



HENLEY CHORAL Society

HERE'S THE PITCH

Issue 34
June 2015

From the Editor

So much has happened since the last Newsletter. A Christmas concert with debut performances by the Youth Choir (update on page 4) a *St John Passion* Workshop followed by amazing Concert (re-live it with the review on page 8) plus two excellent Workshops for HCS, most recently by Randolph Matthews. The Summer Concert is nearly here: Ben says: 'This is music that goes right to the soul! You're sounding wonderful and as if you're really enjoying the chance to schmooze. I hope you're looking forward to the concert as much as I am!' All that is needed now is a packed St Mary's to enjoy this super programme, so please do all you can to sell tickets.

Lovely contributions in this newsletter; a very long-standing member says farewell – and so does one of the most recent. There's a recollection of a moving Mozart Workshop, a foretaste of the *Dream of Gerontius* next Spring and advice on vocal health. Some of you have been sharpening up your funny bone with stories and jokes – a number with a Shearing connection. There is even an article which makes the connection between pig farming and a concert. So hopefully the newsletter has something for everyone. Thanks all!

Angela Law, Alto and Editor



HENLEY CHORAL
Society

SAT 20TH JUNE / 7.30PM

MIDSUMMER MUSIC

Tippett Spirituals
Brahms Liebeslieder
Shearing Songs

FEATURING

Anita D'Attellis, pianist
David Smith, pianist
Senior Henley Youth Choir
Benjamin Goodson, conductor



St Mary's Church, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 2AU

Tickets £16.00 (under 18s £5.00)
Ticket Secretary Jan French 01491 572795
Gorvett & Stone, 28 Duke Street, Henley-on-Thames

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With piano duets by
Grainger & Mendelssohn

Shearing Shaggy Dog Story

By the 1960s Shearing, who was blind from birth, was a world famous jazz pianist. Once, when boarding a flight from Heathrow to New York, he arrived at the airport on a bright sunny morning and pre-boarded in first class with his seeing dog for the blind. The captain and co-pilot, both jazz fans, were thrilled to have their famous passenger aboard and asked Shearing if they could do anything for him. Shearing explained that he'd had to rush to the airport and that his guide dog could use a walk before take-off. The captain happily obliged. After an hour had passed, Shearing began to wonder why no-one else had boarded the plane and where the pilot and guide dog might be. Eventually, a steward returned with the dog and explained the delay. The passengers had seen the pilot strolling up and down the concourse with his aviator dark glasses on accompanied by a guide dog for the blind...

A number of people had tried to cancel their flight and it took some time to reassure the passengers that the guide dog did not belong to the pilot!

Contributed by Toby Greenwood, Bass



Ginny's valedictory

For those of you unfamiliar with the word Valedictory, the OED describes it as a fond farewell on leaving office. Most ambassadors would be expected to write a valedictory, and I'm pretty sure these farewells are not always as fond as all that! So, why am I writing one?

At the beginning of this singing year, I decided that this would be my moment to depart. My range has been reduced, and I can no longer sustain very lengthy phrases without sneaking an extra breath here and there. I have, in fact, reached my "sell by" date, and my ambition from now on is to be a listener rather than a performer.

On telling my friends in the choir of my intention to bow out, they have reacted in a way that quite surprised me. "Why?" and "Won't you miss it terribly?" - and I have to admit that I probably will miss it, having done it for so long, but I can live with that!

So, how long is so long? As a child (four girls in our family) we were all expected to sing in our local church choir. My elder sister and I decided to sing alto, leaving the high stuff to the other two. My father had produced and presented Gilbert and Sullivan operettas during his student days in Cambridge, so in the days before TV we all sang round the piano. We knew all the best solos and thoroughly enjoyed this Saturday night form of entertainment.

In 1959 I was a young teacher with a puppy and I needed a residential job where a puppy could come too. I answered an ad. in 'The Lady', and after a brief interview I went to work for Miss Sophia Wilson at her school in a beautiful Cotswold village. Back then she was a member of Tewkesbury Choral Society, and of course I didn't need much persuasion to go along too. Monday nights have ever been thus! If her name rings a bell amongst our older HCS members, it is because much later, in her retirement, she came to live in Henley and before long she joined the Choral Society. It was Sophia who introduced the weekly bottle raffle to HCS as a simple and effective money-making tradition instead of mounting endless jumble sales!

