

Borough News.
23/3/67

THE MESSIAH WAS GOOD LISTENING

OF all the oratorios surely Handel's Messiah is the most performed from the smallest village choir to the largest of choral societies.

Because it is so well known most choirs fall into the trap of singing as lustily as they can thus spoiling any real attempt at giving the work its full meaning.

Surbiton Oratorio Society thankfully did not make this mistake on Saturday at St. Andrew's church, Surbiton, when they rendered the whole work in a beautifully balanced and controlled performance.

From the moment the orchestra, led by Ursula Snow, started it was apparent that the performance would make good listening.

The soloists were competent, but they did not match the brilliance of the choir which was well rehearsed and truly under the control of conductor John Wilkinson.

Because the singers knew the work thoroughly they were able to watch the stick and not the dotted crotchets.

Of the soloists the contralto, Margaret Duckworth, had a complete understanding of her part and sang it with warmth in rich tones.

Richard Angas, bass, sang with a deep operatic voice which did not always come through but his "Why do the Nations" where the tessitura is higher, was excellent.

The tenor, Philip Langridge, has a good sense of the dramatic and Barbara Elsy, has good technical ability.

On the trumpet was Edward Hobart and Kenneth Lawrence was at the organ.—J.T.

Full house for 'Messiah'

Two hundred extra chairs had to be brought into St. Andrew's Church, Surbiton, on Saturday last week to accommodate the capacity audience for Surbiton Oratorio Society's performance of Handel's "Messiah."

The society's strong following were not to be disappointed. Under the baton of the musical director, Mr. John Wilkinson, the choir of 85 voices, orchestra and soloists showed splendid understanding.

The chorus work was sound throughout and improved as the choir settled into its work. Philip Langridge sang his tenor solos with power and perfect diction, and, although he lacked volume in certain passages, Richard Angas brought a fine tone and similarly excellent diction to the bass parts.

Margaret Duckworth (contralto) and Barbara Elsey (soprano) were the other soloists. The organist was Kenneth Lawrence, the orchestra was led by Ursula Snow, and the trumpeter was Edward Hobart.

Surrey Comet.
29-3-67.

1967

A BLENDED PROGRAMME PROVIDED NO WORRIES

IT is a tradition of Surbiton Oratorio Society for its conductor, Mr. J. Wilkinson, to choose the programme at their annual concert of carols and Christmas music.

The concert at St. Andrew's church on Saturday was a particularly good blend of traditional and modern carols. The choir demonstrated their understanding so well that their conductor must have been relieved at the success of their joint efforts, as he had been confined to bed for several days before the concert.

of the sensitivity of the singing.

Of the more modern carols the choir were at their best in Peter Wishart's "Alleluia" and in Sir Malcolm Sargent's version of "Jesus Sleeps."

Janet Mallion had chosen several relatively unknown carols for her solos but emphasised that these should be better known. "The Fast Mercy" by Peter Warlock and "Bululalon" by the same composer, which were accompanied by the choir, were particularly well sung.

—G.S.

Sensitivity

Both the "Holly and the Ivy" and "Silent Night" are so well known that scope for fresh interpretation is very limited. But here one felt were the high spots of the concert because

Conductor defies illness in carols triumph

Mr. John Wilkinson, conductor of Surbiton Oratorio Society, was ill in bed all day on Saturday and got up just in time to conduct the society's increasingly popular annual festival of carols and Christmas music.

His choir and the congregation at St. Andrew's Church, Surbiton, rewarded him by giving one of their best and most joyful performances. It was also one of the best-attended concerts. The society had put in 120 extra seats to augment the church pews; these were all taken, and additional chairs from the lady chapel had also to be brought into use.

After the concert Mr. Wilkinson said he was particularly glad he had made the effort to get along and conduct. "It was one of their best performances," he said.

Mr. G. H. Holmes, chairman, welcomed the large congregation, particularly the Mayor and Mayoress of Kingston (Councillor and Mrs. R. P. Oliver), the president of the society (Councillor J. Harrison) and Mrs. Harrison, and Councillor and Mrs. J. A. Belcher.

Soprano solos were contributed by Miss Janet Mallion, of Tadworth, and the choir's programme was a mixture of the well-known and the little known.

These were performed with such skill and feeling for the music and the occasion that it seems likely that the society won many new admirers who will make a point of attending its performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion at Easter time.

A collection was taken at the end of the carol concert and will be divided between "Shelter," house a family for Christmas campaign, and the expenses of the society.

The organist was Mr. Kenneth Lawrence.

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November 3, 1967

Well-balanced performance

A well-balanced performance of Bach's motet "Jesu, Priceless Treasure" and of Faure's Requiem was given by the Surbiton Oratorio Society to a crowded audience in St. Andrew's church, Surbiton, on Saturday.

The choir of close on 70 voices has good male strength and an excellent tone, particularly in the softer passages. Their conductor, Mr. John Wilkinson, achieved a well-deserved success, supported by distinguished playing from the chamber orchestra led by Mr. Ralph Nicolson.

Showed

At the organ was Mr. Kenneth Lawrence, who played Handel's organ concerto, Opus 4, No. 4 in F Major with understanding after the motet. The Requiem soloists were Elaine Naylor, soprano, and John Barrow, bass.

The first half of the programme, the motet, showed the choir's range to advantage. After the organ concerto, Faure's Requiem, with its tender Sanctus and exultant In Paradisum, filled the lofty church with rich sound.

—M.B.

'Requiem' — an old friend

Faure's "Requiem" is a perennial favourite with amateur choirs because of its restrained feeling and unassuming but precise craftsmanship, and it was given a convincing performance by Surbiton Oratorio Society at St. Andrew's Church, on Saturday.

It was not the first time that the society has sung this work, and John Wilkinson conducted it with the affection that one reserves for an old friend.

As usual, his choir was firm in line and fresh in colour.

Soloists Elaine Naylor, soprano, and John Barrow, bass, made valuable contributions and Ralph Nicolson led the reliable chamber orchestra.

