



HENLEY CHORAL Society

HERE'S THE PITCH

Issue 37
June 2018

From the Editor

Bonjour! With a fab report and pictures of the recent HCS trip to Falaise by soprano Nicky Norminton, as well as a farewell from soprano Valentine Ford, this edition has a distinctly Gallic tone. It has been a great year for HCS. Jo Dickson reports on the Henley Youth Choirs going from strength to strength; if you missed it in the Henley Standard there is the review of the Spring concert and a reminder of the amazing Workshop we had with Ken Burton.

You have also been exercising your funny bones. Bass Mike Turner provided 'The Henley Choral Society Guide to

keeping conductors in line.' Good luck explaining that to Peter, Mike. Alto Rosemary Woodroffe and Bass John Legh provide handy new musical terms and definitions. Mike Hails has an invite to a local 'psalmathon' (no running involved) and poses the question 'Is a single hydrogen atom more musical than a grand piano?' (to which I have helpfully added a picture of - yes you guessed it - an atom and a grand piano. You're welcome.)

The Summer concert 'A Garland of Song' on Saturday June 30th is round the corner. Do your bit to sell tickets! After all, who could resist our rendition of Bobby Shafto.

Angela Law,
Alto & Newsletter editor

Farewell from Valentine

I started choral singing when I was five years old and it has been a huge part of my life ever since. It follows naturally that the first thing I did when I came to the UK was to look for a choir to join. At the time I was living in Hambledon, but working in Marlow which gave me the choice of joining the Marlow Choral Society or the Henley Choral Society. Perhaps I could join both? Alas it was not to be as both held rehearsals on a Monday evening. Which one to choose? Marlow was more convenient due to my work location but the program sung in Henley was more appealing to me. After much consideration I decided to give it a try with HCS first and I have never looked back. I had such a great time and received such a warm welcome that I didn't feel the need to try out in Marlow. Here I was, 2 weeks after joining the choir, standing on the stage of the town hall in Reading performing Elgar's Dream of Gerontius. This was the first of many great experiences I would go on to have with HCS. I immediately felt part of this big family and it is always a pleasure to come and meet the choir, to sing or to have a drink after the rehearsal.

Over the past two years we have worked on a wonderfully diverse repertoire and on three occasions, I have been given the opportunity to sing as a soloist. I sang the second woman in Dido and Aeneas by Purcell in March 2017, O viridissima virga by Hildegard von Bingen in December 2017 and the Pie Jesu from Fauré's requiem in May 2018. I am very grateful for these opportunities that helped me grow as a singer and helped me build my confidence.

About a year ago I decided to apply to music school as a way to achieve my dream of singing professionally. After months of preparation and auditions, I finally got accepted to the University of York for an MA in Music:

Solo voices in ensemble singing with Robert Hollingworth, the director of I Fagiolini. I will be working with 7 other singers on 8-parts music. We will work together each week on repertoire, preparing for recitals and with coaching from the course tutor. I feel very happy and proud to be part of this MA and my time with HCS has definitely helped me get to where I am today

As you know, college education can be quite expensive and even though I have personal savings that will cover the tuition fees, I am still missing a few extra thousands for accommodation and living. If you would like to support me, I have opened a crowdfunding account: <https://www.gofundme.com/ma-in-music-accommodation-fundraising>

You can also get in touch with me via email: valentine.ford@hotmail.com.

I will definitely miss you all but we still have one concert before I leave, and who knows; maybe I will come back to sing with you in the future.

Musically yours,

Valentine



Youth choir goes from strength to strength

This year has seen the Youth Choirs go from strength to strength. In December the Youth Choirs sang in the Choral Society's Christmas Concerts; the Juniors in the afternoon and the Seniors in both the afternoon and evening concerts. It was really lovely that, this year, the choirs joined the Choral Society for two pieces - 'For unto us a child is born' and 'Gaudete'. The Seniors definitely got into the Christmas spirit in their performance of 'Santa Claus is coming to town' wearing Christmas hats! They all sang beautifully and really enjoyed the experience.

