

The Orpheus Voice

PASSING THE BATON

It has been a year of change for the Choir. July 2010 was Jonathan Sheldon's last concert with us, having been our Musical Director for eight years.

We knew that Jonathan would be a hard act to follow and were fortunate to receive a number of applications for the post. Three of these were invited for interview and to take a short rehearsal session with the Choir and we were delighted when David Bray was offered and accepted the position.

David very quickly made his presence felt. At the Singalong with the CBSO event in March which a number of us attended (see Babs Wallis's report on page 3), Simon Halsey was bemoaning the fact that few English choral conductors spend time developing the quality of the *sound* of the

choir, and this is just what David has been focusing on, getting us to ignore the way we would speak the words and to concentrate on the vowel sounds – as Martyn Glass so memorably reflected in the song he performed at our Christmas dinner! You will find the words on page 4.

The result of this work has certainly impressed our audiences. The husband of one of the altos, who had been unable to attend our first two concerts with David, was so impressed with our *Missa Sancti Nicolai* in April he was heard to ask "What has he done to them?!"

You will find an interview with David on page 2.

RE-LAUNCH OF THE 'FRIENDS'

October 2011 sees the re-launch of the Friends of the Orpheus Choir. The Choir is self-funding and the costs of hire of rehearsal rooms, music, soloists and orchestra fees are met by members' subscriptions, ticket sales and fund-raising activities. The aims of the Friends' scheme are to develop and expand a loyal audience base and to provide additional financial income to support the Choir.

The membership fee is very modest compared to similar local organisations: £8 for an individual and £15 for a couple, so please encourage your family and friends to support us by becoming members.

To join contact: Maureen Williams
Tel: 01604 870318

Email: maureen@thejetty.eclipse.co.uk

Membership of the Friends offers a number of benefits:

- Discount on pre-booked tickets*
- An additional discount for booking all our concerts for the year up front
- Reserved seats* – we will save central seats not too near the front!
- A free programme*
- An invitation to our social events
- A termly newsletter giving advance notice of concerts and social events as well as news of the Choir's activities

*applies only to concerts organised by the Orpheus Choir, not those organised by other bodies

Dates for your diary

CONCERTS

Sat 26 November 2011
St Mark's Church, Queensway,
Wellingborough

Tues 13 December 2011
URC, High Street,
Wellingborough

Sat 24 March 2012
Parish Church, Rothwell

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Mon 9 January 2012
Choir Annual Dinner
Great Park Street Methodist
Church Hall

WELCOME BACK

The Orpheus Voice, newsletter of the Wellingborough Orpheus Choir, returns after a gap of four years and will be published once a term. If you have any news items, articles or suggestions for the newsletter, please email them to the editor:



Maureen Williams:
maureen@thejetty.eclipse.co.uk

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BRAY — MUSICAL DIRECTOR



Photograph: John Wheaver

David lives in Long Buckby with his wife and two sons.

Are you from Northamptonshire originally?

I was born in Stoke Newington London and lived in Hertfordshire during my time at school. Like a lot of people I had not heard of Northamptonshire before coming here in 1990 as an Advisory Teacher for Music. I subsequently became the Northamptonshire County Music Adviser.

Where were you educated?

I went to the Royal Northern College of Music, Huddersfield University, Gypsy Hill College London, University of London and also studied at Cambridge for part of my Masters.

When did you start learning to play the trumpet?

I started the trumpet when I was 14 and piano when I was 16. I would have liked to have started earlier but unfortunately did not have the chance. I used to go to school an hour early to practices because we did not have a piano and my mum hated the noise a trumpet made! I made fast progress though - doing my grade 8 piano by the age of 18.

Did you play professionally?

I have played with various orchestras - BBC Northern, Academy of Ancient Music, Trinity Baroque, Baroque Camerata of Cambridge etc...

What about your choral experience?

I sang with various choirs including the University of Cambridge Chamber Choir

and have conducted many bands, orchestras and choirs.

I used to be involved in competitions and have taken choirs to the finals of the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year Competition, National Festival of Music for Youth and School's Prom at the Albert Hall in London.

I have also appeared on radio and television several times and made numerous CD recordings.

What were your first impressions of the Orpheus Choir?

I liked the choir immediately. Everyone is very responsive and I think that the choir has a lot of potential. A lot of this will be realised through new repertoire and more marketing - so there may be changes ahead.