I stayed in Tewkesbury Choral until I married in 1964 and went to live in London. There, I wanted to keep singing and decided I would be a godsend to the Royal Choral Society. So I went for an audition. They were not exactly short of altos (no choir ever is), and they presented me with a hideously difficult piece to sight-read. I made an almighty hash of it and they politely decided they could manage without me!

Things were different when we moved to Henley six years later. I was lucky indeed to be invited to join the Henley Singers, a small local choir that tackled a wide variety of music, conducted by Fred Rogers. At the time I joined we were rehearsing some lovely Finzi pieces, which we performed as part of the

Newbury Festival. When eventually Fred Rogers retired, the choir staggered on under the batons of different local musicians, but it was never quite the same and apart from continuing to sing carols at Christmas (as we still do), that was the end of that.

So, fortunately for me, Wendy and Graham had decided that Henley needed a proper choir, and before long it was up and running, with me writing reviews for the Henley Standard. I eventually decided to give up the writing bit and join the choir instead.

To become involved in activities outside concert performances is important too. I took my turn for five years as librarian (a truly horrible job!), and have helped with fundraising by cooking cakes for the May Fair, running quizzes, selling plants from my garden, and even selling my hand-made candles to pay for orchestral players in the Verdi *Requiem* performance, and probably other things which I now forget. I have been to Germany to sing there - all these are things I shall certainly miss. But I will content myself with busking along with the BBC R4 morning service, and of course singing in church. I propose to disperse my music collection, keeping only one copy each of those things which come up regularly as Bring 'n' Sings - *Messiah*, *Crucifixion*, Fauré and Mozart *Requiem*s. AND I will come to all your concerts until I can't totter that far. Thank you, and Goodbye!

Ginny Batchelor-Smith, Alto



Diary Dates

Midsummer Music Concert

Sat 20th June, St Mary's, Henley

HCS Summer Party

Mon 22nd June, RG9 4QG

Youth Choir, Henley Royal Regatta

Sun 5th July, 11.30-12.30pm

Family Day

Christmas Concerts

Sat 12th Dec, St Mary's Henley

What is a concert?

What is a concert? I recently came across a thesis from the Wageningen Agricultural University in Holland, the subject of which was decision-making by pig farmers, but the writer started by suggesting that a concert can be described as a complex adaptive system. I'll come back to that.

The writer of the thesis (Sjoukje Osinga) has been a chamber concert singer for most of her life, and saw an analogy between the subject of her thesis and a concert.

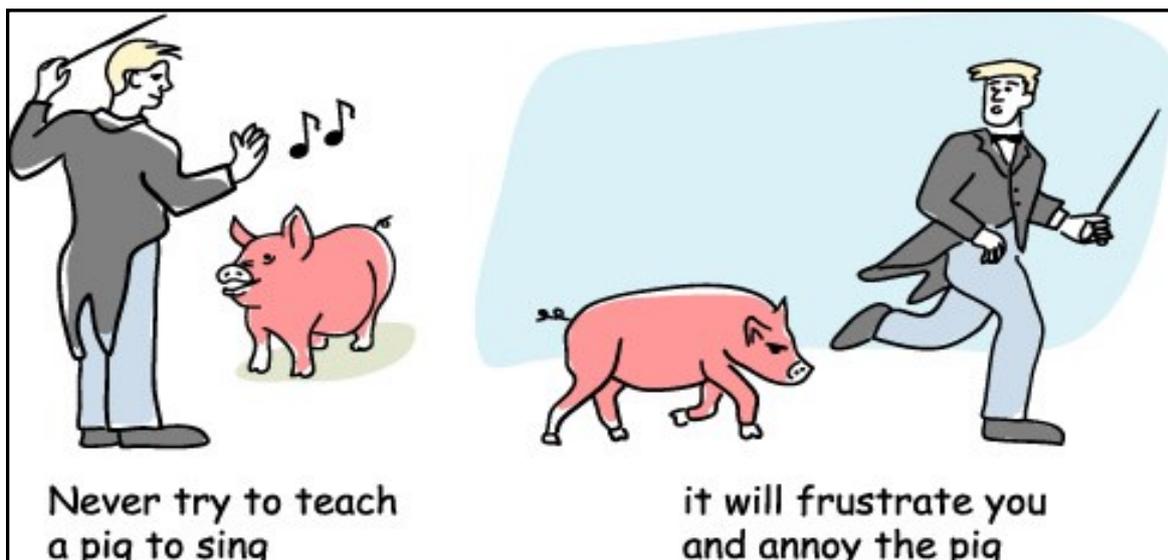
In the following I will try to paraphrase what she has written. Two performances are never the same as each other. In one concert, it could be that everything is perfect, while in another things weren't quite right. It isn't possible to define a good performance, and every person would probably evaluate it in a different way.