The evening opened with Bach's superb motet, "Jesu, Priceless Treasure," in which the choir was also in good form.

Kenneth Lawrence provided a welcome instrumental interlude with an intelligent performance of a Handel organ concerto.

The church was crowded for the concert and the society certainly deserves this kind of support.

Surrey Comet, Wednesday, November 1, 1967

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1968

Borough News
11/11/68

ALL THE FACTORS WERE PRESENT AT SOCIETY'S ELIJAH

FROM time to time in the world of music, one performance transcends anything heard by a society before. Several factors must be present concurrently for this to happen.

The work must be well rehearsed and directed, it must have good performers and it must have a good accompaniment. But, above all, every performer must be fired to give of the best.

All these factors were present in abundance when Surbiton Oratorio Society sang Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' at St. Andrew's church, Surbiton, on Saturday.

Mendelssohn's masterpiece has majesty of composition and great dramatic content but the driving power to reach the destination must come from the performers.

John Lawrenson sang 'Elijah' with such expression, feeling and delightful tonal quality that it is inconceivable the part could be sung better.

Philip Langridge has sung

at Surbiton before and his tenor voice has now excellent quality and good control. In a young man this must mean a promising future.

Doreen Price was suffering from a cold but it did not upset her vocal range which was more than adequate for the demands of an exacting part.

Complete control

The contralto part was taken by Delia Woolford, a singer with much charm and warmth in her voice. She is a full contralto in an age when mezzos are so often passed off for them and she has complete control over her range of rich notes.

The orchestra led by Ralph Nicholson attacked the score to bring out its great dramatic qualities. Kenneth Lawrence was at the organ.

John Wilkinson was the focal point from which all this enthusiasm emanated and he certainly drew from the performers the very best they could give. His choir sang with precision, they blended the harmonies perfectly and enjoyed singing Mendelssohn's music.

I do not think 'Elijah' could have been performed better.
—P.T.

Faultless 'Elijah' at Surbiton

A PACKED audience attended Surbiton Oratorio Society's performance of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' at St. Andrew's Church, Surbiton, last Saturday.

More than 80 extra seats had to be brought in for the visitors, many of whom voted the performance the best they had ever heard—by this or any other society. Their praise was certainly justified.

Surbiton

Both the massed choir of 84 singers, the musicians, and the solo vocalists, were faultless.

Particularly striking was the performance by solo bass, John Lawrenson. Mr. Lawrenson, one of Britain's top soloists who has appeared many times on radio and TV, was making his fourth appearance for the society.

Philip Langridge, a younger man now rapidly rising to fame, also proved his worth. His selection as solo tenor was particularly apt since he made his first professional appearance with the society several years ago.

Perfectionist

Of the women soloists, Delia Woolford made a pleasing contralto, and the strong, sure voice of Doreen Price, soprano, justified her position as one of Britain's top soprano voices.

As leader of the orchestra—which numbered several members of the London Symphony Orchestra—the society was fortunate to have Ralph Nicholson, inspector of music for Surrey County Council, and Kenneth Lawrence, the organist, who has played at most of the society's recent performances.

Finally, a word about the conductor, John Wilkinson. Mr. Wilkinson, who lives at Lyndhurst Avenue, Surbiton, is nothing short of a perfectionist.

As a member put it, "If the society has gone from strength to strength it is largely because of him. He's really marvellous and won't tolerate a wrong note."

Mr. Wilkinson, in business life senior music master at Tulse Hill comprehensive school, has been the society's conductor for 18 years, and has seen membership grow from a small nucleus to the present 86.

Superb Passions deserve second showings

A PACKED church, with seats placed along the side, heard the Surbiton Oratorio Society's performance of the Bach St. Matthew Passion at St. Andrew's, Surbiton, on Saturday. The Malden Methodist Church choir's performance took the place of the usual Palm Sunday evening service.

Both performances, immaculately rehearsed, retold Christ's last days, his trial and betrayal in unforgettable manner. The singing was worthy of Bach—no praise could be higher.

At Surbiton, conductor Mr. John Wilkinson achieved well-balanced singing from his many voices.

The tenor Evangelist, Philip Langridge, who carried the main burden of the singing, was outstanding. He was rivalled by Christus, Richard Angas, a noble bass, and Malcolm Shaw (also bass) as Judas, Peter, Pilate and High Priest. Sally Le Sage (soprano) was Pilate's wife with Sybil Michelow and Paul Taylor in the supporting contralto and tenor roles. Ursula Snow led the orchestra with

Kenneth Lawrence at the organ, Boys of the Tulse Hill school, where Mr. Wilkinson

is director of music, formed additional singers.

Such a fine performance should surely have more than one hearing. The new Borough Arts Council must include provision for such enterprises in its work.

In Malden, the Methodist choir produced equally fine singing on a smaller scale. Their choirmaster, Cmdr. John Farmer, created a performance from the heart—warm, tender, full of compassion.

The chorale "O mighty love, O love beyond all measure," had a deep serenity. Again, the tenor Evangelist, Douglas Carrick, was the main soloist with Robert Loveday, a fine bass as Christus. John Ford, assured and powerful, was Peter and Pilate. Reginald Moody and Una Carrick, wife of the Evangelist singer, were in the supporting roles. Piano was Ursula Floyd and Eric S. Hayes was organist.—M.B.

SOCIETY'S DIGNIFIED 'PASSION'

On the eve of Palm Sunday, members of Surbiton Oratorio Society gave a dignified, and at times, moving performance of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion."

This was the first of their three annual public performances, and judging from the quality of the singing, particularly in the choral passages, the 19th season of the society looks like being one of its most rewarding.

John Wilkinson, now director of music at Tulse Hill School, was appointed conductor in 1952. His relationship with the society is a happy one born of mutual respect over the years, and their response to his guidance and cajoling brought the best out of them.

Elocution from both soloists and choral singers was admirable—no mean achievement in St. Andrew's Church—and its excellence added eloquence in the recitative.