Anita D'Atellis, our wonderful accompanist, invited the Youth Choirs to sing at the 'Bring on the Youth' event which was part of a Winter Recitals series of concerts she was organising at St Mary's Church, Wallingford to raise money for the renovation of the church tower. So on 24th February, we all decamped to Wallingford. The concert, which also included Matthew Prior on the French Horn and Camille Morana on the violin, was a great success. The Youth Choirs gave great performances; the Juniors sang 'Shoshone Love Song', 'Seal Lullaby' and 'Lean on me' and the Seniors sang 'Irish Wren Song', 'Can you feel the love tonight', and 'Pages'. Both choirs also sang a medley from 'Joseph' and 'Summer is icumin in', a 13th century song, and Peter even got the audience to join in too! Many thanks to Anita for inviting the Youth Choirs to sing.



We were all set to enter the Woodley Festival in the 'Upper Junior Choir' and 'Young People's Choir' categories on Saturday 4th March. Both choirs have been practicing their two contrasting pieces and were really excited about taking part. Unfortunately the weather got the better of us and the events were cancelled due to snow!

Several of the Youth Choir singers sang at the Henley Youth Festival Sing event on 15th March at the Kenton Theatre. It was a wonderful evening and perhaps the highlight was Ellie Vokins receiving a standing ovation for her performance of Ave Maria. It was simply beautiful.

The Summer performance is going to be on 15th July at the Family Day at Henley Festival from 10.45-12.00. The day will be a workshop to which families are invited to come along and learn some songs, and 'perform' them at the end of the workshop. The Youth Choirs will also sing some songs they have been learning this term as part of the workshop too. All are welcome to come along, and bring friends and family. Tickets are available from the Henley Festival website.

We have had a great year and look forward to lots more singing from September! Please do spread the word about HYC to any young people, including your children, grandchildren or family friends; we are always happy to have new members.

Jo Dickson, Alto & HYC Committee member



HCS SUMMER PARTY - ALL WELCOME!

7.00pm Monday July 2nd

Kenricks, Hambledon, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 6RP

By kind invitation of Jill Steward

Tickets £5.00 available at rehearsals (free to Friends of HCS)

Please bring a plate of finger food. Partners welcome.

Taplow Psalmathon

The choir at St Nicolas in Taplow is looking for people to join them in a Psalmathon - singing all 150 Psalms to an Anglican chant on Sunday 16th September. Anyone who would like to take part can join them for an hour or two, or however long they can manage. The event is to raise funds for repairs to the church

roof, and they are asking people to sponsor the efforts as well as to come and listen.

For more details contact Neil Matthews
neilmatthews63@gmail.com or Gillian Dibden
gillian.dibden@gmail.com

Mike Hails, Bass & raffle organiser

A Henley Choral Society guide to keeping conductors in line

The basic training of every singer should, of course, include myriad types of practical and theoretical emphases. One important area which is often neglected, however, is the art of one-upmanship. The following rules are intended as guides to the development of habits which will promote the proper type of relationship between singer and conductor.

1. Never be satisfied with the starting pitch. If the conductor uses a pitch-pipe, make known your preference for pitches from the piano and vice-versa.
2. Complain about the temperature of the rehearsal room, the lighting, crowded space, and of a draft. It's best to do this when the conductor is under pressure.
3. Bury your head in the music just before cues.
4. Give the impression you're all about to quit. Let the conductor know you're there as a personal favour.
5. Loudly clear your throat during pauses (tenors are trained to do this from birth). Quiet instrumental interludes are a good chance to blow your nose.
6. Long after a passage has gone by, ask the conductor if your C# was in tune. This is especially effective if you had no C# or were not singing at the time.
7. At dramatic moments in the music (which the conductor is emoting), be busy marking your music so that the climaxes will sound empty and disappointing.
8. Wait until well into a rehearsal before letting the conductor know that you don't have the music.
9. Look at your watch frequently. Shake it in disbelief occasionally.
10. When possible, sing your part either an octave above or below what is written. This is excellent ear-training for the conductor. If he hears the pitch, deny it vehemently and claim that it must have been the combination tone.
11. Tell the conductor, 'I can't find the beat.' Conductors are always sensitive about their "stick technique" so challenge it frequently.

12. If you are singing in a language with which the conductor is the least bit unfamiliar, ask him as many questions as possible about the meaning of individual words. If this fails, ask him about the pronunciation of the most difficult words. Occasionally, say the word twice and ask his preference, making to say it exactly the same both times. If he remarks on their similarity, give him a look of utter disdain and mumble under your breath about the "subtleties of inflection".

13. Ask the conductor if he has listened to the von Karajan recording of the piece. Imply that he could learn a thing or two from it. Also good: ask, "Is this the first time you've conducted this piece?"

