

## New Venue

Altrincham Methodists, Springfield Road,  
from March 1st  
except 15th March, 26th April, 24th May.

### The Great Mr Handel

Not many (perhaps not even our film buff musical director) will know this 1942 film, a rare example of a British made composer biopic, and in Technicolor, something of a rarity at that time. Now that one's age is in the public domain I need not pretend that I have seen the film on some movie channel or on video.

One critic's laconic summary is that it tells how Handel came to write *The Messiah* and thus provide a living for generations of English orchestral players in Yorkshire. It is doubtful whether Handel was mainly motivated by a concern for the prosperity of tyke trumpeters, and, indeed, this apparently stolid man is said to have attested to divine inspiration in his oft quoted words - "I did think I did see all heaven before me and the great God himself". Whether the film graphically conveyed this I cannot remember at this distance, but I do remember that the performance of Wilfrid Lawson as Handel leaned towards the plainness and earthiness of the great composer, yet at the same time one could hardly imagine him composing a concerto grosso. There was clearly midnight-oil burning shown in the film - the composition of *Messiah* took only 24 days start to finish.

The work was first performed in Dublin, probably in response to an invitation from the Lord-Lieutenant to put on a concert in aid of Dublin charities. The choir was mostly made up of local singers, men and boys including members of the two cathedral choirs. There is some uncertainty about numbers, but it is likely that the total was no more than thirty. Large

scale performances of the work, with choirs augmented by amateurs, seem to date from the 1820s. By this time Mozart had doctored the work, but in no outrageous manner. One of his changes was to add woodwind to provide the figured bass when no organ was available. Towards the end of the 19th century there was a shift in attitudes and a more historically "authentic" performance was favoured by some authorities such as Sir George Grove. *Messiah* is divided into three parts, depicting Christ's birth, death and resurrection. Though the modern preference seems to be for performing it at Christmas or thereabouts, it is not at all inappropriate that we are choosing to do so near to Easter. As it happens, last time we did it in December. This was in 1997, so we come to it freshly, perhaps more so than those choirs who feature it in their programme every year without fail. One should never be blasé about this great masterpiece. ACS lore has it that there was once a bass (although this behaviour is more suited to a tenor) who, before the start of the Hallelujah chorus would close his copy ostentatiously and say "Don't need the book for this", only to demonstrate betimes that he did need it.

Above all *Messiah* is a great sing. There are as many as twenty choruses, most of them meaty ones, but equally there are good rests through the arias. If you haven't already got a disc you are happy with may I recommend a "small forces" recording which has great clarity. It is that of the Scholars Baroque Ensemble on Naxos 8.550667-668 - £10 the two CDs.

John Greenan

## TEA ROTA

2nd Feb	Ian Mottram	Jane Hollinshead
9th Feb	Jane Hollinshead	Audrey Taylor
16th Feb	Audrey Taylor	Allison Lumsden
23-Feb	Allison Lumsden	Brian Taylor
01-Mar	Brian Taylor	Estelle Goodwin
08-Mar	Estelle Goodwin	Brian Whitehouse
15-Mar	<b>Hale Methodist</b>	
22-Mar	Brian Whitehouse	Norma Nock
29-Mar	Norma Nock	Audrey Sharman
05-Apr	Audrey Sharman	Kate Robinson
19-Apr	Kate Robinson	Linley Roach
26-Apr	Hale Methodist	Hale Methodist
03-May	Linley Roach	Jean Tragen
10-May	Jean Tragen	Joyce Astill
17-May	Joyce Astill	Helen Whitehouse
24-May	<b>Hale Methodist</b>	
31-May	<b>Bank Holiday</b>	
07-Jun	Helen Whitehouse	Joyce Fuller
14-Jun	Joyce Fuller	Hannah Wright
21-Jun	Hannah Wright	Olive Gilmour
28-Jun	Olive Gilmour	Kate Barlow
05-Jul	Kate Barlow	Gail Hunt

**Please note - on the occasions when we are at Hale Methodist Church tea will not be supplied during the interval (tea-making equipment will be at Altrincham).**

## THE ACS FUND RAISING TEAM

*Progress Report – January 2004*

It's great to have some good news to share with you! Firstly, we have had a fair measure of success in attracting a number of new Patrons. Out of 11 people whom we approached, only two declined. We have raised over £2000 in this way this year. Naturally, we hope that most of our Patrons will stay with us for the long term and continue to come and enjoy our concerts. Secondly, the Sale Charity Shop venture has been a resounding success. In only 2\_ days of trading, we were able to make a net profit of £943.66! There are so many people to thank for this tremendous result.