What are your plans for the choir? Will we be performing with an orchestra again in the future?

We will be performing with an orchestra in the spring. My plans are to make the choir sound fantastic - through teaching some techniques that can be used to help.

What sort of music do you enjoy rehearsing/conducting the most?

I like all sorts of music and don't really have a favourite style. I like doing pieces that I think are really great - which enables me to communicate how I feel about the music in a positive way.

What is your current 'day job'?

I am an Education Adviser. I work with a range of schools to help them to improve and I also work for OfSTED and other contractors.



Photograph: John Wheaver

Do you have time for any hobbies other than music?

I have written various books on music and education. I like walking, surfing, playing sport, reading, drinking wine and cooking. I have little time for any of these at the moment!

Are your wife and children musical?

My wife was a music adviser. She has just started work as a Deputy Head in a Primary School. My sons both play - one trumpet the other piano! Someone else teaches them because I find it hard not nagging them to practice!

WELCOME AND FAREWELL

During the past year we welcomed to the Choir: soprano Pat Moulang; altos Eira Billings, Ursula I saksen, Jan Theedom and Ann Wilson.

We were also delighted to welcome back Paul Skinner (tenor) and David Robinson (bass).

Three long-standing members of the Choir retired during the year: Betty Chapman (soprano); Terry Faulkner, who served on the committee for many years as the tenor rep; and Paul Luxford (bass, and occasionally tenor!) who has moved to Putnoe after his wife got a headship in the Bedford area. Paul designed, set up and managed the Choir's website and we are very grateful to Barry Moulang (bass), who has taken over as webmaster.

We were also sad to say goodbye to Peter and Penny Hullah (bass and soprano) who have moved away from the area. Peter recently left Northampton Academy, where he was Principal, to take up a new post with the United Learning Trust as national executive director for moral and spiritual development.

SINGALONG WITH THE CBSO

On the morning of Sunday 27 March a small but happy group of choir members and friends boarded a minibus and set off on the road to Birmingham. Our destination was The Birmingham Symphony Hall and the event was Singalong with the CBSO.

Maureen had announced it at a rehearsal night several weeks before. She had been the previous year, along with Eileen and Bridget, and the memory of her excitement after that visit really made me want to tag along.

The bus was booked and the tickets bought, all except one for a distraught woman – namely me – who phoned the box office just after the last alto place was sold. All was well in the end though as after numerous daily, pleading phone calls I eventually managed to get a cancellation.

The bus trip was fun with lots of chatter and laughter and on our arrival there was time for lunch before the singing got under way.

...it was a real spine tingling goose bump moment...

The rehearsal started at 1.30 with chorus director Simon Halsey taking us through the pieces we were performing which were Handel's Coronation Anthem *Zadok the Priest* and Fauré's *Requiem*. The choir consisted of 1,000 people who had come together from all over the country.

When we went to take our places the stalls were full, as was the first balcony. We eventually found seats on the second balcony where we could all be together and this gave us a wonderful view of the beautiful Symphony Hall. I felt quite emotional to see how many people were there, all through their love of music and singing.

Mr Simon Halsey worked us hard but with great humour. For the first part of the rehearsal we were accompanied by



Photograph: John Wheaver

two pianists then, after a coffee break, it was back to sing with members of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and we had to work much harder. At the end of rehearsal we took a well deserved rest – more food – before the evening's performance.

The concert started at 7.30 with the audience sitting in the Choir Stalls and the Grand Tier. It opened with music from the Symphony Orchestra and CBSO Children's Chorus then, after the applause had died down, it was our turn.

When the choir sang the opening lines of *Zadok the Priest* it was a real spine tingling, goose bump moment and I think I shall remember it always. The sound of those thousand voices in unison was truly beautiful and I feel really proud to have been one small part of it.

All too soon it came to an end but every face wore a smile.

On the return journey we were all quieter than we had been in the morning. Admittedly we were tired but I suspect that each of us was thinking back over our extremely enjoyable and heart-warming day. Definitely a day that I hope to be able to repeat in the future.

Babs Wallis (alto)

The next Singalong with the CBSO, will take place on Sunday 29 April 2012:

Vaughan Williams: O Clap Your Hands and Five Mystical Songs; Parry: I Was Glad and Jerusalem; Handel: The King Shall Rejoice.