She goes on to say: "In terms of this thesis, a concert is a complex, adaptive system. It is complex because no-one can predict in advance what will happen during the concert. It is adaptive because the participants can respond to what they observe or to clues they get from others"

It is a system in the sense that it is the whole thing, consisting of separate components that are all interacting or related to at least one other component."

"The focus of the thesis was on the role of knowledge in decision-making by individuals, in this case pig farmers. A choir conductor gives plenty of information to the choir: rhythm, pace, but also gestures and facial expressions. Although it might seem that there is little decision freedom in a choir, still there are many occasions where choir members do make decisions. For instance, they decide how loud or how expressively to sing a phrase, or where exactly to place a consonant. The conductor will give clues as to the desired dynamics, but cannot control every person's voice. Individuals also take clues from those around them, e.g., as to pitch. A good singer listens to his or her neighbours and continually adjusts their sound to each other. However, not every person is equally inclined, sensitive or capable of hearing and responding to those around them. Individual differences are very important: a choir of identical singers would sound strangely artificial, and it is the diversity which gives a choir its sound and character."

Mike Hails, Bass and raffle organiser



Henley Youth Choir Update

It has been an exciting ten months for Henley Youth Choir. From the beginnings of the Youth Choir Workshops in September 2014, we now have a firm group of keen singers comprising 40 in the Junior Choir and 15 in the Senior Choir.

As you will all remember, the Henley Youth Choir's first performance was at the Christmas Concert on 9th December. They all sang beautifully and received great reviews: "In just 8 weeks Ben Goodson's junior choir miraculously mastered three difficult songs... three part harmony presented no problems" and "a revelation...mature control, exquisitely accurate harmony and voices like crystal"

In February the Youth Choirs had a workshop by superb South African singer Joyce Moholoagae. It was great fun and a chance for the youngsters to experience a different type of singing.



In the Spring term the Choirs began working towards their next performance, which was at the Henley Youth Festival 'Sing' event in March. The Youth Choirs' performances made up the second half of the 'Sing' event and they sang to a packed Kenton Theatre. They sang a range of songs from *Panis Angelicus* to *Something Inside So Strong* and the Beatles, being joined by the choir from Gillotts. It was great that several local groups and organisations came together on one night to perform together and show how talented the youth of Henley are!



The youngsters are now singing really well together, creating a lovely tone and listening to each other. They are able to sing 2 and 3 part harmonies and, in the case of the seniors, 4 part harmonies. As well as our weekly rehearsals and various performances, Ben has been visiting the local schools using money from various sponsors. In March, he went to Gillotts school which culminated in Gillotts joining the Youth Choirs on the Kenton Stage during HYF. In June Ben is holding workshops at Badgemore School and Shiplake College. We hope that this will encourage even more singers to come and join the Youth Choirs. We are planning to visit more schools next year too.



The Summer Concert is going to be on 5th July at the Family Day at the Barn Bar during Henley Royal Regatta from 11.30-12.30. They will be singing a range of songs from musical theatre including *Matilda*, *Joseph*, *Oliver* and *Bugsy Malone*. The Senior Choir will also be singing with HCS at the concert on 20th June.

We have had a great year and look forward to lots more singing from September!