Primarily Cathy Merrell for proposing, planning and organising the project from start to finish. What a lot of hard work! And then the regiment of volunteer 'sales assistants' who coped with almost constant rain, lots of customers, the occasional smelly dog, and a veritable mountain of 'stuff'. If you haven't seen it, you wouldn't believe it! So thanks also to all the choir members who contributed so generously and took the trouble to take their 'stuff' to the shop. There was a good deal left over – but none of it will be wasted. It will all be recycled to Christie's and Oxfam, to other charity shops or to subsequent tenants in the Sale shop. And the best news of all – it was a lot of fun!

The future? The Funding Team is now about to focus on a number of specific charities who might be kind to us and also on local companies who may like to support such a worthy – and high quality – local arts organisation as ACS. In approaching them, it's so important to be able to say that we're not just sitting back and expecting their generosity. We're working hard to raise money ourselves through projects like the Sale shop and the regular cake/book/CD stalls at rehearsals. But, do you know the two best ways of raising money? Attracting more members into the choir – and having sell-out audiences at our concerts. Messiah could help us achieve both - with your support and enthusiasm.

Dudley Harrop.

## SING UP!

Singing has been scientifically discovered to be good for your health and wellbeing. But why do we sing? John Skoyles, a London-based expert on the evolution of human intelligence, says that singing probably evolved before religion - even before speech - so that we could croon love songs.

He believes that we first developed voices to sing. "Song is a powerful means for parents to form bonds, helping couples to stay together to bring up children," he says. He argues that this mechanism now manifests itself in group vocal hugs such as football chants and choirs.

Singing's health benefits are widely acknowledged. Dr Lars Olov Bygren, of Umea University in Sweden, found from a study of 12,675 people that those who sing together are likely to live longer than those who don't. And Newcastle University research shows communal singing is good for mind and body because it improves muscle tone and blood oxygen levels.

Then there's that addictive high: Manchester University scientists have found that the sacculus, an organ in the inner ear which responds to frequencies found in music, is connected to the brain's pleasure centre. Studies indicate that the sacculus is sensitive only to low-frequency, high-intensity sounds, which includes singing.

We songsters warble not in levity  
But mainly to ensure longevity.  
A gentle twanging of the sacculus  
Can lead to things almost miraculous.  
So open wide your collective mug  
And treat yourselves to a vocal hug.

## It Just Takes Will Power

Have you thought of making a bequest in your will to the Society? This can be a great way to ensure the future of the Society. Think about it now – its no use after the event!

## SINGING DAY

Here it is! The opportunity to try two (probably new) works without being harranged by Steven to get **all** the notes right. We're there to have some fun. Remember to put the date in your diaries – April 24th, 10–5.00pm

## OPEN REHEARSAL

As announced, we are holding a second open rehearsal evening on **FEBRUARY 23rd**. We had a good response on the last occasion, so invite your singing friends along and see if we can do the same again.

**NB** Next edition of the Newsletter will be in April.

## HARKIN' T' MESSIAH

Ted Buckley were a smart lookin' chap as folk knew  
When 'e donned hissel' up a courtin' t'goo.  
'E were courtin' a lass' 'at seemed a bit soft,  
But 'e weren't much better, for 'e went middlin' oft.  
'E went four neets a week and sometimes 'twere more,  
'E geet theer in good time, but ne'er knew when to goa.

There come a neet when 'e geet theer quite lat'  
Poor lass couldn't tell whether 'e were sick, 'urt or what.  
It were Sunday before Christmas, I bethink me o't'day,  
For t'snow 'ad been fallin' and reet thick it lay.  
When it struck nine o'clock there were no signs o' Ted,  
'Er'd ne'er expected 'im if 'er'd been reet in 'yed.