For details go to www.cbsoc.org.uk

Ed

BECOMING A CHARITY

The committee is in the process of applying to register the Choir as a charity. If they are successful, it will mean that membership fees for both choir members and Friends can be gift-aided, where applicable, raising more funds for the Choir.

Watch this space!

Music Quiz

1. How many keys would you expect to find on the keyboard of a concert grand piano?
2. Which composer had composed his first sonatas at the age of seven and had written by the age of twelve, an opera, a symphony and many other shorter works?
3. Name the composer who was court organist at Weimar, and in later life suffered from total blindness before dying of apoplexy.
4. Name the famous Hungarian composer who took holy orders in 1865.
5. Who wrote the music for *The Masked Ball*?
6. With which type of music do you mainly associate John Philip Souza?
7. Which jazz musician recorded a memorable version of Rimsky Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee* on the trumpet?
8. What type of music is referred to as a 'Boston'?
9. With which country would you associate the *Mazurka*?
10. What is the word 'cello' short for?

Answers on page 4

CHOIRMASTER BRAY

(Words: Martyn Glass (tenor)
Tune: *The Vicar of Bray*)



In Jonathan Sheldon's choirmaster days
When technique flourished barely,
The Orpheus Choir's soprano line
Hit top As only rarely.
But since that time a new regime
Has raised their notes much higher,
With jaws set low, mouths opened wide,
Top notes emerge with fire.

Chorus

For this, in truth, we do declare
Until our dying day, sir,
That these effects have been achieved
By our new choirmaster Bray, sir!

Our diction had been our weakest point
And needed some fine tuning.
Our diphthongs had to disappear
To stop our leader fuming.
Not boi but bawy and day became dahy
And purists were filled with awe,
As myriad voices vowelled away,
No noes but only naws,

Our Monday evenings aren't the same
And often you'll hear cursing!
Baggy baby buggy bumper
Baggy baby buggy bumper
Rings out from our rehearsing.
And nanga nanga nanga nanga
Ninga ninga ning
Pronouncing every letter.
We hold our breath till blue in the face...
We really can sing better!

There's but one step that we must take
To reach the highest station.
We've got to learn our songs by heart
Without a hesitation.

If we repeat words just eight times
They'll adhere to our memory,
But ageing seems to rip them out
To lodge in our forgetery.

The moral to this story is
That change can bring improvement.
If we kept singing just the same,
There'd be no vowel movement.
But now our diction's crystal clear
And top notes sparkle gaily.
Our consonants now are well defined
We exercise them daily.

END OF AN ERA

The Choir has been invited to Niort next year to sing with the Chorale André Léculeur for the last time. Louise Biscara, who has been their Musical Director since its foundation in 1974, has decided to retire and the Chorale will be folding.

The relationship between the two choirs began back in 1983 when the French first visited Wellingborough. Since then we have given joint performances in Niort or Wellingborough every two years or so, with the Coburger Bach Chor also invited to the French venues.

Those of us who have taken part in the exchanges since the start have made many friends amongst both the French and German choirs and will be sad to see the relationship come to an end. Our trips to France have been very enjoyable as you will see if you read the accounts of our last visit in 2007 on our website.

Next year's visit will take place during the first weekend in June when we shall be performing Mozart's *Solemn Vespers*.

IN THE NEWS

The following news item about former Choir member Charles Watts appeared in the *Chronicle and Echo* on 16 August. Charles represented the bass section on the committee for some time.

"A veteran of the Second World War has been awarded the highest honour that can be given by the Royal British Legion for his dedication to the club. Charles Watts, 92, of Rushden, was awarded the life membership certificate, also known as the gold badge, after six decades as a member. He joined the Legion in 1945 by which

time he had already served as a tank driver in the army throughout the Second World War in France and Germany. While on leave, Mr Watts was one of the volunteers who helped rescue workers and children from the wreckage of Alfred Street school in Rushden following its bombing on October 3 1940."



Haydn's Creation with the Niort Choir, Wellingborough 2009
Photograph: Marianne Swienink & André Havard

Answers to the quiz

- 85 (50 white keys and 35 black)
- Mozart
- J S Bach
- Franz Liszt
- Verdi
- The march
- Harry James
- A variation of the waltz, known in ballroom dancing as the *Boston Two Step*
- Poland
- Violoncello

Don't forget, if you have any news items, articles or suggestions for the newsletter, please email them to the editor:

Maureen Williams:
maureen@thejetty.eclipse.co.uk