



FRIENDS NEWS

Issue 16 Summer/Autumn 2022



FROM THE CO- CHAIRS

This Newsletter is a little late. We had planned to get it out in May, but failed, since which time both Kate Rogata, my fellow Trustee, editor and contributor and myself have run into work and study commitments. Our apologies.

We were, all of us, thrown out of kilter by the last minute cancellation of our concert in March due to more than half of our number contracting Covid. It has taken some time to get over that shock to the system. The virus has been particularly hard with for large choirs such as ours to work and live with. We have faced some difficult decisions and we know that there will be more to come.



Nonetheless we remain positive. The latest advice emanating from the Government via our professional body seems to envisage a return to a version of normality, assuming that there are no more worrying variants waiting in the wings, and we are very keen indeed to get back there as soon as we possibly can by whatever means seem most expedient.

David's 'first' concert with us, that to say the first concert that he himself devised, put together and directed and conducted, was very well received by audience and choir. We are very much looking forward to our Autumn concert, on 13 November at St. Wilfrid's, where we will be performing a trio of Magnificats. Bach, Rutter and Ayres. Publicity for that concert will be coming on stream in September when we recommence rehearsals, and information about the rest of the season is detailed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Hope to see you at one of our forthcoming concerts.

Paul and Amy

This Newsletter

Just a reminder that this newsletter now goes out three times a year – an Autumn edition in October, Winter edition in January/February and a Spring/Summer edition in May (in theory). If there is more you would like to read in this newsletter, or if you have a contribution then do let us know by getting in touch with Carolyn, the Friends Secretary – email friends@harrogatechoral.org.uk

2022-23 Subscriptions

Also a reminder that your new season subs are now due – Carolyn will have been in touch when circulating this newsletter.

COMMITTEE REPORT

Admin Matters

We are making tentative enquiries into possible alternative rehearsal venues. Christ Church has been a great venue for us but the current Covid advice from Government and our professional body, Making Music, continues to emphasise the need for good ventilation, which we can only achieve in our current venue by leaving the external doors open, throughout the year. This is not helping to create a welcoming atmosphere, for existing and new members alike, and can on occasions feel to be something of an endurance test. Large choirs such as ours need ventilation and a large space in order to comply with the advice that we continue to receive. Our AGM was held on 6th July and the minutes (in draft) are available on the Members page of the website for those who were unable to attend.

Membership Matters

The cancellation of our March concert has not stemmed the new membership enquiries but it hit the choir hard and it has taken time to get back to where we were.

Marketing and Publicity

Jenny Huddleston has been contracted to deal with our online profile and online PR. We do still need to be more active in promoting our concerts, audiences have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Concerts

Our June concert received plaudits from singers and audience alike. Choir numbers were down, for various reasons and this probably affected audience numbers. Over and above the pandemic-related dip referred to above, but this was a very exciting concert. Our November concert promises to be equally so.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

Sunday 13th November

A Trio of Magnificats

in St Wilfrid's Church Harrogate

conducted by David Lawrence

Rutter – *Magnificat*

Bach – *Magnificat*

Paul Ayres – *Echo Magnificat*

Saturday 10th December

Handel – *Messiah*

in the Royal Hall, Harrogate

conducted by David Lawrence

Saturday 11th March

Gounod - *St Cecilia Mass* and Puccini - *Messa di Gloria*

In the Royal Hall, Harrogate

Conducted by HCS President Brian Kay

Saturday 24th June

The Harrogate Prom (new date)

in Harrogate Convention Centre

Tickets for all will be on sale shortly from the Harrogate Box Office www.harrogatetheatre.co.uk
tel 01423 502116, do keep an eye on our website for up to date information

PATRICK BISHOP 1928 - 2021

One or two Members, and possibly some of our Friends, will remember Patrick Bishop, a former chorister with HCS, who passed away last year aged 93. I met Patrick as a volunteer with Supporting Older People, Kate Rogata's charity, a few years ago and we became firm friends, sharing as we did a love of music, poetry, trains, ancient churches, Italy and much else including the same sense of humour. We shared a lot of laughter.

Patrick was an HCS member in the 1950s, indeed I think he may well have joined the choir in the 1940s shortly after its foundation in 1948. I do know that Patrick was definitely singing with HCS on 24th June 1951 because on that date he, along with 25 or so other HCS members, chosen by ballot, sang at the Royal Albert Hall. The occasion was a concert of music by Handel, Israel in Egypt (Pt. 1) and Messiah (Pt. 2) and the conductor was Sir Malcom Sargeant. Under the auspices of the Henry Wood Concert Society and the Festival of Britain London Season. I have in front of me as I write the programme, together with later correspondence from other members.

