



NEWSLETTER

December 2011

CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL SOCIETY

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Chairman's Christmas Message

We have changed our name to emphasise that our objective is specifically to support the Cheltenham Music Festival. In the same spirit, your committee have agreed that next year we intend not only to commission a new work and a particular performance, but we should earmark some of our financial contribution to supporting the programme book. Many feel that the programme book makes an important contribution to the enjoyment of the Festival as well as providing a continuing historical record of the music played and the artists and composers who have taken part. Several formats have been tried over the life of the Festival, but never one that enabled the costs of production to be completely covered by sales. We hope that the direct support of the Society will enable the programme book to continue.

In 2007, together with the Nash Ensemble, the Society commissioned a *Horn Quintet* by James MacMillan and it was played in the Festival that year. We have agreed this year to commission another work for horn – a *Horn Trio* by Alexander Goehr. - and we are inviting Society members to make a special

contribution to this commission. You'll find a preview of the Festival on Page 2.

During the year we have had several successful events including talks and the Benefactors' Lunch and I thank Jill Bacon and other members of the committee for arranging these. We are grateful to Robert Padgett for allowing our members to participate in his opera trips. Mary Mackenzie and Richard Smith have been particularly busy especially in relation to reorganising our way of working and Roger Jones has produced his ever stimulating Newsletters. My thanks to them all – and to all members of the Society. Without you the Festival would be a much poorer affair.

Meurig Bowen and Alexis Paterson have also been busy working on next year's Festival, the first news of which appears later in this Newsletter. We already have a lot to look forward to next year. May I take this opportunity to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Jim Harrison jamess.harrison@virgin.net 01242 238705

Membership Renewals

Subscriptions for 2012 are due on 1 January. Life Members should find their membership card enclosed with this mailing.

If you pay by standing order, you need take no action. I will send you a membership card once I have had confirmation of receipt of your payment from our bank. Our change of name should not affect standing order payments.

Would other Members please complete the enclosed renewal form and, if appropriate, the **Gift Aid declaration.** The Committee would like to encourage Members to use an electronic payment method if they feel able – either bank transfer or PayPal. **If you wish to change to paying by standing order,** please also fill in the standing order mandate, or, preferably, set one up electronically directly with your bank. Please return all the completed forms to me, together with any payment and a SAE. I will send you your membership card by return.

Those Members who are also Founding Members of Cheltenham Festivals should note that, to enjoy their Founding Member benefits at the 2012 Cheltenham Festivals, they will need to continue to **pay a subscription to the Music Festival Society, and to renew as described above now.** You will then in due course receive your new Founding Membership card and details of all four 2012 Festivals by post directly from Cheltenham Festivals. Please note that priority booking for the 2012 Music Festival is expected to open at the end of February, and therefore that you should please renew as promptly as possible, and **no later than the end of January.**

As always, please feel free to contact me by telephone on

01242 578172 or by email at r.j.smith.70@cantab.net in case of any problems.

Benefactors

I am sure that our Members will appreciate that, in the present financial climate, raising adequate funding for the Music Festival is becoming ever more difficult. To this end, the Committee would like to encourage more of our Members to become Benefactors of the Society. Benefactors are acknowledged by name in the Festival programme book, and are invited to an Annual Lunch during the Festival, which is normally also attended by artists from that morning's concert; for the past two years, the Benefactors' Lunch has been held in the Panoramic Restaurant at the Racecourse, and has been a most enjoyable occasion. But the main reward of becoming a Benefactor is the knowledge that you are really helping the Festival to continue and to thrive.

If you pay an ordinary subscription by standing order, or if you are a Life Member, it is still easy to upgrade to a Benefactor for this year – simply send me a cheque to top up the difference between annual Benefactor and Ordinary subscriptions (ie £29 for single member, or £45 for joint members).

Gift Aid

The Society would like to encourage UK income tax payers to help our funds by completing the Gift Aid form. If you do so, it means that, **without any extra cost to yourself,** the value of your subscription (and of any donation) is increased by the amount of standard rate income tax levied upon it, currently 25 pence in the pound, which we can recover. Please do not fill in

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this form if you do not pay UK income tax.

I am advised by HMRC that our change of name does not necessitate the completion of new Gift Aid declarations.

Donations

The Committee would also like to encourage Members to add a

donation to their basic subscription. We have decided this year to put all additional donations towards the commissioning of a new *Horn Trio* by Alexander Goehr and will be very grateful to all those who feel able to contribute.

Richard Smith, Membership Secretary & Treasurer

The 2012 Cheltenham Music Festival takes shape

2012 is the year of the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympic Games and also marks two important musical anniversaries. That most European of English composers, Frederick Delius, was born 150 years ago and so was Claude Debussy whose distinctive harmonies turned music on its head.