Soloists were Sally Le Sage (soprano), Sybil Michelow (contralto), Philip Langridge and Paul Taylor (tenor). Richard Angas and Malcolm Shaw (bass). Ursula Snow led the chamber orchestra, and Kenneth Lawrence was at the organ.

1975

Contraltos delight in cathedral

SINGERS and choirs unfamiliar with the acoustics of Guildford Cathedral tend to find the going hard until they are used to it; what is needed is loud consonants, forward projection and unshakable self-confidence.

I was reminded of this on Saturday when Surbiton Oratorio Society gave a well-planned programme of English and French music; the contrasted pieces were Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, often used by choral societies as a "warmer-upper"; Faure's ever-popular *Requiem* and Poulenc's choral tour de force, *Gloria*.

The choir and orchestra launched into the complex texture of the Parry with a shade too much speed for this building. This piece never lets up and it is difficult to find or to make variety. A lack of audible consonants was evident, and what a pity the sopranos made so little of the great swinging tune. Oh may we soon renew that song.

The soprano section, in fact, is the weakness of this choir, lacking attack and purpose, though their middle range tone was sweet and their intonation was good.

But I should like to pay tribute to one section of the choir that stood out above the rest. Each member was alert and the tone was both even and lively, with good rhythms; furthermore they were lucky in having among them one voice with a decided edge to it, that gave the tone the pointing it needs. Well done, contraltos! It was a pleasure to listen to your singing.

As often happens, it was the French music that gave the contraltos their best opportunities, whether duetting with the tenors in the Faure or singing unaccompanied in the Poulenc.

LACK OF VITALITY

The Requiem started most promisingly and there were a number of felicities later on, but it is sad to report that neither the choir nor its conductor, John Wilkinson, really had the measure of this subtle music. Though again the tempos were slightly fast, the music oddly appeared to drag, through a lack of vitality in the conductor's beat and consequently in the voices.

The transparency of this lovely and deeply-felt music shows up the slightest defect, but the choir seemed to enjoy this more than the Parry, and the *In paradisum* came over well.

The orchestra have a more independent part in this work, and played well, especially the cellos and basses; but how difficult is the ensemble between the harp and the organ in this closing section.

The important harp part in the *Sanctus* was excellent, as was Kenneth Lawrence's efficient organ playing.

The soloists were Angela Beale and John Barrow. The soprano did not sound at ease in the *Pie Jesu*, the consonants being limp and the intonation flat. This is strange, because she is an admirable exponent of early music, and (as we were to hear later) she was at one with the Poulenc.

Pie Jesu, of course, was written for a boy's voice, though few boys have the lung capacity to embrace the long phrases, and the range is too high for a counter tenor. Perhaps the ideal medium would be a castrato, but we are not likely to be given the opportunity of hearing that!

John Barrow, on the other hand, was in his element. He has been singing in the cathedral since its consecration and understands exactly how to make even a quiet entry in the middle range penetrate to the remotest corners, without even a suspicion of forcing.

DRAMATIC APPROACH

John Barrow's *Libera me* is more dramatic than most baritone's, an approach fully justified by the text: this number and the *Hosties* were a joy to listen to.

After the interval came Poulenc's splendid *Gloria*, which was far better suited to this choir's style. The *Domini Fili*, for example, was very spirited and the many vivid climaxes elsewhere were well managed. Angela Beale was much more at home, too — the first *Domini Deus* coming across with clarity and feeling, while the second *Dominus Deus*, an angular motif often repeated, was given with increasing intensity of feeling at each appearance.

The exciting music made an excellent finale to the concert, and the audience was duly appreciative of the choir's success.

Surbiton, 23.10.76

My night at the oratorio began to stray

A NIGHT at the oratorio, you could call it, though Saturday evening in the company of both the Surbiton Oratorio and the Kingston Orpheus Society strayed far enough into adjacent musical camps at one stage to justify the impression of a night at the quasi-opera.

The Surbiton choir at St. Andrew's Church offered up Rossini's *Stabat Mater* which is oratorio in name only.

Musically it sounds as though the master of operatic felicity had just broken off polishing *The Barber of Seville* to attend to it, inserting a tenor aria which the early Verdi

Hilton Tims' music notes

might have coveted and draping the whole enterprise with the inimitable, unmistakable mellifluousness and grace of phrasing he lavished on his stage work. Not for this irrepressibly optimistic composer the sorrow and solemnity with which others treat the subject matter.

It was a delightful, cheering experience. The chorus was not called on to work excessively hard but what it had to do it did with pleasure and conviction.

The soloists seemed unnecessarily reverential and po-faced in their approach, ignoring the music's hopeful impulse. Not so the orchestra, too pronounced at times for the comfort of the singers, but often doing fine justice to Rossini.

The Kingston Oratorio

1976

1980

MD John Wilkinson steps down

Huge response to 'SOS' by society

19/4/80

CONDUCTOR crisis which threatened Surbiton Oratorio Society last week after the sudden resignation of John Wilkinson, its musical director for the past 28 years, has been speedily averted.

Following last week's Music Notes in which I revealed Mr. Wilkinson's departure, an embarrassment of would-be conductors contacted the society to offer their services and bid for the coveted appointment.

The SOS management committee has selected two applicants on a short-term basis, but is withholding their names until choir members have been informed and their anxieties placated.

The first, from outside the area, will immediately take over rehearsals for the choir's October performance of David Fanshawe's African Sanctus, probably the most difficult and challenging choral work SOS has ever undertaken.

The second, a well-known Kingston musician, will subsequently move in to prepare the ground for December's annual carol concert and a performance next March of Messiah.

HILTON TIMS' music notes

I understand that neither of the conductors has been offered a permanent appointment at this stage but it is possible that one of them may at a later date be confirmed as Mr. Wilkinson's successor.

At all events, in the wake of his abrupt resignation, SOS has acquired a breathing space in which to make a considered choice for one of the top choral jobs in the South East.

