

THREE SPIRES SINGERS & ORCHESTRA
NEWSLETTER TO SPONSORS, FRIENDS, ORCHESTRA MEMBERS & SINGERS

May 2006

Musical Director

It was a great sadness to me that, after many weeks of careful preparation for our 25th anniversary concert, I was struck down with illness and unable to conduct on the night. I am immensely grateful to Paul Comeau, our wonderful rehearsal accompanist of many years' standing, for taking over the reins on the night and guiding not only the choir through the majestic Brahms' *Requiem* but also the orchestra on its own through his *Fourth Symphony*.

I am now fully back to health and looking forward immensely to the rest of the season and to next year too. This coming concert celebrates the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and has deliberately been chosen to have a lighter, summer feel to it. We are often down on audience numbers for the fourth concert in each season, so we are hoping that this programme will have wide appeal. Please do tell your friends! The *Solemn Vespers* are partnered with the *Spatzenmesse* ("Sparrow" Mass) in which a small orchestral motif imitates the tweeting of the bird. The choir will also be singing Mozart's emotionally-charged motet, *Ave verum corpus*, with the original string accompaniment. The orchestra will then give a performance of an unashamedly popular work, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. It promises to be a sparkling commemoration of one of the finest ever composers.

Looking further forward to next season, in the Autumn we shall be performing Haydn's *Creation* and at Christmas, Handel's *Messiah*. These two works are both classics of the choral repertoire, so be sure to book early for the best seats for both concerts. I look forward to seeing you there.

Robert Sharpe

Patrons & Friends

It was encouraging to see a large number of you at our 25th Anniversary Concert on 18 March and to perform to such a large audience. All those who attended enjoyed Brahms' *German Requiem* and his *Symphony No 4*. As Robert was indisposed, Paul Comeau conducted the choir and orchestra at very short notice, which was an outstanding achievement.

Our next concert is on Saturday 24 June, which is to commemorate Mozart's 250th Anniversary. The programme will include his *Solemn Vespers* and the orchestra will be playing *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. We do hope you will be able to attend the last concert of this season before the summer break. Please find enclosed the booking form and telephone me for available seats.

Thank you for all your subscriptions, which are now up-to-date. They are an invaluable source of revenue. However, we cannot afford to be complacent and hence, from September 2006, we will regrettably need to increase the Friends' single sub to £25, the sub for a couple to £35 and that for Patrons to £60. The Committee are currently pursuing ideas for fundraising to help our financial situation.

Please display the concert posters as widely as possible as soon as they become available. We are hoping to attract holidaymakers to our concerts, who without the posters would not otherwise know about Three Spires Singers.

Thank you once again for all your interest and support.

Anne Drew
Patrons & Friends Secretary

Matters Financial

About 500 people attended our 25th Anniversary concert in March. With costs of about £12,000, this was another big undertaking for Three Spires and the deficit was higher than forecast, exceeding £5,200. We are hoping for a really good attendance at our summer concert to help boost funds so that we can continue to offer interesting and varied programmes four times a year.

As always, our search for sponsors continues and we would be grateful for any suggestions on this matter.

Sheelagh Jenkins

For your future musical delight

24 June 2006 **Mozart** Solemn Vespers, Sparrow Mass
Eine kleine Nachtmusik

8 July 2006 A concert in the Cathedral in which TSS has been invited to sing with Cornwall Youth Brass Ensemble conducted by David Frost and Brass 10 led by Joe Sharp. The programme includes Rutter's *Gloria*.

21 October 2006 **Haydn** Creation Mass

9 December 2006 **Handel** Messiah

The programmes for the concerts on **17 March** and **23 June 2007** are yet to be finalised.

Chairman

My thanks first to all who supported us at our 25th anniversary concert – it turned into a most memorable occasion, particularly perhaps for Paul Comeau, who so magnificently stepped in at the last moment for our Musical Director Robert Sharpe, who was sadly indisposed. Paul, of course, was a most appropriate choice for this

particular concert, as he has been a loyal accompanist to the choir for nearly all of those 25 years. It was a most welcome change for me to be in the audience and I think all would agree that the choir and orchestra worked tremendously hard to make the evening the success it was. Three of our former conductors, James Sergent, Martin Hall and Keith Williams, came especially for the occasion and had the opportunity to meet up with many choir members in the party after the concert. It was also very good to meet many of our Patrons during the evening and to say a personal thank you for your continuing support. Let's hope the Dean and Chapter will allow us to have a post concert party again.

You will be glad to hear that Robert is now fully fit and rehearsals are taking place for our Mozart concert on 24 June. This should be a very pleasing mix of choral and orchestral pieces for a summer evening and I hope you will all come in force!

