

summer newsletter 2004

Wimbledon Choral Society

An Armed Man, A Verdi Triumph and A Deep River

www.wimbledon-choral.org.uk

Looking Back

When we first put some shape around last season's intended programme it soon became clear that it did not stack up financially and we would have to make a major change to it. It was a toss up between postponing either Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* or the Verdi *Requiem*, neither of which any of us really wanted to drop. In the end, the big Bach lost out but a bit of Bach got added into the Christmas concert in the shape of Part 1 of the *Christmas Oratorio*. What really helped to secure the season was Michael's wonderful offer for us to join Dulwich College in their autumn concert in the Fairfield Halls, as part of his final full-time year with the College. It set in motion what turned out to be a truly remarkable season.



I doubt those of you who took part in the performance of Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with the amazingly talented students of Dulwich College will forget the tingle we all felt at the end of the work. With getting on for 400 performers in total packed on to the Fairfield stage, the full emotion of this work came to the fore and we had some great feedback from

audience members. The piece has since been performed countless times up and down the land but we were some of the first to do it.

In an odd way November 2003 seemed a little empty without our trip to the Royal Albert Hall for the Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance but we had played our part for the previous three years and accepted that was it. Imagine how surprised I was to receive an email in early 2004 from the RBL asking if we'd be prepared to do it again in November 2004.

Be prepared?!?!

Silly question - of course, we'd do it! At this stage the indications are that this will be a one-off but it will be great to return, this time round in conjunction with Great Missenden Choral Society.



MARK THIS DATE The new season starts on **Monday 6th September @ 7:30pm in Drake House, St. George's Road - not the Community Centre as before.**

Christmas saw us return once again to St. Paul's Church in Southfields for our annual Christmas Concert. Following previous programmes this consisted of a substantial piece in the first half and more audience-based items in the second half. Tickets vanished, I think, within a couple of weeks of going on sale for this popular event. Once more, the choir's President, Ian Partridge CBE, sang the tenor solos in Part 1 of the *Christmas Oratorio* and we were accompanied by a splendid Oxford-based period instrument ensemble called Charivari Agréable who we plan to use again. We will be returning to St. Paul's for Christmas 2004.

Then came Saturday 27th March 2004 and that, what can only be described as, awesome performance of Verdi's *Requiem* in Guildford Cathedral with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra and four top soloists. I can't quite put my finger on it but something was ignited inside you and you sang out of your skins and the NQHO matched you all the way. Countless comments of praise for the performance included such phrases as:

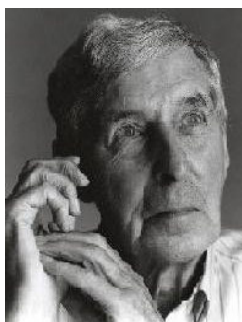


"... I cannot think of a choir of such focused sound and delivery ..."
"... absolutely spellbound ..."
"... never heard a choir sing with such unity of purpose ..."

What's more you excelled yourselves by selling most of the 850 tickets resulting in a near-packed cathedral which was a fantastic and highly satisfying sight for us to see from the stage, wouldn't you agree? You see, you really can do it when you put your mind to it! This was around 300 tickets more than we had estimated in the budget and was the major factor in reducing the overall loss on the event by a significant amount.

In the thirteen years that I've been with this choir, personally I rank three concerts in that time that will remain forever etched on my mind. They are Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* (March 1996), Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* (November 1999) and now Verdi's *Requiem* (March 2004). You were on fire in the afternoon's rehearsal but you were positively roaring by the evening. How proud I was to have been a part of that performance.

One thing that concert did for sure was to strengthen our relationship with the NQHO who were full of admiration of not only your performance but in particular of Michael's outstanding direction of it all. It showed a master craftsman at his best.



Sir Michael Tippett

Our spring concert found us back in familiar territory in St. John's Church, Waterloo where we performed Rutter's *Requiem*, Janacek's *Lord's Prayer*, three of Brucker's wonderful motets and *Five Negro Spirituals* from Sir Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*. Rutter's work is a little gem with beautifully progressive harmonies but this time we used it to start the concert rather than finish it. Instead we drew to a close with Tippett's rich and emotional spiritual *Deep River* which left the audience spellbound at the end.

