

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2012

While the nation has been making preparations for and celebrating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, followed closely by the fantastic London 2012 Olympics, these once in a lifetime events have not prevented SPC from making its mark in the world of music. Indeed the approaching Olympics gave extra spice to our music making.

This extraordinary Season started with an exhilarating performance of 'Belshazzar's Feast' under the direction of Darius. David Soar supported our narration of the dramatic story with a wonderful performance.

The City Hall's Carol Concert was again a two concert event and there were seven other opportunities for Members to sing carols over the Christmas period.

In February we had the moving and affecting 'Requiem' by Gabriel Faure. There were superb performances by our soloists with a breathtaking rendition by Ella Taylor in the Pie Jesu.

The tour de force was 'Alight', an amazing event masterminded by Rachel Mallaband in response to the BBC's challenge to take part in the Cultural Olympiad. Rachel put together a commendable application, and won for SPC the privilege of leading Sheffield's participation in this unique celebration.

Our own Yaron Hollander composed one of two works written especially for Alight.

It has to be acknowledged that many in the Choir were bewildered by having reams (do we still have those?) of music to download and learn at home because of limited time and funding. Music and dance was performed all over the City centre and I know that many of you found the logistics of the weekend quite challenging!

It is a great credit to all those who participated that the event was a resounding success and Members gave unstinting support to the whole weekend. Our thanks go to Rachel and Yaron for their outstanding commitment.

We rounded off the season in April by staging our own concert in the City Hall and it was a pleasure to invite Halifax Choral Society to share the platform with us along with the wonderful Black Dyke Band and our very own Darius. It was the Armed Man again, for which we last joined HCS and Black Dyke in Birmingham for that terrific DVD recording.

In addition to 'The Armed Man' we performed the rather tricky and very new 'Bronte Mass' in front of its composer, Philip Wilby. No pressure there!

We had some valuable help, prompted by Peter Quarrell, from the Medina Mosque in Sheffield who provided a young Muezzin to sing the call to prayer, which he did most effectively.

There's no point pretending that there wasn't some nail biting going on at various times. Ticket sales were very slow - I remember the cheer when we topped 100 - and then, at the eleventh hour, the figures shot up and we sang to a very respectable number.

I had a few restless nights over stage managing the event but with the much appreciated help from Tom Stayte both in emails before, and on the day in the City Hall, all was well.

We did our best to have an end of season party but with so many people in addition to SPC the City Hall Bar was rather crowded to say the least!

Some lessons were learned and lots of friends made along the way.

Oh, the singing wasn't bad either!

After purchasing the stair climber last year we were able to hold the national launch of the 'Singclude' project in January and were delighted that Peter White, BBC's Disability Affairs Correspondent was able to cut the tape on the stairclimber in front of about 50 invited guests in the grand surroundings of the City Hall's Memorial Hall which was kindly offered to us free of charge by Sheffield International Venues.

We really are a privileged Choir because in addition to our having members like Rachel and Yaron in our midst we also have an Olympic Torch bearer!

Kate and Chris Reece put Julie's name forward for selection and, of course, she was chosen, which has been a thrill not only to Julie herself but to many of us who cheered her on her way. In Julie's inimitable way she has shared the joy of her experience with so many including local children in Hillsborough Park after the Torch Relay on 25 June who were thrilled to be able to hold the torch and be photographed with it. Furthermore, Julie has taken her torch into numerous local schools and given so much pleasure to the pupils. While the Torch Relay was not to be used as a promotional tool I suspect that the name of SPC was dropped into one or two conversations here and there!

This summer we have been asked to sing at no fewer than five weddings - three of which were those of our own members. Congratulations to them all and many thanks to Rachel Copley for conducting the Singers on all these occasions - quite a commitment.

Before moving on to next season I wish to thank you all for your co-operation and patience in listening to announcements, reading notices, signing countless sheets and generally being a great crowd of people.

Thank you, too, for looking out for my Jeff, whose Alzheimer's disease sadly is deteriorating quite rapidly now. Your love and care is a wonderful support to both of us.

If you thought last season was busy, don't get the idea that 2012-13 will be a sabbatical. There will be new works alongside some more traditional choral favourites. We will perform in different and exciting venues as well as in our home, Sheffield City Hall.

Of necessity this last season is overlapping with the next. As you know we have been asked by the BBC to sing 'The Beatitudes' by Sir Arthur Bliss, a work written for the dedication of the newly rebuilt Coventry Cathedral

50 years ago. In fact it has never been heard there because Britten's 'War Requiem' was performed instead.

The City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus was initially invited by the BBC to perform this for broadcast in the 50th Anniversary Year

of the dedication of the new cathedral. They were otherwise engaged and so SPC was recommended because “they are reliable and good”!

OK - we were second choice, but to CBSC - that can't be bad! The degree of difficulty presented by this work, as well as its scheduling for 22 September 2012 has meant having to start rehearsals for it quite early.

Our men will be having their own moment of glory when they perform Schoenberg's “A Survivor from Warsaw”. I heard a snippet of their rehearsal and that sounds a challenging piece, too!

Hopefully the discounted tickets will be with me in time for the second rehearsal on 11 September so if you have placed an order please come prepared with either cash or cheque book. Anyone still wanting tickets please email me by the end of August. Michael Foster was being quite flexible but it would be helpful to have a good idea how many tickets we will need.

Paul Duffield, our trusty Transport Manager, is organizing coaches for us, and our guests if necessary, so I hope you have put your name along with the number of seats required on the appropriate list so that he can be sure there will be sufficient places.

