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Leading Notes

Stainer, Parry
and Stanford

Issue 15 : March 2006

Chairman's Ramblings:

There is good news and bad news. The good news first: we can be proud of ourselves for our performance at the Festival. To achieve a 'Distinction' and a certificate from such a demanding adjudicator reflects great credit on us and our 'young' (sic) conductor. The 'Distinction' category means, according to the syllabus 'an excellent performance technically and artistically'. So, thank you, Peter and Shauni, for all your hard work which enabled us to do so well.

Talking of Shauni leads to the bad news: she is resigning as Assistant Conductor after the next concert. There will be time and space later for a fuller tribute, but I would like to express my own appreciation of all she has done for the choir during the twelve years I have been a member, and for some years before that. Her expertise, enthusiasm and skill in communication have been a great help to me, not least in my own amateur efforts in conducting. The obvious sadness of the reaction to the news spoke volumes about our affection and respect for her. Thank you, Shauni!

To conclude, a brief look forward. On 10th of June in Churchill we will perform 'unquestionably the finest English opera until the première of Peter Grimes in 1945'. This quotation is from the notes of my CD of *Dido and Aeneas*, Purcell's best-known opera. Let's make it a memorable performance for all the right reasons.

Roger Stein

Editorial Mutterings:

Thinking of those great Parry songs that form part of our upcoming concert, reminds me of another title that may spring to the mind when this Englishman's name is mentioned - *Jerusalem*. How did it come about that his setting of William Blake's poem achieved its present status of a second national anthem?

We have the Women's Institutes to thank. In the 1920s there was a feeling within the ranks of the WI (it began in fact with the Shropshire Branch) that members should become involved in singing and musical education in general. A WI song book was eventually produced, containing a selection of songs suitable for singing at monthly meetings. However, to find a suitable chorus for the 1924 AGM, Mr A G Leslie, the man to whom the WI had initially turned for advice, persuaded Sir Walford Davies to make a special arrangement for string orchestra of Parry's setting of *Jerusalem*. Parry himself conducted the massed choirs on the day: it must have been a stirring moment. It soon became the official song of the WI; the rest is history.

Well, not quite. In 1918 *Jerusalem* had already been used as a hymn of rejoicing by suffragists celebrating the enfranchisement of women. Millicent Fawcett, the suffragist leader had written to Hubert Parry saying 'your *Jerusalem* ought to be made the women voters' hymn'. And so it turned out. She could not have foreseen the emotions that the hymn may now stir in a much wider context.

££££ Money Matters £££ : our finances continue to be healthy - income greater than expenditure = a happy Micawber. The budget is proving a useful tool and will help when planning another 'Tippett type' concert! Our CAF account has earned over £300 interest so far this financial year. Easter Concert: we have sold 124 tickets (to 20th March) at the discounted rate. Keep up the good work to ensure we 'break even'. Betsy

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Where have they been all their lives?

Fauré and Vivaldi In Birmingham

To sing 'Dies irae, dies illa' double forte in a choir of fourteen hundred voices is an astounding experience, but when those same voices, barely audible sang the final 'libera me' the moment was almost unbearably moving. This was the experience for about 20 members of CNCS, and a group from the Woodstock Music Society, who took part in a scratch performance of Fauré's *Requiem* and the Vivaldi *Gloria* at the Birmingham Symphony Hall on February 5th this year.

The opportunity to sing in the near perfect acoustic of this hall with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was a huge draw for choirs from all over the country, but it became evident that what filled every available seat was the warmth, skill and impeccable organisation of Simon Halsey. Simon Halsey is Director of the CBSO Chorus (as well as being a Principal Guest Conductor in venues as far afield as Berlin and Sydney) and from the enthusiastic response he received it was clear that many there had sung with him on other occasions.

'Where have they been all their lives?' muttered a voice behind me as with a sprinkling of others I waved my copy when asked 'Who has never sung the Fauré before?!' No such response with the *Gloria* which everyone seemed to have sung.

