

May 2009

THREE SPIRES SINGERS

NEWSLETTER TO PATRONS, SPONSORS,
FRIENDS ORCHESTRA MEMBERS & SINGERS

Musical Director - Chris Gray

I was delighted to see so many people in the audience to hear *The Music Makers* at our last concert. The scale of this great work, with an orchestra of 50 and a choir of 100, meant it was particularly exciting and particularly expensive – we were delighted that so many people were there to support us.

This term, the choir has been preparing to sing in a different style altogether – the more intimate nature of the English Romantic part songs we have been rehearsing has allowed us to work on subtle aspects of ensemble and technical issues such as vowel formation and vocal colour. The music is mostly from the Victorian era and includes some intensely beautiful madrigals by Sullivan (*The long day closes*), Pearsall (*Lay a Garland*), Wood (*Full fathom five*), Elgar and Parry. We will also perform Britten's celebrated cantata *Rejoice in the Lamb*, with its strange text featuring a cat called Jeffrey, a mighty hunter called Nimrod and a mouse of 'great personal valour'.

I would particularly commend to you our September workshop on Verdi's much-loved *Requiem* on 19 September 2009 at Truro School. It will provide choir members and anyone else who is interested with the chance to explore the story behind the music. There will be talks on musical analysis, historical context and voice training and our hope, with this new venture, is that audience and singers alike might gain a deeper understanding of Verdi's music as we head towards November's concert performance.

Chairman - Priscilla Reeve

I want to congratulate everyone who took part in the Music Makers. I thought Yvonne Howard was excellent and our orchestra was magnificent. We (the choir) were superb and managed the tempo changes very well. So somebody must have been watching Chris, who looked as if he had been conducting huge works all his life. There was a good audience to receive and appreciate all our hard work.

We can now afford to put on another great big sing with a similar size of orchestra - on 14 November we shall perform Verdi's *Requiem*.

On 5 December we are planning our own carol concert without orchestra, probably in a secular building to be arranged. We hope to share the proceeds with the Cornwall Music Therapy Trust, a charity close to my heart and to many of yours.

Our Summer's Evening concert in St Mary's Penzance is on 13 June with the Camborne Youth Band, who have just become National Youth Champions of Great Britain for the sixth time. I have only heard them outside Sainsbury's at Christmas

and they were out of this world so I'm looking forward to a wonderful evening – the roof will be lifting as we perform *I Was Glad* together.

After that concert we will be returning for a session on 15 June to debrief and to prepare a short choral demonstration for the next week, the last session of the term. That will be a party for the Patrons and Friends and we'll toast our new President and the new website, as well as singing for them and sharing wine and nibbles.

The new Three Spires website www.threespiressingers.org.uk is in mid-production. Pages are being added almost daily. I am editing the content and that takes time. We will have a members' section and many of Camilla's wonderful photographs plus pages on and for the orchestra and CVs of many of our favourite soloists. We are planning a formal launch party at Laymont and Shaw's lovely refurbished shop in The Old Chapel, Millpool, Truro.

Our new President is Petroc Trelawny. After Richard Hickox died so tragically, we took a long time to think of someone to take over the position. There has been much discussion in committee and around the table of the Rising Sun. Then Kay Deeming came up with Petroc Trelawny. When we thought about it carefully and looked at his CV, we realised that he would be an excellent choice. His recent career with the BBC, following the Classic FM days, has been impressive. He presents the Proms and Cardiff Singer of the World 2009 (Dawid Kimber, our recent bass soloist, is representing South Africa and Paul Daniel, our former chorus master and first President, is conducting).

Petroc Trelawny says he is delighted and honoured to follow in the footsteps of Richard Hickox and would like to be active in supporting Three Spires Singers and Orchestra. I think that as a Cornishman, he is more likely to achieve this aim than Paul Daniel or Richard Hickox, who were incredibly busy on a global basis, and so we may all look forward to a productive relationship with our new President, Petroc Trelawny.

Matters Financial - Sheelagh Jenkins

In financial terms our concert in March was a big undertaking, with an orchestra of over 50 players, the usual Cathedral charges and high costs for music hire. Total expenditure for the concert was nearly £14,000. We were really pleased to have such good attendance, with an audience of nearly 400, resulting in ticket income of just over £6,000. As a result, the deficit for this concert amounts to a little under £7,700, and is considerably less than forecast.

Our next fundraising event is Benallack on 27 June, which should be a lovely evening with delicious food and great music. Please come if you can to help support the choir and also have an enjoyable time.

Patrons & Friends - Anne Drew

At Archbishop Benson School, Bodmin Road, Truro, we will be having a social evening on Monday 22 June at 7.30pm. This will be our final meeting of the year and it would be nice to meet you over drinks and nibbles and a brief performance. Please

contact me if you wish to come, so that I can look out for you and we have some idea of how many to expect.

Details of the Benallack event on Saturday 27 June and where to obtain tickets are included in this newsletter. I can guarantee that you will enjoy an excellent evening of music and cuisine. Tickets are limited, so it would be advisable to apply early if you wish to attend.

As usual, please circulate the posters for our June concert in Penzance as widely as possible, particularly those of you who live in West Cornwall. As yet I have not sold any tickets to Patrons and Friends! We do hope some of you will be able to come as it promises to be a very enjoyable evening.

After the *Music Makers* concert, I received a letter from two of our Friends saying: 'We really enjoyed ourselves at the concert and met many friends. The singing and orchestra were marvellous and extremely professional. It was a lovely evening overall. Thanks for a wonderful evening to everyone involved!'