14. If your articulation differs from that of others singing the same phrase, stick to your guns. Do not ask the conductor which is correct until backstage just before the concert.

15. Find an excuse to leave the rehearsal about 15 minutes early so that others will become restless and start to fidget.

Mike Turner, Bass



What goes on tour with HCS... doesn't always stay on tour!

I feel conflicted as I write this; I am a great advocate of "what goes on tour, stay on tour", not least as I have been known to contribute to tour folklore! However, having been kindly volunteered to contribute to the newsletter, here goes...

Our tour started at the ungodly hour of 5am and I admit I was filled with trepidation, as like many going, I only knew who I sat with, week-after-week, and some of the obvious members of the committee. Fortified with a croissant to get us in the French mood, courtesy of Susan, we had an uneventful drive to Portsmouth and boarded our early morning ferry. Peter entertained us with an impromptu performance on board and there were plenty of early morning G&Ts imbibed, purely for medicinal reasons or because 9 o'clock is the same as lunchtime if you creatively do the maths!! Many commented on how lucky we were that the sea was as "smooth as a mill pond". (Drugged up on travel pills and sporting a natty pair of sea bands and static for 6 hours, I am not certain I agreed; note to self - must try Gin in future!)

We arrived in Falaise early afternoon, having made a small detour through Caen to pick up Marko Sever, our organist and, after 11 hours travelling, we finally met our wonderful French hosts or settled into our hotels. We had a free evening to sample the local cuisine; 18 of us spent a wonderful evening at Le Fin Forchette thanks to Jo's social sec. skills. This is where I will



invoke the "what goes on tour" rule as there was far too many size and organ related double entendres!

On Saturday the formal proceedings commenced, in brilliant sunshine, with a civic welcome from Maurice Ruau, Falaise Deputy Mayor, dressed in a Tricolor sash (very evocative of the French revolution!) in the grounds of Le Chateau de la Fresnaye. This was our first opportunity to meet members of Interlude and sample the locally-produced pear cider. After a quick visit to the local market (with very fresh produce!) it was off to Eglise Sainte-Trinité to begin our rehearsal. The church was very impressive and large, if a tad cold (English understatement - more like a fridge!). We made a beautiful sound together and were all looking forward to the evening concert.

A large, well-wrapped audience attended our concert. Interlude started the evening with excellent renditions of a mixed repertoire including *As Torrents in Summer* (Edward Elgar), *Avis Maris Stella* (Edvard Grieg), *Tantum Ergo* (Déodat de Séverac) and the gospel song, *Down the River*. I was particularly impressed with the choir's ability to sing with an English accent. We then followed with, dare I say it, after all our hard work our best performance of Fauré's *Requiem*, singing with colour and control, and received excellent feedback from our audience. We were then joined on stage by Interlude and together we sang another piece by Fauré, *Cantique de Jean Racine*, and *Dextra Domini* (César Franck).





As I sat on a smooth ferry ride home, with a small Pommeau to settle my stomach, I reflected on the weekend. It was a fantastic experience and I was so glad that I went along (Thanks to Fi for the hard sell!). I would encourage everyone, especially those who are relatively new like me, to consider joining future events as I really believe that spending time socialising, and getting to know more choir members, makes Monday rehearsals more fun and lifts our performance as a choir; it certainly did in Falaise.

Finally, I would like to thank Philip, or should I say "Sir Bennett", for all his hard work in organising the logistics and ensuring that we were fed at the hotel on Sunday night. The whole weekend went without a hitch.

Nicky Norminton, Soprano

The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly Valentine's solo. Looking and sounding angelic from her vantage point above the choir, her Pie Jesu emotionally touched everyone in the audience and choir alike. It was sad to think that this will be one of her last performances with the choir and we all wish her well with her fantastic opportunity at York Uni. Our loss is their gain!

Then back to the hotel for a late supper followed by pub games. Peter played a mean game of pool and we witnessed some outstanding darts thrown by the women's team defeating the St Sepulchre duo!

Our final day was spent getting to know Falaise, relaxing with our French hosts and choir celebrating the twinning of our two towns. In the morning, we had an incredibly interesting historic walking tour, learning about the development of the Norman settlement, and birth place of William the Conqueror, through to its almost complete destruction during WWII. The formal end to the weekend was a relaxed, and very delicious buffet lunch, where we sang a cheeky pavane, Belle qui tiens ma vie (Thoinot Arbeau), and consumed more cider. This culminated with a commitment to host a similar event next year in Henley.



