

Phil Me In!

Number 15: Summer 2019

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‘Any fool who doubts good music is being made outside the M25 needs to hear the Leeds Philharmonic.’
says Simon Heffer in *The Daily Telegraph*

Dear Phil Colleagues and Friends,

After last time’s rather jumbo Newsletter this one, at least I hope at the outset, will be a little shorter. After all, there is only one big Phil performance to write about, *Gerontius* on 1 June, but members of the Choir sang at **HMP Leeds** on 28 April, at memorial services for **Ann Gilliam** on 16 May and **Christina Shaw** on 16 July, and joined with other choirs in a concert featuring John Adams’ *Harmonium* in Huddersfield. Yet more Phil singers were in a group rehearsing in the University Music Department on Tuesday evenings for concerts in early July including the first full orchestral performances of *Enosh* by our own **Rudi Leavor** in both Bradford and Leeds. We get around, as the song says.

I’m grateful for contributions from **Julia Wilkin** (Soprano 1) in the *Views from the Pews* section and from our chorus-master **Joe Judge** with a review of his first year with us and a look ahead to what is to come.

Most of this Newsletter ends up being written by me, so I am always grateful to those who volunteer (Julia) and those who can have their arm twisted (Joe) to produce something that I hope will be of interest to members – and let those who follow us in the Phil (hopefully) many years hence see what happened in 2019!

VOICE CHECKS 2019

Come on – tell the truth. What’s the one thing you really *hate* about singing in the Phil? I bet it’s the dreaded voice check, audition, call it what you will! We all have to do them from time to time, and the appointment of a new chorus-master is usually the signal for another dose of purgatory. Fair enough!

Janet Jackson and I rolled up together (but separately, if you see what I mean!) at Leeds College of Music one Saturday lunchtime, got to the 5th floor, thanks to a passing student with an ID card, where we found the smiling faces of **Philip** and **David**. They told us that **John Davies** was somewhere close by studying the sight-reading, and **David Jackson** was currently in the torture chamber. John went in, Janet went in, then it was my turn.

Jill ushered me into the room where a smiling Joe was sitting at a desk and Alan, that very present help in trouble, at the piano. I sang my bit of *Gerontius*, then tackled the sight-reading – though I felt it wasn’t really sight-reading as I’d had a few minutes to look through it! Oddly enough Joe stopped me halfway through before we got to the tricky bit with the syncopated rhythms. Did that happen to you? Range testing was OKish, but could I find the middle note of a scrunchy chord? No. This is something I’ve always found difficult, and panic, increasing age and decrepitude probably don’t help. But that was it; off I went, had some lunch and caught the bus back to Headingley.

Mind you, my sympathies were with Joe, Alan and Jill: we only had to sing once, but they had to listen politely and sound hopeful all weekend! But with a bit of luck that’s the ordeal over for a couple of years...

And talking of Joe, I recently asked him to say something in the Newsletter about his first year as the Phil’s chorus-master and his thoughts for the coming season. Scroll down to the next page and you can read all about it!

THE SPIRIT OF BLACK DYKE'S DREAM OF STABAT MESSIAH

Well, as exciting as it was to perform *Messiah* with the unique brass band arrangement, I'm glad there isn't such an arrangement for *The Dream of Gerontius*! I tried to come up with a title for this short article that summed up this past season, and as you can see, I didn't spend very long on it. Oh well, there's always next year!

Thank you and congratulations to all for a successful and reasonably full-on



season with the Phil! I was delighted with our early efforts working together in the Autumn term, and I am equally pleased with what I see to be steady improvements being made in several areas as the year has progressed.

John Anderson and the Airedale Symphony Orchestra are always very happy to work with us, and this relationship continues to flourish as we look forward to a performance of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in February 2020. I did my best to ruin things with some highly erroneous cannon shots in

the *1812 Overture*, fired from the side-lines on a laptop still running Windows Vista, but John has forgiven me and we're still the best of friends. Your performance of *Sleep* in that concert will stand out as a highlight from this past year.

Of your two *Messiah* performances this past year, I have been equally proud. This might seem a funny thing to say, seeing as I didn't actually attend one of them (sorry, but if you insist on performing in Hull...), but let me explain. The first, with the Black Dyke Band, in my opinion, saw you be the stars of the show. Arguably, the chorus movements feature some of the best moments anyway, but despite a different accompanying colour, and four fabulous soloists working at various pitches, you maintained the drama and thrill of Handel's often over-performed oratorio, and kept it fresh. Singing bars and bars of semiquavers may well take an extraordinary amount of effort and consideration, but if it isn't done with purpose, then the interest is lost all too quickly, and you kept me interested throughout. Your second performance

with Adrian Partington (whom I was sad not to meet in person) and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, saw your reputation flourish on all sides of the Yorkshire boundary. In next to no dedicated rehearsal time, you quickly took on board different markings and ideas, and Adrian himself commented on how malleable you were as an ensemble to go along with his way of doing things, all making for a different but no less exciting performance. External gigs like these are vital for us, and the rewards, both for our reputation and financially, are not to be sniffed at. Keep impressing!

Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* saw us work once again with Music Director, David Hill, and four more exceptional soloists – in particular, the wonderful Catherine Wyn-Rogers. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra provided an extremely effective accompaniment for us to set the scene of a piece that includes seven slow movements! The unaccompanied end to the final movement was electrifying, and an excellent contrast to all the other moods and colours you had set up in the previous movements. I will say that this is one area we must work on though – consistency in rehearsal. I had a few people come up and say to me during the weeks leading up to this concert, 'Oh don't worry, we always pull it out of the bag in the last rehearsal and concert,' but this isn't the sort of choir I am interested in working with. Of course, I always hope that you may have that extra 10% on the night, or whatever other cliché we choose to consider, but we were slow to pick up the pace rehearsing for this piece, and I did feel that we could have done more, sooner. I'm sure you know that anyway, and I'll be encouraging a little more from our earlier rehearsals this coming season!

Then, the crowning moment of this year's season, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, accompanied by the Hallé Orchestra, featured the combined forces of Leeds Festival Chorus, St Peter's Singers, and yourselves on fine form. Particularly impressive was the combination of full chorus and semi-chorus voices, both employed to great effect on the night. To share the stage with such distinguished musicians and soloists is a privilege. It's a funny feeling sat there on the night not really doing much, after weeks of rehearsing the music! However, my Grandma passed away earlier this year, a keen choral singer herself, and part of the *Praise to the Holiest* chorus was played at her funeral. I was delighted that my Grandad, parents, and one of my sisters could be there

at the concert; it made for an emotional evening, and I was very proud of your performance, so thank you.

These voice checks, I know, are not everyone's cup of tea! However, they must be done, and it has been above all else, a highly encouraging experience for me as chorus-master. Yes, there were some nerves, but fundamentally, what I have observed is practically all of you care deeply about being members of this choir, and what you can offer to it. This is great, and it's now teamed up in my head with the knowledge of some recurring vocal technique and score reading issues that apply to most of us. I say this positively, and it's a point of inspiration that I can guide and encourage you to feel more confident about such aspects of your singing. I have plenty of ideas to weave in to next season for our individual and group development! I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to indulge in some personal vocal development. I can't stress enough the positivity of one or two singing lessons of a year. It doesn't have to be much, and it may take you out of a comfort zone, but I can assure you that it will vastly increase your enjoyment, ability, stamina, and multiply that by 120 or so and this choir will get exponentially better thanks to your efforts.

It has been a pleasure working with the inimitable Alan Horsey, our master of the keyboard, and always on hand for extra choral advice when required. Also, the brilliant Jill Foalks, whose tireless work keeps the ship running, and her encyclopaedic knowledge of the membership puts us all at ease. Thank you also to all the Trustees, for their continued support of me, and all of this choir's engagements. So, to next year – two performances of Elgar's *The Kingdom*, Beethoven's Mass in C, and a really exciting programme for our summer concert at Bolton Abbey. I'll be ready to challenge you all, and look for some really positive developments in our sound and ability!

Finally, I'm sat here looking at next season's brochure. The picture attached to the first *Kingdom* performance features some tenors and basses at Leeds Town Hall. David Hill has his baton raised, but if you look closely, some of you look like you're reading Tolstoy, a couple are looking away, one bass has his phone out and is taking a picture (must be a Festival Chorus Member), another looks like he's tuning into Test Match Special... it's a good thing your faces are blurry!

Have a wonderful summer! Alan and I will be working together at the Exon Singers Festival in Devon (look out for a couple of BBC broadcasts!), and we are both looking forward to September and the start of our next season.

Joe

ANN GILLIAM R.I.P.



*Surrounded by friends –
Ann at Temple Newsam, January 2019*

As reported briefly at the end of the last Newsletter, our friend and colleague, the ever-smiling **Ann Gilliam** (Alto 2) sadly died in hospital just after Easter following a short illness. Ann had been a loyal and supportive member of the Choir for nearly fifty years.

