

Nantwich Choral Society

Summer Newsletter 2003

This is my fourth effort at producing a summer newsletter for the Society, and as I sit here slaving over a hot keyboard (while the weather outside is even hotter!) I can't help but wonder if it will be my last. The message in this edition is clear and it is stark: we need a committee! There's plenty more on this subject elsewhere in the newsletter, so I won't dwell on it here. I hope you enjoy the usual mix of news, reviews and opinions, and once again I'm indebted to those members who have kindly contributed articles. Nick Smith



Members of the Society pictured outside Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral on 22nd June. The choir sang the Haydn Little Organ Mass, under the direction of Norman Peate with Andrew Mildenhall at the organ. The trip was a great success, we were well looked after by members of the cathedral staff, our singing was much appreciated and we hope to repeat the experience.

I hope you all enjoyed the social evening recently and wasn't it a joyous experience to hear Patrick and Andrew perform for US! I am sure you will all wish to give a special thank you to Brenda for organising such a splendid buffet and to Ron for organising the wine. I hope that all those of you who sang in the Metropolitan Cathedral in Liverpool enjoyed the experience organised by Ron. I believe that events of this nature are important for the choir, both socially and musically. Thanks to Nick once again for producing this summer newsletter.

I hope you are all enjoying the summer break and look forward to seeing you all on 3rd September at 7.30 pm.

Jacquie

Dates For Your Diary

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| 3 Sep | First rehearsal |
| 17 Sep | AGM |
| 11 Oct | Singing Day |
| 6 Dec | Winter Concert |
| | Christmas Oratorio - Bach
(in Bunbury Church) |
| 20 Dec | Carols |
| | "Winter Wonderland" |
| 27 March | Spring Concert |
| | Via Crucis - Liszt |
| | Messe Solonelle - Langlais |
| 26 June | Summer Concert |
| | Solstice of Light - Maxwell Davies |
| | Rejoice in the Lamb - Britten |
| | (programmes subject to change) |

"Pure vowel sounds are much easier to sing which is why the Italians produce such wonderful operatic divas. Spoken English is full of long diphthongs that can sound ugly."

Was it all right on the night?

It's August, we are enjoying the summer, but Wednesdays are a bit empty until September? Let's look back for a moment to the choir's performances of last season. How do we singers feel about the concerts we gave? How do we rate the programmes chosen for us?

Programme building is a fine art. Some of us might think that the choice of works could be made more democratically. But surely that way chaos lies. Most of us lack the necessary knowledge of suitable works, the forces required, their cost and what the choir can cope with. Patrick is very skilled at putting together programmes that comprise challenge, something new in style or content and enough familiarity to keep us happy.

But is it all right on the night? Do we, the singers, as well as our audiences really enjoy the concerts? Well yes I believe that most of us do.

But let's consider last season:

The November offering...Vaughan Williams, Tavener and Howells with Chudleigh's Cumpnie. Demanding, but for that very reason very satisfying, and all English. We ought to take programmes like that abroad where English choral music is still virtually unknown.

Messiah in December.....different again being directed from the keyboard; no worries about the notes for us old hands, great fun.

The traditional Christmas "do". I always love this one and what an inspiration to have a band share the work with us. They could have been better positioned though.

The April performance of Rossini's Petite

Messe Solennelle somehow came off much better than some of us expected. We had had to work hard on the details at rehearsal, indeed at times it felt like we were doing it to death, but as usual it was all worthwhile and the punters also were pleasantly surprised; they loved it.

Came the last concert of our musical year and, to paraphrase that critic, we were bold and adventurous and somewhat under-rehearsed. Well with only eight weeks of preparation that might have had some truth, but it was the Arvo Pärt he was getting at, wasn't it? That was a work about which some of our members had doubts whilst others were enthusiastic. I had heard the Pärt Te Deum performed in 2001 when I was in the audience and found the sound quite magical. So I was prepared to like the Berliner Mass. Liking did not come at once, but the music did grow on me so that I liked it well enough, even if I cannot yet claim to love it. What I loved was learning something so new to me, so strange and yet so compelling. As to the rest of the programme....well it opened with a delightful piece for string quartet and soprano by a chap called Larley. Everyone enjoyed that and the Haydn, the Monteverdi and the organ solos, so yes we went away well filled with satisfying music. All in all the only negative thing about being in the Nantwich Choral Society for me is my inability to find any musical friends to buy tickets. Why won't more folk give our music a try? Probably for the same reasons as I wouldn't dream of going to a pop concert.

It may be worth noting though that I sold more tickets for the Crewe Hall concert last year than any other ever!

Jean Atkin

"Singing gives the lungs a workout, tones up abdominal and intercostal muscles and the diaphragm, and stimulates circulation. It makes us breathe more deeply than many forms of strenuous exercise, so we take in more oxygen, improve aerobic capacity and experience a release of muscle tension as well."

