

THREE SPIRES SINGERS

President: Petroc Trelawny

news

Newsletter for Patrons, Friends, Sponsors, Singers and members of the Orchestra

Autumn 2016



Welcome to Three Spires Singers Autumn Newsletter. As ever we are grateful to those who have contributed. Items for future newsletters are welcome. Please email them to Sally Williams at sal1will@btinternet.com

■ FROM THE CHAIR

FOR THIS newsletter I offer a summary of the report I gave at the AGM in September, as there were three main themes which I'd like to share with our Sponsors, Friends & Patrons and colleagues in Three Spires Orchestra.

40TH ANNIVERSARY COMMISSION

Firstly, you'll be interested to know that we are in discussion with Graham Fitkin about a new composition to mark our 40th anniversary in 2021, focusing on the life and work of Humphry Davy. This is by no means a firm proposal yet as it would be a costly project for which we would want to apply for funding from Arts Council England and other sources. Three Spires Singers would also have to commit its own funds to the commission, to which end we are looking to achieve a budgeted surplus of around £1,500 in each of the coming five years. If in two or three years' time we found ourselves looking at a shortfall, we might propose a special appeal to members to contribute a further small sum to fill the gap, but if we can raise funding in other ways this would be our aim.

Over the coming few months we will be pulling the plan together with a view to submitting an Arts Council application in 2017 so that by the end of that year we would be able to confirm with Graham Fitkin that funding is in place and we can go ahead with the commission. This has the potential to be a really exciting project for us which really exemplifies the choir's ambition to take on new challenges.

COLLABORATIONS

We operate in a crowded market, and with so much going on locally it makes sense, where there are synergies with other organisations, to work collaboratively. The committee has identified a few areas where we can take some steps in this direction in ways which will enhance what we do, and bring economic benefits.

- ◆ We have invited Truro School Chamber Choir to join us for Messiah in December. With around 40 young singers, they have performed the work before and we can be assured that under the guidance of Martin Palmer and Chris they will be very well-prepared. We hope it will give them an exciting experience to perform as part of a larger choir, with professional soloists and our wonderful orchestra. They will bring a new buzz to our performance, not to mention bringing in some new audience members and, who knows, possibly future members of Three Spires Singers.
- ◆ Next June we'll enjoy our second collaboration with Truro Choral Society when we perform Elijah. This brings the benefit of combining our audiences at a time of year when it's often difficult to attract a large audience. By pooling resources and sharing the concert deficit between the two organisations it also means we can afford to put on a major work which otherwise would overstretch us financially. It's a pleasure working with our Truro Choral colleagues again, sharing the substantial workload involved in organising not only

a major concert but a related seminar on 20 May as well, which will be presented by Paul Drayton.

- ♦ If we are able to make the commission proposal a reality we would like to involve schools in the project too, and I would dearly love to see us finding ways to attract more young people to our concerts. For the Brahms in June we initiated a scheme with Cornwall Music Service Trust to offer £3 tickets to any of their students. It didn't take off because we didn't publicise it actively enough, but we'll see whether we can make some progress with the next couple of concerts.
- ♦ One of our most significant, frequent and valued collaborations is with the players in Three Spires Orchestra, whose musicianship takes our concerts to another level. After the Brahms concert players expressed to Dee their gratitude to us for our generosity in stepping out of the limelight while the orchestra performed the 2nd Symphony. It certainly didn't feel like a selfless act given what a joy it was to sit and listen, but it's good to know that it means a lot to the players, and their response says much about the very happy rapport that exists between us.

FINANCE

Financial stability is absolutely central to what we do, and it costs a huge amount of money to make each year's events happen. As you've all seen from the astonishingly exciting programme of the last few years, the musical experience we have is worth all the effort that goes into ensuring our financial security. I'd therefore like to give you a reminder of the many ways in which everyone can support our finances:

- ♦ **GIFT AID** on membership subscriptions: the £4,500 raised this year by claiming tax back from HMRC could be even higher if everybody who is in a position to sign a Gift Aid declaration did so. If you are a UK tax payer and aren't sure whether you've done this please speak with our Membership Secretary, Sally Hind.
- ♦ **FRIENDS & PATRONS:** do encourage people you know to become Friends and Patrons, both to have the benefit of preferential booking and also for the satisfaction of knowing that they are supporting a worthwhile cause. Talk with

Penny Price for more information.

- ♦ **PROGRAMME ADVERTISING:** if you or friends or family run a business, do consider taking advertising in our programmes, from £45 for a quarter page. Camilla Comeau has all the technical details and can help with presentation.
- ♦ **SPONSORSHIP:** the support we receive from our sponsors is greatly appreciated. If you know of businesses which might have an affinity with what we do, or if you run such a company yourself, do come and explore ideas with me for how a sponsorship arrangement might benefit us all.
- ♦ **FUND-RAISING:** the Open Garden at Simon & Penny's home was a gorgeous day and raised £2,000. Please do support future events: we already have in the diary a wine-tasting on 11 November (details elsewhere in this Newsletter). Penny Price and Sally Williams are also planning a Three Spires Singers dinner in the Cathedral Restaurant in the Spring, details will be circulated in the next couple of months.
- ♦ **LEGACIES:** we recently received a bequest from Miss Hilda Pelmeur, who had long been one of our Friends, a generous gesture that you may have seen acknowledged in the Brahms programme. In this Newsletter we include information about making a legacy to Three Spires Singers. This may not be for everyone, but it's important that we make the information available to those who might like to consider it.
- ♦ **PHILANTHROPY :** I add this not because I want to press anyone to make a philanthropic gesture but because I'd like you to know that from time to time we receive astonishingly generous gifts from people simply because they want to support us. This kind of belief in us is truly heart-warming and makes a huge contribution towards what we can spend on soloists, musicians and imaginative programming.

