



# Music in Time

## The Autumn Concert

BGCS teamed up with HERO, the Heart of England Recorder Orchestra, at North Bromsgrove High School to produce a wonderful and memorable sound for our autumn concert, 'Music in Time', on Saturday the 13th November.

The concert opened with J.S. Bach's ever green 'Flocks in Pastures Green Abiding', otherwise known as 'Sheep May Safely Graze'. This was followed by the first three movements from Elgar's 'From the Bavarian Highlands' which the choir sang to a sensitive and lyrical piano accompaniment by Gill Bradshaw. The Heart of England Recorder Orchestra are an

ensemble of about twenty players using soprano, descant, treble, tenor, bass, great bass and contra bass instruments to perform a wide range of music from many historical periods up to and including modern works. On Saturday they opened their recital with Delibes Suite from 'Le Roi S'Amuse' and followed this with 'Passacaglia' by Handel. Recorder orchestra and choir then joined together for Purcell's Rejoice in the Lord Alway .

The interval was followed by Mozart's 'Ave Verum Corpus', the Recorder Orchestra's interpretation of Luigini's 'Ballet Egyptian' and Vaughan-William's Prelude on 'Rhosymedre'

The choir then performed the final three movements of the Elgar and the whole concert was brought to a fitting and tranquil conclusion when choir and orchestra treated the audience, and dare I say it, themselves to a moving delivery of 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring.'

## The Really Big Choir

Among the leaflets on display during BGCS rehearsals some can often be found advertising "Concerts from Scratch" with the logo, "The Really BIG Chorus." They've been going for thirty years, sending profits to the British Heart Foundation or Leukemia Research and have an enormous following.

I've been lucky enough to join them on three cruises, together with my daughter, Joy, who sings with a choir in Germany, one day last July at the Royal Albert Hall, singing Faure's Requiem and then, last week, in Salzburg Cathedral at the Mozart Festival! We sang Ave Verum Corpus, KV 618, Misericordias Domini, KV 222 and the Requiem KV 626.

There were 320 singers in the choir, mostly individuals rather than choral groups. The small numbers of basses and tenors were magnificent. We were required to take our own scores and expected to 'be familiar with' the music. Most had sung the Requiem previously, somehow, somewhere. I thought I had, over twenty years ago, with the Birmingham University Choir. Although, when I tried to practice my part at home, it didn't seem very familiar! Luckily it all came flooding back as we rehearsed together.

We had two afternoon rehearsals, in different venues, one on the Friday and the other on Saturday, before the evening performance for the public. The first hour of the Friday rehearsal was dreadful! Nobody seemed to be able to count a steady four, nor, apparently to watch the conductor. Can you believe it? But, even more incredible, that gentleman, Brian Kay, succeeded in obtaining a pretty creditable whole by performance time on Saturday.

The cathedral was packed, it holds three thousand or more people, with some of the audience sitting on the

floor between aisles and they were very appreciative. It was wonderful to be there! I shall never forget the half minute after the end of each great chorus. We'd been warned not to move a muscle until the echo had reverberated all around the huge building and eventually died away. Stunning!

More often than not, over the years, the conductor has been the tremendously popular, Sir David Willcocks. Sadly, he had a mini stroke early this summer and his prescribed three months absence from the rostrum was not quite completed, hence Brian Kay in his place.

It was Sir David who awarded B.K. his choral scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, where the famous 'King's Singers' were first formed, so there is a strong link. I'd be interested to know how many B.G.C.S. members ever went to see them perform at Bromsgrove School in the early days of Bromsgrove Concert Club? They used to meet, drink and chat with audience members in the Masters' Club after concerts, so it was actually a bonus for Joy and myself to meet him again personally more than thirty years later. I recall how droll and humorous he was in those days as he made announcements. Although he does not now sing in public, he was persuaded to do one of the G and S rapid patter songs at a very entertaining dinner party laid on for us on the Friday evening.