We also have a very grainy copy photograph of the HCS singers, supplied by Patrick, taken on a break on their coach journey to Leeds station where they, together with the rest of the 1000 singers drawn from 20 Yorkshire choirs boarded two specially chartered trains for London. They were then whisked to the Albert Hall in a fleet of double-decker London buses where they had lunch together whilst the orchestra rehearsed. Sir Malcolm then rehearsed choir and orchestra in the afternoon, before the evening performance. The Soprano was Dame Isobel Baillie. As she was subsequently to become. The other soloists were Mary Jarred, Heddle Nash and Harold Williams.

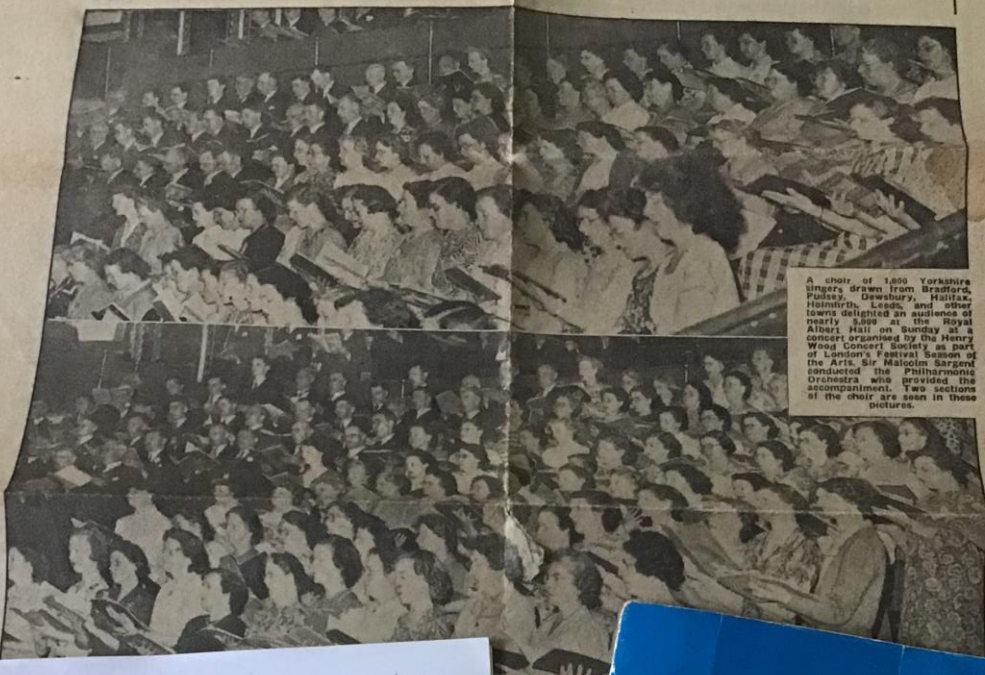
After the event, as I know from other sources, our then Chairman Peter Lee was invited, along I imagine with other members of the Yorkshire Festival Choir Committee, to the flat of Lady Jessie Wood, Chairman of the Henry Wood Concert Society, whilst some of the ladies of the party adjourned to a Lyons Corner House. Where the gentlemen adjourned to after the concert is not recorded, but I like to think that it involved a convenient London hostelry. The ladies were certainly dressed for the occasion. Coats, hats and gloves. To a woman. The gentleman were all in formal suits.

This trip was one of many memories that Patrick shared with me on my visits. He was beginning to struggle with reading, and so I read poetry to him, including some of his own. He could in fact recite verse at length from memory. Housman, Betjeman and others. And we sang together. I can get through any number of Hymns Ancient and Modern by heart, a result of spending so much of my childhood and beyond as a church chorister, as indeed could Patrick. He, once he discovered that I was born and brought up in Rochdale, used to enjoy demonstrating his own take on the very Lancastrian Gracie Fields' rendition of The Biggest Aspidistra In The World.

Music featured on my final visit to see Patrick, shortly before he passed away. His memory was fading, in truth dear old Patrick was fading. I happened to have in my bag the music that we were rehearsing. I showed it to him. My own final, poignant image of Patrick is therefore of a man who had loved music all his life taking one quick squint at the Rossini Stabat Mater and immediately humming his voice part.