THANKS

I couldn't close my address to the AGM without expressing thanks to many people who help make Three Spires Singers a very special organisation.

- ♦ Our wonderful President, Petroc Trelawny, is

enthusiastically involved with shaping our thoughts about the commission. Thank you, Petroc, for being so warmly supportive of everything we do.

- ◆ There's no better testament to the happy teamwork we enjoy on the committee than the fact that everyone offered to stand again this year. It's an outstanding team of people, and nobody values them more than I do. We are all so lucky to have them.
- There are dozens of other ways in which people make contributions large and small to the running

of the choir, and I'd like to thank all those people who give of themselves for the benefit of all.

- ◆ Nobody gives more of themselves than Chris and Paul, who bring to Three Spires Singers their vision, musicality, wisdom and warmth. We hope you know how precious you are to us all.

I look forward to another very happy and rewarding year of music-making with you all.

Lora Wicks

Mobile: 07791 235 269

■ FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR

THE FIRST HALF of our concert on 26 November features three short works. We will raise the curtain with Gerald Finzi's boisterous anthem *God is gone up*, and we go into the interval with one of Elgar's large-scale anthems, *Give unto the Lord*, which is complete with all the expansive tunes you might expect. The filling in the sandwich is Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* from 1876. Barbara Degener is one of the linchpins of our orchestra and will take the solo part in this mini cello concerto. Tchaikovsky captures the spirit of the mid-18th century Rococo period which, in music, sits between the Baroque and Classical eras. This is not pastiche writing, but rather evokes aspects of an elegant, ornate bygone world.

The second half features Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*. This is also known as *Hymn of Praise*, but the work was actually catalogued, after Mendelssohn's death, as his *Symphony No. 2*. I'm not sure it is right to think of it as a symphony. Nor, for me, are comparisons with Beethoven Nine (the Choral Symphony) particularly helpful – the Mendelssohn, from 1840, surely has an awareness of the Beethoven which was composed just 16 years earlier; but the purely orchestral section of Beethoven Nine is much more substantial and intense a journey, with the voices entering late on to crown the rest of the work. The Mendelssohn, in contrast, is really two separate, more straight-forward works with some thematic overlapping, and there is much less of a feel of one organic whole. I feel we should take the Ronseal approach and respect what Mendelssohn wrote on the tin: "*Symphony-cantata*". What the music does contain

is melodies: lots of beautiful melodies. And sunshine: unashamedly positive, unbridled happiness.

Lobgesang was written to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the invention of the printing press. After the orchestra plays its 25 minute *Sinfonia*, the choir enters, ecstatically singing "Everything that has breath praise the Lord", a line that returns to close the work. Along the way, you will hear the exquisite soprano duet "I waited for the Lord", and the hymn still widely used today in the harmonisation from Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, "Now thank we all our God" ("Nun danket alle Gott").

I am especially looking forward to welcoming back three soloists who have appeared with us in the past: sopranos Rebecca Bottone and Kay Deeming and tenor David Webb.

On 10 December we will be performing Handel's *Messiah*. Each time we return to this, Handel's music reminds us why it has stood the test of time and retained its popularity more than any other choral work. Every member of Three Spires Singers owns their own score, so it's great to be able to start rehearsing with all of the breaths and dynamics already marked, and with a strong sense of the musical style we have formed over the years we have performed it together. The same is true of our wonderful orchestra, for whom we keep a set of parts all fully marked up to match the choir.

We have a wonderful quartet of professional soloists joining us: soprano Lucy Hall, mezzo-soprano Laura Woods, Irish tenor Ross Scanlon and the bass-baritone Timothy Dickinson.

Christopher Gray

We are privileged to have so many fine players in Three Spires Orchestra, many of whom are also accomplished soloists, and who relish the opportunity to perform a favourite work to our consistently appreciative audience. Not much short of a cello concerto, Tchaikovsky's delightful *Rococo Variations* demand the height of virtuosity and musicianship.

CHOIR – SIT BACK AND ENJOY!

I HAVE HAD the pleasure of knowing and working with Barbara Degener for about fifteen years. I first met her when I was asked to accompany Philip Montgomery-Smith who was playing at his own wedding (in preference to giving a wedding speech). We decided we would love to meet and perform trios, which we have since done on many occasions. I feel privileged to be part of a brilliant circle of musical colleagues and friends (some of whom I remember teaching); I see many of them in Three Spires Orchestra, and when one of us performs a concerto, it feels more like playing chamber music on a grand scale than appearing as a guest star who has no contact with the other players.

The *Rococo Variations* begin with an expectant orchestral introduction, before the cello announces the main theme: elegant, graceful and stylized, with only the smallest hint of Romantic harmony in the accompaniment. The variations which follow are all delightful – some obviously elaborate the main theme, whereas a couple are particularly pensive. One floats along like dreamy ballet music, and another is heart-rendingly sad; the cello really seems to die on its feet before the orchestra bursts into a rousing finale. The whole composition is one of Tchaikovsky's most delightful works, combining his talent as a miniaturist with his ability to access the depths and varieties of human emotions.

Although considerably shorter than a standard concerto, the *Rococo Variations* are no less taxing: virtuoso fireworks are pushed to their limits, as in the Violin Concerto and the Piano Concertos. The cello is expected to be as nimble as a fiddle, almost disappearing into the stratosphere with harmonics as high as any violinist would be expected to produce.