Review of *The Music Makers* concert - Judith Whitehouse

The Three Spires' spring concert featured British music spanning forty years but was inspired by words from a much lengthier period, beginning with the Old Testament – Parry's *I Was Glad*, which was most recently heard in the Cathedral with organ accompaniment to welcome Bishop Tim. It made a glorious start to the evening with its orchestral fanfares and contrasts between choral breadth and vigour and its more contemplative moments.

Vaughan Williams' *Flos Campi*, also Old Testament inspired but by the implicitly erotic verses of the Song of Solomon rather than a solemn psalm, gave the chorus the added challenge of interpreting a luxuriant text wordlessly, acting almost as an accompanying instrument to the solo viola of Tim Boulton, whose expressive playing fully evoked the sensuality of the writing. Conductor Christopher Gray skillfully moulded choral and orchestral textures to give an authentically impressionistic feel to this unconventional but rewarding work – the final choral fade over muted viola a special delight.

Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* has one of the most stirring openings of any anthem, particularly in its original orchestral version. The choir made the most of Milton's text with rich harmonies and well-contrasted dynamics – a perfect evolution of 'voice and verse' and after the interval, which included a brief blackout as a contribution to the global Earth Hour, the main work, Elgar's *The Music Makers*, was also a setting of words extolling the creative arts.

In an excellent programme essay, Elgar scholar Nicholas Hawker makes a good case for the Ode by O'Shaughnessy being more than just a vehicle for the composer to assemble a 'Greatest Hits' compilation, though I still maintain that Parry was better than Elgar at choosing texts. After the nicely judged *Enigma*-derived orchestral prelude, the Three Spires chorus produced superb, committed singing throughout the contrasting verses and for those of us old enough to have heard Janet Baker in this work, a special treat in the radiant, expressive solos of Yvonne Howard – her *Nimrod* and *Gerontius* moments brought tears to more than one pair of eyes.

Chris Gray's direction of this and the evening's earlier items highlights his remarkable development at Truro as an interpreter of major works – to reconcile the full-blooded romanticism of Elgar's music with the discipline needed to display it at its best is a talent to be envied - and hopefully we shall have a Chris Gray/Three Spires *Gerontius* – with Yvonne Howard as the Angel – in the near future.

Benallack concert - Paul Comeau

On 27 June the Benallack Trio (Phil Montgomery-Smith, Barbara Degener and myself) will be joined by Chris Prindl (viola) and Imogen Fernando (double bass) to perform Schubert's *Trout Quintet* and Mozart's G minor piano quartet at Benallack, near Grampound Road. We are very indebted to Linda Pelham, who allows various organisations to use her wonderful house to put on small-scale concerts. I have been lucky enough to have taken part in many concerts at Benallack, in front of generous audiences.

It is also much appreciated that some of the performers, especially Imogen (who lives at Taunton) are willing to travel considerable distances to rehearsals. All performers are happy to give their services free of charge; the £15 ticket includes a splendid buffet and a free glass of wine. Dishes are provided by choir members at cost price and choir funds are boosted by about £800 if all of the 65 tickets are sold. Tickets are available from Bellanne Lethbridge, tel: 01872 223843 or bellanne@talktalk.net

If you have been to Benallack before you will know that it is a remarkable house with a lovely garden. If you are a seasoned chamber music goer you will need no introduction to the Trout Quintet. If either of these is not the case, this is a wonderful opportunity to discover one of the gems of the repertoire in an intimate setting. On a fine midsummer's evening, a drink in the garden, followed by an informal concert and a delicious buffet supper, is an occasion not to be missed.

Rehearsal files from your computer ! - Hamish Wallwork

Choir members may like to know about this very useful website that has been going for some time. Its originator, [John Hooper \(link to website\)](#), takes music of the type we enjoy singing and patiently deconstructs it to its component parts, so that we may more easily learn it.

The site has a very easily understood introduction and then classifies under the headings choral, carol and madrigal. Music (MiDi) files are then displayed for each voice (SATB). The software Quick Time may need to be downloaded or your computer may already have it.

When the files are heard, the selected voice part is emphasised but not so that you cannot hear the other voices. The files are easily controlled so that you can pause to absorb a difficult section, repeat small pieces or listen to the section with no emphasis for an overall impression.

These facilities have been available commercially on tape and CD but this site is free, easy to use and instantly available.

Heartily recommended!

Committee Sits Vac

A reminder that Lynne Fleming is standing down as Librarian in September - if you would like to take this on, please contact Lynne as soon as possible.

Margaret Pritchard is also standing down as Newsletter Editor and Minutes Secretary.

Hope to see you all flocking to take over these vacancies!

Sheelagh Jenkins has asked for advance warning to be given that at the AGM in September 2010, she will not be standing as Treasurer. If you would be interested in taking on this role, please contact Sheelagh to talk about the work involved.

Rehearsal and Concert Dates

May 11, 18
June 1, 8, 13 (concert), 15, 22 (social evening with Friends & Patrons)
September 7, 14, 21, 28
October 5, 12, 19
November 2, 9, 14 (concert), 16, 23, 30
December 5 (concert)

Future concerts and events

13 June 2009 English Romantic Part Songs, St Mary's Church, Penzance

22 June 2009 Social evening with drinks, nibbles and some singing
Archbishop Benson School, 7.30pm

27 June 2009 Benallack concert

19 September 09 Workshop at Truro School to explore the music of
Verdi's Requiem

14 November 09 *Verdi Requiem*

5 December 09 Christmas concert

16 January 2010 Come & Sing, Truro School

20 March 2010 Monteverdi *Vespers*

12 June 2010 Scarlatti *Missa de St Cecilia*, Pergolesi *Stabat Mater* and
Durante *Magnificat* at St Petroc's Church, Bodmin