Mozart's 'last gasp' shows his genius, originality and power

Going out on a damp and drizzly night is never a promising start for anything – but a concert by the Henley Choral Society always makes it well worth the effort.

This performance of music by Haydn, McDowall and Mozart in collaboration with the Brandenburg Sinfonia was no exception. Several hundred other people thought so too. It was a complete sell-out.

The reasons for this choir's popularity are not hard to find. The HCS is not only one of the largest choirs in Oxfordshire, it is immaculately turned out, very responsive to its inspiring conductor Peter Asprey, and it always "delivers the goods".

A case in point was their performance of Haydn's magnificent choral drama-in-miniature, the Te Deum for the Empress Marie Therese. A solid phalanx of sound with good balance between the voices was underpinned by crisp playing from the talented and supportive Brandenburg Sinfonia.

The orchestra was joined by soprano Lauren Zolezzi for the second item on the programme, Mozart's Exsultate, jubilate. This sacred motet, written for a virtuoso soloist, was clearly intended to be performed as a vocal showpiece. Zolezzi's delivery of it was technically immaculate, but her interpretation did not engender strong feelings of joy or excitement which are usually evoked on hearing this stimulating work.

The palindromic peace anthem, Ave Maris Stella, by the prolific British composer Cecilia McDowall was in a different category altogether. Clearly the choir had taken this attractive music to their hearts and supplied the passion that was lacking in the Mozart piece that preceded it.

The solos sung by Fi Harding so movingly from within the body of the choir reinforced this observation.

From the listener's point of view, the intellectual challenge was to wonder during the first half of McDowall's composition what it was going to sound like

when it was performed backwards in the second half of the piece. The audience showed their genuine appreciation of its undoubted beauty in good measure. The remainder of the programme was devoted to a thoroughly professional and life-affirming performance of Mozart's enigmatic Requiem. Part of the enigma is how this work came to be composed at all and for whom. The rest of it focuses on how Mozart, who by this time must have known that he was seriously ill, could still conceive a work of such originality and power.

The vocal quartet, comprising Lauren Zolezzi (soprano), Emma Lewis (mezzo-soprano), Sam Jenkins (tenor), and Rob Clark (baritone), was not evenly balanced, the lower voices predominating. But their solos were all excellent and accompanied sensitively by the ensemble.

The famous trombone solo, Tuba Mirum, was played delicately and very smoothly, matching the solo voice line most effectively. This was, perhaps, one of the last strokes of genius in Mozart's short life. Coupled with his inspired choice in this requiem of using plaintive basset horns in place of the usual clarinets, it implies that somehow Mozart was able to maintain his extraordinary capacity for inventiveness to the very end.

By John Burleigh, reproduced from the Henley Standard

Help yourself & get the most out of rehearsals

Free resources

- www.cyberbass.com
Free resource where you can play and download SATB parts to aid practice at home.
- <http://johnfletchermusic.me.uk>
Same as above, enjoyed by Francis Piesse.
- www.youtube.com
Listen to performances—anything and everything & varied quality!
- Just try Googling the name of the piece with 'voice' part after it. i.e. Purcell Dido & Aeneas Tenor part — you will be amazed at the variety of free resources, videos and recordings that turn up! Variable quality but useful for basic note bashing, so that you can 'refine' your performance at rehearsals!

Paid resources include:

- www.saffronprompt.com Tel: 01799 586269;
Address: Quintus Benziger, Great Stampford, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 2NY
- www.choraline.com Tel: 0845 3045070; you can buy SATB rehearsal CDs (or download MP3 Files from their website.) Address: Music Dynamics Limited, Stroud House, Station Road, Stroud, GL5 3AP

Whatever resources you use, practising at home will make rehearsals more productive and enjoyable.

New Musical Terms

ALLREGRETTO

When you're 16 measures into the piece and realize you set too fast a tempo

ANGUS DEI

To play with a divinely beefy tone

A PATELLA

Accompanied by knee-slapping

APPOLOGGIATURA

A composition that you regret playing

APPROXIMATURA

A series of notes not intended by the composer, yet sung with an "I meant to do that" attitude

APPROXIMENTO

A musical entrance that is somewhere in the vicinity of the correct pitch

CACOPHANY

A seasonal composition incorporating many people with chest colds

DILL PICCOLINI

An exceedingly small wind instrument that plays only sour notes

FERMANTRA

A note held over and over and over and over and ...