Jo Dickson, Soprano and HYC Committee member

Chuckle Corner

Apparently these are genuine answers in a test set for a 6th Grade class by an American teacher.

“Shakespeare wrote the words and George Shearing did the jazz music for some songs, although he was blind. Shakespeare was born in 1564 on his birthday. He is famous only because of his plays. He wrote tragedies, comedies and hysterectomies, all in Islamic pentameter. Romeo and Juliet are an example of a heroic couple. There’s music about them too.”

“Beethoven wrote music even though he was deaf. He was so deaf he wrote loud music. He took long walks in the forest even when everyone was calling for him. Beethoven expired in 1827 and later died from this.”

“Johann Bach wrote many musical compositions and had a large number of children. In between, he practised on an old spinster which he kept up in his attic. Bach died from 1750 to the present. Bach was the most famous composer in the world and so was Handel. Handel was half German, half Italian and half English. He was very large.

Contributed by Jenny Annett, Soprano



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A SOPRANO'S AT YOUR DOOR?



SHE CAN'T FIND HER KEY AND SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO COME IN.

HOW MANY ALTOS DOES IT TAKE TO CHANGE A LIGHTBULB?

FOUR.

FOUR??!!

YES. ONE TO CHANGE IT AND THE REST TO SAY IT'S TOO HIGH!

Contributed by Susan Edwards, Alto & HCS Chair

Weekly Raffle

This is a brief note to thank all those who support the raffle each week, by buying tickets, donating bottles of wine and/or raffle tickets. As you know, this is one of the ways in which we raise extra funds for the choir.

So far this calendar year, we have raised just under £700, a figure which is comparable to the past few years. We have had three champagne raffles so far this year, and there will be another shortly. In addition, extra funds came from a recent sale of rhubarb by Bernard and Andrew.

Finally, could I also thank those who stand in for me when I am away or taking part in a Bass sectional.

Mike Hails, Bass and raffle organiser



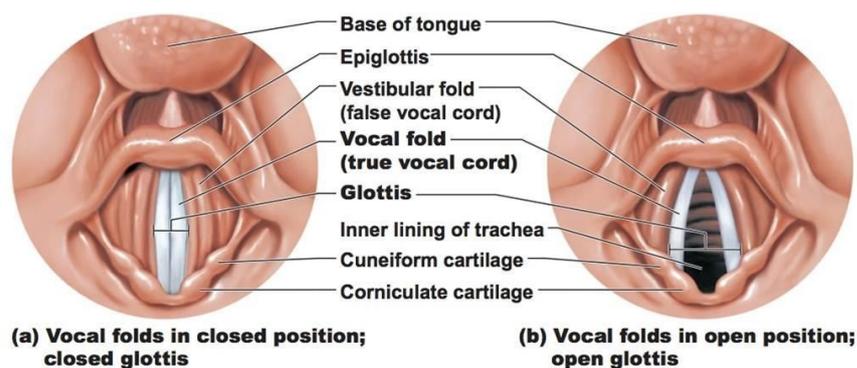
Taking care of your vocal cords

As you probably know, correct breathing and keeping vocal folds (or cords) healthy are key to effective voice production. Here are some reminders:

1. Your voice relies on good breath support. Maximise your lung capacity by using the lower part of the lungs. Think of the lungs as two pear shaped organs with the chubby part of the pear nearest your waist. The lower ribs should move as you breathe in. Feel your lower ribs move upwards and outwards on intake of air.
2. A relaxed and good posture is important for good breathing and good voice production.
3. The health of vocal folds is absolutely key to the voice we produce. Vocal folds are two structures that vibrate as the air from the lungs is expelled between them. Changes of shape, degree of contact of the folds and speed of vibrations result in variation in pitch. Volume depends on breath, contact of the vocal folds and resonance.
4. Vocal folds like a warm moist environment but cannot be directly hydrated. Should a small amount of moisture attempt to pass the vocal folds it will trigger coughing. Sipping water doesn't directly moisten the vocal folds but will help moisten your mouth but ensuring your body is always well hydrated will help to keep the vocal folds healthy for singing.
5. Poor voice production can damage your vocal folds. Habitual shouting, for example from room to room, talking over loud background noise, singing loudly without adequate breath support, smoky atmospheres or habitual coughing are all common causes of vocal damage. Coughing involves the vocal folds violently adducting and frequent banging the folds together can lead to minor or serious damage.
6. Coughing may result from a respiratory tract infection, or may be a habitual way of 'clearing the throat', preparing to sing or just what happens when the music breaks. Listen to the coughing that occurs between movements at a concert. Studies show that there are fewer coughs in intervals, allegedly. Try swallowing rather than coughing. It can be just as effective which is why a sip of water helps: it makes you swallow.
7. It is probably better not to try and sing if your cough is the result of an infection or your voice is clearly abnormal for you. Rest your voice by not singing or talking at length and don't continue to talk above a noise. Never whisper for any sustained time. If your voice remains hoarse for more than 5 or 6 weeks, you should seek an appointment with your doctor and ask for referral to an ENT consultant.