Once again we rounded off the year with another highly enjoyable and well-attended Quiz Night with William G Stewart in control. I would like to record my sincere thanks to Hilary Leacock for organising the event again with such care and attention.

So, what started out as looking like potentially a rather financially restrictive season with an expensive Verdi in the middle of it turned out to be a fantastic programme stretching from Bach to Verdi to Jenkins & Tippett. You will see, when the financial accounts for the season are published, that it all worked out a lot better than originally thought. The choir continues to go from strength to strength with membership levels staying high with a regular intake of new members of all age groups, all of whom are very welcome. I am fortunate to have a splendid committee, both the full team and the smaller executive group, to help run the choir. Without them, nothing would get done. Even more so, we are so fortunate to have the excellent skills and musical leadership from Michael, Tim and Norman.

As always, though, the biggest thanks go to you, the members of this choir. You make this choir what it is and you, in the end, decide in which direction it ought to go. The more you can put into it, then more we can do. Later in this newsletter is some feedback on the survey that was carried out last year and I am grateful to Christine for having waded through the mountain of data to extract the important bits.

The start of this new season brings a bundle of new initiatives (see later) and I am sure you will support them with as much enthusiasm as you have with others in the past. A choir like ours survives because it evolves and we must keep it moving and take on board new challenges otherwise we'll just stagnate and stop. And standing still is not in the spirit of this choir.

Cadogan Hall

(Edited extract from www.classicalsource.com)

A new concert venue is an extremely welcome development on London's music scene; it is also especially timely given the impending 18-month closure of the Royal Festival Hall beginning in July 2005. Conveniently situated within 100 yards of Sloane Square tube (and immediately visible to one's right as one leaves the station), Cadogan Hall is 100 years old this year, having originally started life as a Christian Scientist Church.



It has undergone an extensive and extremely elegant refit funded by Cadogan Estates, re-emerging as the London headquarters of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as well as being used for concerts, recordings, rehearsals and community work. The hall itself is a jewel and a delight - light and airy with a pleasing acoustic. Seating around 900 people at maximum the ground floor is raked so that sight-lines are excellent and there is a horseshoe balcony running the entire circumference of the hall from which it is likely the sound of a symphony orchestra in full cry will be more comfortable.

Whilst London's main halls may be suitable for larger events and whilst the Wigmore Hall is wonderful for chamber music, Cadogan Hall is ideal for those in-between groups currently marginalised. It is an exciting development in London's musical life, and one to follow with enthusiasm.

(Neil's Notes:

This is a fantastic opportunity for us to find almost a "home" for the choir in light of the diminishing probability of getting a similar venue in Wimbledon, although the campaign still goes on. The Hall is absolutely beautiful inside and very well equipped. There will be some "interesting" logistical challenges for us to face, not least how we're going to shoehorn you and an orchestra on to the stage, let alone hide you all behind the scenes somehow. We'll find a way to do those since the pros for using Cadogan Hall easily outweigh the cons for not. With the refurbishment work starting on the South Bank Centre (RFH & QEH), available booking dates in the Hall will become scarce. I've secured three dates so far, two for the coming season and one for the following season.)

Do we have your correct email and home addresses?

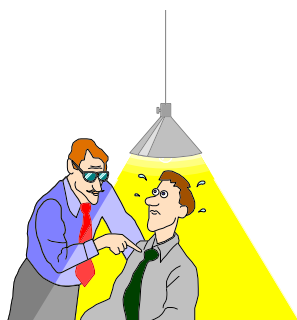


It is very much easier to make announcements, etc, by e-mail wherever possible. It would really help if you could make sure you let Laura and Tilly know of any changes to your email addresses. Also please ensure that Laura is aware of any changes to your home address and contact telephone numbers.



Laura can be found at
membership@wimbledon-choral.org.uk
and Tilly at
marketing@wimbledon-choral.org.uk

Feedback from the Survey



You may be wondering what happened to the survey we asked you to take part in last year. Well, there was a lot of information to process, and all of your responses have now been reviewed and collected together into a summary document. You can view the survey results online in the members' section of our website, and

some hard copies will also be available at the beginning of the season.

