

Phil Me In!

Number 17: Easter 2020

Edited by David Hope (david1549@ymail.com)

2019-20 A SEASON SUSPENDED: THE CORONAVIRUS EDITION!

Dear Phil Colleagues and Friends,

This Newsletter was scheduled to appear around Easter 2020, but in view of the coronavirus pandemic and the consequent suspension of rehearsals you may as well have it now as there will be nothing else to report! Reading it – and doing Rudi’s quiz – could well occupy a pleasant Thursday evening by the fireside...

Seriously, we’re living through a very dangerous situation, the like of which none of us have seen before. As I write this in mid-March, on the very day the schools have closed and pubs, restaurants and leisure centres have been told to shut, there is no real indication how long this crisis is going to last and how serious it will get. I’m still going to the shops as normal (though taking advantage of the crumbles’ first hour shopping on offer at most supermarkets) and going out for a brisk(ish) non-contact walk around Headingley in the afternoon, but as someone who is retired and lives alone it hasn’t really had an impact yet as ‘social isolation’ is my norm. My two usual weekly opportunities for being in close contact with people, services at Leeds Minster and Phil rehearsals, are both suspended ‘for the foreseeable future’.

I don't know what the Phil did during the two world wars of the 20th century, but did we stop rehearsals? Different situation completely, of course.

But think of our friends in the **Leeds Festival Chorus**, who are having a worse time: they were meant to be performing Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in the Town Hall on Saturday 21 March, but the concert was cancelled a mere five days beforehand. We all know the amount of hard work which goes into preparing a major concert, so this must have been a major disappointment for the Festival. At least we got our American concert out of the way...

THE AMERICAN CONCERT

Leeds Town Hall: 29 February 2020

with the Airedale Symphony Orchestra

conducted by John Anderson and Joe Judge

George Gershwin: *Porgy and Bess* (concert version by Robert Russell Bennett)

Samuel Barber: *Agnus Dei*

Leonard Bernstein: *Make our Garden grow* (from *Candide*)

Aaron Copland: *The Promise of Living* (from *The Tender Land*)

Randall Thompson: *Choose Something like a Star*

Well, this was different wasn't it? As I write this particular paragraph it's the morning of St David's day, the first of March, and I'm sitting here reflecting on last night's 'American' concert in the Town Hall. It was great to see the place packed to the rafters, while the wet'n'windy February (just!) weather made me glad that I'd been able to park my car right outside the Town Hall exit!

In spite of that nasty weather a large audience came to the Town Hall, and this was definitely a Good Thing as this particular concert was a joint promotion by us and the Airedale Symphony Orchestra – nothing to do with the City Council or the Leeds International Concert Season – and thus a 50% share of whatever profits there may be will find its way into the Phil's coffers.

After the interval it was fun to ditch the usual chorus performance dress for something more colourful, though I did notice some tenors having to change places on the platform ('Ooh, you're wearing the same as me!'), and at the rehearsal **Jack Parkes** was anxiously asking those basses around him 'What colour are *you* wearing?' And that was just the men!



Unusually colourful – Porgy & Bess at the Town Hall

I have to reveal a little disappointment here. My choir in Ho Chi Minh City used to do occasional charity ‘dinner concerts’ in 5-star hotels where we’d entertain diners with medleys from Broadway shows etc, so I’d thought that the Phil would also have the opportunity to sing some real ‘show tunes’ at this concert—I’d noticed both *Show Boat* and *South Pacific* mentioned at the start. True, the men did get to croon *Ol’ Man River* in fine style, which was enjoyable, but that was it. Officially. But listening to the orchestra play their *South Pacific* medley, the gents around me surreptitiously joined in softly with all the songs – plus appropriate finger actions in *Happy Talk*! From the audience Joe didn’t notice, which was probably a Good Thing.

If the Leap Year’s Day concert was the highlight of our truncated choir ‘term’, then the sad loss of 2nd Alto **Margaret Irving**, who died very suddenly at the end of January, must be the low spot. Margaret was in so many ways a larger than life figure and a good friend to many, and she is sorely missed.