So the first part of the afternoon, apart from a few bars of the *Gloria*, was devoted to Fauré, to the accompaniment of two fluent young pianists. After a rather hectic but timed-to-the-second tea-break, we

joined orchestra and soloists to hurtle straight through the Vivaldi, then focused on detail from both pieces. Exhilarated by the afternoon's work, we stopped at 5.30 for an hour and a half break. With plenty of good company about, and nearby canal-side cafés and bars to choose from, we had the pleasure of a relaxed pre-concert meal.

The audience for the evening was seated behind the orchestra and one can only hope that the powerful acoustic of the hall enabled them to appreciate the student soloists as much as we did. They were Jenny Walker (soprano) and Helen Haviland (mezzo) from the Welsh Conservatoire in Cardiff, with the baritone Matthew Wright from the Birmingham Conservatoire. The confidence of their singing was highlighted by the contrast between their isolation on stage and the massive body of the choir singing with them. Their performances both in rehearsal and in concert were a pleasure to listen to and were warmly and keenly applauded by choir and audience alike.

The journey back, with a tired but satisfied coachload, was smooth, quick - and quiet!

Very many thanks from us all go to Rosemary Wilson for spotting this event, and doing all the organising - a real treat to have a coach ready and waiting on a very cold morning, and to know that someone else had done all the hard work, leaving only the best part - the singing - to us.

Hilda Reed

Gunflight at the OK Choral

As the calendar turned inexorably on to March, three things were certain: the evenings would be drawing out; the shops would be filling with overpriced chocolate; and the rehearsals for our Easter concert would be interrupted by our mobilisation to battle. Yes, the 94th Chipping Norton Musical Festival was upon us, and the cohorts of the 1st Hammer and Tongs Battalion of the Cotswold Choric Brigade, the 'Chippies' to friends, swung into action. The spirit of the Festival, of course, is one of participation and shared musical experience, but there are some feuds which ignore the niceties - and those ladies from Blockley had it coming to them!

So! We gathered in the acoustic loveliness of Chipping Norton School Hall and awaited our clash. The Small/Church choir classes preceded us - it was great to see an increased interest (i.e. entries) over last year. A group of young singers from Kitebrook House School, performed *Sing Low, Sweet Chariot* and had some of the basses foot-tapping along in an attempt to stave off the disappointment of losing the Calcutta Cup. These youngsters showed real nerve to get up and perform as they did (perhaps steeled by the nearby presence of their formidable headmistress, who heckled the adjudicator's comments - quite right!), and they charmed their audience with their singing and school uniform, the latter straight from a C.S.Lewis novel.

Finally, the Open Choirs class arrived, and the action kicked off with Voice Box: clearly, this was to be a relaxed evening, as their last concert at the Royal Albert Hall had been under the banner 'Larynx'. A lovely solo, full of chutzpah, and real musical energy propelled us through a refreshing programme, sections of the audience seemingly mesmerised by their swaying conductor. Gasps of recognition rang around the hall (amongst the 1st Hammer and Tongs at least) when they started *Banuwa*, though they lacked our secret weapon - Mr Mike Terry - to provide extra oomph in their 'huhs'!

Then our *femmes fatales* were on. They looked a little nervous, but the reason would only dawn on your correspondent a little later. The Ladies made their way through the first two pieces, but really seemed to relax into their third number, *By the Rivers of Babylon*, where they appeared at home with the peaceful feel of the music; sworn enemy or not - this was your correspondent's favourite moment of the evening. The reason for earlier nerves now became apparent, for their final piece was composed by none other than the evening's adjudicator, Mr Robert Latham. Waves of sympathy wafted from the audience, which may have helped the Ladies to produce their best performance of the evening - or perhaps they practised that one a little more?