I have already enjoyed running the *Variations* through with Barbara, playing the orchestral reduction on



the piano, and I can guarantee that her performance will not disappoint: she has immense technical prowess. I am more used to playing with her as a continuo partner for the *St John Passion* each year; the Baroque style is close to her heart, but she invested Tchaikovsky's *Variations* with such character and drama – I really did think the cello was dying at one point before she took up the jaunty main theme again with a rather insolent smile. Do listen to this piece to whet your appetite, and encourage your friends to do the same: I haven't investigated, but I'm sure there are a lot of lovely performances easily accessible online.

Paul Comeau

...AND FOR THE ELGAR, FINZI AND MENDELSSOHN...

REBECCA BOTTONE, who studied at the Royal Academy of Music, has worked with many of the world's leading orchestras including the Gabrieli Consort; she has sung under Eschenbach with Renee Fleming and also performed with the Academy of Ancient Music under Christopher Hogwood; she has sung with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Halle and the Manchester Camerata; the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi in Milan; the Philharmonia Orchestra under Sir Charles Mackerras; and the Tonhalle Zürich under Sir Mark Elder.

She has recorded the role of Cis in Britten's *Albert Herring* with Richard Hickox for EMI and two Rossini roles for Opera Rara, Eurice *Adelaide di Borgogna* and Cleone *Ermione*. TV appearances include BBC2's Television documentary *The Genius of Beethoven* with the English Chamber Orchestra, David Starkey's *Music and Monarchy* and the role of a singer in Steven Poliakoff's acclaimed film *Capturing Mary*. She sang Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* with Three Spires Singers in October 2010 and we are delighted to welcome her back.

Rebecca is joined by the choir's own soprano **KAY DEEMING**, for the lovely duet 'I Waited for the Lord'. Kay has been active as a soprano soloist in Cornwall and further afield for many years; she has sung many principal roles with Duchy Opera, and gives recitals with fellow soprano Cheryl Brendish.

We are also very pleased to welcome back **DAVID WEBB**, who was a choral scholar here at Truro Cathedral between 2002 and 2005, and has sung with the choir on a number of previous occasions. After leaving Truro Cathedral Choir he went on to graduate from the Royal College of Music International Opera School. He is a Harewood Artist at the English National Opera, with whom he has sung the Young Sailor in Daniel Kramer's production of *Tristan und Isolde*. His recent highlights include the roles of High Priest, Abner, Amalekite & Doeg in Barrie Kosky's acclaimed production of Handel's *Saul* for Glyndebourne on Tour. His concert engagements include Evangelist in the *St Matthew Passion* with Les Violons du Roy conducted by Bernard Labadie, Evangelist in the *St John Passion* with Oslo Cathedral Choir under Vivianne Sydnès, Handel's *Messiah* with the Royal Northern Sinfonia under Martyn Brabbins as well as the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Ben Gernon, and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Mozart Festival Orchestra conducted by Michael Bawtree.



Rebecca Bottone (soprano) and David Webb (tenor)

THREE SPIRES SINGERS & ORCHESTRA

President: Petroc Trelawny



Reg charity 900017

Elgar GIVE UNTO THE LORD

Tchaikovsky ROCOCO VARIATIONS

Finzi GOD IS GONE UP

Mendelssohn CHORAL SYMPHONY
(LOBGESANG)

Rebecca Bottone soprano

Kay Deeming soprano

David Webb tenor

Barbara Degener cello

Christopher Gray conductor

Saturday 26 November 2016

7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL

TICKETS: Reserved £12-£18 Under 18 half price

BOX OFFICE CORNWALL, Back Quay, Truro TR1 2LL Tel 01872 262466

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■ SOMETHING FROM THE TREASURER, PLEASE?

WRITING A Treasurer's Report for our newsletter always presents a bit of a problem: most people are probably content to be told that "the finances are OK" and to leave the detail to someone in the "back office".

So, for those that like a brief report: the finances are OK.

I'd like to add a bit of detail and colour, though. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the unanimously generous response of members of the choir to the request for a rise in our annual subscription. There seems to be full-hearted support for the ambitiousness of the choir committee, and everyone seems to appreciate that we need to make our concert performances really exciting in terms of soloists and orchestra (as well as our own singing of course!)

Everyone knows how expensive these things are – and that we have to start each concert account by paying a very sizeable sum for the venue in Truro Cathedral.

Next year's budget includes two of the concerts – a *Cathedral Messiah* and *Elijah* with Truro Choral Society – which should be relatively "cheap" to put on (that is, we would expect smaller deficits). We hope to increase our savings slightly (the Accumulated Fund) by this time next year, particularly as we move forward to our 40th Anniversary year in 2021.

As part of the budget plans, we have a target of £2,000 for any fund-raising this year. If you can, please do support the events being planned – they should be great fun and if there's any hardship involved, it will only be in opening your wallet.

We continue to have wonderful support from Patrons and Friends, but numbers have declined a bit recently – please do read Penny's piece elsewhere in this newsletter on the subject.

So perhaps I should end by saying "The finances are OK..... But don't sit back!"

Simon Price, Hon Treasurer

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY!

NEXT June we are once again collaborating with Truro Choral Society, in a joint performance of Mendelssohn's ELIJAH.

On **SATURDAY 20 MAY**, Paul Drayton has very kindly agreed to present a seminar on *Elijah*, which will take place in Truro School Chapel and follow our usual format (complete with cakes!) For those who are newer to the choir, we meet for a long morning with a lovely mid-morning coffee break, for which many members bring home-baked cakes. These occasions always provide a valuable insight into the music currently being rehearsed, and are always enjoyable. They are open to Friends, Patrons, audience members, singers of both choirs, and anyone with an interest in choral music.