Our first summer event has already taken place – a garden opening in aid of Three Spires at the home of Penny and Simon Price. There were plants stalls instead of music on this occasion but there will be another Benallack concert party evening before the summer is out . . . and if anyone was at the opening of the new King Harry Ferry, they will have seen a small contingent of Three Spires Singers celebrating that event!

The first rehearsal of the 2006-7 season and, of course, the AGM will take place on **Monday 4 September**.

Caroline Johnson

Guest Conductor

For me, the last Three Spires concert was a truly wonderful occasion. I had the surprise of my life when my very tentative offer to take charge (if all else failed) was warmly accepted. With less than 36 hours to go before the first rehearsal and teaching commitments which could not be cancelled, I dashed to the scores at every possible opportunity. The music of the Fourth Symphony (which I know extremely well) and the Requiem were buzzing through my head for most of Thursday and Friday nights, from dusk to dawn. Clearly it was a very steep learning curve. I felt I failed at several points during the Saturday afternoon rehearsal but much was rectified by the evening. I owe an enormous thank you to choir, orchestra, soloists (and audience) for their tolerance and above all for the wonderful atmosphere in which I felt I had 100 per cent support and commitment.

As I said to the choir, a concert of two such monumental works hardly ever goes without a hitch (most CDs have had much editing, especially with regard to balance) but music has the wonderful power to transform our lives. We may find it moving, magical, exciting, passionate (and one could go on to list a multitude of adjectives). For me, the Brahms concert had all of this. There were so many memorable moments: the emotion, drive and sense of inevitability in parts of the Symphony and the beautiful flute solo in the last movement. I should add that the strings did a brilliant job but felt that their section should have been much larger: it seemed unfair to have five first violins instead of fifteen but financial constraints (as always) mean that this is never possible.

Although I know the Symphony better than the Requiem, I felt on more familiar territory standing in front of Three Spires Singers in the second half. Both the orchestral introduction, with the low rich sounds of divided violas and cellos and the

first choir entry were quite magical: beautifully shaped and without a trace of flatness! The performance went from strength to strength; the gradual acceleration to fever pitch in the sixth movement was terrifying and truly apocalyptic. I particularly enjoyed both soloists' contributions – my only regret was that we couldn't hear more of them. I thought that Alex Ashworth had just the right kind of dramatic, other-worldly sound – almost Wagnerian. Ruth Holton's ethereal, floating voice was quite sublime – as was the choir's singing of the beautiful final movement.

It was a privilege and a humbling experience to work with such an excellent body of singers and players. It goes without saying that the wonderful tone of the choir and the sheer accuracy and polish would never have been achieved without Robert's meticulous rehearsals. It was fascinating to gain a real insight into the masterminding of a Three Spires concert day. It was also good to see three previous Three Spires conductors, James Sargent, Martin Hall and Keith Williams, at the reception after the concert. I hope that many of the singers, players and audience enjoyed what was, for me and other veterans, something of a Three Spires "family occasion", complete with anniversary cake. Long may it continue, though I might not still be at the piano in another 25 years' time!

Paul Comeau

Review of March Concert

Judith Whitehouse's review has not appeared in The West Briton. The week after the concert, they published an article about Paul conducting at very short notice and apparently they will not cover the same concert twice. Here's the review in full.

As a celebration of 25 years of the Three Spires Singers, this was always going to be a special event with the audience and performers including founder members and veterans of their 111 concerts so far. The evening also saw an astonishing conducting debut – Paul Comeau, Three Spires' coach and accompanist, replacing the indisposed Robert Sharpe at very short notice - taking on two major Brahms works. The Fourth Symphony, from its wistful lilting opening via the intense second movement, exhilarating third and relentless, incandescent finale, displayed a superb level of orchestral playing, with Paul Comeau's consummate musicianship moulding a powerful and utterly convincing performance.

Brahms' *German Requiem* was the first major work performed by the original Three Spires and, with over an hour of continuous choral writing with variations in mood and tempo from gentle consolation to savage menace, demands and received in this performance the utmost commitment from the choir. Baritone soloist Alex Ashworth's dark incisive tones made an effective dialogue with the chorus, particularly in the last trumpet section and Ruth Holton's radiant soprano soaring over gentle chorus and wind was a beautiful contrast in mood. The final movement produced a sublimely glowing sustained sound – a tribute to splendid choral singing, an exemplary orchestra led with habitual professionalism by Malcolm Latchem and a quite amazing display of expressive creativity and control from Paul Comeau, who still had enough strength left after the performance to blow out the candles on the Three Spires' anniversary cake. A wonderful night of celebration all round.

Judith Whitehouse