This brings me to arrangements for the orchestral rehearsal and the performance. Unfortunately and unavoidably these will be on consecutive days which will entail a late night followed by the need to be on the road again by lunchtime the next day.

The orchestral rehearsal is in Salford on Friday 21 September, and Paul will give details of pick up times in order to be there for 7.30pm. The rehearsal is scheduled to finish by 10.00pm and realistically that could mean that we won't leave Salford until approximately 10.20pm, so it will be a late night for those of us living out in the sticks. Snoozing on the coach is allowed - but no snoring please!

The next day we are required to be at Coventry Cathedral for a 2.30pm rehearsal although Darius is hoping to persuade the BBC to rehearse the Beethoven first in order to give us a little more time to relax after our journey down. This will entail leaving Sheffield by noon so have a good breakfast and bring some sandwiches for lunch and tea. I don't know what facilities will be available in Coventry in the time available.

I will make appropriate announcements at rehearsals and all the relevant info. will be on the website in an easy to read list.

Unfortunately, seating at the Cathedral will not be straight forward as there will be some benches of unknown length and chairs for extra seating if required. John will not be able to issue us with the usual seating plan so we will need to listen carefully to instructions and be as co-operative as possible in order to make the event run as smoothly as possible and avoid John having apoplexy!

Of course we will do it all correctly because we are SPC and this is a terrific opportunity which we are privileged to be part of!

You are listening to the CD aren't you??

Close on the heels of our outing to Coventry we will be performing in the De Montfort Hall, Leicester to join Leicester Philharmonic Chorus in Prokofiev's 'Alexander Nevsky'. This dramatic work was brought to life for many of us by the late Sir Edward Downes who inspired us with his remarkable knowledge of the piece and of Russian history.

While we acknowledge that there is insufficient room for all the Choir to participate it is disappointing that only about 50 people have so far signed up. I know that Leicester would very much like more of us to share the platform in this joint performance, so please search your diaries and help us put forward a more representative choir.

Season 2012-13 will start in Sheffield with the annual Carol Concert in the City Hall on 8 December. Again it's two performances, so another busy day in store. This year we will have BBC Radio 4's Peter White compering and once more Black Dyke will accompany us with Darius and Nick Childs at the helm.

The following week we have a long awaited Messiah. It is now a number of years since we performed this and I'm sure we will want to make it a good one. We will perform with Manchester Camerata and some excellent soloist all conducted by Darius. Many of you will not have sung the whole of Messiah so we look forward to some thorough training at the hands of Darius. Those of us who have 'always' sung Messiah could well find the odd note that has 'always' been sung incorrectly, so we'd all better pay attention!

In the New Year there will be no let up as we go straight into rehearsals for Rachmaninov's 'Vespers'. We sang this a few years ago in Sheffield Cathedral and then in Lincoln Cathedral. This time Darius will conduct us in Sheffield's St. Marie's RC Cathedral on Friday 8 March 2013. I can't wait - it still gives me goose bumps.

On 2 June we will be back on familiar territory to sing Vaughan Williams'

'Sea Symphony' in the City Hall. It is a powerful and evocative work and for me it isn't performed often enough. The Halle will join us for this and we will be conducted by Cristian Mandeal.

Tickhill Carols this year will be on Thursday 20 December at Tickhill Parish Church. This popular concert is open to all so do check your diary and join us. After the concert we gather for a party at chez nous.

I'm sure this will not be the only extramural carol concert. I'll keep you posted.

Our perennial recruitment drive will be reinforced by another programme of Men's Sight Reading Workshops. These will commence on 16 October 2012 at 6.30pm. and, as always, they are free of charge so do encourage any potential tenors or basses who may wish to dip their toes in the water. Also please let Rachel Mallaband know if there are any specific organizations that we should be targeting to advertise the workshops, particularly if you have a named contact you can offer us. Low numbers of tenors are now significantly influencing what repertoire we can perform to an appropriate standard, so it is crucial that we recruit more of them!

The great debate of the rehearsal venue has at last been resolved and from Tuesday 4 September 2012 our regular venue will be the King Edward VII School on Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2PW. Try to get there in good time as it will be new to most of us and we will need to find our way around, as well as catching up with friends after the summer break.

Impending crisis – can you help? In the next couple of months Rachel Mallaband will stand down from her role as our Marketing and Publicity Officer, and as I write this we have no-one to cover her work, so from October the Chorus will simply not be able to promote itself or its concerts. If you feel you have any ability at all to write press releases, copy for flyers, keep the Chorus's biography up to date for concert programmes, etc, please would you very seriously consider offering your services immediately! The job could be shared, and is a team role working with Peter Miles on graphics, Kirsty Christer on website content, Janet and Julie on editorial content, Kate Reece on distribution and contacts, and others, so you are not going to be left to struggle alone! Please contact Julie or Janet immediately if you think you can help – I cannot sufficiently emphasize how important it is to fill Rachel's shoes with the utmost urgency!

Friends of the Chorus: Thank you to all who have “found a friend” so far – we have now a handful of Friends and a smaller but significant group of Friends For Life. May we encourage you to carry on seeking Supporters, Friends and Friends For Life, as the financial future of the Chorus depends on them! We still have more leaflets available or you can refer people to the Friends page on our website. We will shortly be needing someone to become the Chair, or Chairman, or Chairperson of the Friends, and then a management committee will need to be established. This does not have to consist of Chorus members, although it could do or could include some, so if you have ideas, or want to volunteer to help with the Friends' organization please let one of the Committee or your Section Rep know.

I hope you enjoy the remainder of the summer, especially now that we have some real summer weather and I look forward to seeing you in September.

Every good wish,

Janet