Paul Drayton is a highly experienced, knowledgeable and very entertaining speaker on a wide range of musical topics and this promises to be an interesting morning. More details nearer the time.



THREE SPIRES SINGERS

Committee 2016–2017

Chairman	Lora Wicks
Secretary	Sally Williams
Treasurer	Simon Price
Design	Camilla Comeau
Membership Secretary	Sally Hind
Orchestra & Soloists' Liaison	Dee Gordon Jackson
Publicity Officer	Damien Lyall
Friends and Patrons Sec	Penny Price
Librarian	Sarah Scott
Concert Management	David Smith
Sponsorship	Lora Wicks



THREE SPIRES SINGERS

WINE TASTING

FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER,

6.30–8.30 PM

OLD CHAPEL CELLARS

ST CLEMENT STREET, TRURO TR1 1EX

www.oldchapelcellars.co.uk

Combining fun with fund-raising, our wine tasting is coming up soon! The evening will include:

- A “welcome” glass of wine while we assemble
- Light-hearted but informative presentation of half a dozen wines by knowledgeable staff Jamie and Charlotte
- After the presentation, continue to socialise over another glass or two
- Light nibbles will be provided
- Raffle: Jamie will choose something special for us to raffle on the night

TICKETS:

£25 – numbers are limited to 50, please don’t wait to put your name down – from Lora Wicks, at rehearsal or reserve by email: lorawicks@talktalk.net

I’d urge you all to visit the Old Chapel to buy a case of wine for Christmas (or sooner!). Not only will you find some lovely wines and a warm welcome, but purchases by members of Three Spires Singers (please identify yourselves) will result in Jamie’s kind donation of another bottle for us to raffle at our dinner in the Spring.

SINGING AND THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

AS A TEACHER of the Alexander Technique, I am delighted when I can share some ideas with choirs, and it was great to be invited to share them with the Three Spires Singers earlier this year. I am also delighted to be asked to share some of them in this newsletter and offer them as a reminder.

- 1 Remember you rest on the ground and don't have to 'hold yourself up'. Your body has a natural knowledge as to how it is put together, and unless you 'pull yourself down', or completely sag into too much 'relaxation', you will nicely just sit on your sitting bones (those hard points right under you as you sit – often known about when you sit on a concrete wall for any length of time!), or stand on the soles of your feet, your body opening you upwards and outwards with room for your breath to come and go. If you lift yourself into a 'good posture', you are actually pulling yourself out of shape into a 'should', and this also tightens your whole body – throat, ribs, and all things which breathe you – and makes singing hard and tight. Just stand, or sit, lightly upright. This is the external support system to your body, activating your internal support system to work well.
- 2 When we breathe out, a stretch is put on the many and various muscles involved in breathing. So, all we need to do at the end of an out breath – sung or otherwise – is to release in the ribs and allow air to enter, not forgetting that our ribs go all the way down to the waistband at your back, and have sides to them. Take a look at someone near you now – a sideways view – and see how deep is the human chest. So release your ribs at the side as well. I suggest consciously letting go inside your waistband at the back and watching how air just comes in to your whole chest. Your knees need to be soft, not bent, but not braced back – see how your breathing is affected when you brace your knees versus not bracing your knees.
- 3 There is an awful lot said about 'support'. And an awful lot of trouble caused by this word. One thing support is NOT is tightening your belly, squeezing, or pulling your belly button towards your back. All that does is actually stop your diaphragm from working as it wants and knows to. You cannot actually action your diaphragm – it doesn't have nerve endings which would let us do so; this (mercifully) allows it to do what it does on its own. We just have to get out of its way, which we do when we don't collapse or pull down in our torso and squash it out of action, or do any of the above pushing and pullings. If you give your body space inside, it can do what it knows best with ease. Yes, you will feel things happening in your belly when natural 'support' comes in to play, and that is perfect, but don't actively do them.
- 4 This natural 'support' happens when we are involved in what we are singing about. A line suggesting peace and gentleness invokes a different support to 'Dies Irae'... So always sing with the words; find out what they mean if not in English, and watch how your body knows exactly what to do with them.
- 5 We played a little with your jaw – finding, or remembering, that it hinges right in front of the hole in your ear: place a finger there and open your mouth so you feel where the joint is. A free jaw comes from thinking of dropping your back lower molars away from your upper back molars, and if even more effective if your face and eyes are alive; try opening your mouth with a miserable face and an alive face/eyes. The amount your mouth opens at the front isn't nearly as important as the amount your jaw can free at the back. A 'singing mouth' is more like a big, deep rectangle than a triangle with the apex in your throat! Also, remember that your upper jaw is your 95% of your head – everything other than your lower jaw and its teeth – and this 'upper jaw' is very heavy

(4 bags of sugar), so although it is completely free to move (and needs to be!), opening your jaw by lifting your head, or nodding it up and down, whilst singing is using a lot of muscular tension and gets in the way of your voice.

- 6 When you hold your music, simply bring your hands up underneath the book/folder and leave them there to support the same. Lifting your shoulder as well simply adds to the weight: book + shoulder = heavy! Don't pull your shoulder down, just don't

lift it up! And, final hint, get some 2 inch-wide elastic, stitch or pin the ends together, stretch the loop you've made around the back cover of your folder, slide your hand under the elastic, and you will find your folder so much easier to manage in the concert!

Happy singing!

Annie Turner

www.thebodywonderful.com for further info.

