

# Altrincham Choral Society Newsletter – April 2007

## *Chairman's Chatter*

Well, I keep slipping up on my Carmina Banana. My trillirivoses get mixed up with my nazazas, and I'm having a bit of trouble with my Wafna. It's not easy In Taberna either; maybe I should get down to the pub more often. Meanwhile, all the ladies seem word perfect and even the tenors are doing a pretty impressive hinc, hinc, hinc. Very annoying! I must go through Stephen Secretan's practice disc a few more times – and only a week to go!

But what a busy few months to look back on! Three carol concerts – our usual URC offering, St Andrew's Court and Chester Cathedral. Not long into the New Year, and we featured on Channel M TV in their piece about Altrincham. Then the trip over the hills to join Chesterfield Philharmonic Choir in Elijah – still very much in our minds from our own sell-out performance at the RNCM last November. With around 150 singers on (or nearly on) stage, I think we all felt this was an inspiring performance; and it was good to meet up again with our friends from Steven's other choir.

This, of course, is nothing to what we'll have at the Bridgewater on Sunday April 29th – almost 400 singers from 6 choirs, as we are joined by Salford Choral Society, Blackburn Music Society, Keighley Vocal Union, Nelson Arion Male Voice Choir and trebles from Oldham Grammar School for Boys. Plus a leading orchestra, conductor James Eastham (celebrating 25 years with Salford) and Simon Keenlyside, whom I heard on Radio 3 this morning. The logistics will be demanding, but the performance should be terrific!

What else, looking ahead? Our summer programme is being put together around

the theme of 'English sacred music down the ages'. Bringing it right up to date will be the piece we have commissioned from our deputy conductor, David. From a large number of texts proposed by our members, David chose 'Virtue' – a short poem by George Herbert. We are seeking up to four local companies to share in the funding for this project. After our opening concert at the RNCM on 7 July, we shall be appearing at St Mary's, Kirkby Lonsdale on the following Saturday, and then travelling to Florence a few days later for two concerts there. Join ACS and see the world!

All this activity is possible only with the creativity and hard work of a surprising number of members. We thank: Pam Moulton for arranging (yet another) adventurous trip abroad; Liz Foy for her many years as Committee Secretary; Kathy Duffy for stepping into Liz's shoes; Joyce Fuller and Rosie Lucas for joining the Music Committee; and a host of unsung heroes who organise tickets, coaches, programmes, publicity, music, musicians, seating, the website, this Newsletter, patrons, VIP hosting, bouquets, folders, charity shop, dinners – and cups of tea. Thanks to all.

And how appropriate to this sunny Spring weather is Simon Keenlyside's first solo:

“Omnia sol temperat, purus et subtilis,

Novo mundo reserat faciem Aprilis.”

But, anyway, back to the score. O Fortuna!

Dudley Harrop

## *Per Ardua ad Alto*

I was one of those “war babies “ – born in Altrincham and going to school in Timperley, then Hale and finally to Altrincham Grammar School for Girls. I can never remember not singing. My mother and her mother had both been soprano soloists in their local choirs, and I was therefore brought up to Edward German’s *Merrie England* and Handel’s *Messiah* as well as the usual childhood songs and of course the Methodist Hymn Book. As a family we attended a little chapel in George Street, where Marks and Spencer is today, and we would be there morning afternoon and nights on Sundays. Quite a marathon looking back and my mother always managed to cook a roast dinner between Church and afternoon Sunday School.



I was typical of my generation, very active in Guides, having piano lessons each week ( but I didn’t enjoy the practising in the winter because it was before central heating and I was only allowed one bar of the electric fire and that was put about a foot away from my legs. As a result my legs got burned. Fingerless gloves was the means of keeping the hands from actual frostbite. ) I loved sport and all types of music and particularly drama.

Having trained to be a teacher of drama I opted to start in a Primary School. Then I married David and we spent sixteen glorious years travelling with the Royal Air Force. We both kept up with our music and were members of the Weston-super-Mare Operatic Society. I led the church choir at each “ posting “ – but our only overseas tour was to RAF Valley in Anglesey. So when Lady Baden Powell as Chief Guide came to Wales I had to lead the camp fire in Machynlleth. Over two thousand Guides, an incredible number of flags and I had the only microphone; I had to lead the Welsh National Anthem in a

language which I couldn’t speak – difficult but quite a challenge!