On May 16, a beautiful sunny Thursday morning, some thirty Phil members gathered at a packed West Park United Reformed Church on Spen Lane to join family and friends at Ann's funeral. The service was actually described as 'A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Ann Gilliam', which was particularly apt for a lady who had been involved in so many things and had helped so many people – particularly young people – over the years. We joined in with the four hymns, then at the very end of the service we moved to the east end of the church where Jill led us in Karl Jenkins' *God shall wipe away all Tears*, the last movement of *The Armed Man* – a piece we can sing with the minimum of rehearsal in spite of all the twiddly bits in the alto and tenor parts.

PRISON EUCHARIST

Sunday 28 April at HMP Leeds

Well, what a change! What a pleasant change! Leeds Prison, I mean. For the first time it wasn't biting cold when we went to Armley to sing; in fact it was actually sunny and I put my car roof down on the journey back to Headingley!

The service was the prison chapel's regular Sunday morning Eucharist, celebrated by chaplain and Phil tenor **Jack Parkes**, and as always we had the chance to meet the prisoners briefly at the Peace and after the service had finished. As part of his sermon Jack invited Julian, one of the inmates, to speak publicly about his offending, and we were moved both by what he had to say and his courage in standing up to say it.

We sang Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*, and the *Kyrie* from Sir Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, the latter with a lovely soprano solo by **Sarah Wright**, and there were a couple of hymns. There was also a setting of the *Gloria*, which showed us a new side to **Alan** as he stood up in front of the captive audience and most amusingly demonstrated to everyone how to sing it! It was – as our visits to the prison always are – a privilege and a real pleasure. Thanks once again to Jack for inviting us and organising everything.

ELGAR THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

Saturday 1 June at Leeds Town Hall

With Leeds Festival Chorus, St Peter's Singers and the Hallé Orchestra conducted by **Simon Wright**

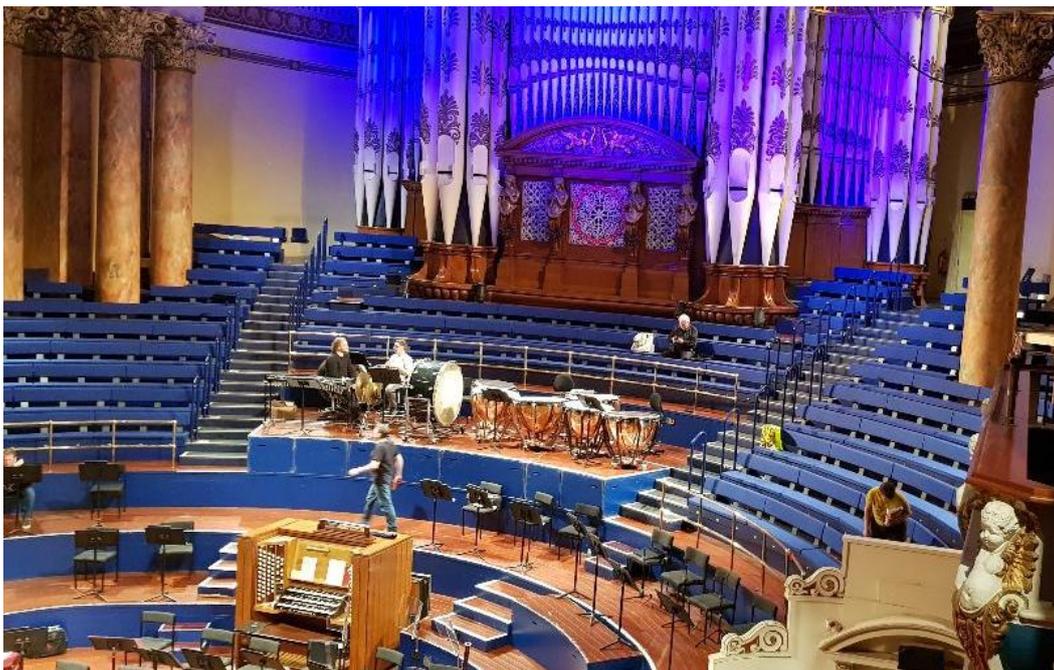
June 1st! For 2nd bass **Dick Pledge** it was his birthday; for thousands of football fans it was the Liverpool v. Spurs Champions League final in Madrid. But for us it was Elgar. '***This is the best of me,***' wrote the composer at the end of his manuscript of *Gerontius* – and it probably was, at least as far as his choral music is concerned. We'll be able to judge better after a double helping of *The Kingdom* next season.