THREE SPIRES COMMISSIONS AND ADVENT SERVICES

THREE SPIRES SINGERS has had a history of giving first performances of newly composed works, beginning with David Briggs' *Music Mountain* in 1991. I was fortunate enough to be asked to write something on two occasions – the choir performed *Lux Mundi* and *In Principio* in the 1990s, and we have since enjoyed giving memorable and moving performances of Russell Pascoe's *Secular Requiem* and Paul Drayton's *Passion According to St Mark*. There is the exciting prospect of commissioning Graham Fitkin to compose for us to mark the Singers' fortieth anniversary in 2021; the work is likely to be based around the famous Cornish scientist and inventor Sir Humphry Davy.

The day after the next Three Spires Singers concert will be personally significant for me – the carol *Lux Mundi* will be broadcast on Radio 3 at 3pm, as part of the Advent service in St John's College, Cambridge, conducted by Andrew Nethsingha, who also directed the first performance when he was here in Truro. It was quickly realised that the piece came over better sung by a small choir, such as the Cathedral choir, which performed

it in 1995, and St John's choir has performed it as part of its broadcast Advent service on two previous occasions. I am very aware that where music is concerned, one man's meat is another man's poison; when writing for a really good choir, composers can be tempted to push musical frontiers – but then public reaction to new pieces varies from enthusiasm to polite incomprehension (and worse). You know that you are batting on a losing wicket when you are told "I loved the piece which came just before yours (attractive easy-listening John Rutter or Philip Stopford) and/or "did the performance lead to any more commissions for you?"

Whatever your musical viewpoint, however, for many the Advent service is one of the loveliest in the Anglican cycle; I particularly enjoy the Truro Cathedral Advent service whenever I am able to attend it. Carols are sung at different points in the building, much of it with restricted lighting – it is a journey from darkness to light, which many find moving, whatever their religious belief (or lack of one).

Paul Comeau

GARDEN PARTY

ON A BEAUTIFUL May summer's afternoon, Penny and Simon Price kindly hosted a garden party to raise funds for the choir. It was extremely well attended and raised just under £2,000 with Gift Aid.

Over two hundred choir members, family and friends had an opportunity to mingle and enjoy the wonderful

garden and views. Throughout the day members of the choir were busy looking after the cake stall, book stall and plant stall and helping to bolster the funds. A goodly selection of refreshments were on sale including Simon's burgers and a varied selection of cakes, splits and scones.

A huge thank you to Penny and Simon for their hospitality.



WANTED – NEW PATRONS AND FRIENDS!

How many of your friends and relations like coming to our concerts?

Would they like to receive early emails giving information about forthcoming concerts?

Enjoy priority booking of the best seats?

Feel the satisfaction of supporting first-class musical performances in Cornwall?

Our Patrons and Friends scheme is just right for them.

Please be an ambassador for Three Spires by asking them!

Full information can be found on our website:

www.threespiressingers.org.uk/support-us/friends-patrons

or direct from Penny Price, 01872 865097 – oak.farm@btinternet.com .

SOME MEMORIES OF CHORAL SINGING UNDER DAVID WILLCOCKS

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE and then a post-graduate student in Cambridge, I was fortunate enough to sing in the choir of the university musical society (CUMS) for six years under the direction of David Willcocks, who died last year. This was more than a wonderful introduction to vocal techniques and to some of the world's great choral music – it was a truly inspirational experience. Willcocks's standards, and his expectations of the choir, were of the very highest order, but it was not only for his musicality that he was so loved; Friday evening rehearsals in the old Music School in Downing Place were the highlight of the week and always happy and good-humoured events. It's all a long time ago now, but a few of the more unforgettable moments might be of interest, whether you knew him or not.

Auditions were compulsory of course, and – as in Three Spires – had to be re-taken for those returning after their first three years. Willcocks – I believe – auditioned everyone himself, and individually (no safety-in-numbers!) They started with scales, always descending rather than ascending, and “to ‘La’, full voice!” Then a bit of sight-reading, then an ear test, usually picking out one of the notes in a triad: “Now please sing the middle one of these three notes!” – and it was rarely a simple tonic triad. More welcome were the words “See you on Friday!”, accompanied by that disarming twinkle in his eyes.

Willcocks' insistence on near-perfection was legendary, particularly when it came to tuning – has anyone ever insisted on tighter semitones? One of his more alarming practices on detecting less than perfect intonation was to home in on the unfortunate individual by getting just (say) the middle row of the basses to sing, then just half the row, then just two adjacent singers, who by now, with the eyes of the rest of the choir on them, would be more than a little nervous if not actually under their seats.

Inevitably, perhaps, it's the moments of sheer hilarity that are the most memorable. I remember a rehearsal

of the *Sea Symphony* which was being recorded by the BBC – an opportunity for a little Willcocksian mischief if ever there was one. Before we started singing, David announced that he wanted us to get more feeling into the music by imagining the scenes painted by Whitman's poetry, starting with the opening lines of the first movement. “Close your eyes” he said, “and I want you to imagine the sea”, so we all dutifully called to mind our favourite maritime images. “Now imagine the ships, the white sails...” – more nautical day-dreaming. “Now picture the limitless, heaving breast!” The eruption of laughter could probably be heard in King's College Chapel. (I'm fairly sure that part of the rehearsal wasn't included in the broadcast.)