Another bonus in Salzburg itself was a puppet performance of 'Magic Flute', which we managed to attend. It is hard to imagine how absorbingly clever this show can be. Add to all that the breath taking scenery, we were so lucky with the weather, as we drove and wandered in the mountains from Joy's home in Munich and back, taking a few days to do the journey which can be done in two and a half hours.

The hills were alive with.....

So, Steven, that is 'What I did in my holidays.'

I arrived home at 6 p.m. on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September, just in time for choir practice!

**Sylvia Cartwright**

You should have been in good voice, then Sylvia!.. Ed.

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### **Keep Music Matters yours**

Write for your newsletter. To those of you who have already done so a big thank-you for your support. Your contributions are super and really appreciated. Why not become a regular? To those of you who haven't yet, you are good enough. If this editor can dare to write for public consumption, so can you. Honest, gov., so, write, please!

## **Church Choring**

A new angle for the society? wonders Kevin Ward

We took our caravan down to Watchet in Somerset at the beginning of this summer and have had several weekends away, with fond memories of pints in the "Star" Inn in Watchet then heading back to the van and meditating whilst gazing across the Severn Estuary at the Welsh Coast with the mountains in the background.

We have also done a lot of exploring, many walks across Exmoor, seen much wildlife and many ruins and prehistoric monuments. One beautiful place is Selworthy, a National Trust Village, a real "chocolate box" little community, with manicured lawns and thatched cottages on the village green, and a beautiful Church. We attend the services if we are there on a Sunday but there are usually not many in the congregation. The good side though, is that during the summer when the Choral Society doesn't meet, it gives us an opportunity to sing in earnest.

Church music makes up a large part of the Society's repertoire. Many of our concerts have at least one piece of Religious music and some are entirely so. But, how many of us have performed these pieces in the context for which they were composed? In Church? We have had the opportunity to do this through the Royal School of Church Music. Recently several of us attended a workshop for Faure's Requiem and then "performed" it, with the appropriate pieces at the appropriate points in a full Requiem Service. What is already a wonderful piece of music was utterly transformed into an incredibly powerful experience. It inspired you to really put your best into it and I now know what standards I have to try and achieve every time. Is this something that the Society could consider? Perhaps performing a full Choral Evensong? With Sixty odd voices instead of the usual Vicar and his dog, now that really would be something of which to be a part!

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### **Friends of B.G.C.S.**

Would you like to become a 'friend' of Barnt Green Choral Society?

As a 'friend' you would get reduced price tickets for our two main concerts held in November and March and priority booking for our popular Christmas and summer concerts. You would also receive a copy of our newsletter, which we hope to produce twice a year.

Your contribution would be really appreciated and would help the society continue to produce enjoyable concerts using first class soloists and musicians.

If you would like to become a 'friend' of B.G.C.S. please send a cheque for £10 made payable to Barnt Green Choral Society, to The Secretary, Fiona Brown, Barnt Green Choral Society, Stable Door House, School Lane, Alvechurch, Birmingham B48 7SA.

## Chair Chat

"We are the Music Makers"

Yes indeed - that is why we are members of Barnt Green Choral Society!

One of our members, John Russell, is delighted that we are helping him to celebrate his 80th birthday by having Elgars "The Music Makers" at the centre of our programme in March. It is a beautiful piece of music and will enable us to share John's celebration with what we hope will be a large and enthusiastic audience. Also on that programme will be another of John's favourites "Messa di Gloria".

John joined the Society just a few months after its founding in 1951, having been invited by his good friend Fred Daniel, himself a founder member and staunch tenor for several decades. John was a stalwart member until 1977 when he had to relocate to Cornwall. He returned to Worcestershire in 1994 following his retirement, as both he and his wife Eileen had missed the Midlands. In a short time John had rejoined his beloved BGCS.

Over the years, both in Barnt Green and Bude, Cornwall {where he had joined a very similar choral society} he had the pleasure of singing many and various types of Choral music. Of course, some were good, some not so and some absolutely exhilarating, of the latter "The Music Makers" and "Messa di Gloria" were the two works which gave him the most pleasure and satisfaction. These were selected from a short list of works by Mozart, Faure, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Dvorak, Handel and Parry [we leave you to guess which were the compositions by these masters]

In order to celebrate his long association with the choir and his approaching 80th birthday in May, John asked the Committee to consider performing the Elgar and Puccini works for the Spring Concert in 2005, and was absolutely "thrilled to bits" that this was approved. John has made a considerable financial donation to this concert.