ELGAR ON GERONTIUS

*"This is the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept,
loved and hated, like another; my life was as the vapour
and is not, but this I saw and knew.
This, if anything of mine, is worth your memory."*

But this was a bravura performance of one of those pieces (almost) guaranteed to fill the Town Hall – which it did – and certainly the most enjoyable of the three Phil performances I have sung in over the past ten years. The Demons' Chorus is always one of the highlights, certainly as far as the gentlemen are concerned, and it was good to have Simon Wright's permission, nay command, to snarl – those 'canting groaners' have never groaned so cantingly or even canted so groaningly. On the other hand. For me some of Elgar's most effective writing is the early part of the following movement when the ladies – in several parts – are being suitably angelical and preparing us for that glorious *Praise to the Holiest* moment, and as a bass it was great just to be able to relax for a minute or two and listen to the much-rehearsed intricacies.

I don't know about you, gentle reader, but the biggest difficulty I found was actually singing on the beat. I'd noticed during the Prologue that the orchestra seemed to be playing half-a-beat behind the stick, so although my eyes were usually glued to the conductor, as an 'on the beat' singer I was sometimes uncertain *exactly* when to launch into the fray!



BEFORE: If you look carefully, you can see Brian Stanley (B1) in solitary splendour awaiting his colleagues for the Saturday afternoon rehearsal of Gerontius.

We were blessed by three top-flight soloists, including Dame Sarah Connolly, probably the best *Angel* around at the moment, and I remember with what delight Simon Wright told me that she had been booked well over a year ago whilst we were at St Chad's one evening rehearsing *Faust*.

Here's Geoffrey Mogridge's review of *Gerontius* from the Ilkley Gazette which you may not have seen:

Cardinal John Henry Newman's epic poem imagines the spiritual journey of Gerontius from deathbed to after-life. The text inspired Sir Edward Elgar to some of his most descriptive orchestral and vocal writing. Said Elgar at the time of the premiere at Birmingham Town Hall, on 3rd October 1900, 'Gerontius is the best of me'. In 90 minutes of music, he blends the noble English choral tradition with more than a hint of the music dramas of Richard Wagner, most notably Tristan and Parsifal.

Saturday's luminous performance showcased three great Leeds choirs. 250 singers from the combined Leeds Festival and Philharmonic Choruses with St Peter's Singers and the 80-strong Hallé Orchestra were conducted by Simon Wright whose acute sense of pace maintained the narrative flow. This is, after all, Elgar at his most operatic and that does not apply only to his immense vocal demands on the soloists and chorus.



AFTER: Taking a bow at the end of a 'Dream' performance

Wright's skilful layering of textures achieved impeccable balance and illuminated Elgar's vast musical canvas. The richness of orchestral detail in his expansive account of the scene-setting Prelude, from magically hushed opening woodwind and muted strings to menacing brass and growling bassoons, conjured up a sense of mystery and wonderment. The massed choirs responded to Wright's dynamism with blistering needle point attack, whether as Souls in Purgatory, Angelicals, or the ferocious chorus of Demons. Praise to the Holiest

in the Height burst into an incandescent cry of exultation from choirs and orchestra, beefed up by the sonorities of the Town Hall's mighty organ played by Darius Battiwalla.

A stellar line-up of international soloists was led by tenor Barry Banks as a crystal clear and eloquent Gerontius, subtle of vocal colouring and with a superbly sustained Sanctus Fortis, Sanctus Deus. One sensed the chemistry with Dame Sarah Connolly's consoling Guardian Angel. Connolly's humanity shone through her every phrase: each fervently expressed 'Alleluia' and with darkening of tone, her warnings of the impending judgement. Bass David Soar sonorously declaimed the Priest's lines in Part One and had even more gravitas as the Angel of the Agony in Part Two. The great work ended sublimely with Softly and gently, dearly ransomed Soul - the Angel's tender farewell in which Connolly seemed to enfold the entire audience.

I SAY GERONTIUS, YOU SAY JERONTIUS...

One of our newer basses asked me one evening which pronunciation was correct. I told him not to worry about it as both versions co-exist happily. Personally I use the hard 'G' simply because *Gerontius* comes from a Greek word; I learnt some New Testament Greek many years ago, and in Greek the 'g' is not softened when followed by 'e' as it is in English, though I will readily admit that 'Jerontius' sounds more natural to an English speaker.

The Greek element 'γερωντ-', from which the title comes, refers to 'old age' – 'gerontology' is a branch of medicine dealing with older people – so the *Gerontius* of the title is simply an old man who is dying. But you knew that...

The heading of this little aside reminds me of a musical joke on the BBC2 programme *Only Connect* last April. You need to sing it to get the full effect...