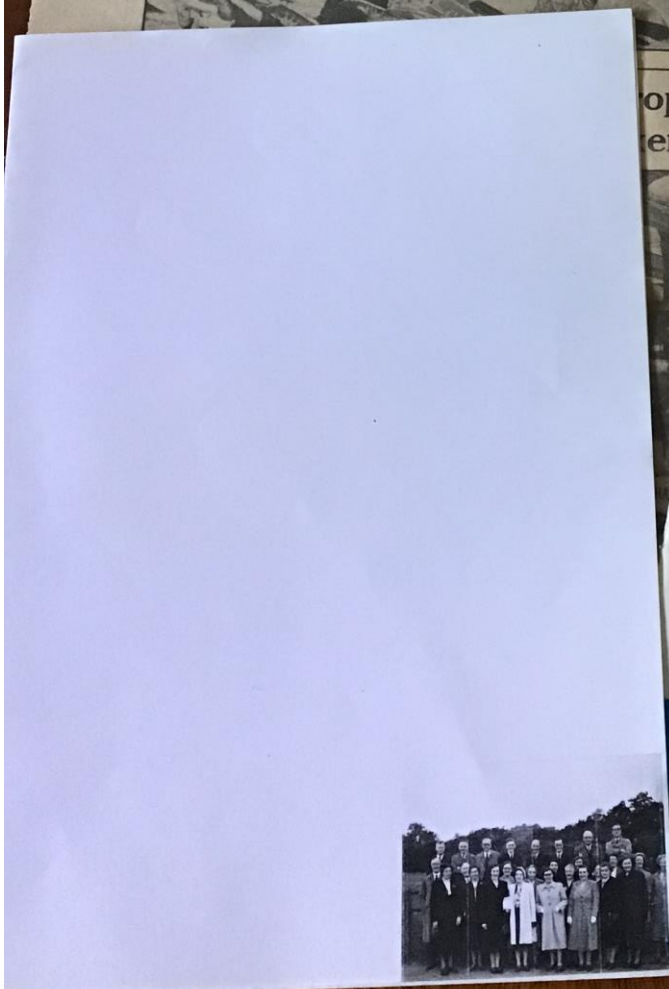
The wonderful power of music...

YORKSHIRE FESTIVAL CHOIR IN LONDON



A choir of 1000 Yorkshire singers, drawn from Bradford, Paisley, Dewsbury, Halifax, Huddersfield, Leeds, and other towns delighted an audience of nearly 5,000 at the Royal Albert Hall on Sunday at a concert organised by the Henry Wood Concert Society as part of London's Festival Season of the Arts. Sir Malcolm Sargent conducted the Philharmonic Orchestra who provided the accompaniment. Two sections of the choir are seen in these pictures.

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FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN
LONDON SEASON MAY 10 TO JUNE 30 1951

THE HENRY WOOD CONCERT SOCIETY



**HANDEL
CONCERT**

Conductor:
SIR MALCOLM SARGENT

ROYAL ALBERT HALL
PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING

AN INTERESTING ARTICLE!

The following is a reduced version of an article that appeared in The Observer on 20th March 2022, entitled “Hitting the High Notes; the lessons of all singing from the same hymn sheet”, and was written by Joe Moran. It is reproduced courtesy of Guardian News and Media Limited. The link to the full article is below. I enjoyed it and hope you will too...

There is something about singing in public that solicits everyone’s attention instantly and demands a reaction. It makes its own weather system wherever it happens. Even singing that is wildly off-tempo and off-key, like drunken karaoke, can’t be ignored. And when the singing is beautiful, it declares the singer’s emotional state and replicates it in the listener, gluing them together briefly in a moment of shared attention.

We have seen and heard this in videos that have emerged from Ukraine in the past few weeks and gone viral. MPs lustily singing the Ukrainian national anthem as they returned to parliament. Parents singing folk songs to their children in underground stations to keep their spirits up. A young girl silencing the other occupants of a Kyiv bunker with a rendition of Let it Go from *Frozen*. Singing stops us in our tracks in a way that speech rarely can.

I have always loved to sing. For most of my adult life, though, I have just sung to myself – in the shower, in the car, or along the corridors at work. Then, three years ago, I joined a sea-shanty choir. Liverpool, where I live, has a rich shanty tradition and our choir’s leader, Professor Gerry Smyth, is a leading scholar of the form. We were an unlikely crew to be singing these rough-hewn sailors’ work songs, meant to accompany the hauling of ropes on ship. Women outnumbered men in our group, as they do in most choirs, and none of us looks as if we could heave up an anchor. I get seasick on the Mersey ferry. But the sense of incongruity soon wore off, and I found, along with the two million other people in the UK who belong to choirs, that singing in unison and harmony with others is a joyful thing.