Overall the survey results provided much food for thought, and showed once again what a mixed bunch you are, with widely varying musical preferences and views on just about everything from subscriptions to venues. A healthy 121 responses were received, fairly evenly split between the voice parts.

It was very interesting to compare with the last survey, conducted in 1998, and to see whether views had changed or not. The answer is - not a lot! Although 21% of the survey respondents joined less than 2 years ago at the time of completing the survey, the musical preferences in particular were remarkably similar. And, just to show that your preferences are taken into account when planning music for each season, since the last survey we have already performed 7 of the top 12 'would like to do' works, including the Rachmaninov *Vespers*, *Requiems* by Verdi, Rutter, Duruflé and Brahms, and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*. So you see, we do listen!

To give a taster of your favourite musical works this time - overall top spot went to *The Dream of Gerontius*, followed by Brahms' *German Requiem* and Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*. Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* surprisingly topped the list of your dislikes, with Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* a close second. Interestingly, the Walton and many other works on the 'dislikes' list also appeared in the 'would like to do again' list, which clearly demonstrates the varied tastes within the choir, and indicates that we really need to continue to perform a mixture of works to keep everyone happy!

Fairfield Hall once again topped your list of favourite venues, followed by Guildford Cathedral. The possibility of touring, either in this country or abroad, sparked a great deal of interest, with cost being the determining factor for most of you. We are therefore continuing to explore different possibilities and will keep you informed.

Tony Marshall did a separate survey to gain further data on doing tours or travelling abroad. Again he had 121 replies with the majority of you (82) being prepared to fund such ventures yourselves. Only 15 replies stated they weren't interested in doing anything of this nature at all. The other 24 were interested in taking part but with one or more caveats attached, some related to cost, others related to when the trips would or could take place - the chief issue naturally being school holidays and long weekends.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the areas of subscriptions and ticket sales generated the most comments. Overall, it was agreed that subscriptions were reasonable, although several of you would prefer to pay by the term. This would, however, make budgeting for the season very difficult, with no guaranteed income and increased administrative overheads, so we will stick to whole season payments for now (see later). Regarding ticket sales, most of you, perhaps reluctantly, accept the need for the 2 tickets rule, and several ideas were put forward to help increase ticket sales and promotion of our concerts. We will certainly be following up on these.

The choir website continues to receive positive feedback from both existing and potential members, and has proven to be a great source of new recruits, with 32% of newer members hearing about the choir via this route.

In addition to the above, there were numerous comments suggestions on a variety of subjects, such as seating, concert venues, rehearsals and general communication, which will be reviewed.

Finally, thanks to all who contributed to the survey. Your continued input and suggestions are essential to the development of the choir, so please do provide feedback to your voice representatives at any time.

Looking Forward

Getting the new season sorted out has been a long road. We had originally got the Royal College of Music booked again for Sunday 21st November and provisionally Dulwich College Great Hall for Saturday 19th March. The Sunday date was unavoidable because no Saturdays were available. Then, fortunately, our persistent chipping away at Cadogan Hall paid off. Michael & Neil managed to visit it whilst it was being completed and only a month or so ago secured two dates for the new season. It meant we were able to have a Saturday in November after all and keep the same March date as planned. Regrettably, though, having got the March date in Cadogan Hall we can't now do the proposed *St. Matthew Passion* since it is being performed only 10 days earlier in the same venue. So the new season has shaped up as follows:

The November concert will consist of Haydn's *Nelson Mass* in one half and a brand new commission from our own Tim Sutton in the other half. A new Hall, a new venue for us, a new work. What better way to show what we can do to a new and wider public audience. Most of you will know that Tim's son, Edmund, was tragically killed in a car crash early in 2003. *Psalms 23* was commissioned by Wimbledon Choral Society and is written in memory of Edmund. This commission was made possible by a generous donation for which the Society is most grateful. We owe it to Tim to give this work a special performance at its world premiere.