'Owever, 'er 'and't much longer t'wait  
For 'er 'eard sound o'somebody rattlin' o't'gate.  
Next minute dur open'd and Ted walked reet in.  
'Er looked fowl as 'er could but 'ed still same old grin.  
"Ee it's a bad neet" e' said as 'e cowed down in't chair.  
"Ar, there's been many a worse" 'er said wi' a sneer.

"Now where's ti been goin? I'd just like t'know.  
Tha cannot blame everythin' that 'appens on t'snow"  
'E said, "Owd thee tantrums and dunnut turn pale;  
Tha'll alter thi tune when I've told thi mi tale.  
I've been over t'old chapel t'arken t'choir,  
They've been givin selections from Ondel's Messiah.

New parson were theer but 'e didn't speak long;  
They were a'itchin to 'ear that sweet service o'song.  
Now I cannot bethink me as 'ow it all went,  
But I'll try to explain what I think it all meant.  
Now they sung of some sheep that 'ad gotten astray;  
As I understand it, they'd gan their own way.

"I don't know 'ow many, or 'ow much they cost,  
But that maks no difference, main thing is they was lost.  
Then a feller stood up, an 'e sang by 'issel';  
Now whether they were 'is sheep as were lost I cannot  
tell.  
But 'e said every valley and 'ill ud be made low.  
I thowt they mean to find yon sheep that's missin' th'  
know.

"Then a woman geet up in a reet clear voice;  
Told 'em noan to worry but greatly rejoice.  
Ee!... it were a stiff piece, I'm sure it were 'ard wark,  
But 'er sang it as easy as the 'er were a lark.  
I asked for 'er name to 'ear 'er again some fine day,  
"It's our leadin' singer" a chap said, "Miss Clay."  
"Then a feller jumped up an' by 'eck 'e singed cross,  
I were wonderin' if they were 'is sheep they'd tecken  
an' lost.  
'E said y'ed imagine a vain thing in a rage'  
While th'organist banged on as though for a wage.  
But th'audience were suited, you could tell bi their face,  
An' they sighed wi' relief when 'e cowed down in 'is  
place.

"Then t'rest of t'choir, mad at 'im bein' so clever,  
Started singin' it ud rain forever an' ever.  
I made for t'dur as fast as I could;  
I thowt, I 'd best get wom it there's bound t'be flood.  
Now I've towed this mi tale about 'arkenin t'Messiah.  
I 'ope as tha suited an' satisfied Sophia."

"Ah weel" er said, "tha makes it sound grand,  
I'd like t'ear it missel next time it comes round."  
"I'll tek thi missel'" Ted promised Sophia  
As 'e utched up 'is chair a bit nearer t'fire.  
"Ee, that'll be champion" er said, comin' round,  
"An' 'appen bi that time yon sheep'll be found."

Anon

## Forget Harry Potter-We have our own Wizard!!!

We, at ACS, have a wealth of information on our web-site and it is all lovingly cared for (with frightening efficiency) by our very own resident Web Wizard, Colin Skelton. Despite a (slightly) less efficient publicity manager, whose ideas for the site far out-weighs her technical web abilities, Colin manages the impossible and creates and maintains an exciting, informative site, which promotes all aspects of ACS, not just the concerts.

For example, did you know that photos from the last three concert tours are featured in the 'Members Information' section? Your chance to re-live the food, the wine, the culture, the ambiance, the never-failing camaraderie of the 'Brits Abroad'....something else.....erm....THE SINGING! Sorry Steven. Oops!

For those who sang at a slightly 'quicker' – and noisier – concert than usual, there are pictures of ELO and the 'heavenly' choir (Manchester Evening News) too!

However, despite (in spite of?) all this nostalgia, there is also a very practical side to the web-site, in that it details concerts and how to get tickets, and gives details about us, as a choir, what our hopes and aims for the future are, and how people can come and join us. There is a mailing list for people who want details of concerts, singing days etc and also an e-mail link for people who want to talk to a 'real person'! Which shows you how the site works for others, but how, you might ask, does it

work for you?

Well, if you are unsure about a rehearsal date, you can simply click on the 'Members Information' button and you'll find a rehearsal schedule. You'll also find committee meeting dates, plus copies of the ACS newsletter (You may be reading this in there now!). New members have their own section which gives details of where we are (yes, both venues are mentioned along with the relevant dates) and a map of the area so that they can find us.

