



Patron: Samuel West
Music Director: Darius Battiwalla

Summer Newsletter, July 2009

Our first concert of the 2008/09 season in September was an exhilarating rendition of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* with the BBC Philharmonic and their Chief Conductor, Gianandrea Nosedà. I think this concert for many of us (particularly me) will be one of the most exciting concerts we have participated in, not least due to performing of *An die Freude* by heart. The concert was recorded live for the BBC and has yet to be broadcast on Radio 3.

The following concert in November, conducted by Darius, featured very different music: vibrant and glorious works by Gabrieli, Bruckner, Brahms, Vaughan Williams and John Rutter, accompanied by Harlequin Brass and organist Simon Lindley.

Our annual festive Christmas Concert was hosted by broadcaster and conductor, Brian Kay, and accompanied by the world-class Manchester-based Northern Chamber Orchestra Sinfonia.

2009 commenced with our contribution to the second series of the innovative *five40five* concert series in the City Hall Ballroom where we performed two of the great works of the English choral a capella repertoire: Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G minor*, and Hubert Parry's masterpiece for the choral medium, *Songs of Farewell*. It was also a lovely opportunity to feature soloists from within the Chorus.

In March we were re-united with Nicholas Kraemer with whom we sang the St John Passion the previous year, and the Hallé. Mendelssohn's *Elijah* is one of the mainstays of the choral repertoire, full of wonderful choruses to sing and we certainly gave a wholehearted rendition. The pointed Yorkshire Post review highlighted the noise problem that we have been struggling with and complaining about for 2 seasons.

Our season in the City Hall ended on 29 May with a performance of Haydn's *Nelson Mass* with the Manchester Camerata, conducted by their principal conductor, Douglas Boyd, who extracted some exceptionally vibrant singing from us.

We came full circle at the end of June, working again with the BBC Philharmonic with whom we started the season, this time in the recording studio rather than the concert hall. We have made the very first complete recording of one of Elgar's rarities – *The Crown of India*. This was conducted by Sir Andrew Davis and included the wonderful Gerald Finley as baritone soloist. The CD will be released in November on the Chandos label.

We have worked with some renowned conductors this season: Gianandrea Nosedà, Nicholas Kraemer, Douglas Boyd and Andrew Davis, and with some of the best orchestras in the country: BBC Philharmonic, Halle, Manchester Camerata, and the Northern Sinfonia (slightly disguised). We are very fortunate to have such a highly respected Music Director in Darius with whom these top notch musicians are so happy to work.

Our forthcoming **2009-10** season includes more opportunities to sing some of the greats of the choral repertoire: Haydn's *Creation* and Brahms's *German Requiem*. We are also participating in a recording of Karl Jenkins's *The Armed Man* with the Black Dyke Band with whom we also join forces again for our annual Christmas concert.

Here are the dates and details:

Friday 27 November 09 (City Hall)

Haydn's *Creation*
Manchester Camerata, Paul Brough
Kate Valentine, soprano
Thomas Hobbs, tenor
Andrew Rupp, bass

Saturday 12 December 09 - Christmas Concert (City Hall)

Black Dyke Band
Ian McMillan, compere
** this concert will include the participation of pupils of the Sheffield Academy who are involved in a Carol writing competition to be performed on the night as well as a special collaboration between Darius and Ian McMillan. It is also possible that it may be recorded for Radio 2!*

Sunday 18 April 2010 (at Symphony Hall Birmingham)

Karl Jenkin's *The Armed Man* – A Mass for Peace
Black Dyke Band, Nicholas Child
With Halifax Choral Society & Leeds Met University Choir
** this concert will be recorded for a DVD.*

Saturday 8 May 2010 (City Hall)

Brahms' *German Requiem*
Hallé Orchestra, Ewa Strusinska
Soprano tbc
David Stout, baritone
** Ewa has already expressed her desire to come and meet us at one of our rehearsals in the autumn*

As well as the large-scale concerts outlined above, Rachel Copley has already agreed to conduct the following small-scale voluntary concerts:

Saturday 14 November

Firbeck Church, Rotherham

Friday 4 December

Carol concert in aid of Bluebell Wood Children's Hospice; venue Herringthorpe Church, Rotherham

Sunday 13 December 09 (afternoon)

Carol Service for St Luke's Hospice

Sheffield Cathedral

Bochum 2010

At the beginning of the season Janet Hoyle(2nd alto) will be updating us on the proposed visit to Bochum to join with the Philharmonischer Chor in a large-scale international celebration of song on Saturday June 5th 2010. We have secured 30 places in the first instance. People will need to make their own travel arrangements but accommodation has been offered by our German counterparts. It may be possible to apply for more places but it depends on definite commitment by our members.

The Committee

The Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus would not exist were it not for the hard work that goes on behind the scenes by the members of the committee. Some have very specific responsibilities and others are there giving much-needed support, back-up and ideas.