There will be plenty of pomp in the **Royal Musical Treasures Concert** on July 8th with the award-winning Flowers Band and a choral ensemble. Walton's *Crown Imperial*, Handel's *Zadok the Priest* and Parry's *I was Glad* will head the line-up of stirring works.

Still on a royal theme, the Royal Philharmonic Society will be staging a concert to mark the launch of its mentor scheme for promising new artists. Some of the distinguished mentors will be in the audience watching their protégés perform.

Since London will be hosting the Olympic Games in August, the second weekend will focus on Britain's capital with a marathon closing concert featuring the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under Martyn Brabbins' direction. The programme will include Ireland's *London Overture*, Elgar's *Cockaigne* and a new work by Hannah Kendall based on the idea of a London Portrait. The concert will culminate with Vaughan Williams' popular *London Symphony*. See if you can spot the chimes of Big Ben in it.

The Orchestra of the Music Makers from Singapore will be making their Cheltenham debut which will feature Melvyn Tan playing one of the Ravel piano concertos. Britain's best known Singaporean resident will also be performing a solo recital.

Remembering World War I

The final five years of Debussy's life coincided with the First World War and a series of five concerts will feature music by Debussy and his contemporaries composed during each of these years. The 1914 concert, for instance, will feature Webern's *Three Pieces* for cello and piano, Janáček's *Violin Sonata* and Ravel's *Piano Trio*.

Two works by Debussy will be performed from 1915 along with Szymanowski's *Myths* and Reger's *Clarinet Quintet*, while 1916 will have a more English flavour with Bax's *Elegiac Trio*, Delius' *Cello Sonata* and Schoenberg (the token foreigner!) represented by his *Piano Quintet*. This concert also has a lady composer – Rebecca Clarke (*Lullaby and Grottesque*). Bartók, Fauré and Debussy feature on the 1917 programme and the grand finale (1918) will focus on Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale*, Bruch's *String Quintet* and Elgar's *Piano Quintet*.

Escorting us through this fascinating series will be musicians of the calibre of Steven Isserlis, Emily Beynon, Lars Anders Tomter and the youthful, but brilliant, Esher Quartet – plus other distinguished musicians yet to be announced. Sprinkled throughout these concerts will be talks, films and other performances exploring these five fascinating years.

Song, Opera and Choral Masterpieces

Lovers of vocal music will not be disappointed next year. James Gilchrist will come down his hill to sing Finzi, Britten and

Tippett accompanied by a live video set.

There's a gritty contemporary offering from The Opera Group: *Babur*, a new work by Ed Rushton, which deals with terrorism in a London suburb.

Do you remember I Fagiolini who performed Monteverdi love songs to startled diners in the Daffodil one year? The ensemble will be back in a more formal setting to sing Striggio's forty part *Mass* composed for the wedding of Prince Francesco and the Archduchess Johanna of Austria in 1565. Their recording of the work won the Gramophone Early Music Award 2011.

Ex Cathedra will be coming to Cheltenham College Chapel to perform Rachmaninov's *1915 Vespers* by candlelight. Finally, Cheltenham will face an invasion of students from Utrecht University who are coming to sing and play Bach's *B minor Mass*.

Music for World Travellers

If queues and security checks at airports put you off travelling abroad these days, why not opt for a hassle-free musical holiday instead? Travel and exploration represent another strand to this festival.

You could, for instance, imagine yourself in France with Delius' *Paris: Song of a Great City* - or else you could cross the Mediterranean to experience the sinuous melodies of North Africa in Holst's *Beni Mora*.

If you yearn to venture to the heart of Africa you can do so with *African Sanctus* in which the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus will play a leading role.

Long distance travellers with a passion for the Orient will be able to enjoy Sarah Connolly as Savitri in Holst's Indian opera of that name, while Debussy's *Pagodas* will conjure up the magic of Indonesia.

If you seek something even more exotic, how about the Andes? Florilegium will be bringing a Bolivian choir with them to perform a concert entitled **Music from the Missions**.

Last but not least, the Festival Academy will be performing a composition by Delius with strong local connections. This is the incidental music for the play *Hassan*, written by the Cheltenham poet James Elroy Flecker, to whom a plaque was unveiled at Dean Close College a few months ago.

Isserlis, Bavouzet, Grosvenor and Nazimova

Two great favourites with Cheltenham audiences will be wending their way to the Festival. Steven Isserlis will be appearing in a number of events: in a solo recital, in the First World War series and in the final concert playing the Elgar *Cello Concerto* – the Worcestershire composer's elegy for those who had died in that war.

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet proved to be a hit with musiclovers last year so it is good to know he is returning to communicate his enthusiasm and empathy for his compatriot Debussy. And

we shall be welcoming back the young pianist Benjamin Grosvenor.