Talking of new venues, there is also a section on the home page (that's the front page to you and me) of the site, which will give you details of when and where rehearsals are for the next couple of months, in case you didn't get the details last week.

There are lots more things to look at on the web-site – a biography of the ever-charming Lydia – photos at the RNCM – future concerts, past concerts....

BUT, (come on, you knew there had to be one, didn't you?) there is always room for more, so any ideas (sensible or otherwise) as to any more additions to the site will be very welcome.

So what are you waiting for-Get Surfing!  
– [www.altrincham-choral.co.uk](http://www.altrincham-choral.co.uk)

Melanie



# ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

[www.altrincham-choral.co.uk](http://www.altrincham-choral.co.uk)

Registered charity no 500729

## January 2004 Newsletter

### Re. Joyce

Joyce Crimes, doyenne (service not age) of the alto section, had long entertained the idea of an ACS concert for charity and had more than once invited consideration of the project. In the summer of 2001 she introduced the topic again with heightened determination, and her eloquent pleading secured approval for her to develop the idea. Joyce had more than a mere outline already in her head and she had soon presented a viable scenario for a concert at Stockport Town Hall in aid of Barnardo's. Bollington Brass Band would also participate. The concert would be in December 2003.

There followed exploratory meetings and Joyce fleshed out the plan with great energy and singleness of purpose. She was not entirely without help from other choir members (Andrew Wragg notably in the later stages gave support), but it was Joyce who worked through everything which had to be done, and that was a considerable amount. There were obstacles to overcome - not the least being that early in 2003 Joyce was found to have breast cancer, and has had to contend with surgery and prolonged treatment, not to mention the inevitable worry, which in truth was not outwardly evident. She was not in the slightest deflected from her objective. She maintained her enthusiasm and the final turnout from ACS was nearly 100%.

Nigel Ogden of *The Organist Entertains* was added to the list of attractions. We had no clear expectations about the evening, but the planning had been meticulous, and indeed it was a personal triumph for Joyce, though few of the audience would know this. The venue was an impressive one, there was a full house, including Mayor and Mayoresses of Stockport, Bollington and Trafford. Bollington Brass Band, under Peter Christian, was extremely competent and very smart, Nigel Ogden plied his myriad wizardry on the Mighty Wurlitzer, Lydia was her usual excellent self, and Steven was an ebullient compere/conductor. He had the audience eating out of the palm of his hand and we saw plenty of their palms as Steven induced them repeatedly to perform what can only be described as an Irish form of the Mexican wave, with everyone rising to their feet at the same time in our pastiche-German encore number *Schneewalzer*. The choir wasn't bad either, in the serious as well as the knockabout items.

Since the project for the charity concert was launched one has heard choir members ask "What's in it for us?". The answer surely cannot now be "Nothing". We had the satisfaction of helping to raise £3500 for a children's charity, and do not need to be coy about it. Our gratitude must go to Joyce for organising what turned out to be a life-enriching event. Let's do it again.

### The Lancashire Chamber Orchestra

The Lancashire Chamber Orchestra was formed in 1969 to give string teachers and talented amateurs the opportunity to perform to a high standard under the direction of a professional musician. Music for strings forms the core of the repertoire, but the orchestra expands to include wind, brass and percussion as the occasion demands. We have performed with many distinguished soloists in recent years including Peter Donohoe, Yuri and Dimitri Torchinski, Dina Parakhina, Peter Dixon and Graham Salvage. In June 2002, Robert Chasey in celebration of his many years as the orchestra's director, conducted the Lancashire Chamber Orchestra in a recording on CD of string music by Ireland,

Elgar, Barber and Tchaikovsky. (Copies may be purchased through members of the orchestra). The orchestra has for many years had strong links with the Blackburn Choral Society and the MAIA Singers of Stockport and has concerts in the near future with both choirs in Blackburn and at the RNCM. The orchestra's next concert takes place on **Saturday 27th March** (7.30pm) at St John's Church Altrincham when we shall be playing under the direction of the young American conductor Kenneth Woods in a programme to include Mozart's Symphony No 35 and the oboe concerto Richard Strauss, with soloist Rachel Clegg, principal oboe player of the Manchester Camerata.