Meanwhile, a more cheerful stroke of fortune for the choir...

It has been invited to contribute a singing delegation to the Malcolm Sargent Memorial Choir currently being formed from leading groups in the Greater London area for a US tour in March, 1982.

Already more than 30

members have applied to make up the Surbiton representation in the prestige choir which will perform Messiah before mass audiences in Washington and at New York's Madison Square Gardens.

Music society says thanks

As noted by your Show-page in last Saturday's edition, Mr. John Wilkinson is no longer to continue as the musical director of the Surbiton Oratorio Society after a long period of fruitful musical association, for which the society would like to express its gratitude.

Meanwhile, we look forward to an exciting new year of music-making, which starts for us in September with the re-commencement of our rehearsals.

JANE D. ANDREWS, Public Relations Officer, Surbiton Oratorio Society.

Surbiton Comet 29/12/80.

Oratorio society fills its top post

YEAR'S end is marking some magnificent comings and goings over a wide spectrum in Kingston's musical life.

Coming... Robin Page whose appointment has just been confirmed as permanent musical director of Surbiton Oratorio Society, leaderless since the sudden resignation of John Wilkinson in the summer.

Mr. Page will be only the second conductor the choir has had in its 23-year history.

He won the coveted position in competition with more than 30 applicants, all of whom have been carefully scrutinised and auditioned.

The deciding factor in his appointment was probably the unprecedented success of his performance with the choir in David Fanshawe's African Sanctus two months ago.

Bombshell

Mr. Wilkinson's resignation came as a bombshell at a crucial stage of rehearsal for the work. Mr. Page took over in a caretaker role and won the admiration of both the choir and its audience.

He was a choral scholar at both Oxford and Cambridge, studied piano and trumpet at the Royal Academy of Music and is now attached to the teaching staff there.

His experience is catholic. He has played trumpet in the Joe Loss Band, sung in the chorus of Welsh National Opera and conducted recordings with the Scottish Ballet orchestra.

Mr. Page (26) lives in Teddington and will make his formal debut with Surbiton Oratorio Society next March with Messiah.

* * *

Top conductors leave

12-4-80

THE normally serene tenor of Kingston's musical life has this week been hit by unexpected squalls which have left the town's two foremost choral societies looking for new conductors.

In separate and unrelated decisions John Wilkinson has resigned as conductor of Surbiton Oratorio Society and George Anderson told Kingston Orpheus Society of his intention to retire.

Both men have been responsible between them for the mainstream of choral

singing in the Royal borough since the war, and their surprise announcements followed independently the annual meetings of their societies last week.

HILTON TIMS' music notes

Mr. Wilkinson's resignation was totally unexpected. He has been conductor of the Surbiton choir for the past 28 years and guided it to the forefront of choral singing in the South East.

A committee member told me: "The reasons are personal but they do not reflect any ill-feeling."

The choir is currently well into rehearsal for probably the most challenging work it has ever undertaken, David Fanshawe's African Sanctus to be performed next October.

formed next October.

Mr. Wilkinson severed his work on it immediately upon his resignation announcement but the project will continue under a guest conductor.

The society will shortly be advertising for a permanent conductor to take up the appointment in time for scheduled performances of Messiah in Surbiton.

Mr. Anderson was, for two years, the Surbiton Oratorio Society's first conductor after it was formed in 1949. Simultaneously, he was musical director of the Kingston Orpheus Society which he founded in 1944. It now ranks as the district's oldest choral society and one of Mr. Anderson's proudest claims is never to have missed conducting a single performance.

His retirement will take effect next May, giving KOS ample time to appoint a replacement.

Hilton Tims' music notes

1980

New MD Robin Page's first concert

Fusing electronics in a choral challenge *Surrey Comet 25/10/80*

THE breakages at Surbiton Oratorio Society's concert on Saturday were significant. Tradition was broken, so were attendance records, as cogent an argument for cause and effect as any advocate of reform could wish for.

The agency for this extraordinary landmark performance which, at a stroke, has transformed the image of the society, was David Fanshawe's cult choral extravaganza African Sanctus.

It was not only the most modern (1978) work the choir has attempted but also the most musically bizarre. Banks of amplifiers, synthesizers and tape-mixing console gave St. Andrew's Church the appearance of a hard-rock venue. Conductor Robin Page wore a head-set. The era of choral technology was dawning over Surbiton.

Vari-coloured

Gone were the singers' traditional, pious dark suits, white blouses and black shirts. Vari-coloured blouses, shirts and bow ties were the new order of dress.

Mr. Fanshawe himself, an amiable, ebullient, communicative composer, introduced his opus in a near hour-long exposition that was not so much a talk, more a one-man show.

He demonstrated the African music he taped on his remarkable odyssey, shaded in idiom from Islamic prayer-chant to Ugandan ululation, and explained the techniques he devised for weaving his own music into their fabric.

Then the Sanctus proper, and here the choir proceeded to justify triumphantly the risk and the challenge they had faced in their decision to attempt it.

The evening's star was, marginally, Mr. Page, who had laid the groundwork of faultless choral balance and iron-clad co-ordination. But the singers themselves raised the structure of this fascinating work with amazing mastery of its complex beats and tempos, the tonal blending of live voice with taped note, the shifting keys and alien voice effects.

Something elemental and compelling took hold of their performance and it was exciting to hear.

The soloist, Kathryn Harries, wreathed her voice through this intricate texture with captivating power and beauty, totally confident in the punishing range demanded of her. At the end she was obliged to enquire the appealing Lord's Prayer setting, faintly rem-

HILTON TIMS' music notes

iniscent of rock-musical ballad style. That, to my knowledge, has never happened before at an SOS concert.

It is unlikely that Surbiton Oratorio Society will ever be the same again, even when it reverts to the tradition of Bach, Handel or Mozart. African Sanctus has clearly given a new and potent dimension to the technique and confidence of their singing.

Indeed, David Fanshawe was so impressed with the performance that he has offered to compose a work specially for them. The ultimate accolade.

