

THREE SPIRES SINGERS

NEWSLETTER TO SPONSORS, PATRONS, FRIENDS,
ORCHESTRA MEMBERS AND SINGERS

January 2007

Musical Director

As I write, we have just started rehearsals for Bach's epic *St Matthew Passion*, a work which stretches the orchestral and choral forces of Three Spires to the full, written as it is for soloists, double choir, double orchestra and separate ripieno choir. This latter part will be sung by the cathedral choristers, who will add an extra dimension to the sound.

The concert, on Saturday 17 March, will begin at the slightly earlier time of 7pm to allow space for this large-scale work. Please book early for this concert and try to encourage friends to come as we need a large audience to help finance the venture - as well as to appreciate the performance. We shall be singing the work in a new English version by Bach scholar Neil Jenkins and so it will be possible for all to follow the narrative clearly as the story unfolds.


In December, we enjoyed a capacity audience for Handel's *Messiah*, a work which never fails to please with its familiar arias and choruses – especially when performed near Christmas. The orchestra accompanied the work enchantingly on this occasion, led so ably by Malcolm Latchem and with Paul Comeau jumping with extraordinary ease from chamber organ to harpsichord for the different movements.

The December concert was the second of a pair of 'classic' concerts last term, as in October we enjoyed performing Haydn's *Creation*, again in the cathedral. The orchestral writing of this masterpiece always thrills with its colour and virtuosity and the piece is full of drama and excitement. It is particularly exciting that both the Handel and Haydn concerts included a large number of younger, new members of Three Spires who were singing these works for the first time.

When the excitement of *St Matthew* has died down, we can look forward to two concerts with the same programme: Rachmaninov's powerful setting of *Vespers*, or more correctly, the All-Night Vigil. We are going to sing this work in two large churches, those of Penzance and Bodmin and as a departure from our usual concerts with orchestra in the cathedral (or Hall for Cornwall), these two shorter concerts will be preceded by a glass of wine and will be given without an interval: an ideal way to enjoy some superb music on a summer's evening in two magnificent buildings.

Robert Sharpe

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Patrons and Friends

Since our last Newsletter, we have performed two concerts: Haydn's *Creation* and Handel's *Messiah*. Both concerts were a great success musically, particularly the *Messiah*, when we had a capacity audience of between 600 and 700, which was very encouraging and uplifting.

We are now rehearsing Bach's *St Matthew Passion* to be performed on Saturday 17 March 2007. June Martin will be selling the tickets – details are on the booking form. We do hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend as a preparation for Holy Week and Easter.

As usual, please circulate the posters as widely as possible. If they are not enclosed with this Newsletter, they will be posted to you as soon as possible.

Thank you all for your support and may I wish you a happy and musical new year.

Anne Drew
Patrons & Friends Secretary

Matters Financial

There have been two concerts since the last newsletter.

In October, attendance at our performance of Haydn's *Creation* was slightly disappointing with an audience of approximately 350, perhaps due to the timing of the concert on the first Saturday of the half-term holiday. As a result, we suffered a deficit considerably higher than had been forecast.

However, the December performance of Handel's *Messiah* was very well-attended – an audience in excess of 780 – which meant the concert performed better than forecast. In fact, I am in the unusual position of being able to report that the concert made a surplus – albeit a very small one!

We are extremely grateful for the generosity of choir members, who have reacted so well to the request that £84 be a minimum subscription with larger donations gratefully received. We hope that our subscription income will be about £3,000 higher than last year. This will help meet the rising costs of concerts and help us to maintain the current range of programmes.

Financially, these two concerts and the subscriptions have given us a good start to the season but fundraising is still required and we continue the search for additional sponsors to ensure that we can continue to offer such exciting programmes.

Sheelagh Jenkins

Come and Sing Workshop

Such was the success of this last year that we repeated the same format and 140 singers spent an exhilarating day rehearsing Haydn's superb *Nelson Mass*, followed by an informal performance in Truro School Chapel to a small audience of friends and relations.

Paul Spicer led us with boundless energy and good humour throughout the day. Many thanks go to Robert Sharpe who was our accompanist for the day and our four soloists, Louise Merrifield, Eddie McMullan, Chris Dollings and John Buckland who generously gave their time. Singers of all ages and experience came from all ends of the County and even one person from Herefordshire.

Comments seemed to have been unanimously enthusiastic. It was of course made so much easier by having Truro School's facilities and help from many members of the choir – serving food,

making cakes, organising music and money etc. Thank you to all - its popularity will ensure that we should make this sort of day into an annual event. The goodwill it creates amongst different groups of singers within the County is so important and it has also proved to be a very effective fundraiser. Let's hope that we might have raised nearly £1,000.