continued >>>

**Stainer 'The Crucifixion'; Parry 'Songs of Farewell';
Stanford: Three Motets Op.38**

**St.Peter's Church, Hook Norton
Saturday April 1st, 2006 at 7.30pm**

And Looking Ahead

Saturday 10th June 06, All Saints Church, Churchill - Purcell: *Dido and Aeneas*
 Saturday, 16th December 06, St.Mary's Church, Chipping Norton - Handel: *Messiah*
 Saturday, 31st March 07, Methodist Church, Witney - Duruflé: *Requiem*; Fauré: *Cantique de Jean Racine*; and more
 Saturday, 9th June 07, St.Edward's Church, Stow-on-the-Wold - Elgar: *From the Bavarian Highlands*; and more

Brief Lives (Three Oxbridge Professors)

Stainer, Sir John born London, 1840, d. Verona, Italy 1901. Had a distinguished academic career (as had Parry and Stanford) and was Prof.of Music at Oxford Univ. He was 'before his time' in his appreciation of, and research into, medieval music. Wrote much church music, including *Sevenfold Amen* as well as his well-known *Crucifixion*.

Parry, Sir Charles Hubert born Bournemouth 1848, d. Rustington, Sussex 1918. Influenced by the works of Bach and Brahms, his choral music, along with that of Stanford placed him at the leading edge of British music at the end of the C19. *Blest Pair of Sirens* and the *Songs of Farewell* are perhaps his most well-known works. His unison setting of Blake's poem *Jerusalem* echoes over the years in WI meetings and Last Nights of the Proms.

Stanford, Sir Charles Villiers born Dublin 1852, d. London 1924. Best known for songs, operas (e.g. *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1884)) and choral music. He also wrote 7 symphonies, and a considerable body of chamber music, these latter showing the influence of Brahms, whom he greatly admired.

CNCS who's who

Admin committee:

- Roger Stein** (chairman)
- Sarah Cobb** (deputy chairman/
ticket secretary)
- Betsy Tyler-Bee** (treasurer)
- Beth Sinclair** (secretary)
- Marian Stein** (librarian)
- Brian Jones** (subscriptions)
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- Peter Hunt** (musical director)
- Shauni McGregor** (asst. musical
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- Marian Stein**
- Vicki Pike**
- Wendy Guest** (sopranos)
- Jill Greer** (altos)
- Dennis Mowbray** (basses)
- Roger Stein** (tenors, and
committee rep.)

Festival assessment

What Robert Latham said (extracts):

'Tuning especially in F was secure enough. Perhaps some softer moments?' (Mozart)

'Generally needed more time here to capture the majesty of the piece - a challenge to fill all vowels' - 'bricks and cement' - 'more string fewer beads' etc. etc.
(*Never weatherbeaten...*)

'Good dynamics. FLING - lower larynx? GATES- full crotchet. A safe pace, but it allowed the dotted rhythm to come over well. Words clear - good for so many singers!. Just lacking real drama, but very effective nevertheless. Milk his style, go O.T.T. with the expression perhaps?' (Stainer)

Categories: Outstanding; Distinction;
Commended; Merit;
Promising; Fair.

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>>> **Gunflight** continued

No matter, for now it was the turn of CNCS to take centre stage. Our love affair with the musical round continued with our first piece by Mozart (*V'amo di core*), but sung in our mixed choirs. It went OK though Mr. Latham rightly pointed out that we didn't do much to develop the music - it was a bit samey. Next we shuffled into our usual format, what luck that Mr.Latham's main theme of the evening -positioning of singers and mixing of parts - was something that Peter had looking at so closely this term! There are two possible explanations here: either he slipped the adjudicator a tenner before the class started, or could it be that behind the beard Peter actually knows what he's talking about? Once again the choir managed its rather useful trick of upping its game come the performance - *Never weather-beaten sail* swooped and soared in its dynamic range and emotion, but, better still, it did so mainly at the behest of Peter; and *Fling Wide the Gates* had dust coming down from the ceiling. Stirring stuff, and we left the stage feeling we had done ourselves justice - the most important thing. Or perhaps, second most important, as in his summing up, Mr. Latham presented us with a certificate for the Open Choirs class. Of course there was room for improvement, but we had done our best, had kept Peter happy by pretending to watch him, and had vanquished the auld enemy - until next time at least!

