



ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

www.altrincham-choral.co.uk

Registered charity no 500729

September 2003 Newsletter

Former music teacher gets academic award
Former music master at Sale Boys' Grammar School, James W Dickenson has been awarded a PhD by Salford University for his pioneering research into the impact of Norwegian folk music on Norwegian Jazz.

A former conductor of Altrincham Choral Society, and music teacher, he currently lives in Norway where he works as cantor in the State Lutheran Church, directs a youth big band, and is married to a Norwegian teacher.

Messenger - 6 June 2003

A MAESTROS MUSINGS!

"Since singing is so good a thing I wish all men would learn to sing."

Perhaps William Byrd hadn't heard of political correctness when he made this comment, or was it that he failed to grasp the Adam and Eve thing! Well, does it matter? Actually on this occasion no, because I am going to take Mr Byrd at his word this year. At a recent committee meeting I suggested that the choir should have three targets and guess what, target number one is for us all.

Try these questions out for size:

Do you know any men?

Are they free on a Monday evening?

Now it gets tricky:

Can they sing?

Are they a tenor?

If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then your mission, should you choose to accept it (BUT DO YOU REALLY HAVE A CHOICE?) is to recruit them into the choir. This year I want 5 new tenors and 3 new basses. There, I've said it, I have been sexist, but Mr Byrd made me do it.

So, can you meet this target? Let's wait and see! Sorry, forgot to mention, it really is quite important that we recruit more men, especially tenors because I am worried about the overall balance between sections. SR

Esoteric - or what? As a "pioneering" subject it is perhaps not quite up there with DNA and the Y-chromosome, but the news about a former conductor should reassure Steven that there is life after ACS, even if it is amongst the trolls in Trondheim. On offer for a PhD thesis is "Nul points in the Eurovision - the political agenda".

A few of our present members will remember Jim Dickenson who was conductor for but two years - between 1976 and 1978. Some years earlier he had been a singing member, singing both tenor and bass - though not at the same time. However, one programme for a Free Trade Hall concert showed James Dickenson in both tenor and bass sections. The bass entry was a slight error as it should have been "James Dickerson" a stalwart of the period, sadly to die of leukaemia in the 1980's.

One recalls Jim as a pretty relaxed musical director. He was a genial man, though not immune from podium rage. We happened to have the dress rehearsal on the eve of his final concert, and the programme included Elgar's *Songs from the Bavarian Highlands*. We failed persistently with one particular section and Jim threw a megawobbly, threatening to cancel the concert. We tried again and it was "Huzzah - a hit".

An accomplished and versatile pianist and harpsichordist, Jim liked to ring the changes. With him we did our last *Verdi Requiem* before November 2002 and our last *Trial by Jury* before July 2004 (judicial reform permitting).

Jim Dickenson's successor was Gordon Stewart, who is by way of being star conductor on *Songs of Praise*. He is rarely seen in close-up, but recently in a programme from Exeter Cathedral he was shown in conversation with Aled Jones about a Royal School of Church Music visit to Southern Africa.

Barbara Coombs

**AGM
SEPTEMBER
22nd
7.45pm**

POSTERS

One of the aims of the recent marketing project has been to find ways of raising the Choir's profile in the local community. Posters placed prominently around the district have been a way in which we have advertised our concerts. Analysis of ticket sales shows that most tickets are sold through personal contact. So it could be argued that putting up posters is a waste of time. However, it is important as a way of keeping our name known in the area. We must be seen to be out there with Sale Choral, Salford Choral and the many other choirs and Operatic Societies that advertise prolifically in the libraries, shops, churches and on public notice boards.

Whilst we were discussing this aspect of publicity with the Marketing Group, I volunteered to oversee the distribution of posters. I know that many of you already take posters and leaflets and distribute them amongst your friends and at your places of work. This is great! What I would like to do is co-ordinate the distribution around the local area and in Manchester city centre, making sure that all likely places are covered. If you can commit yourself to putting a poster in a particular place for each concert we should be most grateful. An up-to-date list will be on the notice board in September. Please watch that space!