Finally, there will be a treat for film buffs: a showing of *Salomé*. This is not the Rita Hayworth-Victor Mature version from the 1950s, but a silent art movie from 1923, based on Oscar Wilde's play and starring Alla Nazimova. The Cardiff-based composer Charlie Barber has written an intriguing and effective score for this work which involves four percussionists playing live plus a recorded vocal ensemble. A warning though:

the film is definitely not suitable for children or for those who are easily scandalised!

The Festival opens on Wednesday 4th July (American Independence Day) and runs to Sunday 15th. Please note that the priority booking period opens two months earlier this time round – on February 27th - and members will receive their brochures before then. Previews of next year's batch of premieres will appear in the next issue of this newsletter.

Reviews

New 9/11 choral work confronts tensions between Christianity and Islam

Political speeches and belligerent calls to action might not strike one as the most obvious material for a choral work, and Richard Blackford showed great daring in confronting one of the major issues of our time – the apparently irreconcilable rift between Christianity and Islam which harks back to the time of the Crusades. The work, entitled *Not in Our Time* after a poem by Hilda Doolittle, starts in the 21st century with an orchestral evocation of the attack on the Twin Towers and President George W Bush's address to Congress on September 20th 2001 declaring a crusade – a war on terror. This provokes a strong reaction from two Arab spokesmen.

Listeners at this premiere performance by the BSO, Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Junior Chorus on 11th September in Cheltenham Town Hall were then transported back to the Middle Ages to hear Pope Urban II urge people to repel the Muslim invasion of the Holy Land and “destroy that vile race” since “it is the will of God”. Then follows a wonderfully stirring Crusaders' marching hymn, *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, with a terrific brass and percussion accompaniment which makes them sound truly invincible - as indeed they are. Jerusalem falls under their pitiless onslaught and they wade through the blood of their victims to worship at the Holy Sepulchre with the hymn *Lucis largitor splendide* – a thrilling outpouring of praise full of contrapuntal complexity, which both the adult chorus and the children's chorus handled with relish and skill. But towards the end of their celebration dissonances appear in the music and one has a premonition that the Christians will not have things their own way for ever.

The next section is as quiet and thought-provoking as the previous one had been loud and triumphant. (Mr Blackford does not spare the use of *fff* and *ffff* if he feels the occasion demands it!) It is a setting of “He deserts this earth like a arrow”, Tom Junod's evocative description (previously alluded to) of a man falling to earth and certain death as his body accelerates at “32 feet per second as though he were a missile, a spear, bent on

attaining his own end”. The words were sung with eloquence and conviction by Paul Nilon above a silvery, ethereal accompaniment. Then it was back to the Middle Ages as people contemplate the destruction around them, implore the Lord to help them and complain that he does not listen to their pleas. Eventually the words dissolve into a hubbub of voices. But then comes more rejoicing - this time from the Muslims after Saladin defeats the “infidel” and retakes Jerusalem. “The Holy War! The Holy War! Help God and He will help you,” sings baritone Stephen Gadd lustily - but he represents the Muslim cause.

So whose side is God on – ours or theirs? Well, it would seem that he is not one for taking sides but favours the peace-makers, if President Obama's speech to students at Cairo University is anything to go by. The final section of the piece is devoted to this speech in which Obama insists that “violence is a dead end” and quotes from three holy books - the Talmud, the Quran and the Bible - to prove his point.

The Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, who commissioned the work for their centenary this year, have gained plenty of expertise over the years - it certainly showed at this splendid performance – and their junior offshoot were also remarkably accomplished. Gavin Carr on the conductor's rostrum welded his large forces together into a very convincing ensemble and the two soloists proved excellent in their respective roles.

Richard Blackford has composed a work which is stimulating both musically and intellectually – not all choral pieces are! - and choral societies who appreciate a challenge should be vying with each other to perform it. It proved a magnificent climax to a concert inspired by the tragic events of a decade ago and deservedly received a standing ovation.

(This is a shortened version of a review which first appeared on the international reviews website www.seenandheard-international.com, part of Musicweb International).

Cheltenham Opera Society attends soporific *La Sonnambula*

Members travelled to Covent Garden to see Bellini's *La Sonnambula* on November 10th and almost nodded off during the performance. Much of the blame lay at the door of the conductor Daniel Oren who opted for painfully slow tempi which made life difficult for the singers, or so I would have thought. Moreover, Marco Arturo's direction and set design served to confuse rather than clarify. There were some good

performances, notably from Michele Pertusi as Count Rudolfo and Eglise Gutierrez as Amina, but they could not compensate for the lack-lustre production. Still, I was glad to have the opportunity to experience one of Bellini's lesser known gems.

