

WELLS CATHEDRAL VOLUNTARY CHOIR

President Lady Gass DCVO
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Michael's Thoughts

Much has been contributed by others to the success and enjoyment of our week at beautiful Southwell, immeasurably enhanced by the warmest of welcomes from Dean Nicola and Terry, and I would like to add mine to the roundly unison chorus of thanks to them both from everyone who went.

John Keble wrote: "The trivial round, the common task, would furnish all we need to ask; room to deny ourselves, a road to bring us daily nearer God." In a particularly refreshing way, this verse pretty well sums up a choir's *raison d'être* in highlighting the relatively hum-drum day-by-day sung offices and common prayer amongst the year-round cycles of the church's seasons and festivals. Keble adds a timely proviso, though, reminding us to put others first – in choir terms, this is pure gold: to place one's own singing second to that of everyone else. Listening is at least 80% of music-making, and to realise instinctively that one needs either to pipe down or to pipe up, for the common good, is the chorister's greatest asset. I remind choir members of this from time to time but, to use yet another of my weird analogies - this time about a gearbox - it should be automatically applied, not manually.

Membership

We are sorry that Judy Davies (Alto) and Tom Williams (Tenor) have retired from the Choir for personal reasons. We thank them for their contribution and service to the Choir. We would like to welcome to the Choir Liz Cresswell (Soprano) and Grant Lewis (Tenor).

Future Services for the Voly Choir 2018

Fri	Sept 21 st	Evensong (One Day/One Choir)	5.15pm
Sat	Sept 29 th	Safeguarding Service	2.00pm
Sun	Sept 30 th	Joint Evensong	3.00pm
Thurs	Oct 25 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Oct 28 th	Evensong at Compton Dundon	6.00pm
Thurs	Nov 1 st (All Saints)	Eucharist	5.15pm
Fri	Nov 2 nd (All Souls)	Eucharist	5.15pm
Sat	Nov 3 rd	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Nov 4 th	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm
Sat	Dec 8 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sat	Dec 15 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Dec 16 th	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm
Sun	Dec 23 rd	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
Mon	Dec 24 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sat	Dec 29 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Dec 30 th	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm

Cathedral News

We would like to welcome Rev Mary Bide to the Cathedral as a Priest Vicar.

Desert Island Listening – Simon Birkett

My desert island will undoubtedly have the human singing voice represented above nearly all else. It amazes me that I have chosen as many as two instrumental pieces (but even they are concertos, pitting a solo voice against the orchestra). I've limited my choice (with great difficulty) to eight works but please don't count the actual *discs*: I'm primarily an operaphile and compilations and extracts just don't work for me.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Clarinet concerto

It was either going to be this or the *Gran Partita* K. 361, but I have a certain affinity with 'end period' compositions (see *Falstaff* below and don't get me started on *King Lear* or the final quartets of Beethoven). This beats the contemporaneous *Requiem* and *The Magic Flute*, because of its warmth and positivity. I remember being carried on a 'train' around a vineyard near Bordeaux, when the slow movement came on as background music: incongruous, disrespectful, but somehow not out of touch with a cheering glass of a *Grand Cru*. (I'm wringing my hands about having to leave *Figaro*, *Così* and *Giovanni* on the ship, but let that pass.)

Giuseppe Verdi: *Falstaff*

Verdi, to me, expresses every facet of human emotion. However grand the setting, however literary his sources, the relationships are wholly believable and based in family ties. Father-daughter relationships are particularly important to him (possibly because his own daughter died young) and he surrounds them with music of great tenderness. In *Falstaff*, using plot and poetry from Shakespeare (a passion of mine), Verdi deftly summarises material from his whole career (jealousy, the role of women, pomposity, young love, marital suspicion, conspiracy and the rest) in a comic opera that is as light as thistledown. And the final gesture of his extensive career is a fugue: 'the whole of life is a joke, man is born a buffoon'. That's something for me to think about on the desert island.

Dmitri Shostakovich: Violin concerto (no 1) in A minor

This, by coincidence, was first performed at about the same time as I first saw the light of day, but I didn't get to know it until the end of my teenage. A work which expresses the tensions of its composition under Stalinist censorship (and which was kept back until after Stalin's death) struck a chord at what was an uncertain period for me. Its overall feeling is one of overcoming obstacles, a spirit of defiance, though it goes through the mill on the way to its resolution. It revives for me the situation I then found myself in every time I hear it.

Richard Wagner: *The Ring Cycle*

I know! Fifteen hours of music ought to represent more than one choice out of eight, if it's allowable at all. I could have chosen *Lohengrin* (have you ever heard the Wedding March in its original, choral form?) or *Parsifal* (very apt for anyone who spends a good amount of time in a cathedral), but *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has so much to say that I could never be unoccupied in my solitude. All those gods, giants, dwarves, heroes and Valkyries can be interpreted in many ways: psychologically, politically, economically or just as a rather bizarre, but always thrilling, fairy tale. And such a range of musical expression!