We started doing gigs in pubs and bars, the first time I had sung for an audience since concerts at school. Writing, my only other creative outlet, connects with its readers one-sidedly and remotely. Mostly it generates polite interest or indifference, or any enthusiasm is long-delayed – as if you’d dropped a stone down a really deep well and heard, months or years later, the tiny splash of a reader’s response as it hit the water. When we sang, the response was instant. We woke up the room.

And then Covid silenced us. Some choirs migrated online, with varying success. We had a couple of desultory meetings on Zoom, but soon realised that you can’t sing in unison because of the millisecond time lag. The urge to sing remained. So, to raise my spirits in the boredom and anxiety of lockdown, I started singing to karaoke backing tracks on YouTube. I soon acquired a weirdly eclectic repertoire, mostly governed by the singers (Frank Sinatra, Glen Campbell, David Cassidy) who sing in the same keys as me. On my daily walk, I would turn a corner and find myself singing full-throated to a startled-looking dog walker.

It was worth the odd awkward encounter. Singing, I am sure, has got me through the last two difficult years. Its mental and physical health benefits are well established. It has been found to reduce stress, release mood-boosting hormones and increase the body’s tolerance of pain.

Graham Welch, professor of music education at the UCL Institute of Education, has collated this evidence for more than 30 years. For him, the physiological and psychological effects of singing both derive from its status as a primal act, “interwoven with core emotional states that are central to the human condition”. When you sing, you feel your chest and head vibrating and the lungs properly filling and emptying. It reminds you that you are a living, breathing, sentient body, taking up its own space in the world and making its own noise.

Singing every day is heartening because you can hear yourself improving. Almost without trying, I found my tone getting smoother, my range expanding and my breath sustaining for longer notes and phrases. As the pandemic wore on and the days melded into a homogeneous mass, singing gave my life at least some measure of progress and momentum. Still, I longed to sing in a group again. Group singing was one of the last activities to be released from coronavirus restrictions, because the respiratory droplets and aerosols that singers exhale are thought to make it high-risk.

Even before Covid, singers would fret constantly about the state and health of their voices; throat-knacking air conditioning, dry sinuses, or that little tickle that might be a cold, or worse. Singers know that the voice is like life itself – a fragile, mortal, capricious thing that can falter and founder without warning. The lungs lose power as we get older, and the muscle fibres in the vocal folds become stiffer and thinner. The voice is the only musical instrument that is alive, and the only one that ages and dies with its owner.

Singing in public is as near as our disenchanting world gets to the “winged words” that the heroes of Greek epics speak, which fly like feathered arrows to pierce their listeners and leave them changed. At the end of March, our shanty choir will perform in public for the first time in over two years – the first of many more gigs, I hope. I feel like I’ve already wasted too much of my life just singing to myself. Now, whenever I get the chance, I will sing to anyone who wants to hear.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/20/perfect-harmony-singing-with-others-is-a-joyful-thing-even-in-difficult-times>

REVIEW OF VOICES ORGAN AND BRASS

June 25th in St Wilfrids church



Harrogate Choral Society had a fallow period, due to Covid 19, as did all other such societies. Their first concert since lockdown 2020 was on 13th November 2021 in the Royal Hall with their new conductor, David Lawrence, performing a programme that had been planned before his appointment, containing works by Elgar and the Brahms Requiem.

Tonight's concert in St. Wilfrids Church, entitled "Voices, Organ & Brass" was very much a joyful, celebratory programme. A fitting celebration by Harrogate Choral Society of the first concert wholly prepared by their new conductor! David Lawrence comes with the highest qualifications and experience of choral work that any Society could wish for, both nationally and internationally. The brass group had a very heavy responsibility throughout the evening. They were Cobalt Brass, an ensemble of orchestral brass instrumentalists, who met whilst studying at the Royal Northern College of Music. It is important to note the distinction between such a group and a brass band that is a very different entity, both in respect of the instruments used and the number of players. In some of the works, percussion instruments had an important role which was taken by the Northern Percussion Ensemble who also came highly qualified, formed from musicians from all the major UK orchestras. Another important partner in the event was the building – the grand St. Wilfrids Church! Including the organ of course, but the original pipe organ is unfortunately in need of major restoration, so a fine electronic instrument is currently used.

The programme began with the very good choice of 'Behold a Great Priest' by James MacMillan, written for the Consecration of Bishop Hugh Gilbert in 2011 and set in Latin. It begins with just two trumpeters, who played from the back of the church, then the choir entered, singing in Antiphonal style, first the men from the south, then joined by the women entering from the north – a nice touch.