Borough News 24/10/80

This African hunt was for music!

ANYONE expecting a reworking of the "Missa-Luba" Mass at Saturday evening's performance of David Fanshawe's "African Sanctus" had a great shock in store.

For this work, staged by the Surbiton Oratorio Society at St Andrew's Church under guest conductor Robin Page, was quite different from anything else in the current choral repertoire.

The evening started with Mr Fanshawe giving a vivid account of the aims and genesis of the work, telling of his often hazardous journey through Northern Africa hunting for music. He was even imprisoned in Cairo and spent some time on the run from the Egyptian anti-terrorist

squad.

African Sanctus is a blend of African sounds and music on tape mixed with live European performers; African languages with the Latin Mass. A blend in a glorious unity, all forms of worship of the one God. A sentiment that not everyone would be able to share.

For a work which contains acoustic and electronic instruments - including guitar - solo soprano, a large chorus and the tapes around which the entire piece hangs, balance between each group is important. Any slight weakness in Saturday's performance stemmed from this.

Of those taking part, the strong enthusiastic singing of the chorus must take the greatest praise.

Kathryn Harries sang with immense feeling and poise. Conductor Robin Page - complete with headphones - directed with consummate ease and understanding, and his sense of style and rhythm must be greatly applauded.

Elgar's thrilling journey

Sutton & Cleam Advertiser

10/6/81

A WORK of infinite profundity, and a permanent landmark in English choral music, Elgar's "The Dream of Gerontius" creates a kind of musical and religious journey for the listener.

This quality was maintained on Sunday when Banstead Musical Society and Surbiton Oratorio Society sang the oratorio at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon.

Under Richard Stangroom's unflurried beat, the English Symphony Orchestra provided a compelling account of the prelude with firm integration and keen attention to dynamic

detail.

In the opening vocal phrases, tenor soloist David Johnston displayed a trenchant sensitivity to the words.

As the work progressed, some of his declamatory outbursts were less well-controlled, as if his voice were tired. Seldom did he hold his long notes as Elgar indicated.

However, the translucent tone of the semi-chorus, a mere 20 students from Trinity College of Music positioned in front of the main choir, brought a special dimension to the performance.

From their first entry with

the "Kyrie eleison," their clarity, poise and cogent enunciation illumined all that was best in the evening.

The main chorus was also characterised by its splendid tone and cohesive balance between voice parts. Rarely do we hear from local choirs at Fairfield such attuned attack from sopranos, nor such a lithe resonance of well-produced men's voices.

There were some passionate and resplendent bursts of choral sound in "Go in the name" and "Praise to the holiest," but they avoided making the demons' chorus as

verbally histrionic as some other choirs.

From time to time, in the biggest climaxes, the orchestra swamped them, yet the actual effect — despite the lack of definition — was in itself quite thrilling.

This combined choir certainly paid heed to the direction from the rostrum, such confident rapport between singers and conductor revealing itself in the flow of the singing (the "journey" characteristic, again), as exemplified in the closing pages.

While the higher tessitura of Margaret Cable's voice produc-

ed some stirring moments, the mezzo range did not project with enough weight and often became swallowed up by the orchestra.

The vital, climactic phrase of the tenor, "Take me away," was riveting in its sheer emphatic power and intensity.

What a marvellous account John Noble gave of the priest's part, full of authority, exemplary diction, magisterial tone and beautifully firm intonation! Of all the many good elements in Sunday's performance, Mr Noble's singing was unequivocally supreme.

David Squibb

SOCIETY'S NEW WITH A TRULY

A NEW conductor, a new venue...and a conspicuously Surbiton Oratorio Society which broke with its tradition moving out of Surbiton to St. Luke's Church in Kingston.

The concert was, too, the first demonstration of the mark its recently appointed musical director Robin Page is making on the choir.

The singing, flattered by the excellent St. Luke's acoustics, had an energy and trimness attributable in equal parts to the disciplines Mr. Page is imposing and the freshness of the music he gave notice of introducing under his regime.

Purcell's King Arthur was a radical departure for SOS, the first non-sacred work it has attempted. Its operatic format with varying tempos, differing moods and narrative drive was a test passed with colours.

Indeed, the colouring and shading throughout the singing were the most audible gain from Mr. Page's ministrations.

On more familiar ground with Vivaldi's Gloria, the choir's crisp, firm line and balanced textures showed how confidently it has regained its poise.

Among the admirable soloists, Kathryn Harries registered some glorious soprano effects in the Gloria, though she seemed

HILTON TIMS' MUSIC NOTES

less happily at ease with King Arthur.

A word of praise, too, for the Thames Sinfonia, which seized the unaccustomed chance for orchestral displays in the Purcell and showed itself to be an asset, too often taken for granted.

★ ★ ★

1981

Fairfield County Chorale visit Kingston

(from page 1)

On 25 June 2005, Kingston Choral Society sang with Fairfield County Chorale during the latter's Summer tour. Members of KCS paid a return visit to Fairfield in Summer 2007

Visitors from Connecticut

Fairfield County Chorale, a choir resident in Connecticut are beginning a U.K. tour taking, in five venues in a week.

(continued on page 3)



THE AMERICAN ISSUE 625 MAY 2005



Johannes Somary, the director of music for Fairfield County Chorale

Kingston Choral Society undertakes yet another new venture on June 25th when it combines with Fairfield County Chorale for the final concert of this season. The concert, which takes place in Kingston Parish Church at 7.30 p.m., will be conducted by the American choir's distinguished director of music, the Swiss-born Johannes Somary. After an opening orchestral piece, the choirs will perform two choral items, Mozart's 'Coronation Mass' and Bruckner's 'Te Deum' accompanied by the Thames Sinfonia.

Johannes Somary has been the director of music for Fairfield County Chorale for thirty-years in addition to having conducted many other ensembles, including the English Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic, both in the United States and Europe. He is also a composer, organist and teacher and has an impressive discography, which includes composers from Bach to Britten as well as his own works.

