



# Ashford Choral Society

*A tradition of choral singing since 1857*

*Conductor: Paul Young Deputy Conductor and Accompanist: Matthew Raisbeck  
Chairman: Alan Paterson Secretary: Virginia Brown Emeritus Conductor: Mark Deller*

**Newsletter – January 2021**

## **Chairman's Announcement – Change of Conductor and Programme**

This last year of pandemic has not been easy for anyone – least of all for those still working – and it has taken a particularly heavy toll on professional musicians. I am therefore sorry to have to announce that a radical change in Paul Young's personal circumstances means that he will be moving to Lincoln, where his wife has found a new job as Head of the Minster School. Paul's role within the Canterbury Cathedral choir has also ended and whilst they are house hunting in Lincolnshire, he will be working locally until mid-summer. Paul has reluctantly tendered his resignation as our Conductor and Director of Music from 31st May, after the theoretical date of our next concert and at the start of our traditional summer break.

This is a great shame and Paul has expressed huge regret at finding himself in this position. He has made such a promising start but the pandemic has meant that he will have only one concert to remember! We wish Paul well in the future.

Paul was the stand-out candidate and unanimous choice to replace Mark Deller. As you can imagine, Paul's predicament has resulted in difficult decisions not just for him, but also for your Committee. However I am delighted to report that we have been able to come up with what I hope you will all feel is the perfect solution.

As you can imagine we were not anxious to repeat the lengthy selection process undertaken when replacing Mark, particularly as auditions are currently impossible. I sought Mark's wise counsel and since Matthew Raisbeck is already our Deputy Conductor, I am delighted to tell you that after giving the matter thought, Matt has accepted the Committee's unanimous decision to offer him the post. Matt becomes our Director of Music and Conductor on a permanent basis from 1st June. I am sure you will all want to wish him a long, enjoyable and rewarding tenure.

You may not know that Matt, during his years at Oxford, conducted large amateur choirs with orchestras – something Virginia remembers was quoted in his biography in a concert programme when we performed in Boulogne Cathedral. Matt's experience is therefore significantly greater than that of Mark at a comparable stage – and his appointment turned out quite well!!

You will all know that Matt is a consummate musician and already has the respect of the choir. Further, he knows our strengths, weaknesses and has many friends within the choir. Matt's appointment will therefore ensure stability and continuity at a difficult time. He also has the vision, strength of character and stature amongst other professional musicians to lead Ashford Choral Society forward.

Matt has agreed that he will help us find a new repetiteur, but makes the point that there are so many uncertainties within the community of self-employed musicians that he will only make a move in that respect when the progress of the pandemic makes it realistic. I have spoken with our orchestra 'fixer', Rachel Waltham, who is very happy with the appointment, and the hugely experienced Sue Wanless, newly retired from her post as Director of Music at University of Kent, who has offered to stand in if Matt were ever unavailable.

### **Effects of Pandemic**

As you will be aware, we have already cancelled our proposed March concert. At our virtual Committee Meeting on 13th January we had to make several difficult decisions

- 14th May concert cancelled
- Rehearsals cancelled until September
- Fundraising Dinner at London Beach Hotel and Recruitment Worksop postponed until further notice
- We are still planning to hold a concert in November, with Colyer-Fergusson booked for 13th November – but choice of programme deferred until a clearer idea of rehearsal time available.
- Carol Concert – we hope to sing on December 18th - venue to be confirmed.

Your Committee will meet again in mid-May to review the situation, when it may be possible to be more specific about future plans. It is profoundly disappointing to be in the position where no definite dates can be announced, nor any positive decisions made.

The only rays of sunshine I can report are that the inoculations will surely triumph in the months ahead and that our financial situation remains strong. Thanks to a significant number of members who have either paid full subscriptions or made donations, we will be able to 'come back with a bang' in due course, with no financial constraints.

Ashford School is keen to welcome us back when Covid rules so permit. We will conduct an online straw poll of members' willingness to return to rehearsals when the time approaches, so until then – do stay safe!

Julia Blackwell does a great job producing our newsletters and it was she who had the idea of the very successful monthly 'broadcasts' by Paul and Matt so – enough of me – over to her for news of what ACS has done and will continue to do during these bleak months.

*Alan Paterson, Chairman*

### **Tuesday evening Zoom chatroom**

The weekly Zoom link arranged by Dominic, which enables all members to chat with each other informally on Tuesday evenings from 7.30pm onwards, will continue. Virginia will send out a weekly reminder, with the link, so it does not get 'lost' in mailboxes.

In addition to these weekly chats, a new programme of talks for members starts in February:

### **February 23rd at 7.30pm**

Greg Tassell, tenor soloist at our November 2019 Britten concert, will talk about his life as a singer – from his formative years as a chorister at Durham Cathedral to his current international solo career.

A Zoom link for this talk will be provided shortly before the talk.

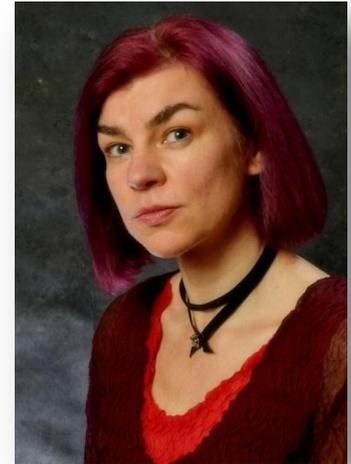


**March – date to be confirmed**

**Dame Ethel Smyth DBE**

Janet Oates has agreed to talk about the composer and suffragette, Dame Ethel Smyth DBE (1858 – 1944). During her lifetime, Ethel Smyth was a hugely regarded choral composer yet today we rarely perform or hear her works.

Janet, who is a professional soprano and a composer, will set out the case for more performances of Ethel Smyth’s works and as well as describing her musical career will talk about her political activism – Smyth famously conducted the suffragettes singing whilst in Holloway prison!



A Zoom link for Janet’s talk will be provided shortly before the talk but if you want more information on Janet please visit her website [www.janetoates.co.uk](http://www.janetoates.co.uk)

**April – date to be confirmed**

Paul has agreed to treat us to another in-depth analysis of a favourite choral piece.

**May – date to be confirmed**

Carris Jones, the first ever female to join St. Paul's cathedral choir (as an alto), will join us to talk about her career. As a consort singer, Carris has sung across five continents. She was a founder member of Stile Antico – whom you may have heard at Stour Music – and has collaborated with Sting on his recent Dowland lute song project.

**MARMALADE**

At a recent Tuesday Zoom chat, Ruth confirmed that as soon as Seville oranges are available she will be making more of her famous marmalade – hopefully in the next few weeks. Ruth will keep a stock of marmalades and jams until it is Covid-safe for ACS members to collect from Margery as before. Watch this space.

I leave you with something to smile about.....

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**Gloria in Excel sheets**