RJ

Forthcoming Outing

Sunday 19th February 2011 at 3pm

Cardiff International Piano Series

LESLIE HOWARD

Dora Stoutzker Hall

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Leslie Howard's 94 disc recording of Liszt's complete piano music is one of the most stupendous musical achievements of current time. In this concert he plays Liszt, Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations and Rachmaninov's barnstorming *First Sonata*.

We will be able to view this beautiful new concert hall with its superb acoustics and theatre opened in Summer 2011 hopefully as a guided tour at 2pm but certainly individually.

Participants will have time to visit some of Cardiff's other attractions. Close to the RWCMD is the National Museum of Wales and Art Gallery with **free entry and a restaurant** and coffee bar. Special exhibitions will include *Captain Scott: South for Science*, *Archaeopteryx* and *Artist in Focus: David Jones*. Also close by is Cardiff Castle (for which you will need about 3 hours, entry price £9.50) and *The Cardiff Story* in The Old Library near St David's Hall in The Hayes which offers free entry.

We will leave Cheltenham racecourse at 9.00am, picking up at Westal Green (9.15) and the Benhall Roundabout (9.20). We will return after the concert at approximately 5pm. Inclusive Cost £26. Please send replies and cheques made out to Cheltenham Music Festival on the enclosed form no later than December 31st 2011 to Jill Bacon, 2 Witley Lodge Close, Cheltenham, GL51 3LW. Tel: 01242 231615.

Opera Trips

There will be trips to the WNO in Cardiff to see *Beatrice and Benedict* (Berlioz) on Friday 17 February 2012 and *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner) on Saturday 19 May 2012. Booking forms have been sent out for *Beatrice and Benedict*. They will be sent out for *Tristan und Isolde* in the new year. Simon Rees, the dramaturg of the WNO, will come and talk about *Beatrice and Benedict* on Tuesday 17 January and about *Tristan und Isolde* on Monday 5 March. Both talks will be at 7.00 pm at St

Andrew's Church, Montpellier Street, Cheltenham.

If you would like to go to operas and you have not already given him your details, please send your address, phone number and e-mail address to Robert Padgett, 14 Century Court, Montpellier Grove, Cheltenham GL50 2XR, 01242 571802, robertpadgett@btinternet.com.

Music to Banish Winter Blues

Avoid the temptation to go into hibernation after Christmas or you'll miss some of the good musical events on offer. This article highlights just a few.

On December 11th Julian Lloyd Webber will be stealing a march on next year's Delius anniversary celebrations when he teams up with the Cheltenham Symphony Orchestra to play the composer's *Cello Concerto*. If you want more seasonal fare, how about **Fanfare for Christmas** (15th at 7) in Cheltenham College Chapel with Sarah Connolly, the Flowers Band and various choirs.

Cheltenham Contemporary Concerts launch 2012 with a visit from the trio Equivox on January 18th at 8 in St Andrew's, Montpellier. On 19th there'll be the premiere of a new work by Charlton Kings composer Gilbert Biberian played by the Rautio Trio at Gloucester Music Society. Alas, the event clashes with a concert of Russian music from BBC National Orchestra of Wales under the baton of Tadaaki Otaka. With visits from the Takacs on 24th (CMS) and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on 26th (with Kirill Karabits conducting and Gautier Capuçon playing Dvořák's *Cello Concerto*) in prospect, nobody can complain that January 2012 is going to be dull.

That fine pianist James Lisney will be back at the Pittville Pump Room on February 1st to resume his Masterworks series.

There's also a notable orchestral concert on the 8th to celebrate the centenary of Captain Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. This will, of course, be part of the celebrations for one of his companions, Edward Wilson whose statue stands close to the Neptune fountain in the Promenade. This month's Cheltenham Contemporary Concert on Wednesday 15th features guitarist Adam Kham with percussionist Jeremy Little in the Town Hall Drawing Room, and Cheltenham Music Society's offering on 22nd February is the Martinu Quartet. Shiver my timbers! It seems we're getting another visit from Julian Lloyd Webber - this time playing the Shostakovich *Cello Concerto* with the Orchestra of the Swan.

The Hallé Orchestra will be coming our way on Saturday March 10th with two brilliant young musicians: pianist Alexander Romanovsky and conductor Andrew Gourlay. A prominent classical music broadcaster described the latter as the most exciting of the current batch of young conductors and clearly destined for stardom. Cheltenham Contemporary Concerts will present David Bednall playing Messiaen, Macmillan and Howells on the organ of Holy Apostles on 12th, and on Sunday 25th Oxford Philomusica return with Natalie Clein. She will offer us another opportunity to hear Saint-Saëns' amazing *Cello Concerto* with which Steven Isserlis began the current Cheltenham Concert Series in September.