*I say Carmina,
You say Burana.
I say Carmina,
You say Burana,
Carmina, Burana, Carmina, Burana,
Let's call the whole thing Orff.*

JOHN ADAMS *HARMONIUM* & Other Works Friday 12 April at Huddersfield Town Hall

The Phil's last performance of John Adams' piece was in May 2006 with the Festival Chorus, and before my time in the Phil. I do however remember 2013 when there was another performance scheduled for May 25 and we slogged away in rehearsals under Darius Battiwalla, who was interim chorus-master at the time, only to find a couple of weeks beforehand that the piece had been withdrawn from the programme.

Dick Pledge in Newsletter 13 recalled the announcement at a rehearsal that *Harmonium* was being pulled and **Penny Dean** remembers feeling very, very annoyed 'as we had finally got it.' I think we were all a little taken aback by its sudden disappearance from the programme, presumably because it wasn't deemed 'ready', though some singers were definitely relieved.

So when the **Huddersfield Choral Society** announced that *Harmonium* was in their Spring 2019 programme and invited Phil members to join in, there wasn't quite the rush of volunteers we experienced with the Hallé *Faust*, but twelve singers indicated that they'd like to take part. Things being as things are, these twelve were eventually whittled down to five:

Cindy Maude (Soprano 1)
Penny Dean (Soprano 1)
Christine Starmer (Alto 1)
Judith Smith (Alto 2)
Dick Pledge (Bass 2)

Five must be the magic number: there were also five Phil members in *Faust*!

Penny Dean recounts some of the difficulties involved in preparing this latest performance:

'For this one we had to slog through sixteen rehearsals on Tuesdays and some Fridays starting on 8 January. Our main issue was the car park on the M62 every other week trying to get there on time, then closed junctions on the other side of the M62 when trying to get home afterwards. We had both Greg Batsleer and Fanny Cooke teaching it to us – two very different styles and approaches.'

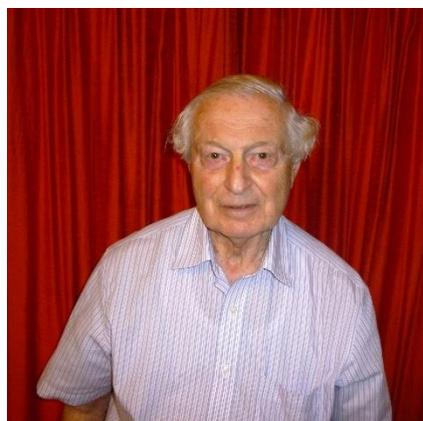
But Penny also mentions how welcome the Phil members were made to feel, just as we were when we went to Manchester in February.

The concert itself brought problems of its own, it seems. The choir sang Parry's *Blest Pair of Nylons* ('What a relief to sing something normal,' says our correspondent) and contemporary composer Tarik O'Regan's *Celestial Map of the Sky*, ('A bit easier') but when it came to *Harmonium*, 'it was conducted much faster than we had rehearsed it, if that was possible,' and (tell it not in Gath) it was whispered in my ear later that at one point the conductor lost his place in the music. Nuff said.

But you will be aware, dear reader, that as insiders we know things that the audience doesn't know, so it may come as no surprise to hear that the reviews of the *Harmonium* concert in the press were uniformly good!

CAME AND SANG! ENOSH by RUDI LEAVOR
Saturday July 6 at Bradford Grammar School
Tuesday July 9 at St George's, Leeds

It isn't often that we get to sing 'home grown' music (I haven't yet asked you to sing my *Missa Saigon* (sic), written for the cathedral choir in Ho Chi Minh City!), but in July some of us took the opportunity to take part in the first full orchestral performances of **Rudi Leavor's** *Enosh* – a Hebrew word meaning 'mankind'. Rudi's piece, for orchestra, choir and soloists, is written largely in Hebrew, but, like Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, which we sang a few seasons ago, the Hebrew text was transliterated into the Roman alphabet.



The first performance of any new work (see *Gerontius* below) always brings its problems! True, *Enosh* had been performed before – it was written back in the 1970s, then lay in the back of Rudi's cupboard for many years! – but only in a version for choir and organ; this was to be its first performance with orchestra, our friends the Airedale Symphony Orchestra doing the honours.

Our final rehearsal on July 2 at the University Music Department found a rather harassed **Dr Stephen Muir**, who was to conduct, telling us how to amend our vocal scores after his first rehearsal with the orchestra. Those who know about these things will understand that it's far easier to amend vocal scores rather than orchestral scores and parts; whereas singers have all the vocal lines in our scores, so that we basses know what the sopranos, altos and tenors are singing and can see how it all fits together, orchestral players have only their own line, their 'part', so a 1st violinist has no idea what a bass trombonist or even a 2nd violinist is playing. Only the conductor has a score with everything – a 'full score' – and each player has only his or her own part.

