

# *Altrincham Choral Society Newsletter*

## *November 2006*

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### *Chairman's Chatter*

I can feel the excitement building for Elijah! Almost everyone I talk to in the choir tells me they are listening to their CD's, often in the car, and can't get the music out of their heads. It's the same with me. All last week I was laving the thirsty land; this week I'm being not afraid. It looks as though Elijah will be our first sell-out concert since the Verdi Requiem in November 2002, when we sold 463 tickets. That's a huge compliment to the enthusiasm of our members. The story of Elijah starts in 1 Kings chapter 17. It's an enthralling drama and I'm planning to go over it again the night before the concert to get me fully in the mood!

It's great to know that we will be singing Elijah again with Steven's Chesterfield choir in Sheffield next March. Before then there's the evening in Chester Cathedral (7 December), our own Carol Concert (16 December), and our Singing Day (3 March).

There's also the Sale Charity Shop (opening up Monday 29 January for 3 days) and our annual dinner (9 February – a ceilidh). Busy times!

A big 'Thank You' to our retiring Treasurer, Ted Thompson, for his long service in this demanding role and for keeping our finances in such good shape. We're very pleased to welcome Terry Goodill as our new Treasurer. Thanks also to Ann Davidson, who is stepping down from the committee but, I'm glad to say, will be continuing as Editor of this Newsletter. Welcome to Christine Fitzgerald, who becomes our Patrons Secretary, and to Gordon Cooper as our new Bass voice rep.

And now back to Elijah. I keep getting lost just after the sea was upheaved and before the earth was shaken. Must practise!  
Dudley Harrop

### *Maestro's Musings*

Next to the Messiah, Mendelssohn's Elijah is probably the most popular choral work in this country. Choirs enjoy singing this masterpiece and audiences enjoy listening to it. In spite of the labels of 'Victorianism' and 'Old-Fashioned' this work is as popular today as it was at its premiere performance in 1846, and there is a warm appreciation surrounding it, even before rehearsals begin.

Elijah was composed at the end of Mendelssohn's life and was certainly a high point in his compositional genius.

Influenced by both Bach and Handel, the oratorio in two-parts is carried along with a series of recitatives, arias and choruses,

with the chorus often playing a dramatic role along with the main protagonist Elijah.

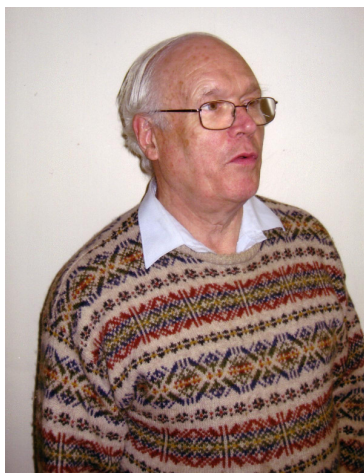
There is a real sense of word-painting in this piece and the audience should be able to visualise the drama progressing, particularly in some of the more 'fiery' choruses.

The story unfolds as a series of tableaux allowing the Israelites to suffer appalling trials and tribulations whilst cheerfully praising God for his goodness.

It is always a privilege to conduct this work and to see it start to take a dramatic shape, culminating in the powerful combination of orchestral textures, solo and choral singing.

## *John Charlton – One Man's Mead*

John's avuncular presence in the ranks of ACS is something we have come to take for granted, but who is he – apart from a member of the much vaunted bass section? He is a modest man, particularly as far as his singing is concerned. He joined the choir as a tenor when Gordon Stewart was conductor. How good naturedly he suffered what he calls the weekly "trashing" of the tenors under this director. When Steven decided to listen individually to the men of the choir he decreed that John should be promoted to the first basses. Happily this has not led to trashing of the first basses, at any rate not every week. John says he will have a go at whatever our musical director cares to risk his reputation on, but reckons he needs support for such things as time, notes and words from those around him. He says he is always expecting a quiet tap on the shoulder accompanied by the instruction "Don't sing!", but no one else expects such an injunction unless it is a general one to the first basses. John is a long time member of Sale Male Voice Choir and still functions as a tenor with this ensemble.



Confusion might result from this, but it is found that an elbow in the ribs tends to keep him onside.

John was born in South London (it seems that both Blackheath and Greenwich have claims on him). Asked about his education he says that he went to about 10 schools "all over the place" – no suggestion that the ins and outs were other than voluntary – before winding up at MGS from where he went on to Salford

Tech and Birmingham University, obtaining a degree in Chemical Engineering. It was in chemical processes that he made his career, specialising in cryogenics and heat exchanger design. He was involved in components from deep sea submarines to space satellites as well as mundane static earth based equipment.