I hope that all members will enjoy, as much as John will, the rehearsals and performance. I have already booked our three soloists and Steve has almost got a full orchestra booked. I am sure it will be a very good evening.

Norma Hazell.

## From the Treasurer

In order to write this, I have to set aside my singer's brain and engage the financial one (no comments, please) as the years are different!

The Summer Music Evening is the first event of "my" year. As always, it was a successful occasion financially, boosting funds for events which will inevitably make a loss. Steve's choice of Trial by Jury was well received and the evening, although hard work for many, was a lot of fun. Most importantly, though, it brought us together as friends, showing that BGCS is not just about singing.

Our November concert with HERO (Heart of England Recorder Orchestra) should not tax us too much financially, leaving us scope to splash out on a full orchestra in March. This is a particularly special occasion as we are marking an important birthday. Details elsewhere!

Overall, our funds are healthy, allowing us some flexibility of planning - within reason, we don't need fourteen horns at our concerts! We are looking into buying some Christmas music to vary our repertoire and can also acknowledge the enormous contribution made by our conductor and accompanist by raising their fees more substantially than in the past.

Membership is buoyant and subscriptions coming in well. I hope you will avoid my polite reminders by paying promptly (I might present a wooden spoon to the last!) although special arrangements are never a problem. And associate members - whom we now like to call Friends: please remind your supporters that they can receive our newsletter and ticket reductions for a donation of £10 or more.

To summarise - we have a sound financial basis from which to plan our future singing. Long may it last!

Lesley Penfold.

## The Music Stand

Sadly, we no longer have Win Cowie and Margaret Pascoe as members and friends. However, the Committee decided that a music stand for use at

concerts would be an excellent use of their generous bequests, and a fitting way of keeping them with us while we sing, so Margaret Parry and Lesley Penfold have spent several months on the case.

We now have a very elegant wrought iron stand, incorporating Lesley Penfold's original design, now the BGCS logo, which was made by David Eastwood at Burcot Forge. It will be used for the first time at the November concert, and will undoubtedly be not only a part of all our concerts, but an enduring tribute to two delightful ladies.

Lesley Penfold and Margaret Parry.



## Our Logo

Symbolism is often found in art in all its forms, not least in words and music. Logos too can express much that mere words cannot easily convey.

Take, for instance, the new logo we adopted at the commencement of our second half century. Did you spot a certain symbolic coincidence? If not, Look again. Placed upon the staff are our initials BGCS. Just think for a while. Our Society is based close to the northern boundary of Worcestershire, our village set amid the Lickey Hills. At the other end of the county rise the majestic Malverns, playground and soul country that inspired our beloved Sir Edward Elgar. Look yet again, and what do you see? Sing the notes BGC (ignoring the 'S' of course) and then discover our very own symbol of music-making in Worcestershire - the first three notes of Elgar's Enigma theme.

Peter Mobley.

## Joining the Choir.

I had attended most of the choir's concerts during recent years and enjoyed listening to the lovely music which the choir members had sung so well. "They really must enjoy being a part of it," I thought. I too enjoy singing. I had been a member of my school choir and had sung in the Grammar Schools' Choir Festival many years ago. Sadly I realised, most of my singing was now duets with M. Callas, or sing a' longs with The Messiah, Fauré's Requiem, the list was endless and often happened when ironing the weekly pile! Or reclining in the bath.

Like a seed germinating my enthusiasm and confidence grew until I could hold back no longer. I would ask Chris, a pal of mine, who is a member of the choir whether or not I should join. I explained my past experiences.