Caroline Johnson

Future concerts and events

17 March 2007	J S Bach	St Matthew Passion	Truro Cathedral
16 June 2007 23 June 2007	Rachmaninov	Vespers	St Mary's, Penzance St Petroc's, Bodmin
October 2007	Schubert J S Bach Purcell	Mass in E Flat Brandenburg Concerto No 2 Oh Come Ye Sons of Art	Truro Cathedral

(All information correct at time of going to press)

Chairman

We have had two concerts since the last Newsletter and so are now well into our 2006/7 season. Although the audience for Haydn's *Creation* was a little lower than our expectations, the *Messiah* more than made up for it with a full house and a marvellous pre-Christmas atmosphere. On reflection, for the Haydn, it was probably a mistake to fix a date which coincided with one of the half-term weekends in October and we will make sure that does not happen next year. This not only affects audience numbers but makes orchestra-fixing difficult, as many of our players are teachers. This is an opportunity for me to give a special thank you to Dee Gordon-Jackson who works tirelessly and enthusiastically to book the best players to perform with us. Robert, Dee and myself meet regularly to sift through regulars and new hopefuls to pick the team best suited for each particular work. This takes a lot of thought and coffees (!) but at the end of the day it is Dee who gets them there.

As you can see, there are important changes to our programme this year. After some thought, Robert and the Committee felt that rather than perform another large, very expensive orchestral concert in the Cathedral in the summer, it would be a welcome change to take ourselves to our very loyal supporters in the Penzance and Bodmin areas. Let's hope that Rachmaninov's *Vespers* on a summer evening with a glass of wine will go down well.

In the meantime, the choir's numbers appear to be on the increase again as we begin to rehearse Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. It's great to see so many students interested in singing with us, even if just for one or two seasons. We are anticipating a large audience for this great work and tickets will be on sale very soon.

Happy New Year

Caroline Johnson

Review of *Messiah* concert, December 2006

Any performance of Handel's *Messiah* inevitably attracts a large audience around Christmas-time and given the Three Spires Singers' reputation for excellence, a vast crowd assembled – though everyone managed to squeeze in and the use of TV screens enabled most to get a decent view.

Conductor Robert Sharpe wisely chose naturalistic tempi while allowing an element of romanticism for the soloists – a young team of great potential: soprano Helen Massey's bright, silvery sound was ideal for *Rejoice greatly* and gave a radiance to *I know that my Redeemer liveth*. Counter-tenor James Laing's light, ethereal tones also displayed contrasting intensity and vigour in *He was despised*. Tenor David Webb, clear and expressive in *Comfort ye* and *Every valley* also brought great drama to the Passion section of Part 2. Bass Aaron Mcauley was powerful and agile throughout, though in *The trumpet shall sound*, he was somewhat upstaged by the brilliance of Joe Sharp's virtuoso playing.

The chorus, reassuringly rock-solid in Handel's many contrapuntal episodes, produced some fine sounds, particularly in the series of Passion choruses, contrasting an intense and searing *Surely he hath borne our griefs* with an almost jaunty *All we like sheep* and a superbly articulated *He trusted in God*. The dynamic contrasts within *Since by man came death* were also impressive for a choir of over 80 voices.

There was also a good balance with the relatively small orchestra. Under the experienced leadership of Malcolm Latchem, the strings captured the spirit of the opening *Synfonia* and created a rapt atmosphere in the *Pastoral Symphony*. With the lower strings and wind, convincing contrasts of dark and light were evoked, with Paul Comeau on digital harpsichord and chamber organ providing varied and idiomatic accompaniment as always.

Robert Sharpe's expressive and expansive direction, with his habitual commitment and energy, drew all these strands together, culminating in a glorious climax in *Worthy is the Lamb*, with all its irresistible momentum and finely-phrased interwoven *Amens* – a finale greeted with thunderous applause by the huge and appreciative audience. If I have a gripe – apart from the daft tradition of standing for the *Hallelujah Chorus* – I'm sorry that some of the Part 3 sections were omitted but that didn't detract from a splendid seasonal offering and the anticipation of another: J S Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in March.

Judith Whitehouse

Rehearsal and Concert Dates

January	29
February	5, 12, 26
March	5, 12, 15 (Thurs), 17 (1.30pm-4.30pm, concert 7pm), 19, 26
April	16, 23, 30
May	14, 21
June	4, 11, 16 (St Mary's, Penzance), 18, 23 (St Petroc's, Bodmin), 25