Elizabeth Jones.

A MAESTRO'S MUSINGS!

"....music set to this ode could not therefore be expected to have great strength or sincerity..."

"...lacking in flavour and bouquet..."

The papers were hardly enthusiastic. Elgar, however, thought differently.

"I have written out my soul...and you know it and my vitality seems in them now...and I am happy it is so – in these 3 works I have shown myself..."

He was of course talking about the violin concerto, his 2nd symphony and The Music Makers.

So why should you enjoy The Music Makers? Well, if you are an old romantic like me and enjoy the notion of Elgar's music being 'typically English', and if that wasn't enough you don't mind a bit of self indulgence, then it is definitely for you.

First performed at the Birmingham Festival in 1912, Elgar said "the mainspring of O'Shaugnessy's Ode is the sense of progress of never-ceasing change; it is the duty of the artist to see that this inevitable change is progress. With a deep sense of this trust, I have endeavoured to interpret the ode as shewing the continuity of art, in spite of those dreamers and singers who dream and sing no more."

Elgar felt that he should include not only poets and singers, but all artists who feel the tremendous responsibility of their mission to "renew the world as of yore". Indeed, it is this responsibility for a composer's message that we, as artists and performers, have to take forward or at any rate try to achieve. We have to approach all music with an open mind and trust in the composer's intentions to enable us to communicate their message to our audience with integrity and truth.

The music aims to represent moods and emotions that all artists suffer, so you will find sadness, enthusiasm, joy and frenzy in this work, and we must endeavour to be true to Elgar's intentions.

But what about self indulgence, was he really so insecure? Elgar had decided to set O'Shaugnessy's entire Ode without change or deletion. In the years since he first thought of setting the Ode, some melodic ideas had appeared, but these were short and relatively few. So, to offset this weakness, he resolved to enrich the setting with quotations from the whole range of his own past music. This included themes from the *Enigma Variations* (1898-99), *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), *Sea Pictures* (1897), *Violin Concerto* (1909-10), *Symphony No 1* (1907-1908), *Symphony No 2* (1903-10), *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* (1901-05) and you will even find Thomas Arne's *Rule Britannia* and the *Marseillaise* included.

Elgar knew only too well that music did not move and shake the world. He was badly treated by publishers and he knew the fickleness of the public response to his and others' work.

If you, like me, want to try and understand the music and get inside it, you must be open to its moods and allow the music to live through your singing. SR

BE WARNED!

To minimise disruption of rehearsals, the Committee has decided that the downstairs door will be opened for late-comers **once** at 8.00 and again at tea-time. Standing there ringing the bell will only get Steven in a black mood!

NB Next edition of the Newsletter will be in November.

WHISTLE-STOP TOUR OF BRITANNY 2003

After 28 hours travelling arrive Sauzon, Belle Ile. Allowed 20 minutes to book into hotel & collect concert gear before coach leaves for rehearsal in L'Eglise de le Palais.

Search for meal. Change.

One room - ladies first.

Concert - unbelievable!

OK mistakes were made but definite tingle factor.

Back to hotel - bar.



Next morning wake up to RAIN!

Most opt for coach tour. Scenery murky.

Driver hilarious. Pam smitten.



Lunch in Sauzon. How many can you squeeze round the table?

Back on the ferry and drive to Vannes. Weather brighter.

Evening meal booked in local restaurant. Who remembers what they ordered?

Next morning wake up to RAIN!

Wander streets soaking up the atmosphere - literally. Beautiful old buildings.



After lunch, rehearsal in Cathedral of St Peter.

Walk two streets to find restaurant.

Quaint or what?

Back to Cathedral. Change Concert.

Oh boy, even better!! Steven *almost* praises.

Back to hotel bar for celebrations.

Departure morning wake up to SUNSHINE. Quick run around to see the town, then off to St Malo. Last evening meal together.

Long journey home, thank Roger the driver.

Bed.



AD