Most of the choir know that John keeps bees – and in no small way – he has never failed to collect a prize card when exhibiting at the Royal Show or National Honey Show. This year he won a large silver cup at the Royal Show for his 20 year old mead. Sadly little is left to further improve, so younger vintages will have to prove their worth. He never exhibits honey in jars, since, although the honey may look perfect, it lacks the subtle flavour of unprocessed or unheated honey. Beekeeping led to an interest in microscopy, bee diseases and pollen identification, and he is a member of the Manchester Microscopical & Natural History Society and is their slide curator. Incidentally, he has kept bees for twice as long as he has been in ACS – which is 27 years.

Clearly John is a man of many parts, and it turns out that a lot of these belong to vintage motorcycles. A motorcyclist in his youth, he now sports a vintage machine, which is taken quite successfully on national reliability trials. Maintenance and fashioning of spare parts are carried out in his "shed" where he also makes his beehives. He is probably perfecting a practical elixir (honey based of course) in this shed. He has so many interests – he can't allow them to come to an end, abruptly or gradually. He says that now that the family has grown up (he speaks here of, in order of seniority, Clare, Beth and Harry) and need only occasional help with installing a new bathroom, a central heating system, or getting an aged car through its MOT, he should have more time for his other interests.

John gives the impression of a man with all the time in the world, but in reality he is busy as a ... (No! please) ... Yet it is very rarely that he misses a rehearsal, still less a concert. He obviously gets a buzz out of choral singing – all right, it had to come!

## *Cummings and Goings*

Last summer we went to France. We always try to attend to a local concert and make invidious comparisons with ACS on these visits. So, at the start of the holiday, we went to a local Tourist Information office to find out what was happening.

There was nothing the first week, but we were in luck, the second week in a town about half an hour away from where we were staying at Etamps, a choir were performing the Schubert Mass in E flat and Mozart Laudate Dominum – just up our street! We took the details and, as the weather was not too good then, we decided to find the Church where the concert would take place. Having found it, and had a look around, we booked a meal the following week in a restaurant nearby and then planned to go on to the Concert.

The day arrived and we set off in plenty of time arriving at the Church about two hours before the Concert.

It was deserted – no flyers on the wall and all doors locked. We were a little surprised but decided to have our meal and then go back at the appointed time. We asked at the restaurant and were told not to worry, as in France they do not open the doors of Churches until just before an event.

Having stuffed ourselves with wonderful French cuisine, we walked back to the church and were pleased to see others heading in the same direction. However, they were very casually dressed as they carried their music into the church. The noise inside was just like a party– it was not a concert, but the first rehearsal of the season for the music and they were all

greeting their friends and catching up with their news! Mike, as usual, was not to be deterred and immediately went over to where the basses were assembling and the next thing I knew, he was holding some music and getting ready to join in. Obviously, I did not want to be left out so I went and asked some of the women if I could sing with them. They only spoke French but I managed to make myself understood and somebody gave me the score. There we were, all ready for a choir rehearsal, when we had intended to hear the performance.

We had a wonderful sing with them – music is international like Latin - so it did not matter that we spoke very little French and just about managed to understand the Maestro who went on at length about the difficulty of singing, like Stephen does, the Schubert before he started. There was nepotism introduced though as the soloist, one of the choristers, who did have a beautiful voice, was his daughter. Later, an alto soloist was required and his wife took the part (not so lovely) and he sang the tenor solos!

The acoustics in a medieval church are quite fantastic and the sound there was enough to make two Jews convert to the faith.

At the end of the rehearsal, we were asked if we would be able to sing in the Concert in December – the same day as our Carol Concert – and Mike was given a membership form as the maestro had given him an impromptu audition.

What a great experience for us and one we will remember for a long time.

Jean Tragen.

## *Singing Day*

**10.00 am to 5.00 pm, Saturday 3rd March 2007**  
**Altrincham Methodist Church**  
**Springfield Road, Altrincham, WA14 1HF**

### **Karl Jenkins**

#### *Requiem*

The UK's most popular contemporary composer, Karl Jenkins was born in 1944 and was raised in Penclawdd, South West Wales. His father was a school teacher, organist and choir master, who taught Karl music theory and the piano.



While at Gowerton Grammar School, Karl played oboe in the National Youth Orchestra of Wales, before reading music at the University of Wales, Cardiff. He went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

**Górecki *Totus Tuus* for unaccompanied mixed choir Op. 60 (1987)**



Born on 6 December 1933, Henryk Mikolj Górecki studied composition with Boleslaw Szabelski at the State Higher School of Music (PWSM) in Katowice (1955-1960). After a post-graduate sojourn in Paris, he became a professor of composition at the PWSM in Katowice, and-- in 1975-1979--its Rector. As a composer, he has been known and respected in Poland, but not well-known around the world. The phenomenal success of his Symphony no. 3 (*Gramophone's* "Best-selling CD in 1993") has astounded many of his contemporaries, especially in Poland, where the work had been known for more than a decade. In his home country Górecki's Third was perceived as one of a series of fascinating compositions, the result of a long and complex creative evolution.