MARGARET IRVING R.I.P.

It came as an enormous shock to hear of Margaret’s sudden death. Everyone will have their own memories of this lovely lady; before the altos started to move around every week, Margaret and I sat across the aisle from each other and shared many a private joke.

Margaret in her own Write – Here’s what she told us about herself back in 2017:

Being nearly six foot and blond in the ladies’ section, it’s easy to pick out who I am. What’s not so easy to see is what a lucky person I am... so, so lucky.

Lucky to be born where and when I was, on the Yorkshire/Lancashire border at a time when all the numerous small chapels and churches had choirs. All schools had a choir, even the small first schools, and all the surrounding towns ran their own music festivals. Born to a mother who sang all day every day, especially when *Sing Something Simple* had been on the radio. As children, we would play the game where we hummed a tune in the next room and tried to count to ten before she was singing it. If I woke to her singing, I went to bed to my father playing banjo, ukulele and tin whistle; nothing sophisticated or tutored but all my life music has been associated with happiness.

I was lucky enough to marry my childhood sweetheart, a doctor in medical research, and into a family who all played one musical instrument or other at family ‘meets’. I was the one who had to sing. When we started our married life in this area, what luck to be in a village where a hugely talented boy organist started his own ladies choir. I sang at university so joined in willingly. We learnt everything by heart, never took our eyes off him for a second and won many prizes. Blackpool Music Festival was one such. I then joined a local four-part choir, equally committed and again we learnt a lot by heart. We competed, and on several occasions won classes, at Llangollen International Music Festival. What hard work but what fun! Camping in a field all together near Llangollen we were ecstatic to win and sang into the night outside in a field!

It seemed very brave at the time in the 1980s to travel for over an hour on my own into Leeds and audition for the Leeds Philharmonic Chorus. I was so nervous and so lucky to get in. Sir Charles Groves, Charles Mackerras, Richard Hickox, giants in the music world all within the first few years. Not only that, but I seemed surrounded in the choir with very talented musicians, some even having choirs of their own. Luckily no-one seemed to have noticed my inadequacies, so after years of encouraging three daughters through grade 7 and 8 piano, flute and oboe exams I decided to take my grade 5 theory quietly with the youngest one. There were many “oh mother!” when I made mistakes and the lovely piano teacher often commented on my age and daughters

threatened to tell her I hadn't done enough practice! I was lucky enough to have three talented singing teachers, James Ashworth, Jean Allister and Kathryn Woodruff, who passed on their knowledge with enormous encouragement and skill. I auditioned for Huddersfield Choral and sang with them for 15 years. Soprano with them and alto with Leeds, a big commitment but I felt so lucky to be part of both wonderful choirs.

When my husband died very young the friendship, commitment and regularity of this music world was a blessing. It was through music I met my lovely partner Chris an oboist and now our house is full of music all day.

What have been the highlights in all this? Well, singing in Canterbury with the lovely Heather Cleobury. I met a Harvard doctor who encouraged me to try to get into the Berkshire Festival in Massachusetts. I stayed with him in his home at Martha's Vineyard and then flew up to near Tanglewood to sing for a week I will never forget. I joined a group who sang the services for a residential week in some of our wonderful cathedrals. I was lucky enough to sing with both Leeds Phil and Huddersfield in Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Austria on tour. Wonderful music and friendship combined.

Now that the latest audition is behind us, and I can't be accused of flattery, I know that I (we) are so lucky with our choir at the moment. A chorus master who combines musical brilliance with the most advanced people skills of anyone I have met along my musical route through life! Those choir members new to the life should note it is not normal for rehearsals to be so consistently cheerful and pleasant, believe me! Alan too can play anything, anytime, and for one who is near enough to the 'hands together' stage I'm aware of how lucky we are to have both of them. It may not show but I know I am so... so lucky.

Margaret Irving

And we too, Margaret, are so lucky to have known you...