For Fairfield County Chorale, a choir resident in Connecticut just outside New York City, this concert marks the beginning of a U.K. tour taking in five venues in a week. Following their performance in Kingston the chorale travels to Llangollen, Chester and Canterbury before returning to London to sing at St. James Church, Piccadilly. Kingston Choral Society will then host a party for them on 2nd July before they return to the U.S. Plans are underway for a reciprocal visit to take place next year with Kingston Choral Society's director of music, Robin Page, conducting.

Tickets for the Kingston concert, price £12 (£10 concessions/£5 for U16s) will be available nearer the time from the KCS box office on 020 8398 1718 or 020 8390 5689, Hands Music, Market Place, Kingston, the website for Kingston Council (www.kingston.gov.uk) and at the door.

Extensive coverage of the Society/University joint concert including Britten's St Nicholas

Times, Friday, December 31, 2004

Inventing programming

Kingston Choral
Society

Charles Brennan

KINGSTON Choral Society recently performed a joint Christmas concert with Kingston University Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Robin Page and Rebecca Miller.

The programming was unusual yet effective: the first half consisting of a comparatively unknown work 'St Nicolas' by Benjamin Britten.

The scoring for the piece is itself unusual: tenor solo, choir, semi-chorus (off stage), string orchestra, percussion, piano duet and organ. Philip Ball was the soloist and he was accompanied by the three trebles Ludo Fahey, Charley Manton and Simon Jennings. Much of 'St Nicolas' is sombre in tone and the introduction set the scene for much of the work. The pizzicato string opening of 'The Birth of Nicolas' leads to a highly effective 'dialogue' between the choir of women and Ludo Fahey who sang the words 'God be glorified' with complete confidence throughout the movement. 'Nicolas devotes himself to God' involved a considerable number of key changes for the tenor soloist who coped extremely well with them.

'He journeys to Palestine' began with the tenors and basses singing in unison.

There was a strong theatrical element to this movement, with much interaction between the choir and the semi-chorus. There was a good build up to the 'Storm', which concluded with some beautiful string and piano orchestration. 'Nicolas and the pickled boys' was one of the highlights of the work and included a procession down the aisle of the three boys who timed this to perfection.

'St. Nicolas' ended with the hymn 'God moves in a mysterious way'; one of two

hymns requiring audience participation. This was an inspired choice and Robin Page, Kingston Choral Society, and the university are to be congratulated on their performance.

The second half consisted mainly of orchestral works, which were conducted by Rebecca Miller. Mozart's overture 'Cosi fan Tutte' was played confidently and the conductor maintained a good tempo throughout. The strings then played three movements from the 'Serenade for Strings' by Dvorak. Again, the conductor kept a tight rein on the tempi and her beat was precise. At times there was loss of clarity, especially in the semi-quaver passages, although this did not detract from the overall performance. The viola and cello sections performed more cohesively and I was impressed with the quality of their sound, particularly in the last movement.

The final orchestral work was a rarely performed symphony by the Basque composer Arragia. The orchestral playing was more assured and the players appeared to enjoy the performance. Throughout the symphony there were some lovely moments for the wind section, in particular for the flute in the 'trio' of the third movement. The last movement was rhythmically strong and exciting and ended on a triumphant note.

The evening concluded with carols, in which the audience were invited to participate. Well done to the choir for performing an unaccompanied (and unconduted) rendition of 'We wish you a merry Christmas', which worked perfectly!

Many thanks go to all the performers for their parts in this memorable and rewarding concert. Lastly, special mention should be given to Rebecca Miller and Robin Page for their inventive programming and lively direction.

A joint effort



Christmas is a time for people to get together, and Kingston Choral Society has taken this to heart as it teams up for the first time with the choir and orchestra of Kingston University to perform Benjamin Britten's cantata, St. Nicolas this month. The part of St. Nicolas will be sung by tenor Philip Ball and Kingston Choral Society's musical director, Robin Page, will conduct the combined forces.

The second part of the Christmas concert will feature Kingston University Orchestra, conducted by Rebecca Miller (pictured). Repertoire will include Mozart overture to *Così fan tutte*, Arriaga Symphony in D and Dvorak serenade for strings op 22. This will be followed by carols for choir and audience. The concert takes place at Kingston Parish Church on Saturday, December 11 at 7.30pm. See listings for details.

Choirs stand united for concert

MUSIC

HIGHLIGHT:

Gareth Foreman discovers a joint collaboration will bring a festive flavour to Kingston Parish Church this Saturday.

In a new venture, Kingston Choral Society will join with the University Choir and Orchestra for a performance of Benjamin Britten's St Nicolas on Saturday at Kingston Parish Church.

This seasonal piece will be conducted by the choral society's conductor, Robin Page and the title role of St Nicolas will be sung by the tenor, Philip Ball.

Both the Choral Society and the University hope that this will be the first of many fruitful collaborations.

The remainder of the programme will be a mixture of carols for choir and audience, accompanied by the University orchestra, who will also perform a Mozart overture and Dvorak's Serenade for Strings.

Tickets priced £12, (£10 concessions and £5 for U 16s) are available from Hands Music in the Market Place or from the box office on 020 8547 8430.

Kingston Informer

Friday, December 3, 2004

Choral delight

KINGSTON Choral Society will join Kingston University's choir and orchestra in a performance of Benjamin Britten's St Nicolas on Saturday, December 11, at 7.30pm.

The remainder of the programme at Kingston Parish Church will be a mixture of carols for the choir and audience accompanied by the orchestra, which will also play a Mozart overture and Dvorak's Serenade for Strings.

Tickets for the event cost £12 (£10 for concessions and £5 for under-16s) and are available from Hands Music, Market Place, the box office, on 020 8547 8430, or on the door.

November
2005

Brilliant Bach

To mark his 25th year with Kingston Choral Society, Robin Page, the musical director, has chosen The Mass in B Minor by JS Bach to open the choir's season on Saturday, November 12. Described in 1817 by the Swiss critic and publisher Hans-Georg Nageli as 'the greatest work of music of all ages and of all peoples' it is an appropriate work to celebrate such a marathon stint with the society.