George Frideric Handel: *Saul*

(This is to demonstrate that my operatic tastes are not wholly lodged in the nineteenth century: both Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett failed to make the cut but I had to have something from nearer the beginning; apologies to Monteverdi, too.) I have a biography of Handel, written in the 1960s, that states that Handel's operas are unstageable in modern times, due to the untenable conventions of the Baroque stage. Not so, as any opera company's programme for the last twenty years will testify. And now even his oratorios are regularly staged, such is their dramatic potential. Handel's insight into human psychology is belied by the ease with which he borrowed numbers from his own works and others'. This was a three-way choice with *Giulio Cesare* and *Theodora*, but *Saul* wins on the pin sharp portrayal of the protagonist's jealousy and the beauty of the numbers for David and for Jonathan.

Franz Schubert: *Die Schöne Müllerin*

I've not had a great relationship with song, *chanson* or *lied*, but this cycle comes from a time when I was doing a lot of travelling in the car and wanted to try to rectify that. Of course, it helps that the cycle is written for tenor (!) and that the sequence of the songs has a definite narrative curve; I can't get on with those songs that stand alone and tell a brief snippet of a story. It's difficult not to imagine that the young man has some mental health issues from the beginning, but then so does Romeo (among others); they both come to a sticky end, but do it very beautifully.

Gustav Mahler: *Resurrection Symphony*

This reminds me of Dante in its massive context and scope, rendered personal through the narrator. For all that the orchestra and chorus are doing (usually very loudly, but sometimes exquisitely quietly), the soprano and mezzo soloists express in individual terms both the pain of bereavement and the hope of resurrection. You'll also notice the accountant in me getting value for money: many other symphonies are over in twenty minutes, but not this one.

Ralph Vaughan Williams: *Serenade to Music*

There's a very real sense in which this is absolutely the *wrong* piece for me to take to the island: I can't listen to it! It takes a beautiful and very positive scene, a discussion about the power of music from Act V of *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare again), and sets it to music of incomparable beauty, written for orchestra and sixteen soloists (who also sing in chorus). The sentiments expressed and the delicacy of the setting infallibly move me to tears: it would be the end of me (but what a way to go!).

Now the big question: just one of them. It's almost a random choice because I couldn't do without any of them. But I think *Falstaff* has the most of me in it and would keep up my spirits as I hoped for rescue.

May 2018 ACVC Weekend at Guildford Cathedral – Richard Hathway

Like some of its medieval predecessors, Guildford Cathedral (for those who don't know) has a prominent hilltop setting. Away from the city centre it has a light attractive interior, though the functional brick exterior is somewhat less prepossessing. On a warm, sticky Saturday some of us climbed pilgrim-like up Stag Hill to complete our initial arrival. We found out that a major renovation has recently been completed. Asbestos removal has been very expensive, and without managing to fund a compensating adjustment the acoustic has become more reverberant.

The music was led by John Bawden, maestro of the local Voluntary Choir (who have quite a light schedule of Cathedral commitments). Evensong included a Harris introit, and Stanford canticles (including a measured Nunc tempo: *Adagio allungata?*). As a newcomer with no clear idea what to expect, I had assumed larger numbers. Certainly there were some Tenors to compensate for my exposed and solitary Wells preparation! Inevitably with volunteers crossing the country to participate, our numbers were never likely to be perfectly balanced.

From 48 Dioceses in England and Wales, 56% have Cathedral Voluntary Choirs.

41% of the 27 member choirs were represented at this ACVC weekend.

Around 93 singers participated in Saturday Evensong

(sadly somewhat outnumbering the Nave congregation).

Soon after Evensong participants assembled for a shared evening dinner in the Cathedral Refectory. Mischievously nicknamed the 'Naafi' by Michael, we were treated to commendably high Officers' Mess catering standards. Jonathan Willcocks, whose anthem we had sung at Evensong, gave an entertaining speech. For example, Sir David's son was able to provide helpful advice on how to react if trousers are accidentally soaked immediately before making a public appearance.



Bleary eyed (in my case) for an early morning rehearsal, the Eucharist featured a *Missa Brevis* by Grayston Ives, which was arguably the musical highlight of our visit. As an anthem we sang Glinka's Cherubic Hymn, starting in an elongated tempo – *Adagio quasi troppo?* – which was daunting for those of us who don't have the cavernous physique of a typical Russian bass. Ben Potter – who sadly was unable to sing during this weekend – felt that this piece was particularly effective in the resonant Nave acoustic.

After this service ACVC participants were free to disperse although some did stay on and join with the Guildford Voly Choir to sing Evensong that evening.

Where have we been singing?

On 9th Feb we sang for the a Service to celebrate the life of Peter Dixon. We sang 'Be Still for the presence of the Lord – Evans arr Michael Cockerham' and 'The Lord's my Shepherd -Howard Goodall',

On 16th Feb we sang for the Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Phillipa Cruickshank. We sang 'A Clare Benediction – John Rutter and 'The Lord bless you and keep you – John Rutter'.