Some forty Phil members gathered at St Luke's church in East Morton (on the canal just outside Keighley) for Margaret's funeral on Monday 10 February. I hesitate to describe a funeral as 'jolly', but as the shock of Margaret's sudden death had passed and we were thinking of her as she always was when she was with us, it was a happy affair. We joined the large congregation in two hymns and sang Mozart's *Ave verum Corpus*, directed by Alan, as our own

tribute to a dear friend. Margaret's partner Chris played a beautiful oboe solo and her son-in-law gave the eulogy, helping us realise that Margaret was, of course, also a much-loved lady beyond the limits of Phil rehearsals. We repaired afterwards to the Busfeild Arms for lunch. On the basses' table the meat'n'potato pie was simply glorious, and **Brian Stanley's** two 'trios' – sausages and ice cream, though not served together – also seemed to go down well, judging by the contented look on his face afterwards!

Some Tributes to Margaret from fellow Altos:

(Thanks to **Lynda Kitching** for collating these)

- A very lovely lady.
- A lovely person, always so welcoming.
- A huge shock – she always looked so well and smart.
- So warm and welcoming. She made a big impression in the short time I've been in the choir.
- Such a sad loss.
- Awful shock.
- So full of life, so resilient no matter what life threw at her – a really talented singer, artist, gardener, who loved her family and took great joy in life. She will be greatly missed.
- Everyone who knew her was fond of her and respected her.
- Difficult to accept that we will not see and hear this elegant, friendly singer anymore.
- Alto **Jill Foalks** adds the following little story: When Margaret had her last voice check with Richard she was *very* nervous and, when she'd finished, she was in such a hurry to leave the room that she opened the wrong door and found herself in a cupboard! In true Margaret fashion she related the story to give us all a laugh!



MEMBERSHIP NOTES

Membership Secretary **Jill Foalks** has given me the names of the following singers who have auditioned successfully and joined the choir since Christmas:

Hilda Webb Alto 1

Jill Ramsden Alto 2

Rachel Meredith Soprano 2

Sue Silkstone Soprano 1

We hope that they all have a happy and fulfilling time singing with us!

CONGRATULATIONS to **Graeme Gooday** (Tenor 2) who received his 25-year badge from conductor John Anderson when he came to take the rehearsal on February 20.

As our Hon Sec reported at the end of February, we're delighted to confirm that 1st Tenor and violinist **Kamran Hosseini** from Iran was recently granted 'leave to remain' in the UK for five years by the Home Office. I'm informed that PAFRAS (Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) and the Red Cross are exploring the legal pathway for Kamran to live permanently in the UK.

MY PHIL: VIEWS FROM THE PEWS

No17: Tom Chilton (Bass 1)

Hello! My name is Dr Tom Chilton and I sing 1st Bass. I've been asked to write an article about myself for the choir Newsletter.

I didn't start singing with choirs until I moved to Silsden (near Keighley) to live and a friend asked me to join a local choir, the Keighley Vocal Union, who had about eighty members. I agreed to sit-in at rehearsals for a few weeks before the dreaded audition.

I didn't have a clue what voice part I was, so I sat in the bass section when I went for the audition. I had to sing the usual scales and take a piece of music to sing, so I chose a piece by Handel called *Art Thou Troubled*. I have a Kathleen Ferrier recording of this piece of music and have always loved it. After the audition I was given the good news that I could join the choir, but the bad news from the chorus master was that he wanted me to sing tenor, so I would need to learn the tenor part.

Every year the choir sang *Messiah* at a small Methodist church in Freckleton near Blackpool, where we did part 1 in the afternoon followed by a lovely afternoon tea, then the remaining parts in the evening followed by a coach trip home which naturally included a stop for drinks at a pub.

The choir also entered the Eisteddfod Festival each year and won it once, but unlike other new choirs taking part who sang without copies and performed movement with their songs, KVV went in traditional choral dress, copies in hand and heads firmly down in the music. As you can guess, things had moved on, but the choir hadn't – which is the fate of a number of choirs whose members are ageing.

I later auditioned for Bradford Festival Chorus and discovered that the tenor audition test piece was *Let all the Angels* from *Messiah*. So, I rehearsed this and got in the choir, and it was good to be able to sing with a much larger choir at St George's Hall in Bradford.

