



Ashford Choral Society

Celebrating 160 years

Conductor: Mark Deller – Accompanist: Matthew Raisbeck

Chairman: Alan Paterson – Secretary: Virginia Brown

Newsletter 2 – January 2018

MUSIC SITES FOR “NOTE BASHING” THE NEW PIECES

- Vaughan Williams – all parts for the Mass in G minor can be found in Midi or MP3 format on www.johnfletchermusic.org. All parts are also on Cyberbass – a US site. Go to “Major Works” alphabetic index by composer and scroll down.
- Fauré “Requiem” – all parts of the Requiem can be found in Midi or MP3 format on www.johnfletchermusic.org. Also on Cyberbass. Go to “Major Works” alphabetic index by composer and scroll down. Choraline can also provide a rehearsal CD or download for a particular part for the Requiem.
- Brahms’ Deutsche Requiem – all parts in Midi and MP3 format and a useful PDF German pronunciation guide on www.johnfletchermusic.org. The Requiem can also be found in its component movements on Cyberbass. Go to “Major Works” alphabetic index by composer and scroll down. Choraline can also provide a rehearsal CD or download for each voice part of the Requiem.
- Brahms Nänie – all parts on John Fletcher Music on www.johnfletchermusic.org. Not available on Cyberbass.
- Cyberbass parts listed above are free to use but to access the parts on the John Fletcher Music website you need to pay a membership fee of £10 p.a. Choraline charges vary as to CD or download chosen – visit www.choraline.com and use search.

WELCOME TO THE FIRST ASHFORD CHORAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER OF 2018

As we begin our rehearsals for four new works Mark Deller reflects on 2017 and the challenges of 2018. There is also an insight into the particular sound world of **Vaughan Williams’ Mass in G minor** (1922) which we will sing in March.

LOOKING FORWARD WITH MARK DELLER

As we start a busy second session of our current season, I am hoping that 2018 brings renewed support and enthusiasm for Ashford Choral Society. Whilst there were good things to remember from 2017 – a splendid performance of Mendelssohn’s **Elijah** in May, with Matthew Brook as the outstanding soloist in the title role, and an equally memorable line-up of soloists for **Alexander’s Feast** in November – there were also disappointments along the way: a falling-off of membership, in particular amongst the basses, but, more critical still, fewer tickets sold for our concerts. This created a difficult financial situation for the Society, which was only overcome through the generosity of a number of our Patrons who stepped into the breach.

In general, our audiences have been very good for concerts since we moved to the splendid Colyer-Fergusson Hall in Canterbury, but its increasing popularity as a concert venue for the region does present additional challenges. By and large we have managed to persuade our loyal supporters to come with us to Canterbury, and I think they have appreciated the benefits of comfortable seating and good acoustics, and the luxury of a bar and cafeteria for the interval. But with the competition of other similar concerts taking place at the hall on a weekly basis, not to mention at the Cathedral and other venues in the city, the onus of selling tickets falls even more heavily on members of the Society. With more than a hundred members we ought to be able to rustle up 200 friends and relations to come along and support our concerts; currently we are managing to sell just over 100 tickets ourselves. About the same number are sold directly via the Gulbenkian box office. But together that only adds up to just over a 50% house.”

In May, we have a concert at the Colyer-Fergusson which should be a popular attraction, with a programme that includes the much-loved Brahms **Requiem** and Richard Strauss **Four Last Songs**, and also, as a curtain-raiser, a little performed piece, **Nänie** by Brahms. And before that, in March we have a concert in Wye Church, when we shall be performing Vaughan Williams’ beautiful unaccompanied **Mass in G minor** and the Fauré **Requiem**, supported by our brilliant accompanist Matthew Raisbeck on the organ. Lots of lovely varied music to look forward to! I hope that, despite the challenges of the weather at this time of year, most of you will make the effort to get along on a Tuesday evening for rehearsals.

M.D.



AN INSIGHT INTO VAUGHAN WILLIAMS' MASS in G minor

The **Mass in G minor** is work of profound spirituality by a profound sceptic - looking back to an earlier "golden age" of English choral music after the trauma of the Great War.

Written in 1922 when Vaughan Williams had just turned 50 – a milestone birthday marked by the first performance of his "**Pastoral Symphony**" and he had just become the conductor of the Bach choir – which must have given him great insights into choral writing.

The work is written for 4 unaccompanied soloists and 2 choirs and follows the traditional Latin mass – a very unusual subject for a piece of early 1920s music.

Vaughan Williams had a strong interest in trying to create a "national English music" and was much influenced by the rediscovery of music by Byrd and Tallis by Richard Runciman Terry (1865-1938) – organist and director of music at the newly built Catholic Cathedral in Westminster - who helped put Church music back at the heart of the liturgy.

Byrd's sound world made a deep impression on Vaughan Williams as can be heard in the **G minor Mass** which uses Modal music – something not fashionable since the 16th century - the piece thus has a strong flavour of old English Church music but seems also very new. The work is not in a conventional G minor scale – but rather follows the ancient Dorian mode where the 6th and 7th notes/intervals are different – which produces fascinating dislocating shifts of sound.

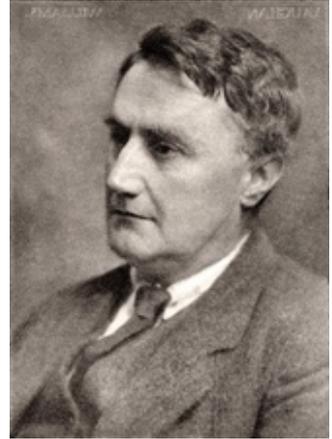
The whole work is full of clever harmonic writing – beginning with the *Kyrie*. The altos begin and end the *Kyrie* with their voices apparently mysteriously oscillating and floating into the ether. The *Gloria* follows with each praise "*Laudamus te*", "*Adoramus te*", having its own character and the two choirs begin to sing antiphonally – that is, each choir moving individually. The *Credo* – the longest section of the work – is again antiphonic - dwelling on the great theological mystery of the incarnation. Superb word setting in the *Credo* underscores the meaning of the words – for example all voices literally descend very low whilst singing "*Descendit.....*" "*Et sepultus est*".

The *Sanctus* echoes Vaughan Williams' writing in his recently performed "*Pastoral Symphony*" with the voices rising from almost nothing in three broad waves of sound. The *Benedictus* follows, full of triadic harmonies – again an echo of the writing of Tallis or Byrd –and with the *Agnus Dei* the climax of the liturgy is reached, bringing a recapitulation – with echoes of the *Kyrie* – a very different ending to that which Byrd would have written as the voices all float off at the end as if blown away on the wind.

Vaughan Williams described himself as a "Christian agnostic" – but the evidence of this work shows he was fascinated by the musical possibilities of the liturgy.

The piece was dedicated to Gustav Holst and the Whitsuntide Singers and received its first performance on 6 December 1922 in Birmingham Town Hall. The first liturgical performance was at Westminster Cathedral under early music specialist, Richard Runciman Terry, who with Holst, championed its liturgical use, writing to Vaughan Williams "**In your individual and modern idiom you have really captured the old liturgical spirit and atmosphere**".

J.T.B.



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** are another important source of revenue – both for a personal sense of achievement and to cover costs (orchestra, soloists, conductor and premises), it is important to sing in front of a full audience. Please help us by promoting our concerts and selling tickets to your friends and family.
- **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.

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