In addition, Stephen mentioned that the string parts were barred differently from the woodwind parts, and he had also discovered that there were two different vocal scores in circulation. Who'd be a conductor?

So before we actually sang a note at that rehearsal we had to take our pencils out and amend our copies: there were beats to miss out, bars to be repeated, almost a whole page to delete... or not?

Pencil-wielding Phil members singing in the concerts were:

Sopranos

Carol Molloy
Jo-Anne Clarke
Penny Dean

Tenors

Eric Lewis
John Kavanagh
Rudi Leavor

Altos

Linda Rosen
Lynda Kitching
Rosemary O'Dea

Basses

Brian Stanley
David Hope

We were not, of course, alone. There were other singers, the bass section being particularly pleased to welcome **Edward Thornton** of St Peter's Singers who for many years sang in the chorus of Opera North. He was good!

In addition to *Enosh*, we sang three works by Gabriel Fauré, his Requiem, *Cantique de Jean Racine*, and a choral version of *Pavane*, plus *The Shepherds' Farewell* from Berlioz' *Childhood of Christ*.

Both concerts, at Bradford Grammar School and our own St George's in Leeds, went well, the Fauré and Berlioz pieces causing no difficulty, and while our performances of *Enosh* were perhaps a little 'seat of the pants' in places, we got through safely to the end.

Speaking personally, in spite of all the difficulties it was a privilege to sing in these two performances of Rudi's *Enosh*, music close to his heart, reflecting the horrors experienced by the Jewish community in the 1930s and 40s. As ever, many thanks to those Phil members who joined the audience in Leeds; it was good to have your support!

MY PHIL Views from the Pews

No15: Julia Wilkin (Soprano 1)

Now at the end of my second season with the Phil, I have reflected on what has been quite a couple of years for so many reasons. Walking away from a



32-year stint with Huddersfield Choral was probably the most difficult thing I have ever had to do, but once I had faced up to the facts, I had to focus on the future.

In spite of my 50 years' experience, every change of direction has been a new beginning. I have to say that, as a new member of the Leeds Phil, I felt quite cossetted by the small army of people who keep the choir operating so smoothly. Help and support is everywhere, and the quality and frequency of information is second to none. Apply this level of

enthusiasm and attention to detail to the music, and you have a formidable force.

I have had friends in the Phil for many years, and helped swell the ranks on numerous occasions, but nothing could have prepared me for the pure inspiration which welled from Richard Wilberforce. If I needed any encouragement to succeed in a new setting, here it was in bucketloads. Short-

lived as that was, here we are, in another new chapter, with a chorus-master whose prowess on auditioning has been proved beyond doubt. I feel the engagement of the chorus with Joe has been outstanding. Alan, we love you too! We are inspired as we embark on a new journey, and it is most exciting.

How lucky we are, as amateur singers, to have the privilege of working with such talented professionals, not to mention the fabulous orchestras and soloists, in amazing venues. It's great to join forces and be part of a major body like the Leeds International Choral Season (LICS), but it is a very special feeling to perform as an independent force, which I felt in our October concert last year. I, and many others, no doubt, will share the agony of having to listen to 'somebody else' singing all those beautiful semi-choruses in the big works, when there is so much talent in our own ranks. Only through our individual drive and commitment can we command those high-profile platforms.

The short time we spend together each week demands conscious and continuous effort from every one of us. To add to this, an hour or so between rehearsals adds great value to what we have learned, and allows us to progress at a faster pace. When I trained as a youngster with Joan Balmforth in the Leeds Girls' Choir, we learned we would never perform with copies, which meant we had to do our homework. With the demands we have in adult life, it is almost impossible to learn a major work off by heart, but to be more familiar, and therefore more confident, allows us to watch and gain so much more satisfaction and precision, both in rehearsal and performance.

And so to work. I promise personally to be attentive and work hard at rehearsals, and do my homework regularly (yes, even on my holidays!) to avoid too much revisiting at the next rehearsal. There is so much to learn from our professionals, so much to glean from hearing what's happening in the other parts, which adds value to the performance as a whole. So, leave at home the knitting (still can't quite believe that), puzzle books and novels, switch off your devices, do your chatting in the break, and let's be the best we can be. Let's give those goosebumps some regular outings. Thank you, and happy music making, everyone!

