



Ashford Choral Society

Celebrating 160 years

Conductor: Mark Deller – Accompanist: Matthew Raisbeck

Chairman: Alan Paterson – Secretary: Virginia Brown

Newsletter – Summer 2017



SEASON 2017-2018

The planned programme is:

- **Handel - Alexander's Feast**
Concert on Saturday 18th
November, Colyer-Fergusson Hall
- **Carol Concert, Saturday 16th**
December
St Mary's Church, Ashford
- **Fauré – Requiem**
Fauré - Cantique de Jean Racine
Concert Saturday 10th March 2018,
Wye Church
- **Brahms – Requiem**
Concert Saturday 12th May
Colyer-Fergusson Hall



KEY DATES

- Tuesday 5th September: first rehearsal
- Tuesday 10th October: AGM
- Saturday 11th November: Charity Gala Dinner
- Saturday 18th November: Concert
- Saturday 16th December: Carol Concert
- 17th December – January 4th, 2018: No rehearsals
- Tuesday 9th January: Rehearsals resume
- Saturday 10th March: Concert
- March 27th – April 3rd: No rehearsals
- Saturday 12th May: Concert

TENORS & BASSES WANTED

ACS needs men! If you know any man – partner, son, friend, colleague or neighbour - who would like to join, please bring them in. We need Tenor and especially Bass voices.

Remember: there is NO subscription for under 25.

AN INFLAMMATORY NOVEMBER CONCERT

ACS will be singing Handel's **Alexander's Feast** on November 18th – not quite St. Cecilia's Day (which is November 22nd) - but a very appropriate time of year in view of the history of this work.

Handel's oratorio of 1736 is based on a poem written in 1697 by John Dryden (1631-1700) entitled **Alexander's Feast: Or, The Power of Musique. An Ode in honour of St. Cecilia's Day**. Annual celebrations of St. Cecilia's feast day began in 1683, organised by the **Musical Society of London**, a group of musicians and music lovers. This was thus a strictly secular celebration – especially in late-17th century staunchly Protestant London.

Perhaps the most famous work for the **Music Society's** celebrations is Purcell's **Ode to St. Cecilia** which was composed, to text by the Irish poet Nicholas Brady, for the celebrations of 1692. Dryden's poem was thus commissioned explicitly for musical performance and originally set to music by Jeremiah Clarke. Such was the popularity of Dryden's verse it was again set to music by Thomas Clayton in 1711 – sadly neither score survives today.

Handel was encouraged to set Dryden's famous verses to music by the playwright and poet Newburgh Hamilton in 1736 as Hamilton was convinced the work would be a much needed commercial success. Indeed **Alexander's Feast** was an immediate success as the subject gave Handel immense scope for expressive musical writing - since the poem demands he summon up every mood from love to hate and to literally set the world ablaze!

Dryden's poem, and Handel's libretto, is based on the **Life of Alexander the Great** by Plutarch (c AD46-120) with which the educated of the 18th century, with their passion for the ancient world, would have been very familiar. Plutarch describes Alexander's feast, celebrating the defeat of Persia at Persepolis. At the feast is Thais, whom Plutarch describes as Alexander's mistress (Mary Renault readers will know differently!) Thais is roused to anger by the music of the bard Timotheus and persuades Alexander to burn Persepolis in revenge for the Persians' burning of Athens.

Handel structured his oratorio **Alexander's Feast** in two parts – the first describing the many different states of mind the bard Timotheus is able to evoke through his music - as he literally plays on Alexander's emotions. The second part brings the rousing words calculated to awaken Alexander to vengeance and the destruction of Persepolis by fire. As the blaze commences, a powerful chorus announces the arrival of "Divine Cecilia", "Inventress of the Vocal Frame" and tells why pagan Timotheus must "yield the prize" to her for "arts unknown before".

Hopefully when ACS perform **Alexander's Feast** at Colyer Fergusson Hall, Canterbury, on 18th November the pyrotechnics will be purely musical!



ALASTAIR HUME IS GUEST SPEAKER FOR SOCIETY GALA DINNER

As announced earlier this year, Ashford Choral Society is marking its 160th anniversary with a gala dinner at London Beach Hotel, Tenderden on the evening of Saturday 11th November.

Whilst booking forms for Society members and patrons, for this event, will be issued separately we thought that it would interest everyone to know that the guest speaker at the dinner will be Alastair Hume. Alastair was a founder-member of the world-famous vocal ensemble **The King's Singers**, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2018.



Alastair Hume and his fellow founder-member Simon Carrington sang with the group for 25 years, but interestingly they both started out not as singers but as professional double-bass players, with the BBC Northern Orchestra, amongst others.

Since retiring from The King's Singers, Alastair has returned to playing again, and continues to lead a busy life as a free-lance orchestral player. He has played regularly for Ashford Choral Society and Stour Music for almost 40 years. He is also a visiting professor at the Royal Northern College of Music, and Trinity College London, and frequently sits on the adjudicating panel for various music competitions.

From his work in a wide range of musical activity, from Sir John Barbirolli to the The Two Ronnies, he has a wealth of experience and a fund of anecdotes with which he promises to entertain us at the dinner.

We hope that as many Society members as possible will support the dinner - as each ticket purchased will contribute to funds for the Society – so that Ashford Choral Society can enjoy another 160 years.



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SUPPORTING YOUR CHOIR

The Choral Society does not benefit from any funding or grant.

Funding comes mainly from your **yearly subscription** (2017/18: £90 for members over 25); if you are a tax payer, please remember to fill in a declaration form to allow the Society to benefit from Gift Aid.

Other sources of revenue include:

- **Raffle tickets** sold at rehearsal; please contribute by buying tickets or providing raffle prizes of a value of around £10.

- **Concert tickets:** Both for personal sense of achievement and to cover costs (orchestra, soloists, conductor and premises), it is preferable to sing in front of a full audience. Please help us by promoting our concerts and selling tickets to your friends and family.

- **Social event:** The ACS will hold a charity dinner on the 11th of November at the London Beach Hotel in Tenderden; if you have not received the form, please contact the Society's secretary.

- **Bequests:** If you have enjoyed singing with the Society, why not leave something in your Will? This will contribute to ensure that the ACS will continue well beyond today's 160 years.