A dear late friend of mine called Basil Newby was a member of Leeds Philharmonic Chorus and Leeds Festival Chorus, and he suggested I should join Leeds Phil. So, I auditioned and was accepted as a tenor. I think he may have suggested this as he wanted me to give him a lift each week to rehearsals!

I remember one particular trip singing *Messiah* in Europe with Jill Wild, in Vienna, Hungary and the home of Leoš Janáček. We all had a fabulous time. I will never forget Jack Parkes holding up a T-shirt on the coach asking if someone had left it behind. He looked at the size and said it must be Tom's!

It had always been my ambition to join Huddersfield Choral, but the audition was really tough as the test piece was not just a few bars but two or three pages. I persisted and finally got in as a second tenor. The highlight of my time with Huddersfield was performing at the Albert Hall and a trip to Japan to sing Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*. We stayed in a 5-star hotel for a week in Osaka and sang with the Osaka Symphonic Choir. They even came to meet us at the airport and travelled with us to our hotel. On our return to the airport our chorus-master Joseph Cullen reminded us all to check that we hadn't left our passports behind. Guess what? He had left his in the hotel and had to travel back to the UK the following day!

Sadly, when I retired I found the travelling to Huddersfield by train too much and left Huddersfield Choral Society, but I missed my singing and the fellowship that this brings so I decided to have a go to re-join Leeds Phil and was pleased when Joe accepted me as a member of the Bass section.

It's great fun singing again, and we have done some wonderful pieces of music by Elgar. I really enjoyed our concert on Saturday 29 February singing American music.

Tom Chilton

OUR ROVING REPORTER GOES TO ROUNDHAY!

March 6 has long been a date of note for me. In my life I've had three friends born on that date, Harry, Garry and Barry. Seriously. So it always rings a bell.

This year's March 6 fell on a Friday and found me – in my guise as the Newsletter's roving reporter – at St Edmund's church in Roundhay for a concert by the students of Katy Kelly, the well-known singing teacher who coaches several members of the Phil.

This was Katy's last such concert for a while as she is currently expecting a baby and is concentrating her energies on that important forthcoming event!

Several of our members were performing, and it was good to see at least half a dozen more in the audience – friendly support is vital for confidence on occasions like this!

As last time, I found a tremendous range of music on offer, and also a wide variety of voices in various stages of development.

1st bass **David Jackson** once again started the evening (I thought he was being brave but he said that he was told to do so!) with John Ireland's setting of Henry Newbolt's poem *Hope the Hornblower*, which went at a fair lick, and he followed this with Purcell's *Wondrous Machine* and Robert Schumann's *Die Beiden Grenadiere*, reflecting on Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812.

David was followed by soprano **Souheila Fox**, who gave us *Cruda Sorte*, an aria from Rossini's opera *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, then more from Schumann in a

memorable performance of the showpiece song *Widmung* – ‘Dedication’ in English.

A gorgeous duet followed as **Bonnie Pang** and **Leonie Hilliard** sang *Sull’aria*, the famous *Letter Duet* from Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, which, if you don’t know the opera itself, you’ll know from the 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption* where it’s blasted around the prison yard!

Then Bonnie and Leonie went their separate ways, Bonnie with Offenbach’s *Elle a fui, la tourterelle* from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and Leonie with *La Mamma Morta* from Umberto Giordano’s 1896 opera *Andrea Chénier*. I see that I wrote ‘ace’ in my programme by this last, so I must have particularly enjoyed it!

The next Phil member down to perform was Alto **Christie Ruijsenaars**, who sadly was unwell and unable to be present. I was particularly looking forward to her Bach aria!

The recital finished with more performances from Bonnie Pang and Leonie Hilliard, the former with *Le Colibri* from Chausson’s *Sept Mélodies* (Op 2) and Puccini’s famous *O mio Babbino caro*, and the latter with the *Habanera* from *Carmen* by Bizet (and not ‘Bidet’, as the Classic FM announcer once said) and *If you go away* by the Belgian singer, songwriter, poet, actor and director Jacques Brel.

A very enjoyable evening of music in a warm church!

TAILPIECE: RINGING THE CHANGES?