Preparing us for a performance of *Gerontius* that was to be conducted by Britten at the Aldeburgh Festival (sorry about the name-dropping!), Willcocks recalled once going through the big alto solo *My Work is Done*, with its ever more ecstatic refrain of ‘Alleluia’. “Oh, Mr Willcocks” he assured us this particular soloist asked him, “How long do you want me to stay on the -lu-?” Unusually, his interpretation of *Gerontius* was over-ruled by Britten on just one point: Willcocks liked a really nasal sound for the repeated ‘Ha ha’ in the Demons' Chorus. “No, no, not like that” said BB; “try singing it as if you had just been told a very old joke”. Who else would dare to correct DVW?

It was in CUMS rehearsals that I learned the standard ‘pair of specs’ marking for ‘Watch the conductor’. You may have heard, or read, of Willcocks's classic trick of putting his handkerchief on his head when he was aware that not all pairs of choral eyes were on him; being the last one to notice was definitely a reason for wanting to hide under your seat. The Willcocks Wiggle – a very characteristic shake of the hips – was another one to watch for: “Did you see me wiggle? Hands up anyone who didn't see me wiggle!”

Willcocks of course had perfect pitch, but there was one occasion that almost persuaded me that ‘pitch’ could be – if not learned – at least memorised in the

medium term. At the last Friday evening rehearsal of the B Minor Mass, after a whole term of singing in B minor and related keys, he came bouncing into the rehearsal room, and, without giving us time to think or to compare notes (!) he announced “Right, no chord from the piano, straight in: Kyrie eleison” and we did, with a creditably unanimous chord of B minor. An interesting experiment!

Willcocks’ time at Cambridge came to an end at the same time as mine, so it’s almost the case that I had no experience of singing in CUMS under any other conductor. Except that he went away on sabbatical leave for a term, during which George Guest took over. Guest was a wonderful musician and was renowned for his direction of the choir of St John’s College (now under the direction of ex-Three Spires conductor Andrew Nethsingha). But, faced with a much larger choir, GG simply didn’t have anything like the charisma of DVW; one term of our Guest conductor was enough to remind us of the importance of Willcocks’ apparently natural aptitude for managing large numbers of performers. Despite having made his reputation with the more modest forces of cathedral

and college choirs, there seemed to be no limit to the numbers he relished handling. Later in his life he was well known for his Come and Sing performances with choirs of thousands, but (almost) my last experience of his conducting was in his last concert with CUMS, when we sang Mahler’s 8th, the *Symphony of a Thousand*, which we performed in Ely Cathedral for want of a sufficiently large venue in Cambridge itself. What a gargantuan event (I’m so glad I wasn’t the Concert Manager)! I can still remember the thrill of that final long-sustained high E flat. He loved it; we all loved it; we all loved him.

I last saw him just a few years ago, when – as President of the Newquay Choral Society – he ran one of his occasional Come and Sing events there. The book *A Life in Music: Conversations with David Willcocks and Friends* (recommended) had recently been completed and he recounted a few of the stories that went into it, before taking us through *Zadok*, a carol by Rutter and (interesting but very characteristic choice) a psalm. I didn’t see him wiggle, but the twinkle was definitely still there.

David Smith

12 October 2016

EASY FUNDRAISING!

Ever think “I can’t afford to give extra or pay for these fundraising events for Three Spires Singers”? I have, yet without spending an extra penny I have managed to become the Number One Supporter of the choir through easyfundraising. (Now there’s a challenge – who can overtake me?)

Did you know that whenever you buy anything online – from your weekly shop to your annual holiday – you could be collecting free donations for Three Spires Singers?

There are over 3,000 shops and sites on board ready to make a donation, including Amazon, John Lewis, Aviva, thetrainline and Sainsbury’s – it doesn’t cost you a penny extra! For example, almost every week I have a delivery from Sainsbury’s which earns the choir 50p – that’s over £25 a year, not to mention

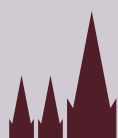
the odd purchases I make on ebay and Amazon which all add up.

It’s as easy as 1, 2, 3...

- 1 Head to <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/threespires/> and join for free.
- 2 Every time you shop online, go to **easyfundraising** first to find the site you want and start shopping.
- 3 After you’ve checked out, that retailer will make a donation to your good cause for no extra cost whatsoever!

There are no catches or hidden charges and Three Spires Singers will be really grateful for your donations.

Gill Hunkin



Forthcoming events

November 26 ♦ 7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL

Elgar GIVE UNTO THE LORD

Tchaikovsky

ROCOO VARIATIONS

Finzi GOD IS GONE UP

Mendelssohn LOBGESANG

December 10 ♦ 7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL

Handel MESSIAH

April 1 ♦ 7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL

Haydn CREATION

May 20 ♦ 10 am—12.45 pm

TRURO SCHOOL CHAPEL

Seminar on

Mendelssohn's ELIJAH

June 24 ♦ 7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL

Joint concert with

TRURO CHORAL SOCIETY

Mendelssohn ELIJAH

All tickets from Box Office Cornwall

www.hallforcornwall.co.uk

tel 01872 262466

HFC
Hall for Cornwall

THREE SPIRES DINNER

Three Spires Singers will be holding their major fund raising event of the year with a dinner in the unique setting of the

CATHEDRAL RESTAURANT.

The date will be Friday 3 March at 7.30 pm.

Please make sure this is in your diary as the tickets will be limited and are expected to sell very quickly. More details will be available in the New Year.