Julia Wilkin

MEMBERSHIP NOTES

Membership Secretary **Jill Foalks** has recently given me the good news that **Lewis Hemingway** has auditioned successfully for the Choir as a 2nd Bass.

We hope that Lewis has a happy and fulfilling time singing with us!

OUT & ABOUT – our Roving Reporter enjoys some extramural activities...

Leeds Guild of Singers

As I'd enjoyed a previous concert by Joe's 'other' choir, the **Leeds Guild of Singers**, the evening of Saturday 15 June found me in Leeds Minster for their 70th birthday concert. And I wasn't alone – every few seconds I spotted yet another Phil member in the audience and thought how good it was that we offer such mutual support to musical colleagues in the city.

The music, naturally, was a survey of that sung by the Guild over the past seventy years, ranging from Renaissance composers William Byrd and Clemens non Papa to *Sing*, a brand new 70th birthday commission from choir member Matthew Oglesby, a setting of words by Leeds poet Hannah Stone.

A thoroughly enjoyable evening, finishing with an unusual journey back to Headingley in the company of David Jackson on an X84-branded Alexander-Dennis Enviro400 bus instead of the usual green LeedsCity Euro6-compliant Wright Gemini built in Ballymena. Apologies to those readers who are not 'bus people', but it WAS unusual!

Recital by Katy Kelly's pupils

A message from Jill alerted me to another commission for the Newsletter's roving reporter – i.e. me. On Friday 21 June **Katy Kelly**, the singer who teaches several members of the choir, was presenting an evening of songs by her students at St Edmund's Roundhay, a church I know well, as in 1975 its then choirmaster, the late, great Richard Darke, invited me to Leeds for the weekend to join the choir for its annual trip to Scarborough then to sing on the Sunday following. This was my first visit to Leeds!

As someone who has taught singing (aeons ago, though one of my ex-students from Thailand went on to study in Italy and is now an operatic tenor!) I was intrigued enough to leave the comfort of my armchair and the newly arrived DVDs of Season 4 of *Game of Thrones* (I'm working my way gently through it) to go and hear what Katy's students could do – and a very enjoyable evening it was too, with a wide variation in both repertoire and production problems! And once again it was good to find half a dozen Phil members in the enthusiastic audience. I know from school how important a friendly audience can be!

David Jackson (Bass 1) bravely opened the recital with an excerpt from Haydn's *Creation* (or should I say *Die Schöpfung*, as David sang it in German), followed by a splendid performance of Tchaikovsky's *None but the lonely Heart* sung, naturally, in its native Russian. We also enjoyed contributions by **Rowena Herbert** (Alto 2) with songs by de Falla, by **Alison Wilson** (Soprano 1) with Vaughan Williams and Bach/Gounod, and by **Leonie Hilliard** (Alto 2), **Penny Tharratt** (Alto 1) and **Souheila Fox** (Soprano 2) as a trio of ladies singing Mendelssohn and the contemporary Emma Lou Diemer, but the revelation of the evening, for me, at any rate, was **Bonnie Pang** (Soprano 2) in songs by Francesco Cilea (no, neither had I) and Schubert. How could such a big roof-raising sound come from so tiny a person?

There were also two excerpts from Chinese Yue opera, sung in costume and with movement by Xu Hui Xie. Yue (or 'Shaoxing' opera) is China's second most popular form after Peking opera and is mainly centred around female characters. I have to own up here that my only experience of Chinese opera is from the wonderful 1993 Chinese film *Farewell my Concubine*, which features Peking opera set against the history of 20th century China, but with that proviso, Xu Hui Xie's way of singing, quite different from what we are used to in the West, sounded very authentic to me, and an exotic interlude in the evening's programme.

CHRISTINA SHAW R.I.P.

Jill circulated members recently to announce the sad loss of **Christina Shaw**, who sang 1st Alto in the Phil for several years until about 2003. Christina was living in Headingley in those days, before moving out to Bramhope. Her time in the Phil was many years before mine, but I knew Christina as a 'choir mum' in the 1980s when her son, Owain, named after the Welsh conductor Owain Arwel Hughes, was a chorister at Leeds Parish Church under Simon Lindley.

Christina was the daughter of William Moelwyn Merchant, novelist, sculptor, poet, Anglican priest, and Professor of English at Exeter University. She herself taught French at Leeds Grammar School for many years.

A memorial service for Christina took place on 16 July at St Giles church in Bramhope and some Phil members were invited to sing with the church choir. Music included Mozart's *Ave verum Corpus* and Karl Jenkins' *God shall wipe away all Tears*.

TAILPIECE: The Dream – or was it a Nightmare?