After a successful collaboration with the Fairfield Chorale from the USA in the summer, the choir is now planning its own visit to America with concerts in New York and Connecticut in 2007.

Robin, has a very busy schedule as a musician. He is the musical director of Thames Sinfonia and the Purcell Orchestra and has recently conducted both the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and London Symphony Orchestra. More locally, he is Professor of Conducting at The Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall.

The Mass in B Minor by Bach will be performed in Kingston Parish Church, Market Square at 7.30pm with a full complement of talented soloists and the Purcell Orchestra, who perform on period instruments.

Tickets for the Kingston concert will be available from the KCS box office on 020 8398 1718 or 020 8390 5689, Hands Music, Market Place, Kingston, the website for Kingston Council (www.kingston.gov.uk) and on the door.

kingston
live

March
2005

Poetry in motion



A newly commissioned work by leading composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, will be performed by Kingston Choral Society with Kingston University Chorus at All Saints Parish Church this month.

The Kestrel Road, a song cycle set to poems by George Mackay Brown, was jointly commissioned by 47 choirs, all of them members of Making Music, the national umbrella organisation for several thousand amateur choirs and orchestras.

Sir Peter has been president of Making Music since 1989 and the work has been commissioned as a tribute to mark his 70th birthday. The feelings evoked in the words of Orkney-born poet Brown are suggestive of their "elusive land and seascapes," says Sir Peter who was appointed as Master of the Queen's Music in March last year.

The programme also includes George Shearing's Songs and Sonnets; John Rutter's Birthday Madrigals, written 10 years ago to celebrate Shearing's 75th birthday and solo piano pieces given by Australian accompanist, Mark Knoop (pictured). See listings for details.

arts & leisure

A new chapter for Page

**Kingston Choral
Society Kingston
Parish Church**

By Simon Fitzjohn

For Kingston Choral Society director of music Robin Page, the KCS' November concert will be a bittersweet affair.

The reason? Well, not only will the concert incorporate Sir Edward Elgar's *Dream Of Gerontius*, which Page describes as classical music "of the very highest level", but it will also be the final appearance for Page before he hangs up his baton after 27 years in charge.

And the poignancy is not lost on Page himself.

"It is going to be a real wrench to leave the choir. I shall miss everybody greatly.

"On a professional level, though, it was time to move onto pastures new, and by moving to Glasgow I will have many opportunities, both in Scotland and abroad, to further my career that a weekly commitment to KCS couldn't ever give me."

Page took the mantle back in 1980 when the KCS was a scuffling group with a handful of members under the name the Surbiton Oratorio Society.

And, under his tutelage, things have gone from strength to strength, with the group swelling to more than 100 members.

And, despite a dazzling array of concerts over the years, Page insists his fondest memories come from the human element.

He adds: "We have had some quite marvellous concerts but, for me, the real highlight has

been the choir members themselves.

"You couldn't meet a nicer bunch of people.

"They have supported me loyally through the years and their joint expertise, from all walks of life, has helped to run the choir brilliantly."

Page will be joined by renowned Welsh tenor Wynne Evans, soprano Kathryn Harries and baritone Michael Pearce for a sumptuous evening of music.

And he is delighted that Elgar's music will provide his send-off.

He explains: "Elgar as a composer has always been special to me.

"The *Dream of Gerontius* is a central work in Elgar's output.

"In my view, he touched the very highest level in only a few pieces – The *Dream*, *Enigma Variations* and *Cello Concerto* to name a few – but what a level that is!"

Page will be succeeded by Graham Ross in the KCS hot-seat. And the veteran artist reveals he will always hold his time in Kingston dear.

"KCS has made an excellent choice in Graham to succeed me.

"He is a very gifted young musician of immense potential and I am positive that the choir will flourish under his leadership."

KCS Concert, Kingston Parish Church, November 15, 7.30pm, £12/£14, 020 8390 5689.

KAC News'etter

Robin Page is moving on

After 27 years as Musical Director of Kingston Choral Society, Robin Page has announced that he will be moving on to develop his conducting career. He will depart in style with the Society's 60th anniversary concert, a performance of Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' on November 15th 2008.

Robin says "It has been an enormous pleasure working with such a committed and friendly group of singers over the years. We have made music together both in Kingston and much further afield, notably in New York and Venice, and I shall miss the choir greatly, at a personal level as well as musically. I feel most privileged to have overseen the choir's growth from its early days as Surbiton Oratorio Society to its present status as one of the major Choral Societies in the London area."

The Chairman, Denis Down, paid tribute to Robin "He has been an inspiring Director, who always gets the best out of both choir and orchestra. We have

appreciated Robin's breadth of repertoire which has ranged from the choral staples like Mozart's 'Requiem' to the first UK performance of Sibelius's 'Coronation Cantata', new works and lighter pieces such as a setting of Hilaire Belloc's 'Matilda' by Antony le Fleming. Not least, Robin has enlivened rehearsals with good humour and many musical anecdotes. We will be sad to see him go, but understand that it is time for him to move on. We wish him well in this new phase of his career."

In the run up to his November concert Robin has been taking a sabbatical. During this period the choir has been led by three distinguished guest conductors, Mark Uglow for the Christmas concert (Charpentier's *Nesse de Minuit*), Martin Hall for the concert in March (Durufle's 'Requiem' and works by Schumann) and Christopher Dawe for the June concert (CPE Bach's 'Magnificat and Handel's *Dixit Dominus*').

The choir is currently advertising for a permanent successor to Robin as Musical Director and plans to make an appointment at the end of June, ready to take over for the Christmas concert. The

November 2004

St Paul is performed once more

With its performance this month of Mendelssohn's neglected oratorio, St Paul, Kingston Choral Society will be reaching back to the dawn of the great British choral tradition.