We meet about 6/7 times a year either after a rehearsal or on a separate evening. There is always much business to discuss. The meetings may be rather lengthy but they are never boring. My thanks go to the following who are a great group to work with:

Julie Smethurst (1st soprano), our amazing chairman, always calm and diplomatic.

Pamela Leon (1st alto), our Finance Officer who endeavours to balance the books. Our subscription increased this season to £105, but membership of the Chorus represents great value for money. We join the chorus because of the pleasure we get from singing, and we have to cover the cost involved in making that possible.

John Spence (1st tenor), our Membership Officer. John has completed his first season in this role having taken over from Miriam Gilchrist. Miriam has been a hard act to follow but John has been busy devising new systems in order to ultimately make such things as registration, auditions and concert seating more streamlined. One of his most difficult tasks has been to organise the soprano re-auditions, an undertaking that unfortunately became very protracted for a variety of reasons. We appreciate that for most sopranos it has not been the easiest of seasons.

Sally Turnbull (2nd soprano), our New Members' Officer, a role devised in order to assist with the many matters pertaining to membership. Sally has been the friendly face greeting those people trying out the Chorus and an encouragement and support for those auditioning for the first time.

Sue Pennington (2nd soprano), our Minutes Secretary who most efficiently brings cohesion to and makes sense of the discussions that we have at committee meetings.

Kate Reece (2nd alto), our Publicity Officer, who never misses an opportunity to ensure that we have copious amounts of printed matter on our person to spread the word about the Chorus.

Else Pearse (2nd soprano), our new Librarian, who, like John, has had to get to grips very quickly with the procedures involved in music distribution. She had a baptism by fire taking over from Hilary Bingham on the lead up to the Christmas concert with its numerous pieces of repertoire from many different sources.

Angela Argenzio (1st soprano) our Social Events Officer, and **Dan Spicer** (1st bass) have this season organised a variety of events to appeal to all ages including post-concert meals, a quiz night and a family picnic.

Jenny Swann (1st soprano), our Education and Outreach Officer, is working with Julie on developing our relationships with the Sheffield Academy, a group we felt we could link to most time-efficiently in terms of their musical talents and our limited time.

Helen Kirk (1st soprano), **Jim Monach** (1st tenor), **Richard Salt** (1st bass), **Janet Bower** (1st soprano) and **Margaret Brugger** (1st soprano) make up the rest of the committee, all of whom have given tremendous support in a variety of ways to the work of the committee in general. Thanks to all of them.

There are other members of the Chorus who are not on the committee but who do a lot of work on behalf of the Chorus and who are greatly appreciated. I would like to thank:

Frazer Jarvis (1st bass) for his invaluable helpful work on the continual updating of our website, which we increasingly see as an extremely important tool for both communication amongst ourselves, but also for recruitment. The overwhelming majority of the many people who came and sat in on rehearsals this season, did so as a result of finding us on the internet.

Ros Hunt (1st alto) who led the second round of choral workshops leading up to the Elijah concert.

Peter-the-coachman-Clarke - we were never late for any of our 3 coach engagements!

Rachel Copley (2nd soprano) for her unflagging enthusiasm and willingness to take us on for all of our small-choir concerts.

And lastly, thanks to our Section Reps:

Janet Bower (1st sopranos)
Patricia Hall (2nd sopranos)
Felicity Goodliffe (1st altos)
Kate Reece (2nd altos)
John Spence (1st tenors)
Peter Clarke (1st basses)
David Mortimer (2nd basses)

The City Hall

All I will say here is that we hope the sound problems will have been resolved for the coming season as a result of the vigorous intervention of both the Hallé management and also Sam West, our patron, who experienced the noise firsthand when he came to our Elijah concert. Please also note that the concerts next season revert back to the **7pm start**.

Margaret McDonald

Margaret is one of the country's foremost voice coaches, as well as a much in demand professional mezzo soloist. We are so fortunate to have her coach us to help us make the best sound that we can, in both one-to-one sessions and in full chorus warm up sessions. If we all remember and implement *the principles* behind the funky gibbon, the pigeons, teacups and tractors then we will become a noticeably better choir. Thanks to Maggie for her commitment to us – and particularly for the encouragement she gave to all the apprehensive sopranos.

Andrew Booth

Thanks to Andy for accompanying our rehearsals for the past two seasons. He has decided to take up the role as accompanist for Croft House Operatic and so leaves us. Julie will give details of plans for his replacement in her comments below.

Darius

Darius has again brought us to readiness for the three concerts led by guest conductors this season so that each one was easily able to add his particular polish, thus resulting in three highly acclaimed concerts. We also had the opportunity to be conducted by Darius for two City Hall concerts and the five40five concert in the Ballroom. High turnouts to the additional Saturday rehearsals show our commitment to Darius as our Music Director.