"Yes of course, come and give us a try," was his reply. Armed with the date and the time of the next rehearsal I was the first to arrive, far too early, and had to wait in the car park. This gave me time to think. "What had I done?" I was convinced that I was going to make a perfect fool of myself and a wave of embarrassment passed over me. I was sure my sight reading would be dismal and those scales I would have to sing in front of the choir master would be as flat as a pancake and delivered in not much more than a whisper. As I was on the brink of leaving Chris and the refreshment crew arrived and I was whisked into the hall. There I found, to my great relief, I did not have to audition. I learned about the raffle and tea breaks etc., my situation was improving by the minute. More choir members arrived and I was greeted by cheery "hellos". I was not given much choice as to where I was to sing. I was hijacked to the altos, and seconds to boot!

After my first rehearsal I was truly mentally exhausted. It had been a tour d' force, Daniel in the lion's den. There was so much to do, trying to follow the line with my poor sight reading, singing in tune, looking out for piano, pp, dotted quavers, attending to pronunciation while also watching the conductor. While I was still wondering if I could ever be a proficient and worthwhile choir member. I was invited to join a weekly driving rota for following rehearsals.

With almost a years membership and a concert behind me I'm happy to say that I'm gaining in confidence and actually enjoy singing. Being a new member of the choir could have been a daunting experience but I have been encouraged by friendly folk in a relaxed atmosphere and corralled by an experienced pianist and enlightened choir master.

Norma Brooks.

## View from a back seat.

"Well," I was asked. "What do you do on Monday evenings at that choir of yours?"

The large, brown eyes of my youngest son's latest girl held mine in a politely interested gaze.

"I sing," I replied.

"What, on your own?"

"No, of course not. I sing with a lot of other people."

"Can't see the point of that. I mean a lot of people all singing the same tune. I should have thought one person would have been enough!"

"Yes, but we don't all sing the same tune. We sing in harmony. Different tunes that blend together."

"Hmmm. Who decides what bit you sing?"

"Well, the composer. He writes music to fit the various types of voices, you know, bass, tenor, alto and soprano."

She looked puzzled. I realized she had no idea at all what I was talking about. Music, after all, is not important enough to be part of the national curriculum and classical music is so 'out' that to listen to it, even for a moment, except as background to an ad is to lose all 'cred' instantly. "Look," I said. "The sopranos are the ones who can reach the highest notes." I played a high F on the piano. "Because they can get so high they think they're the best thing since sliced bread. You can tell them from the others because they have the longest hair, fanciest jewellery and swishier skirts than anyone else. They also get very sniffy if they're not allowed to sing at least as high as that F I played you in every movement of every piece we sing. If you listen hard and watch the conductor beating time you'll see that when they get to those high notes they always hold them for at least twice as long as the composer and the conductor want and then afterwards they'll be complaining that they've got sore throats and the conductor and composer are both sadists. They think altos are generally unnecessary. A bit like lead guitarists think about rhythm guitarists; nice to harmonise with but if they weren't there the piece would be just as good.

Tenors, on the other hand are good to have around; beside the fact they're male and therefore can be

flirted with, sopranos like to sing duets with tenors because tenors can only sing in a mid to low soprano range, a bit lower than an alto, and the sopranos are free to soar into the stratosphere and show off on their own. Now the basses, according to sopranos, are the pits. They sing far too damn loud, for a start, are useless to tune to because they sing far too low and they have grave reservations about anybody who sings in the F clef anyway.

You know how your kid brother is? Spoiled! That's what tenors are. There are never enough of them for a start and musical directors would sell their souls rather than let even a poor one quit. Mind you for some perverse reason tenors are always really good. Its one of those very irritating facts of life. Because of that all tenors eventually get swollen heads. They are, after all, the only ones who are ever called upon to make sopranos swoon. The only thing that can make tenors insecure is the accusation, usually made by basses, that anyone singing that high can't possibly be a real man! Being the perverse people they are, tenors will never acknowledge this, however. To compensate they complain even louder than the sopranos about the sadistic tendencies of composers in demanding they sing so high. Tenors love the conductor because he's always so sickeningly nice to them, but they hate him because he's always telling them to sing louder, because there are so few of them. No conductor has ever, ever, asked for less tenor in a forte passage. On the other hand tenors feel threatened by all the other sections of the choir; the sopranos because they sing so much higher; the altos because actually they can do everything a tenor can, except make sopranos swoon, and they sing a bit higher as well and the basses because although they can't sing anything above an E they always sing it so loud they drown the tenors out. Tenors will never admit to any of this. It is also a well known fact that tenors move their eyebrows more than anyone else when singing.

