for many years. Many of you may not know, however, that Brian now lives in Cambridgeshire yet still regularly travels the great distance to rehearse and perform with us. That is loyalty and dedication.

Brian has decided that, although he will continue to come to as many rehearsals as he can, it is no longer practical to retain his role as Assistant Musical Director. Without doubt we will miss his musical skills, charm, good humour, quick wit and effervescence up on stage as he guides us through the music but we are delighted that he will continue to sing with us. Many thanks, Brian.

Hello, Norman!

Michael certainly needs to have an able assistant to help him and it is a great pleasure to announce that Norman Harper has accepted the role of Assistant Chorus Master.



Norman has accompanied us on the organ for several performances in recent years and also took many of the rehearsals for the Elgar concert last year during Michael's sabbatical leave, so he is no stranger to the choir. We are all looking forward to working with him. Welcome on board!

Notes and Dates for your Diary



New Season

The first rehearsal of the new season is on Monday 4th September, starting at 7.30pm, in the Wimbledon Community Centre, St. Georges Road. Please do make sure that you arrive in plenty of time so that we can start promptly. It would be nice if you could maintain that practice for every rehearsal throughout the season as well. The AGM will be on Monday 25th September at 7.30pm.

If you have any friends who you might have convinced over the summer break to join the choir then please bring them along with you on the first night. We would be delighted to welcome them.

A Earful of Beethoven

The first concert of the new season is on Saturday 4th November at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon. With the date being earlier than usual (sorry, but getting reasonable dates at Fairfield is almost impossible), the content of the programme has to be realistic. However, that content promises to make it a great concert. The two main pieces will be Beethoven's wonderful *Mass in C* and the *Choral Fantasy* which many people believe to have been his "rehearsal" for the later "*Choral*" *Symphony No.9*. When you hear it, you'll understand why. A particular delight in this concert is that Tim Sutton will be the piano soloist in the *Choral Fantasy*.

Classic Cathedral Music

The March concert, once more at St. John's Church in Waterloo, will contain some of the most beautiful music written for cathedral/church singing. Handel's *Coronation Anthems*, while simplistic in their structure, have a richness that just confirms Handel's mastery at choral music writing, and William Boyce's *Lord, Thou hast been our refuge* (remember those words in the Elgar?) is an equal example of such excellent early works.

The Big Bang!

The main season will end with what promises to be a spectacular concert at the Fairfield Halls in partnership with Croydon Philharmonic Choir and the BBC Concert Orchestra. With a choir of 250+ we should be able to bring the roof down performing Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* (another one on your wish list) and Carl Orff's popular *Carmina Burana*. The particular aim of this concert is to sell and fill every seat in the hall, over 1400 of them. Now wouldn't that be something special in which to participate?

It's up to YOU

The Christmas concert(s) are on Saturday 16th December. With there being a longer gap after the November concert we are likely to do something a little bit more than usual for these concerts - details later in the season when they've been worked out. However, you've now got the dates for the whole season, you've got the brochure, you know the programme -- now is the time to publicise all of these concerts to your friends and colleagues and get them to block the dates in their diaries. It really is up to you. Go and sell those tickets!

British Legion Festival of Remembrance

At the time of writing this has still not been confirmed officially but you should make a note of it. Croydon Philharmonic Choir (CPC) and Wimbledon Choral Society have been asked by the British Legion to make up the choir for this year's Festival of Remembrance in the Royal Albert Hall in the presence of the Royal Family on Saturday 11th November which will be broadcast on BBC TV. There will be a mandatory rehearsal for those taking part (presumably at the RAH) on the Friday evening and it will take up ALL day Saturday since some of the recording is done in the afternoon. I understand that coach transportation, food and watering will be provided but at this stage I do not have all the details or the final required numbers for the choir, believed to be around 120-150 in total which will be split 50:50 with CPC.