REHEARSALS

Autumn 2015 – Spring 2016

2016

M	Nov	7	
M		14	
M		21	
S		26	1.30–4.00pm Cathedral 7.30pm CONCERT

M		28	
M	Dec	5	
S		10	1.30–4.00pm Cathedral 7.30pm CONCERT

2017

M	Jan	9	
M		16	
M		23	
M		30	
M	Feb	6	
M		13	half term – no rehearsal
M		20	
M		27	
M	Mar	6	
M		13	
M		20	
M		27	
S	Apr	1	1.30–4.00pm Cathedral 7.30pm CONCERT

THREE SPIRES SINGERS & ORCHESTRA

President: Petroc Trelawny



Reg charity no 900017

with TRURO SCHOOL CHAMBER CHOIR

Handel MESSIAH

Christopher Gray conductor

Lucy Hall soprano

Laura Woods mezzo-soprano

Richard Pinkstone tenor

Timothy Dickinson bass-baritone

Saturday 10 December 2016

7.30 pm

TRURO CATHEDRAL



TICKETS: Reserved £12—£21 Under 18 half price

BOX OFFICE CORNWALL, Back Quay, Truro TR1 2LL Tel 01872 262466

www.hallforcornwall.co.uk



Truro Cathedral

by kind permission of the Chapter



Find us on **facebook** and **twitter**

www.threespiressingers.org.uk

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHOIR –

A SELECTION FROM THE BASSES

My name is **Ian Brown**.

I live in Truro and sing Bass 1. I sang in Hertford College Chapel Choir, a small choir in London and then after moving to Cornwall I joined St Mary's Singers and Three Spires Singers. I play the clarinet (badly!) and the bass guitar (only in private!). I have been known to ring the Truro Cathedral bells (also badly!). It's difficult to say who my favourite composer is but as far as choral works go it is probably Bach and on the orchestral side I keep going back to Tchaikovsky. This makes my favourite choral work Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and my favourite orchestral work Tchaikovsky's *6th Symphony*.

My name is **Peter Hadfield**.

I live in Helston and sing Bass 1. I have never played a musical instrument but sang in school choirs from the age of eight years old. I had a break from singing to bring up family then sang with Waynflete Singers in Winchester and now with Three Spires Singers. I was privileged to record with Benjamin Britten – *Friday Afternoon Songs*, Psalm 150 and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which makes my favourite composer Britten.

My name is **Kevin Lawton**.

I live in Wadebridge and sing Bass 1. I used to play the violin and took

Grade 1 which I passed with the lowest mark available! I sang as a treble with my school choir and sang a solo on the World Service BBC at Easter 1958. I have also sung with the Richmondshire Choir (Yorkshire), Esterhazy Singers (London) Rheindahlen Choral Society (Germany), Andover Choral Society and Wadebridge Choral Society.

My name is **Barry Marsh**.

I live in Polgooth and sing Bass 1. I was boy/man chorister in Romsey Abbey for 35 years before joining Southern Voices and Bournemouth Symphony Chorus. Whilst my voice was 'in the change' I played euphonium in a silver band. Whilst in the Abbey choir I appeared in the Ruth Rendall series with George Baker. My music tastes are very varied with Queen and Elgar at the extremities.

My name is **Graham Mitchell**.

I live in Falmouth and sing Bass 1. I have sung in various jazz bands, a T dance band, a salsa band and in musical theatre, I also play the trumpet. Before I joined Three Spires I sang with the East Cornwall Bach Choir for a couple of years. My claim to fame is that I once acted in *Crossroads*! I have broad musical tastes so I don't have a favourite composer however one of my favourite

pieces of music is Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* – a piece which I would love Three Spires Singers to perform.

My name is **Paul Parsons**.

I live in Truro and sing Bass 1. I used to sing with my college chamber choir and I play the piano. One of my most interesting achievements is that I learnt to fly in Hong Kong. My favourite composer is Wagner and my favourite work is *Tristan und Isolde*.

My name is **Giles Richards**.

I live in Truro and sing Bass 2. As well as singing in Three Spires I sing with the chamber choir Celtic Voices. I enjoy playing badminton, watching cricket and rugby and my hobby is farming. My favourite composer is Elgar and two of my favourite works are *Nimrod* and Stanford's *Te Deum*.

My name is **Stuart Skeplorn**.

I live in Truro and sing Bass 2. I have sung with Bristol Youth Choir, Bristol Nova Singers, BBC West of England Singers, Pearce Singers, Carnon Vale Male Voice Choir and Celtic Chorale/Voices. I once had the privilege of singing a solo for a live performance on BBC Radio 3. My favourite composer is Rachmaninov and my favourite piece of music is his *Second Piano Concerto*.

◀ My name is **David Smith**. I live in Truro and sing Bass 2. I play the piano and harpsichord (also the 'cello and organ but that was a long time ago!) I spent six years singing with Cambridge University Music Society under Willcocks, five years with Trinity College Dublin Music

Society and a couple of years in the Open University choir in Milton Keynes. I have been a member of Three Spires Singers since 2005. I was born in a house that has been home to three Astronomers Royal (I'm related to two of them) in a street named after the discoverer of

Uranus. My favourite composers are Bach, Mozart and Britten and my favourite pieces of music are *B Minor Mass*, the *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*, *Così fan tutte* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



A BASS VIEW

Chapter 2: Health and Safety

REHEARSALS START with exercises to improve your physique, voice and mental health and it is therefore important that you should not stand too close to your neighbour when flinging your arms around. Some of the voice exercises are embarrassing, but just keep a straight face. The mental exercises are always troubling and I still cannot, despite really trying, 'sense the soft tissue at the back of my knees'.

It is no longer common to take a break in the middle for coffee, presumably because coffee is a diuretic. Singing for a couple of hours therefore requires stamina, particularly as we never seem to sit down. A particular problem are the neck muscles, which

must, during a concert, support the weight of score and red folder, held high in the air 'so that you can see the conductor'. Concerts also require the choir to scramble up scaffolding to reach their seats. In light therefore of the considerable physical demands made on the ordinary member, the choir could do with a physical training officer, an appointment which would allow us to suck oranges at half time.