Angus Sorrell

Leading Notes Editorial
via The Red Box
or to barberpandw@onetel.net

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Bookshelf

Gentle Regrets by Roger Scruton

Just make your boat
Of music staves,
For then you'll float
On waves
Of sound; those dancing naiads
Are really triads,
And every sea change
Just a key change,
Your ballast just a note.,

Without the heading, would you have guessed that the lines above were penned by an academic philosopher famous for his love of hunting and his loathing of modernist architecture? Actually it soon becomes clear from Scruton's latest foray into autobiography that he enjoys not only listening to music but also performing (on piano and organ) and composing (two operas to date: The Minister and Violet). In the 1990s he taught a course on philosophy of music at Boston University, where he made a point of listening to his students' music, remembering how important it had been for himself in his youth to put Muddy Waters side by side with Schubert and to take the needle off Ray Charles in order to put it down on Bach. There is no art without judgement, he insists, and if you choose to read this book you will encounter his judgements not only on music and architecture but on many other aspects of Anglo-Saxon and European culture. Whether you agree with those judgements or not, they are, as befits a practising musician, always clearly and harmoniously expressed. Naomi Bowen

Gentle Regrets by Roger Scruton/ Pub. Continuum/ hardback ISBN 0-8264-7131-5

Canons to right of them, canons to left of them....

During the 17th and 18th Centuries there was something of a vogue for puzzle (or riddle) canons, which some composers gave to friends or relations as a token of friendship or esteem. JS Bach is known to have composed many such which were presented, for example, to godparents at baptisms. (If he had made a habit of it, then it would account for a good number of canons for starters!)

To try to revive interest in this somewhat arcane art, I offer a modest example of my own invention. You are given just one part of the canon, one line of music. You have to work out the pitch of the second voice, and the point at which it enters (i.e., it could follow after one beat, or two, one bar, two bars etc.) All I will tell you is that it is a two-part perpetual canon - like a round, when the end is reached, it starts all over again.

Anyone interested in finding out more about Bach's canons (OK, I realise this is very much a minority interest!) is recommended to refer to 'The Bach Reader' by Hans.T.David and Arthur Mendel (publisher: W W Norton & Co.)

Incidentally.....

Shauni is leaving us, we hear. Alas and alack. After how many years? Eds. will endeavour to persuade her to put pen to paper for the next edition of LN, and tell us of the highs (and lows?) of her association with the choir, and the joys and otherwise of the all-important role as 'fixer'.....

..... Identity mistaken ...Eds. were rather taken aback when, years ago, we first became acquainted with a devotional musical work called the 'Crucifixion' composed, apparently, by a boyhood hero of ours called Sir W.Stanier. Now, if you are of our generation, male, and, to use a contemporary phrase, wore an anorak, i.e. stood on windy station platforms notebook and pencil in hand 'collecting' the names and numbers of steam locomotives - you will certainly know that some of the finest engineering triumphs of that breed were designed by Sir W. Stanier FRS. So Stanier's 'Crucifixion' was rather a culture shock. Further investigation led us to Sir John Stainer.

Those - few - of our readers who seem to enjoy doing the prize quiz with a bottle of something dangled as a come-on, may possibly be disappointed that, given the late appearance of this issue (you usually have a week or more to work on it), we have held it over until next time. However, why not sit at the piano and figure out the answer to Martin Root's canon puzzler, which he tells us is not as arcane as it may look?

See below.

Thank you to our contributors in this issue. To Martin Root, to Hilda Reed who kindly volunteered to write up the Birmingham visit, to a Friend of CNCS, Naomi Bowen, who offered the book review opposite, and to Angus Sorrell (Angela's Scots uncle?) for a breezily irrelevant take on the events of the Festival evening.

Shauni leaving ? Can't be true. But we hear of Bernard arriving. A very warm welcome from all.



Have a word with Martin if you can't sort it out!