Finally, try to make sure you have time to warm up with Ben before we start singing. He gives excellent exercises and advice.

Susan Edwards, Alto and HCS Chair



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Tenor Rep Paul Clayden

Bass Rep Bernard Carter

Please contact your voice reps if you have any questions or comments.

Farewell from Thomas

It was the day of my Grade 8 piano exam that I was asked by Wendy Hawkins if I would like to join Henley Choral Society. With the relief of having just finished my exam and with nothing imminent to prepare for, I gladly took the opportunity to join the choir and to widen my circle in Henley a little. It is with regret that I can only stay for the duration of this spring term, as I will be returning to Bath in July to complete my final year at university, but it has been a pleasure meeting the choristers and musical team, and to be a part of a thriving choral community (even if only for a short time).

I have been warmly welcomed into the choir and am thoroughly enjoying the repertoire we shall be singing in the June concert. Although this will be my debut singing in St Mary's, it is not actually my first performance there; a few years ago I played there with Neath Male Voice Choir as their accompanist and I remember it being a sterling concert. I may even have met some of the choristers without knowing it! Little did I know that I would return to Henley to perform there again with HCS, albeit with a slightly different instrument...

When asked why I joined HCS, the answer is simply because I enjoy singing! I am by no means a great singer, but the experience of singing in a choir is an uplifting one, and I hope that I have brought

something to the choir this term. This is my first time singing with an 'adult' choir, but I have sung with Ariosa Singers, a youth choir from Mumbles, Swansea. We have sung in St Peter's Basilica, Rome, amongst other places, which was a fantastic experience (especially for the younger children) and great preparation for singing in other choirs later on in life. Finally, thank you for the heartfelt welcome you have given me, and for the opportunity to sing with you this year. Good luck with your continued recruitment drive, and best wishes for your continued success and growth!

Thomas Williams, Bass



HCS SUMMER PARTY – ALL WELCOME!

7.30pm, Monday 22nd June, Grey's Piece, Rotherfield Greys, RG9 4QG

By kind invitation of Peter and Hiltegun Blaker

FREE FOR FRIENDS OF HCS

Tickets £5.00 from Sally Clark, Vice Chair, HCS (Bring plate of finger food & raffle prize!)

Mozart by heart

A number of HCS members joined the Lea Singers event on February 20th for the *Mozart Requiem* Singing Day. HCS performed the *Requiem* some 5 or 6 years ago. There was a warm and memorable welcome with a feast of great cakes which made for a particularly fine breakfast. Ben was a great tutor as we roamed through the pieces, and he highlighted the great dramatic moments, and the ones which light up the synapses because they are so subtle and often unexpected. There was the added bonus of performances by young singers whose names I am sure we will come to know.

For the Lea Singers, this was one step in the preparation for the concert in March in which Ben asked that they perform the *Requiem* without scores, and the whole performance that they gave at the end of the Singing Day was breathtaking. It was such a joy to see the singers looking forwards, (and paying special attention to the conductor which is useful!),

completely focused on the music which swooped and swirled and each voice part group seemed to have a special connection to the others, and listening intently to each other. The spiritual impact of the work was as ever powerful but this was a special haunting and passionate performance. The barrier of flapping scores and folders was completely removed, and the result was expressive, sincere and very moving indeed so the handkerchiefs were out in our row. There was also a great orchestra and soloists, three of whom have sung with HCS, so please can we see them again? My feeling was "I wish we could do that". I would volunteer tomorrow to sing without scores - despite the struggle I had with the SJP chorale which I never quite mastered. Hats off to the Ben and the Lea Singers and thank you - it was unforgettable.