You probably know that the first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* in Birmingham Town Hall on 3 October 1900 was a shambles. Lady Elgar's diary simply recorded it as 'inadequate'!

Birmingham and Leeds were the two great provincial centres of choral music in those days, and no doubt there was serious rivalry between the two! Regarding 'big steps forward' in choral music, Birmingham took the lead with *Gerontius* in 1900, but thirty years later we in Leeds got our own back with the young William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*.

The problems of the first performance of *Gerontius* under the conductor Hans Richter seem essentially to have been twofold. Firstly, the piece was very definitely a 'big step forward' in its requirements of the amateur singers. Think back to singing Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* last March: its first performance (here in Leeds) was in 1877, only 23 years before *Gerontius*, but just consider the difference between them, especially in their demands on the chorus!

It's been said that the Birmingham singers didn't take things 'seriously' when rehearsing their new work, and I do have a happy mental image of those Brummie basses giggling at the Demons' 'Ha-ha's and bellowing (basses always 'bellow', don't they, Joe?) '*Deespossessed, asoide thrust, chooked down...*'

Then there were logistical problems. Elgar had first been approached about a possible new work for the 1900 Birmingham Festival in 1898, but at the end of 1899 he had written to give up the commission. The chairman came to visit Elgar in Malvern on New Year's Day 1900, and, as a result, agreement was made that Elgar would produce *The Dream of Gerontius*, a setting of Cardinal Newman's poem, for the October festival, nine months ahead.

He set to work with vigour. His friend Rosa Burley wrote:

'Throughout the early months of 1900 we simply lived Gerontius. We talked of little else on our walks and Edward seemed to think of nothing else. Again and again manuscript fragments would be brought...tried over and discussed.'

Of course, there was a long gap between Elgar's composing in his head, writing the music on paper and actually seeing it in print. Nowadays a composer can work straight onto a computer using a score-writing program like *Sibelius* which will produce both the conductor's full score and instrumental parts ready to be printed, but in Elgar's day – and until recently – a fair copy of the hand-written manuscript had to be set by a music typesetter (in reverse!) at the publisher's, then proof-read by the composer before being returned and printed, a laborious and time-consuming process.

Elgar's good friend A J Jaeger (to whom *Nimrod* in the *Enigma Variations* is dedicated) acted as consultant and critic, and there was much correspondence between the two. Many, many changes were made: for example Elgar had several attempts (which got as far as being printed as proofs) at the section between Gerontius' Soul coming before God and the *Angel's Farewell* which ends the work before settling on what we have now.

Those who sang in the semi-chorus might like to know that their line *'David from Golia and the wrath of Saul'* was originally *'Daniel from the hungry lions in their lair'*, rejected in this position because of an unwanted rhyme with the previous line *'Moses from the land of bondage and despair'*. Details!

On 6 June 1900 Alice Elgar's diary noted: *'E. finished The Dream of Gerontius. Deo gratias. Raser porsley.'* (This last comment simply means 'rather poorly' in the Elgars' private baby language.)

But, as ever, correspondence went back and forth between Elgar and Jaeger, changes were made, and it wasn't until 3 August that Elgar completed his hand-written full score. It was actually dated 13 August, so presumably there were still amendments being made to the orchestration.

Elgar was then anxious that a fair copy should be made, and here he ran into problems. Novello's main copyist, William Dodd, was fully occupied with making *Gerontius'* orchestral parts and other urgent work so no copy could be made quickly. The immediate result was enormous pressure over proof-reading, and the manuscript circulated between Novello's, Dodd and Elgar, but

the longer-term effect was that the great German conductor, Hans Richter, who was to conduct the first performance in Birmingham on 3 October, didn't see the completed full score until ten days beforehand. For us singers this might not be a problem, but a conductor needs time to get to know the music intimately, especially when the work is new and unknown.

But the 'inadequate' first performance took place in Birmingham Town Hall under Richter with the soloists Edward Lloyd (tenor) Harry Plunkett Green (baritone) and Marie Brema (mezzo-soprano), the first English singer to perform at Bayreuth, as the Angel.

There is a happy Leeds connection here as one of Marie Brema's great grandsons is none other than our Vice-President, Simon Lindley!

NEXT SEASON IS ALMOST UPON US!

A reminder that next season begins with a rehearsal at St George's on **Thursday 5 September** (which I've just realised would have been my parents' 80th wedding anniversary!) so please be there with your copy of *The Kingdom* and your pencil!

In the meanwhile, have a great summer – and let's hope for some decent weather.

David

Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the contributors themselves and do not necessarily represent the views of the Leeds Philharmonic Society.