In May 1997 my husband who had left the Royal Air Force in 1980 and had subsequently become a Councillor for Trafford was elected Mayor and I was his Mayoress. It was an incredible year, almost unreal because of the number of engagements we had to fulfil. I can remember that we only took Christmas Day off because Boxing Day saw us on official duty at Manchester United F.C.!! During the year we were official guests at many concerts, plays and tournaments

and it soon became apparent to me that Altrincham Choral Society’s standard of performance was superior to that of the other societies. Therefore, when our year of office was over I auditioned as a first soprano to be told tactfully by Steven that the choir would benefit

if I sang contralto! I have sung in every concert since then other than *The Dream of Gerontius* and so I’ll have to wait.....

I have had three books published, one on the Methodist Heritage of Altrincham, the second on my year as Mayoress of Trafford and the third on Stamford Park School. In the course of fund raising discussions I was able to suggest that we hired the charity shop in School Road Sale, and the result was that I have been charged with organising the enterprise for the last four years. Happily this year’s was our best result yet.

I love my involvement with ACS. We have a lot of fun. When I joined I hardly expected to play Fairy Godmother in a minimalist yet hilarious version of *Cinderella* or to sing the Flanders and Swann number *The Gas-Man Cometh* with the now chairman as the eponymous CORGI. Above all it is an immeasurable joy to participate in the singing of great choral works.

Catherine Merrell

## *ACS at the Bridgewater Hall*

It doesn't seem too long ago since we were singing Symphonic Queen and the effective backing vocals for ELO. Well it was, so I am especially pleased for us to be able to take part in this concert.

The Bridgewater Hall is a fabulous venue and one which I was privileged to conduct in for the first time in January, so I am sure to sing in it again will be special.

Remembering the quality of sound of the combined voices of Altrincham and Chesterfield, and the power that these forces could produce in our recent performance of Elijah in Sheffield was thrilling for everyone.

Imagine, almost 400 voices coming together in possibly one of the most well-known and exciting of choral pieces, not

to mention the glorious harmonies of the Parry and the passion of the Wagner.

You will have a great time and whilst there will be difficulties bringing together such large forces, the end result will be one to remember. A tour de force for Conductor, Orchestra and Choir alike. Enjoy the experience!

In contrast to the vibrancy of this concert, we become more intimate for our next concert and discover some of the most beautiful of English sacred music and being able to perform not only once, but three times, and especially in the evocative city of Florence.

Certainly a season to remember.

Steven

## *ACS Summer Programme Commission*

I am delighted to be writing a new piece for Altrincham Choral Society!

The poem that I have chosen from the shortlist submitted is George Herbert's *Virtue*. The simplicity and cyclical nature of the text really struck a chord with me and the poignancy of the poem was just the kind of character I wanted to set to music.

Many of my compositions are rather light-hearted and have some kind of underlining dry humour in the music; so writing a more 'serious' composition is something I really wanted to challenge myself with. So far, two of the four verses have been set (although maybe

the piece will be finished by the time you read this!) and the music carries a very reflective quality, starting with solos for female voices and the choir gradually joining part by part. I am enjoying writing many close harmony dissonances and pensive suspensions! The work is set a cappella and, part by part, should be challenging but certainly achievable in rehearsal. There's no point in alienating the choir and audience with over-complexity.

I hope the music will grab the listener and performers with a simplistic beauty.

David Lloyd-Mostyn

## COMING SOON

April 25 Wednesday	Carmina Burana etc rehearsal at St Philip's, Salford	Coach from Hale War Memorial at 6.15 pm Arrival at St Philip's – 7.00 pm
April 29 Sunday	Carmina Burana etc concert at Bridgewater Hall	Coach from Hale War Memorial at 12.30 pm Arrival at Bridgewater – 1.00 pm for rehearsal at 2.00 pm Concert starts 7.30 pm
April 30 Monday	Start of rehearsals for summer programme – 'Alleluia'	Rehearsals: May 7, 14, 21, 28 June 4, 11, 18, 25      July 2
July 7 Saturday	'Alleluia' at RNCM – 7.30 pm	Choir and audience coaches to be arranged
July 14 Saturday	'Alleluia' at St Mary's, Kirkby Lonsdale – 7.30 pm	Choir coach to be arranged
July 19 Thursday	'Alleluia' at Basilica San Lorenzo, Florence	
July 21 Saturday	'Alleluia' at Chiesa Santo Stefano, Florence	
Sept 3 Monday	Start of autumn term	Rehearsals: September 3, 10, 17, 24 (AGM) October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29
Nov 3 Saturday	'The Sea' at RNCM – 7.30 pm	Stanford: Songs of the Fleet Britten: Four Sea Interludes Vaughan Williams: A Sea Symphony