FIDDLER CRABS

Grumpy string players

FLUTE FLIES

Those tiny mosquitos that bother musicians on outdoor gigs

FRUGALHORN

A sensible and inexpensive brass instrument

GREGORIAN CHAMP

The title bestowed upon the monk who can hold a note the longest

GROUND HOG

Someone who takes control of the repeated bass line and won't let anyone else play it

PLACEBO DOMINGO

A faux tenor

THE RIGHT OF STRINGS

Manifesto of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Violists

SPRITZICATO

An indication to string instruments to produce a bright and bubbly sound

TEMPO TANTRUM

When a junior choir does not follow the conductor

VESUVIOSO

An indication to build up to a fiery conclusion

Contributed by Rosemary Woodroffe, Alto

A TV classical music judge gave tips to members of Henley Choral Society

Ken Burton, who has appeared on the BBC's *Choir of the Year* and Channel 4's *Gospel Singer of the Year*, led a workshop at the d:two Centre in Market Place on Saturday. After leading warm-up activities, he encouraged the choir to sing gospel and African tribal music while moving around the room, high-fiving them as they did so. The choir also sang sheet music including *I Feel Better Now* and *Total Praise*.

Burton said: "I'm bringing some of the technique and joy of gospel to the choir with the hope that they can connect the act of singing with the act of being open and free and wearing their heart on their sleeve. The classical focus on music and performance is correct but not necessarily moving, so I'm getting them used to connecting their heart and soul with their voice."

Emma Beesley, the society's publicity manager, said: "It was a really technical, demanding and emotional session. He worked us hard and we were harmonising really well. "The main thing we will take away was that he encouraged us to be ourselves and express our emotions in the music. A few of the members, including me, were moved to tears.

There's something about what he does that touched us. We have had a few guests like this now and it helps us to explore new ways of singing and takes us out of our comfort zones."

Reproduced from the Henley Standard, contributed by Cath Reynolds, Alto & PR Manager



A Musical Alphabet

ALTITUDE - the demeanour of lower voiced female members of a choir

BARITONE - the timbre of pub singing

COUNTERTENOR - operatic character who insists on jumping on bar tops to declaim arias

DA CAPO - what da rap singer wears on da head to keep off da sun

ESPRESSIVO - having the quality of sweet milky coffee

FAN BELT - area outside the stage door where autographs are signed

GUEST CONDUCTOR - front of house steward

HARMONIC INTERVAL - refreshment break in which no fighting takes place

INSTRUMENTAL WORK - piano tuning

JAM SESSION - cooking preserves

KEYBOARD - place to hang locking devices

LIGHT OPERA - fireworks display

MELODIC SEQUENCE - tune

NATURAL - born singer

OVERTURE - chat up line

PIANISSIMO - very small keyboard instrument

QUAVER - tremor

RELATIVE PITCH - attempt to secure a job for one's offspring

SILVER BAND - engagement ring

TESCO NON BIO - supermarket washing powder

UPPER REGISTER - the gentry

VIRTUOSO - well behaved

WIND INSTRUMENT - hurdy-gurdy

X POSITION - Composer's stance when developing a musical theme

YALE KEY - Particular style of American university music

ZIMBALUM - positively the last word in musical instruments

Contributed by John Legh, Bass

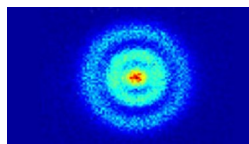
Is a single hydrogen atom more musical than a grand piano?

I have read that the physicist and pianist Arnold Sommerfeld has suggested that a single hydrogen atom which emits one hundred frequencies, is more musical than a grand piano which emits only eighty-seven frequencies. This seems to take us into the realms of quantum physics, which I must admit is well beyond me, and I haven't been able to identify the source of this quote.

Another musical quote that I came across is by Lewis Thomas: 'If we had better hearing and could discern

the descants of seabirds, the rhythmic timpani of schools of mullets, and even the distant harmonies of flies hanging over meadows in the sun, the combined sounds might lift us off our feet.'

Mike Hails, Bass & raffle organiser



Sing. Enjoy. Support.

Become part of Henley Choral Society

www.henleychoralsociety.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 276728

Gill Green

Pianoforte Tuner/Technician

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