The Chairman's Message

This is my third contribution to the newsletter as your chairman. According to our constitution, it is mandatory that I stand down at the next AGM and that you elect a new chairman. In addition, three of the remaining committee members are standing down and by the time you read this newsletter there will be approximately 4 weeks to the time when you, as members, will be required to elect new officers of your committee. It is most important that as my last major contribution to the society during my chairmanship I encourage you to give due consideration to your responsibilities to elect a new committee.

The choir will need another chairman, treasurer, minute secretary and committee member with responsibility for concert management. There are many members of the Society who have never served on the committee and I ask you to give this serious consideration - think of the pleasure you have had being a member of this vibrant society and perhaps it is payback time!

We have just completed an exciting year and the committee, the five of us, has worked extremely hard during the last twelve months seeing the season's projects through and introducing different ideas. Things just don't happen by accident - they take much organising and many hours are spent by the committee doing this. But we do rely on your support and commitment. Although it is the "closed" season, we are actively preparing for the next season, especially our Singing Day, which will be held on 11 October. You will see that we have enclosed a brochure concerning this - I hope the choir will support this fully. We have sent off brochures to over 100 societies in Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Cumbria, and the Midlands.

The "Christmas Oratorio" concert on 6 December will be held in Bunbury Church, not St. Mary's Nantwich. As you are all aware, because of the logistics problem associated with St Mary's, and the fact that it is necessary to have a very large orchestra for this work, it has been necessary to find a different venue. After much searching around the area, this is the decision we have taken. I know that many of you have been asking to do this work for some years now; it will be an extremely expensive concert to put on and we are counting on you to do all you can to sell tickets for this. It is not often performed in this area, so hopefully we shall fill the church. I ask all of you to go on a marketing exercise and do what you can to advertise this event in your locality and SELL TICKETS.

The web site is now up and running, thanks to Roger, - please go into it and we welcome your comments. The site address is www.nantwichchoral.org.uk

I have had the pleasure of welcoming Roger Wickson, our new President, to NCS and I am sure you will all make him feel welcome and we look forward to a long and fruitful association.

Jacque

Exercise to tone up your diaphragm Extend your arm in front of you and, with your palm facing away from you, hold out your index finger. With four short, sharp puffs, try and blow out your finger as if it were a candle. Your chest should move.

"You cannot make a lovely sound until you stand and sit correctly. Arms and shoulders have to be loose and necks must be supple and free."

Society Welcomes New President

Back in May, Jacquie announced the appointment of our new President, Roger Wickson, following the resignation of Chris Thorley. Roger is a former Headmaster of the King's School, Chester, now retired and living in Audlem. A keen musician, one-time chorister at his Cambridge College Chapel and player of both oboe and clarinet, Roger's favourite composer is Joseph Haydn. We were delighted that Roger and his wife Susan were able to join us at our summer social evening just before he went into hospital for an operation on his hip. Roger sends this message to the choir:

"I duly had my hip operation on 18th July. It seemed to be very successful and I am now at home recuperating. The advantages of having done some singing and dabbled with the clarinet and oboe were apparent. After the operation my blood pressure and oxygen level were tested several times a day. My oxygen level was regularly 100% or only a little below. The nurses said they had never known anything like it! I am sure this is because I have taught myself to breathe properly in order to sing and play wind instruments.

I consider it to be a great honour to have been invited to be President of a Choral Society of such distinction. I very much look forward to my association with you. My wife and I very much enjoyed the social evening and the splendid recital. We look forward to attending future events and send our very best wishes for the coming season."
Roger Wickson

Vorsprung durch Technik

In common with other organisations NCS has become computer literate! Members (some!) communicate by e-mail, labels on ticket envelopes are computer printed, minutes are word-processed. It all tends to make for smoother running of the Society.

For some time I was a member of another Choral Society - which I tended to compare unfavourably with NCS. Their 'systems' for publicity, hospitality for orchestra and soloists, distribution of tickets, were rudimentary compared with ours, ad hoc and disorganised. A tiny Committee did all the work and found difficulty in getting others to help.

How different from our own dear NCS! But are we, too, beginning to 'leave it all to a few'?

With 80-100 members and a (notional) committee size of eight, members can expect to be on the Committee about one year in ten - less often since the span of service may be more than one year, more often if we allow for other factors - people arriving and leaving, home / family / business commitments, age and general decrepitude...

"But I've done it before, I'm new here, no good at it, too shy". No excuses. NCS needs YOU!

Another German saying - "*Viele Hände machen leichte Arbeit*"

Joe Watson

AGM

Please note that the AGM will be held on Wednesday 17 Sept at 7 p.m. in the Hall at Malbank School

Exercise for breath control Place your hands on your hips, thumbs facing forwards. The tips of your fingers should be touching at the base of your spine. Take a deep breath, without raising your shoulders or tightening up your neck muscles. You should feel the tips of your fingers moving apart. Exhale slowly, counting to eight. Repeat, counting to 16 and then to 32.

"It is easy to hit the high notes if you sing with a surprised look on your face."