The Christmas concert will be a little less refined this year compared to last and it is likely we will perform extracts from the *Messiah*, mainly from Part 1.

March will find us back in Cadogan Hall, except not for the *St. Matthew*. It is disappointing to defer this work again but I think you'll understand why. In its place the proposal is to perform Part 2 and the last sections of the *Messiah* together with Wesley's *Confitebor*. This is work that is slowly beginning to regain some exposure. Although written in 1799, it took 27 years before it was actually performed for the first time and then another 146 years to the next! At the time of writing, we are planning to use the ensemble Charivari Agréable again as noted earlier. Their period instruments are ideal for these two works.

St. John's Church, Waterloo will be our summer base again for another Music on a Summer Evening concert. The proposed works include motets by Berlioz, Faure's *Messe Basse* and the *Mass for 4 Voices* by Monteverdi.

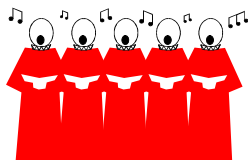


So, I hope you'll agree that the whole season covers, again, a very wide range of music from the brand new to the just about ignored! I do, though, want to raise a point regarding some of the music we do. In the choir's constitution, it is stated that:

The objects of the Society are to promote, improve, develop and maintain public education in and appreciation of the art and science of choral music by the presentation of public concerts and other activities involving or relating to choral music.

This covers choral music of all periods, from centuries ago right through to today. The Society sets out to educate not only the public but also you as members. In doing so, you will come across and learn things you really like but you'll also look at some pieces which may not have the same level of appeal. Like any similar environment, though, you really do need to give both ends of your taste spectrum the time and effort they need since everyone's tastes are different. What I'm saying is that just because you may not like a particular work should not mean that you can drop out and avoid singing it simply for that reason. It limits your choral experience (life is full of likes and dislikes but they all add up to the experience) and is actually unfair on others who do like the works in question. If you limit yourself to just Bach and Handel all the time without gaining knowledge of other works, contemporary or otherwise, then I'd even go so far as to comment that you can do that in loads of other choirs. Wimbledon Choral Society likes to stretch its limits and its repertoire and needs to explore new paths otherwise it will simply die.

This is one of the core reasons why we don't and won't operate a pick'n'mix scheme for subscriptions. The policy is simple. When you join the choir, you join as a full member and the subscription is payable on successful audition and at the start of each following season thereafter. If you decide not to start a new season but decide to return later then the full season subscription is still payable. There may be some exceptions but, as a rule, not. Similarly if you leave part way through a season then no part of the subscription is refundable. Any pro rata rule for payment is only applicable in your first season.



Thanks.

Proposed 2004/2005 Subscription Rates

Type	Rate
Standard	£95.00
Aged 25 or Under	£55.00
Registered Unemployed	£55.00
Full-time students	£12.00



And Finally

Some random notes

- ▶ Don't forget that the rehearsal venue for the new season is Drake House on St. George's Road, not the Community Centre.
- ▶ Please do not make any recordings (visual and/or audio) of any of our concerts unless you have been given the authority to do so. Professional musicians are particularly sensitive to this and on several occasions in recent seasons we have had guest singers/players who have almost refused to perform. Please also inform your friends and family about this. This applies also to flash photography.
- ▶ Members of other choirs who were in the audience for the Verdi contacted Tilly and expressed amazement at how we'd managed to get a full house.
- ▶ Although our compulsory ticket rule is for 2 tickets, you really should aim to sell 4 tickets, especially for the larger concerts. You know what a difference it makes and it is much needed extra revenue for us.
- ▶ Don't leave selling tickets until the last minute. Get out there! Tell everyone what excellent concert staging production we have, what fantastic soloists and orchestras we use, and what great music we sing. Invite different people, make an evening of it, go for a drink or meal after a concert there's loads you can do!
- ▶ Tony Marshall's half-marathon in aid of the St. Mary's Organ Appeal has so far raised around £500 and there are still a fair number of you who owe Tony your pledges. The appeal continues until 4th December when there will be a concert at St. Mary's in aid of the fund. The music will include works by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Further details can be obtained from Norman on norman.harper@clara.co.uk.