Our American concert on Leap Year Day was an interesting experience of doing ‘something completely different’ for the Phil. Personally I’m all in favour of ringing the changes musically, but there were choir members who loved it, others who hated it, and still others who changed their opinion – for good or ill – as we went along!

Mind you, the American songs we sang in the first half of the concert were essentially ‘classical’ in nature, requiring a classical singing technique, so no difficulty there, but the problem for many was the very different musical approach needed for *Porgy and Bess*, George Gershwin’s 1935 ‘folk opera’.

Gershwin himself said of the piece:

'Porgy and Bess is a folk tale. Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began work on the music I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folksongs. But they are still folk music—and therefore, being in operatic form, Porgy and Bess becomes a folk opera.'

The initial problem with *Porgy* – and *Bess* too, I suppose – was that we were approaching it as classical singers – and this didn't really work! My own personal road to Damascus (or rather Catfish Row, Charleston) moment came when I watched performances on YouTube with predominantly black chorus singers and suddenly it was clear how to sing – or rather perform – it! From then on I let myself go a little and began to enjoy the rehearsals much more. Moving to the rhythms of the music – as we were encouraged to do – was an integral part of the performance, and classically-trained singers do tend to stand still! As an ex-cathedral musician, I find the rhythmic movements of gospel choirs on the TV quite off-putting, and they would certainly look out of place in cathedral choirstalls! But in the gospel style of church singing they are absolutely appropriate.

When I started to run choirs in the 1970s I came from the background of cathedral and college chapel music, and as the essential *raison d'être* of my first school choir was to sing at Sunday morning chapel services I felt quite at home. But as soon as the choir began to be invited to sing in the local area and further afield I started varying the repertoire. A typical recital would find boys' voice church music in the first half, whilst after the interval we changed completely, removing cassocks (but only into school uniform and not colourful shirts!) and venturing into a wide variety of 'fun' songs.

Our original 'standards', which featured in every concert, were *Chattanooga Choo-choo* and *There is Nothing like a Dame* from *South Pacific*, the second of which gave many boys the opportunity to sing a solo line. Our first recording, in 1983, was entitled *Pardon me, Boys*, the first line of *Chattanooga*, and built on this varied repertoire. It's currently in my car CD player and I still listen to it with affection!

Mind you, I did once ask my kids what was the favourite piece that they sang, and the answer was the opening chorus of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*!

RUDI'S RUMINATIONS – AND A QUIZ!

This is going to be an occasional presentation of comments on musical events and a **Quiz**, the answers to which have been sent to David. Items are in no particular order.

- Smetana scored a few bars in the first movement of his 1st string quartet for first violin playing one note high on the E string. Commentators have suggested that he wished by this to simulate his deafness. My comment is that it's not deafness which produces a whistling in the ear but tinnitus, and I suggest that that is what he wanted to indicate. He may well have been deaf as well, of course.
- On a recent cruise an Armenian pianist Naomi Edemariam, based in London, played, *inter alia*, an arrangement for piano *left hand only* of the *Ride of the Valkyries*, including the big tune and accompaniment, a considerable achievement. She would do well in Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand.
- In these days of hi-fi it is astonishing that on separate occasions I heard three violin concertos in recordings on the radio in which the orchestra completely drowned out the soloist. By pleasant contrast I heard Tchaikovsky's concerto played by the Istanbul Symphony Orchestra, not noted for any claim to fame, to absolutely well-balanced perfection.
- On another cruise a Japanese girl played a Schubert Impromptu rather well – this in a public place not as formal recital. I stood and watched in admiration. Presently she got up and walked away whilst the piano kept on playing.
- Deaths have occurred recently of Jessye Norman, mezzo; Sir Stephen Cleobury choirmaster at Cambridge succeeded by our late choirmaster Richard Wilberforce; Barrington Pheloung aged 65, composer who wrote, *inter alia*, the music for the Inspector Morse programmes originally on BBC TV; Mariss Jansons, conductor; Peter Schreier, tenor; Barry Tuckwell horn player; Robert Ponsonby, General Secretary at Glyndebourne, Manager Scottish National Orchestra, Controller Radio 3 including the Proms, author..