Accounts

Liz Holder does a terrific job in keeping a close and careful eye on our expenses and making sure we do not stray too far from the budget plan. Ask any member of the committee and he/she will confirm it. In addition to this, though, Liz is our main liaison with the Charity Commission, ensuring that we keep within the guidelines and rules defined by that institution. In past years the final accounts for the previous season have been included with the summer newsletter. However, the extension of the season to include the Dulwich Country Fayre, and other tasks, means that it is no longer practical or reasonable to expect the accounts to be closed, examined and published in such a short timeframe. The committee members should find a copy of the accounts for their approval enclosed but the final set will be issued to everyone else before the AGM in September.

What has been decided, though, are the subscription rates for the new season. In recent years we have had enjoyable one-day workshops at the Gateway Studios and this is likely to be a regular event from now on. In order to cover costs, it has been past practice to charge around £10 per person for this event. This generates additional workload for Liz and others to handle and we have decided to change this. Next season's subscription rate will include the component for the workshop rather than charge for it separately. So you might expect the subscription rate to go up by at least £10. Hmmmmm? Wrong! In fact, the total increase per person is being limited to £5 which, if you take out the workshop element, actually means a £5 decrease. Now, how bad is that? The new rates, therefore, are as follows:

Type	Rate
Standard	£85.00
Senior Citizens	£80.00
Aged 25 or Under	£43.00
Registered Unemployed	£43.00
Full-time students	---

Have you visited our website yet?
www.wimbledon-choral.org.uk

Gift Aid

A short while back, you should have received a letter about Gift Aid in relation to your subscriptions and how it could really help our income if those who could use this facility actually did so. At the time of writing around 85 have returned the forms and been able to do this but that still leaves around 40 or so who haven't replied. If you have any questions or concerns on it then please see Liz.

Social?

Once more we had to cancel the Auction of Promises earlier this year which was a real shame. However the Quiz Night was a great evening as always. Please do come to the "Proms in the Garden" (see the front page) at June's house. It's a lively and enjoyable evening. Tickets on sale on Monday 4th September or on the door.

Brochures and Programmes

I must say a big thank you to Jane Bidston who has taken on the job of creating, writing and organising the printing of the concert programmes and new season brochures. The original design of the brochures and the overall style, you'll recall, were devised by a student at Reading University and many people have said how much more professional and smart the whole lot looks.

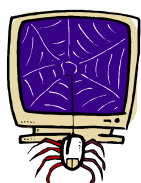
Special Offer

Have you done your bit and recruited more people to become Friends of the Choir this past year as asked this time last year? Please make the effort to do this. As a special incentive, for every new Friend signed up during this next season, you can purchase a Season Ticket at a £2 discount, making it £30 instead of £32, which is already a £5 saving on normal ticket prices. The more Friends we have, the bigger the audience we get. Have you thought about buying season tickets anyway rather than having to remember to buy tickets separately for each concert? Think about it.

Concert Dress

A survey was carried out amongst the ladies last season regarding this thorny and emotional topic. If you have any queries on this or seek clarification on items like jewellery or whatever then please speak to your voice representatives as they are the only ones authorised to comment on it.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and I look forward to seeing you again on Monday 4th September.



And finally

Does anyone know a fellow by the name of Luo Hongjian? Well, he sure as heck knows us. I was checking something for our website the other day when I found a reference to us on another website in Singapore! Curious, I linked to this site and found the following

"... Music : My favourite choir piece was a song called Pavane by Faure sung by the The Wimbledon Choral Society for BBC television during France 98."

I sent an e-mail to him to say how pleased we were that he liked the music. In his reply he said that he was in the UK at the time of the World Cup and "was moved" by the music so much that he had to buy the CD. He thought the choir "did an outstanding job" and he agreed with Mike Cobb's comments on the cover. He also said that the opening and trailing sequences of the television programmes (in that Parisian restaurant) "will forever [be] etched onto my mind".