For those really concerned about their health, there are many qualified doctors in the choir, each of whom will, I am sure, be delighted to answer questions about your health or personal problems.

Chapter 3: The Conductor

REHEARSALS ARE taken by a Conductor, who stands at the front of the hall bounding up and down a very narrow bench. Don't worry. He hasn't fallen off yet. He is the leader, director and tyrant of the rehearsal, a god like figure who requires devoted concentration and attention and a complete absence from the choir of the background chatter that is normally held to meld human society. This is the man in charge of your evening, a person who is genuinely able to improve your voice, and weld a hundred discordant and difficult personalities into one. Conductors give life advice, posture advice, part of a joke heard in the pub and may also make emotional attempts to improve performance. Rage, lateral thinking and imaginative word use are common. One recent requirement was to be 'perky'. I still can't do 'perky', despite practising at home.

As a choir member you will wish to get the notes right and hope

that your section is not criticised. However, you will find that when the conductor criticises a section or person, he doesn't stare at the wayward singer. This means that if he isn't looking at you, you are in the wrong. However, on the other hand, if he does look at you, you are definitely wrong. Every singer must therefore learn to appreciate guilt and all I can suggest is that if the guilt really gets to you, you should send a long e mail to the conductor with details of your mental problems.

You should also recognise that for the conductor, sopranos are always flat, basses are behind, (really behind), tenors are wrong (but rare and wonderful) and the altos inaudible.

Finally, a conductor is obsessed with being looked at, and will frequently scream 'Watch me'. Don't worry, that's his problem. Just give him a bright smile and cheerful wave.

Stephen Tyrrell

MAKING A LEGACY TO THREE SPIRES SINGERS

WE HAVE MANY dedicated participants and supporters who are very committed to ensuring our continuing success year after year. These include members of Three Spires Singers, Three Spires Orchestra, Sponsors, Friends, Patrons and our many audience members. One way in which some of us might like to give future financial support is to make a legacy to Three Spires Singers in our wills. Such gifts are exempt from Inheritance Tax, and in April 2012 new rules brought in a reduced level of Inheritance Tax for people leaving 10% of their estate to charity.

If this proposition is not for you please disregard it, but if you think it may be of interest please continue.

It is best to leave a legacy as part of your Will, so it would be advisable to see a solicitor to arrange this. A suggested wording is below, but please check with your solicitor.

"I bequeath to Three Spires Singers, Registered Charity Number 900017,
either (Pecuniary bequest) the sum of (amount in words) or
(Residuary bequest)% (amount in words) of the residue of my real and personal
estate which I can dispose of by Will in any manner I think proper
to be applied to the general purposes of the said Charity, and I direct that the receipt of the Treasurer or of any
other appropriate officer for the time being of the said Society shall be a good discharge to my Executors."

Alternatively, if you are simply adding a donation to Three Spires Singers to an existing Will, you can use a codicil. Adding a codicil means there is no need to change the terms of your current Will; it simply adds a new instruction.

A few simple rules for Codicils – an example is given below, available in hard copy on request:

- ◆ Do not cross out or write new instructions into your current Will as any changes will not be valid.
- ◆ As with Wills, two people need to witness you signing and dating the codicil. They do not need to be the same people who witnessed your original Will.
- ◆ Keep the codicil along with your current Will in a safe place.
- ◆ Send or give a copy of the Will and codicil (in a sealed envelope if preferred) to your Executor or a trusted friend, with a note indicating where the original is held.

There is no need to inform us if you choose to make a legacy to Three Spires Singers.

Thank you so much for giving this your consideration: any legacies made will bring pleasure to a great many people.

Legacy 10 is an independent campaign launched in November 2011 that seeks to increase the amount of giving to good causes. You may find it helpful to peruse their website for more information: www.legacy10.com

If you would like to discuss the details of making a legacy to Three Spires Singers please contact our Chairman:
Lora Wicks, Albert House, Callestick, TRURO Cornwall TR4 9LN
Telephone: 07791 235 269 ◆ Email: lorawicks@talktalk.net

EXAMPLE CODICIL

This is the **first*** / **second*** / * / Codicil to my last Will dated / /
of me (name)

of (address)

I bequeath to Three Spires Singers, Registered Charity Number 900017,

either (Pecuniary Bequest)

the sum of (amount in words)

or (Residuary Bequest)

..... % (amount in words) of the residue of my real and
personal estate which I can dispose of by Will in any manner I think proper

to be applied to the general purposes of the said Charity, and I direct that the receipt of the Treasurer or of
any other appropriate officer for the time being of the said Society shall be a good discharge to my Executors.

If at my death any charity named as a beneficiary in this Will or any Codicil hereto has changed its name or
amalgamated with or transferred its assets to another body then my Executors shall give effect to any gift
made to such charity as if it had been made (in the first case) to the body in its changed name or (in the
second place) to the body which results from such amalgamation or to which such transfer has been made.

In all other respects I confirm my said Will and any existing Codicils thereto.

Signed Date / /

SIGNED by the said (name of Testator)

as and for a* Codicil

to his/her last Will and Testament dated the (date of Will)

in the joint presence of us both being present at the same time who at his/her request in his/her presence
and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

WITNESS 1

Name
Address
Occupation
Date
Signed

WITNESS 2

Name
Address
Occupation
Date
Signed

* Please indicate what number this Codicil is.