The organ also joined in this piece of simple but effective construction and forces. Next we heard the popular (and seemingly compulsory at Coronations) I Was Glad by Hubert Parry, words from Psalm 122 and began of course by the full brass ensemble and a bright arresting tone from the chorus, who were somewhat overpowered occasionally. The short “Vivat Regina” section was included (often cut for concert performances) to mark this special year for our Queen.

Cobalt Brass then gave us two pieces, performed without conductor, Sinfonia La Bergamasca by the 16th/17th Century composer Viadana, including some nifty trumpet work followed by an arrangement of Elgar’s Nimrod. Before the interval we heard Seascape by Christopher Brown, who was present at the concert. It is a very distinctive work to celebrate Borlase Smart, the St. Ives artist, famous for his seascapes, with words by Bob Devereux. The difficulties in pitch and rhythm of the solo vocal lines were taken with apparent ease by Soprano Aoife O’Connell and Baritone Andrew Mayor. The brass quintet was equally exercised in this highly descriptive atonal work. The setting of the words is in the nature of recitative, but precisely notated. The choir as a whole has few concerted moments and is usually women’s and men’s voices separately, who, as far as I could understand, coped well. In the early part of the work, some of the words are given to a reciter, in this case performed by Oliver Longstaff. Two particular effects worked beautifully, one being a chorus chord sliding slowly, softly, downwards representing the sinking of ships and the other, the mimicking of soft winds, again by the full choir.

Next, following the Interval, we heard ‘Make a Joyful Noise’ by Edward Gregson with words from Psalm 100 which included copious percussion, giving a dramatic change of tone colour. The work certainly lived up to its title! The name of the organist (you may have wondered) is Thomas Moore. He is, amongst other duties, deputy music director of Harrogate Choral Society and performed a fiendishly difficult Toccata & Fugue by Gerald Hendrie, which was fully appreciated and admired by the other musicians present, as well as the audience. Finally, the ever popular Gloria by John Rutter which David Lawrence conducted from memory, was accompanied by the full forces of all instrumentalists present. The second of the three movements featured the delightful, plaintive and decorative organ part and solos for three lucky female members of the chorus. Mr. Rutter and all the performers provided a great finale to the concert. Well done!

HENRY PANKHURST



VOLUNTEERING

As we move on, we hope, from Covid and its dreadful impact upon our ability to rehearse and perform as we would wish, a number of volunteering roles present themselves. Some arise as volunteers of many years standing understandably wish to pass on the baton. Others as we realise that things that didn't seem quite so important at the height of lockdown or whilst simply avoiding cancellations or costs now do seem to be rather necessary once more. Whilst these have in the past been carried out by Members or past Members they could equally be done by one of our Friends should you wish to be more involved.

A few examples. Kathy Carr, former Alto, has for some years acted as our press officer, preparing press releases and pursuing contacts in the media. She is now standing down. We are very grateful to her for the time and effort she has dedicated to this role. Henceforth, Jenny Huddleston, who is behind our online presence, is going to cover the promoting, chasing and prompting aspect of the job as it dovetails with what she does already, but if anyone with relevant experience feels that they would wish to prepare the press releases we would welcome your input.

Rosy Jones, to whom we have already expressed our thanks for presiding over the regular fund-raising cake stall, is stepping down. The stall will be making a comeback this Season. The choir have been contacted in the weekly email seeking volunteers to help to run this but again please do if you are able to do so and importantly would enjoy doing so, step forward.

David Cork has organised our 200 Club for many years. He is passing on the baton. It is likely that the 200 Club will reappear in January. The format will probably change in that there will be a remote draw with results announced online. Again, if you would like to take over please do not hesitate.

Volunteers keep us afloat. Katharine Bruce, in taking over part of Ruth's role, specifically the core Secretarial aspect, has made a world of difference and we are very grateful to her. Trevor Berry has kindly come forward to offer to run a weekly wine raffle to raise funds. Thank you Trevor. I mustn't either forget Sheila Boyle who runs the book stall, again thank you Sheila.

I was once advised that if I started thanking people I should mention everyone. I didn't agree at the time and still don't, but I do of course know that many choir members help out voluntarily and we could not operate otherwise. You are all included!

A final plea for offers of accommodation on Wednesday nights for David, who otherwise would have miles to go before he slept, to borrow Robert Frost's words. I know that some choir members have already hosted David and thank you for doing so. We have confirmed accommodation for 7th and 14th September. If anyone please could please offer any other Wednesdays during the coming period we, and David, would be very grateful.

Thanks everyone
Paul