Basses sing lower notes than anybody else in the choir. That says everything about basses. They are solid, good, reliable chaps. Now, tenors may have the most mobile eyebrows in the choir, but basses certainly have the most facial hair. Basses are the most important section of the choir. They provide the solid foundation upon which every piece is built and the counter point that adds piquancy to the efforts of the others, and without them the timing of many works falls to pieces. This view is endorsed by many prominent musicologists. However, it is not a view shared by tenors, altos and sopranos. Basses tend to feel unappreciated because they often have the most boring part to sing, often being required to repeat the same note for bar after bar after bar or sing in endless fifths

for an entire page! Because they know how important they are, how the other sections rely on them for timing and to bolster their self respect basses tend to sing as loudly as they can get away with all the time. Other sections complain how high the composer asks them to sing and basses are no exception, but they have another trick up their sleeves. They are the only section who can regularly complain about how low they are asked to sing. Basses are recognisable by the horribly contorted faces they pull whilst trying to reach the lowest notes. Basses try to get on with everyone in the choir, but their good humour does not extend to tenors who they consider effete poseurs, real men can't sing that high, remember? Basses do like altos and often composers will have alto and bass duets, but don't expect basses to be enthusiastic when the altos get the best part. Sopranos are outside the comprehension of basses. They might as well be in a different universe. They cannot understand how anyone can sound that bad when they make a mistake. After all when a bass makes a mistake the other three parts cover him and he can continue to waver about the scale with the certain knowledge that sometime, somehow he will end by singing the root of the chord.

I've seen this, or something very similar to it, on several websites. It struck me as amusing, I hope you enjoy it too.

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## Funny?

A backward poet writes inverse.

A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.  
Show me a piano falling down a mineshaft and I'll show you A-flat minor.

He often broke into song because he couldn't find the key.

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## Christmas is coming...

There's still time to get your thinking caps on to see if you can nominate a poem, reading, song, anecdote, sketch, pantomime .. anything that you think might go down well in the BGCS Christmas Concert.

Last year choir members made the concert the success it was by the range and quality of the items nominated. I only hope you have not exhausted your supply of items! From the beginning of November, there will be a suggestions box at rehearsals. It would be useful if you could indicate whether or not you are prepared to read your nominated piece.

## Falling off a Horse

'You've got to fall off a horse seven times before you can ride it'. Those were the words I heard from Canon Lemmon, Rector at Hexham Abbey when I was a 16-year old organ pupil and I've never forgotten them!

As part of my training I started playing the odd hymn at services, and graduated to being given the task of playing for the 11.15am service of Matins.

This was not the main service of the day, but was attended by hard-core prayer book matins-lovers (numbering about 15-20) and no choir. But lots of psalms. Psalms are a particular devil to accompany on the organ. You have to fit the same 8 bar chant to each verse by following the words and 'pointing' in the psalter. Some verses are long and some are short.

I had developed the technique of singing the psalms lustily to myself while I accompanied. This meant keeping one eye on the music and one on the words but was a good idea because it meant there was less chance of getting lost, as the congregation were completely inaudible over the sound of the organ (the organ-loft was some way away from the choir stalls where the congregation were). You could keep the loudspeaker switched on, but then all you heard was the vicar and that was far more off-putting than helpful.

So this Sunday I was merrily ploughing through psalm 76, singing away. Only I was completely unaware that the congregation were struggling with a completely different psalm, I having misread the number. And their psalm was considerably shorter than mine. I became aware of the verger standing behind me as I was playing, then after a while he summoned up courage to come up and tap me on the shoulder. 'We've finished now,' he whispered compassionately.

Despite hiding in the organ loft for 20 mins after the service, I still encountered Canon Lemmon when I came down.

Whatever horses you attempt to ride, may all your falls be gentle!

Steven Cowperthwaite

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