Felicity Bazal, Alto and Librarian

The Dream of Gerontius

– a foretaste

In 1889 Elgar received as a Wedding gift a copy of Cardinal Newman's mystical poem, 'The Dream of Gerontius'. This account of the dying moments of an old man, Gerontius, and the subsequent passage of his soul into the after-life and to the ultimate vision of the Lord, was one to inspire composers. Dvorak had considered making a setting of it for the 1888 Birmingham Triennial Festival, but was discouraged by the emphasis of the particularly Catholic aspects of the subject, and this was one of the factors that led to the lukewarm reception given to Elgar's oratorio when it was first performed at the Birmingham Festival in 1900..... "My boy, it stinks of incense!" (C. V. Stanford). It was not until prejudices had been discarded and the music given adequate performances that the originality and beauty of Elgar's conception were generally perceived.

A combination of circumstances led to a disastrous first performance: the Festival Choir's chorus-master died shortly before rehearsals began; there was a lack of appreciation of the work's importance or difficulties by the conductor (Richter) until too late; there were even reports of "buffoonery in the basses"! It was not until 'Gerontius' was given two performances in Germany that Elgar's masterpiece was seen and heard in its true light and Richard Strauss toasted " Meister Elgar, the first English progressive musician".

That Elgar knew he had written a masterpiece is clear from these words of Ruskin that he inscribed at the end of his score: *This is the best of me. For the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved and hated, like another; my life was the vapour and is not; but this I saw and knew: this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory.*

C J Walker, Conductor of Benson Choral Society and Conductor of Henley Choral Society 1987 - 1993

Choral Society at it's very best

BACH'S *St John Passion* pierces the emotions as its narrative charts Christ's final hours from betrayal to burial. It is an awesome musical journey, to which Henley Choral Society's performance at St Mary's Church under Musical Director Ben Goodson did total justice.

It eclipsed previous stand-out performances and I have not witnessed a more remarkable array of soloists and period instrumentalists or seen HCS so thoroughly prepared.

The orchestra, led by Bojan Cicic, was impeccable. The main continuo trio of organist, cello and lute had total empathy with the soloists: Nicholas Mulroy (Evangelist), Giles Underwood (Jesus/bass), Elizabeth Cragg (soprano), Clare Wilkinson (alto) and Joshua Ellicott (tenor). Mulroy was a class act as narrator with a fabulous voice, great acting and total authority. That the soloists' interpretations were so convincing should have been no surprise, as they all had operatic credentials. It was opera minus the set. The marathon introductory chorus, Herr, unser Herrscher, was of the highest musical and technical quality, and as beautifully balanced as it was ominous, providing a magnificent curtain-raiser. There was an equally glorious opening chorale and

chorus in Interrogation and Flagellation, which also included a well-crafted bass aria from Giles Underwood (Jesus), and, to end the section, a phenomenally expressive and emotionally charged aria sung by Joshua Ellicott, ushering in Christ's Condemnation and Crucifixion. The final soprano aria in Burial, with sensitive woodwind accompaniment, was exceptionally poignant too, but the most moving moment came in The Death of Jesus with Clare Wilkinson's heart-rending *Es ist vollbracht!* This was sheer perfection.

Bach's *Passions* are punctuated by chorales, usually repeated but reworked with adventurous harmonies. Here they were all carefully engineered by Ben Goodson and exquisitely sung. His master-stroke was to have the final chorale sung in German from memory. As the scores were lowered, it was as if hearts and lungs had doubled in size. The inspired, commanding singing that followed created the perfect ending and underscored what must surely go down as Henley Choral Society's finest hour.

Review by Trevor Howell, reprinted from *The Henley Standard* of 23rd March 2015

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