I have completed my second season as Chorus Administrator. It is a job I really love doing and get much satisfaction from but unfortunately, due to changes in circumstances, I will have to step down as administrator for the forthcoming season. It is with huge sadness that I will have to do this, but I no longer have the time to commit to all that the job both requires and that I wish to give to it. Ideally I would like to start handing things over from September, thus easing somebody else into the job. If anyone is interested in knowing more about what it involves with a view to taking over, please get in touch, I'd be very happy to talk through things (administrator@sheffieldphil.org or 0114 2882183).

George Swindells' celebration of his 90th birthday this season and with at least another 3 years membership of the chorus, says much about the benefits of singing – it is good for your physical, emotional and mental well-being. Another benefit is the camaraderie we gain from it. Singing together unites us irrespective of age, sex, beliefs, nationality.

I like this quote from Brian Eno (ex-Roxy Music for those who remember 70s pop music!)

....singing together is all about the immersion of the self into the community. That's one of the great feelings – to stop being me for a little while, and to become us."

I look forward very much to seeing you all again on **Tuesday 8 September at 7pm**.

Over to Julie

Ruth Jones
Chorus Administrator

July 2009

First I would like to thank everyone for making last season such a success, from Beethoven's 9th Symphony in September 08 to the highly successful performance of the Nelson Mass and the recording for the BBC at the end of the season - I am conscious that everyone has worked tremendously hard and this has shown in our performances and reviews. After the last concert Douglas Boyd asked me to pass on his congratulations and thanks to the Chorus - he said we "sang wonderfully" and he had thoroughly enjoyed working with us.

Section Reps: We are gradually expanding their role and one thing they will now be doing is helping John Spence to contact members who are at risk of failing to meet minimum rehearsal attendance requirements. The Chorus is a very committed organization - we love to sing so most of us attend most rehearsals and when we don't there is usually very good reason, so if a Section Rep approaches you about this it is in an effort to keep things low key and not to have to resort to impersonal lists of numbers being read out or people being told very late in the rehearsal process that they will be unable to take part in a concert. The Section Reps themselves feel this is a positive way forward as it will also enable them to be aware of any problems or issues affecting people's attendance. Section Reps also act as a further link between the members and the Committee so please make sure you know who your rep is and speak to them about any matters you feel they should know about.

Accompanist: As Ruth said, Andy Booth now has a new job on Tuesday evenings; whilst we hope to continue working with him the Committee feels we should establish a good working relationship with a regular accompanist and they and Darius are currently seeking the best person to fulfil this role. We are not advertising as we already know of a number of suitable candidates who are being approached. On behalf of the Chorus my thanks to Andy, and best wishes to him for the future.

Chorus funding: We are now entering a new phase on this, having moved successfully to being self-financing. The Chorus is a costly organization to run and in order to do some of the things we might like and indeed need to, (such as putting on a possible gala concert for our 75th anniversary, or paying for some professional expertise we don't currently have within our ranks) we simply need more money! We are currently in negotiation with the Hallé Concerts Society about the financial investment we shall be required to make into future concerts, which over quite a short time will seriously deplete our capital base if we don't take action. In the early weeks of the new season our Finance Officer Pamela will be presenting us with precise details of our current financial situation, following which we may be making some significant decisions, so I am writing this now in order to give all members, including Honorary ones, time to reflect on and discuss these issues and to make any comments or suggestions about the way forward. I am always pleased to hear from members, either via email (chairman@sheffieldphil.org), by phone on 0114 2685405, or in person before or after rehearsal, so please let me, any Officer or Committee member, or any of the Section Reps, have your views. We really are talking here about the future survival of our Chorus so we must find solutions which are acceptable and sustainable.

The Committee has debated often and at length the question of funding, and it seems to me that a "one size fits all" approach won't work: some members advocate a substantial rise in subs (the Hallé Choir is apparently doing this) but this may deter potential new members or present ones on lower incomes; some people favour the idea of making and selling jam or cakes or holding coffee mornings or raffles whilst others can't think of anything they would like to do less! still others feel we should all have to sell a minimum number of tickets for each concert which for some is impossible; and finally people have suggested we should seek sponsorship or other kinds of financial support for which we

would have to "bid" - this would be an excellent avenue to explore but requires time which none of the present Committee has.

For those who would simply prefer to pay a higher sub please remember that any of us can pay more than the fixed amount, and several members already do. Is it now time to establish a "Friends of SPC" organization that could help us to fundraise, and if so, has anyone got time and energy to form such an organization? How many of us can follow the splendid example set by members such as "Janet the cake" who regularly raises funds for us with her superb baking? I'd love to hear from anyone who might have the time and energy to do some work on potential sponsorship and trust funding or who has links with potential appropriate funders. I think we need to view this whole area as our next challenge and an opportunity to secure the Chorus's future, rather than something to be feared and agonised about; so please start thinking and talking and let's make sure we can get this matter sorted out so we can concentrate on what we really want to put our energies into - making wonderful music to the best standard we can achieve! I hope everyone has an enjoyable and refreshing summer break, and look forward very much to seeing you all again in September.

Julie Smethurst
Chairman
July 2009