- On a church notice board: ... and the choir will sing the tedium. On another board: if you can sin join the choir.

Brain teaser: Brahms' 1st, Elgar's 1st, Mahler's 5th, Schubert's 8th, Schumann's 3rd, Borodin's 2nd, Shostakovich's 9th, Bruckner's 7th: what completes the list?

Set by John Ashmele. By kind permission of the Editor of 'Kehila'.

- At a recent performance of the opera *Hänsel und Gretel* at Opera North the person next to me gave a start when the witch in Act 3 was pushed into the oven. As Bernard Haitink said, there is always someone in the audience who has not heard Beethoven's 5th Symphony before.
- Richard Farnes, one of the first conductors at Opera North, recently received rave reviews in *The Times*. Jack Malvern wrote on 27 December that it is possible to alter slightly the music of Mozart, who would change in performances of his own music small details according to the ambience and 'moment' at the time. Quoting Simon Keefe, he said that opera companies and orchestras should take this concept on board and not feel bound to keep strictly to the score.
- *The Times* also reported (22 January) that for every ticket sold by opera companies, Birmingham Opera Company received £173, Opera North £108, English National Opera £97 and Welsh National Opera £60.
- 2020 is Beethoven year; he was born 250 years ago. He was plagued by ill health all his life, predominantly by his deafness; he had a fractious relationship with most people, especially with his allegedly immoral sister-in law and her son, his nephew, for whom he claimed guardianship when his brother died; he often fell in love with 'wrong' women except one teenager whom he loved dearly – Therese Malfatti, to whom he dedicated a piano piece, but when drunk dedicated it *Für Elise*. Though getting more and more profoundly deaf he nevertheless composed astonishing music extending the boundaries of technique, orchestration, invention and drama. The opening of his Fifth Symphony was adopted by

the BBC as a victory signal during the Second World War, the rhythm being the symbol for V = victory. In his Third Symphony, the *Eroica*, he pushed the boundaries out to what was then infinity, including two bars of unheard-of repeated discords in the first movement. Boundaries were also expanded later in his Ninth. His music will live for a very long time.

And here's the Quiz:

1. Why is the beginning of the Overture to Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride* not a fugue though it sounds like one?
2. What was the cause of Wagner's death?
3. Which well-known person died on the same day as Prokofiev?
4. What is the name of Sibelius' string quartet?
5. Which well-known choral work has no key signatures but plenty of accidentals?
6. For which organisation was Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* written?
7. How many symphonies did Beethoven write? (Be careful now).
8. Benjamin Britten received a high honour towards the end of his life. What was it?
9. What is the connection between Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth)*?
10. Leeds is one of only three cities which employ a 'city organist.' Which are the other two?
11. What was the most famous make of cinema organ?
12. Which popular piece of music was written under the influence of hypnosis?
- 13a. 'They call me Mimi, but my name is...?'
- 13b. What is Tosca's first name?
- 13c. What is Butterfly's name? Incidentally the opera is called *Madama Butterfly*, not *Madam Butterfly*.

14. Did Erik Satie write any other music apart from his famous *Gymnopedies*?
- 15a. Which concerto has four movements?
- 15b. Which two symphonies, one with five movements, are really concertos?
16. Where did Herbert von Karajan begin his career?
17. What were Wagner's first and last operas?
18. Where does this refrain come from: '*Please don't send me up again*'?
19. Where did Chopin spend the last years of his life and with whom?
20. Who is presumably the earliest known lady composer?

Set by Rudi Leavor, 1st tenor for 50 years.

You can e-mail answers to me at david1549@ymail.com – and there may even be a prize for the first correct solution received!

And to finish with...

A 10-year-old's topical joke (tweeted by his mum):

Q. What do you call a composer with coronavirus?

A. Drycoughsky.

Good, eh?

So that's it, dear readers, until...whenever. **Please stay safe**, and in the immortal words of Dame Vera Lynn, 103 years old today (20 March 2020):

"We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when..."

...but hopefully at St George's later in 2020!

David Hope

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