Because before music publisher, Alfred Novello, published a performing edition of St Paul at a very low price in 1837, group singing had been mainly professional because of the expense of obtaining or copying the parts.

So Novello's acumen opened up the market for affordable sheet music and led to a boom in the establishment of amateur choral societies and choirs.

And when Mendelssohn followed up St Paul with an even greater success, Elijah, the previous work was consigned to relative obscurity.

Robin Page conducts the Kingston Choral Society's revival of the piece on Saturday November 20 at Kingston Parish Church.

Hilton Tims



Kingston celebrates local vocal talent

festival of the voice

The voice is a magical thing, known to soothe a tortured brow and to send spirits soaring. Kingston's heritage of musical talent and its identity as a centre of artistic tradition stretches back through the centuries, with Hampton Court and All Saints Parish Church both serving as Meccas for musicians and singers. In November, the third Festival of the Voice takes place in Kingston with a host of events for everyone.

Ben Costello, Chair of Kingston Arts Council, the body responsible for putting the festival on, and Paul Reeves, a local composer and affiliate of KAC, are very excited about the programme which showcases local vocal talent in and around the borough. Many of these performers and composers have achieved national and international success.

"The programme is huge," says Ben, "and while we are not dumbing anything down, we want to introduce different musical forms to people with the aim of developing and building a love for it, we want to make it as accessible as possible. Our commissions are designed to give something very special to the festival, and these are works which will go on to be performed by other groups at other festivals."

Although you may not know Paul Reeves' name, you almost certainly will have heard one of his compositions as he is an extremely successful commercial composer with clients such as Dulux, British Airways, Virgin trains and Eurostar. While that is his day job, he is also a jazz composer and musician and has a passion for choral music. The highlight of this year's festival will be the inauguration of a specially-commissioned piece written by him and focused around the Thames. *The Deum*, a hymn of praise to God, performed by The Thames and Philharmonic Choir in All Saints Church. An extremely moving and vocally challenging piece, it combines a huge variety of musical styles from classical to jazz to new age and promises to be an aurally thrilling work not to be missed.

Come and Sing with John Rutter
- workshop held in October 2009 as part of Kingston Arts Festival of the Voice was organised by Kingston Choral Society

This year's festival has three themes. Firstly, in line with the council's commitment to encourage more young people to participate in and benefit from the arts, there will be a strong emphasis on providing a range of opportunities for children to learn and enjoy singing. Workshops have been designed to tie up with Key Stage educational goals and include a drama and music workshop for KS2, jazz workshops for KS3 and a master class in singing with Allison Pearce and Ben Costello for University level. KACAS will be hosting an all-day workshop for secondary pupils consisting of workshops in the day leading to an evening performance at the Rose. Mary Bourne will be leading a Singing it Back workshop for the whole family. These events are free, they just need to be booked in advance. Second of the themes is that 2009 is a year for celebrating the anniversaries of some of the greatest of the world's composers: Haydn, Mendelssohn, Purcell and Handel will all be represented. And finally, the festival is also a celebration of the venues for performing in the borough: the Lovekyn chapel which is 800 years old and will be the scene of some early music; the cornerhouse, a vibrant local arts centre which will have an open mic night; and the Rose which will run a series of free lunchtime concerts in the Culture Café (including some stunning Jewish folk music) and host the fabulous Tiffin Boys Choir singing with the London Mozart players.

Festival of the Voice 16-28 November
Tickets available through www.kar.org.uk

Come and sing with John Rutter
Saturday 21 November

John Rutter is a well-known conductor and composer of choral music. His work is at Tiffin School, Queen Elizabeth Road, Kingston. 10.15am-12pm. Tickets £15 (to include music hire and refreshments). There is also a limited number of free tickets for under 18s, with £5 refundable deposit. Booking is in advance only. For an application form email kcs-enquiries@blueyonder.co.uk or call 0208-8949 4961 or send an SAE to Rutter Day, 27 Overdale Avenue, New Malden, SE23 3UE.

CONCERTS: Kingston Festival of the Voice, All Saints' Church

Will Gore

This year's Kingston Festival of the Voice will close on Saturday at All Saints' Parish Church, Kingston, with the first performance of an exciting new work by former Kingston University student Paul Reeves.

The programme also celebrates three of the great composers whose anniversaries fall this year: Handel (died 1759), Haydn (died 1809) and Mendelssohn (born 1809).

Thames Philharmonic Choir will perform Reeves' setting of the *Te Deum*, commissioned by Kingston Arts Council for the festival.

Handel is represented by two of the four anthems he composed for the Coronation of George II in 1727 - *Zadok The Priest* and *The King Shall Rejoice* - while Haydn's *Missa Cellensis* will also be performed.

Thames Festival Orchestra will then perform Mendelssohn's *String Symphony No10* in B minor, a work produced by the composer in his early teenage years.

The concert will be conducted by Thames Philharmonic Choir's Artistic Director, John

FESTIVAL'S FINAL FLING



John
RUTTER

As part of the festival, renowned composer and choral conductor John Rutter was at Tiffin Boys' School last Saturday to lead a workshop in choral singing, organised by Kingston Choral Society. The day included music from a vast range of composers, from Bach and Handel to the more contemporary Bob Chilcott.

The society's next concert, featuring Rutter's *Magnificat*, is on December 12 at All Saints' Parish Church.

Tickets cost £14 (£12 concessions, £5 U18s), available from the box office on 020 8339 0816, Hands Music Shop (Market Place, Kingston) or on the door. Visit kingston-choral-society.co.uk

Bate, who is well known to local audiences for concerts over many years with the choir and with Kingston University.

The Thames Festival Orchestra is led by distinguished violinist Adrian Levine, who has led many important orchestras including the Philharmonia, Rome Opera, and the Academy of St Martin-

in-the-Fields.

The concert will start at 7.30pm and tickets, which cost £16, are available from the box office on 07522 524081. There will also be an open rehearsal at 2.30pm and a pre-concert discussion, with Paul Reeves and Festival of the Voice's Benjamin Costello at 7pm.