On 3rd April we sang for the Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Dru Robinson. We sang 'And the glory of the Lord (Messiah) – Handel' and 'Ave verum corpus – Mozart'.

On 20th Apr we sang the Funeral and Thanksgiving Service for the life of Ann Jarvis. We sang 'Magnificat – Philip Moore' and 'Nunc Dimittis – Herbert Howells'.

On 12th May we sang for the Wedding at Fiddington of Kieren Berry and Katie Mackenzie. Kieren is a former member of the Choir. We sang 'Gabriel's Oboe', 'Psalm 128', 'Magnificat – Herbert Brewer' and 'Love Divine – Howard Goodall'.

On 20th May we sang Evensong at Allerton Church. We sang 'Be still – Evans arr Michael Cockerham', Responses – Radcliffe', Mag and Nunc – Dyson in D', 'And I saw a new heaven – Edgar Bainton'.

On 9th July we sang for the Funeral and Thanksgiving for the life of Margaret Alexander. Margaret's husband Chris is a former Member and Vice-Chairman of the Choir. We sang 'For the beauty of the earth – John Rutter' and 'A Gaelic Blessing – John Rutter'.

On 21st July we sang for the Wedding at Somerton of Christopher Gatherer and Jeanette Wakley. We sang 'Jesu joy of man's desiring – Bach', 'Pie Jesu – Faure' and 'Ave verum corpus -Mozart'.

On 15th Sept we sang for the Wedding at North Cadbury of Joe Casey and Pippa Woodrow. We were joined by some of the guest and sang 'O Magnum Mysterium – Morten Lauridsen', 'Bridge over troubled water – Paul Simon' and 'I was glad – Hubert Parry'.

On 29th Sept we sang for the Diocesan Supporting Safeguarding Service in the Cathedral. For the Service we sang 'Psalm 121 – Chant by Walford Davies' and 'O God make the door of this house – Owain Park'.

SOUTHWELL 2018. – Della Leutchford

In most parts of Nottinghamshire "Southwell" is pronounced Suthhull with a soft th [as in the or there] and with a silent "w". However, residents of Southwell itself largely pronounce the word as it is spelt.

[From a notice in Southwell library]



Every residency is notable for a particular feature. This year it was the great welcome we received from the Dean, Nicola Sullivan. On Tuesday evening we were entertained right royally by her and her husband Terry, to drinks and a delicious dinner in their house. It was her Birthday on the following day, August 15th, and that was the only day she was absent from the services in which we sang.

For those of us who had not visited Southwell before it was a delightful surprise. The Minster was heavily restored in the 19th Century and in 1884 it became the new cathedral of Nottingham and Derbyshire. It is famed for the carvings in the Chapter House.

The residency dinner was held in the Piano Restaurant very close to the Minster and a jolly evening was had by all. Sara had devised a difficult competition with written snippets of the music which had been sung at the Hereford residency twenty years ago. Matthew won hands down!

Friday was our dumb day. Members went on various different trips. Twelve sailors took a boat from Gunthorpe, arranged by Philip, on the river Trent with plenty of Prosecco and a pub lunch stop.

Sunday Eucharist was held in the Nave. There was a problem in that the Organ decided to give up and was only fixed at the last minute. Bishop Peter Price the former Bishop of Bath and Wells preached the sermon. It was a coincidence, according to the Dean.

We were very pleased to welcome John Berry and Brian Garrard back to the choir.

Rehearsals were held in the Hoskyns room of the Palace. We were able to sing quite loudly in there! The coffee and biscuits provided by Jo made welcome breaks.

Our rehearsals were marked by a number of new ideas from Michael about how we should sing. Michael suggested that the approach to decrescendos should be likened to bath water running out slowly until there was only a drop left. And we should definitely not sing as if we were stirring treacle with a straw! Some allusion was made to flat tyres but that did not seem to go down so well.

We are grateful to Ellie and Nancy for arranging our stay in Southwell. Those who stayed in Brackenhurst College, part of Trent University, enjoyed excellent student accommodation.

Michael had chosen some good music for us to sing and we enjoyed our stay in Southwell. Thank you, Michael.



Wells Cathedral Chapter Letter 2nd Sept

The Cathedral Voluntary Choir has recently completed a week singing residency at Southwell Minster. We were made very welcome by all the congregation and especially by Dean Nicola Sullivan who was in residence and was delighted to see us at Southwell. We sang Choral Evensong on all days except for Friday, and Eucharist and Choral Evensong on Sunday. The preacher at the Sunday Eucharist was Bishop Peter Price along with many other familiar faces in the congregation from Wells (retired Archdeacons/Bishop's Chaplain). Dean Nicola assured the congregation that this was a pure coincidence that Bishop Peter was there the same day as us. It was more to do with England playing at Trent Bridge! Dean Nicola sends her love and kind regards to all in Wells. Southwell Minster is a hidden secret and well worth a visit.

My thanks to Richard Hathway, Simon Birkett and Della Leutchford for their contributions.