

# Guildford Philharmonic Choir

## NEWSLETTER

Editor: Margaret Dentskevich



ISSUE 2 - MAY 1999

### Introduction - John Trigg,



GPC Chairman

First of all I must congratulate the production team of the Newsletter on their splendid first issue, and I know that we are all looking forward to reading this issue.

It comes after our enormous success with the Bruckner/Mahler concert -- the first time I have seen a standing ovation in the Cathedral. Obviously Jeremy must take the credit for the success of the concert and nothing must detract from this. It was wonderful, too, to sing with the splendid Forest Philharmonic Orchestra.

However, we must all remember that that much more than the performance is needed to ensure success. All the work that went on behind the scenes is another part of the story, and that is where a large majority of the choir, and others, all did their bit. It is this enthusiasm and willingness to support our choir that will ensure we are a force to reckon with in the Guildford music scene. We were indebted to our friends in the Philharmonic Society for their help and their sponsorship of our young soloists, Jeanette Ager and Katy Tansey. Their support not only helped us, but also gave these two singers experience which will help them enormously at the start of their careers. This is the third time that Jeanette has sung with us, and she is booked again for the St Matthew Passion.

Two weeks ago, along with Robin Onslow as the President of the Philharmonic Society, and with Rita Horton, Chair of the Society, I met with the Chief Executive of the Borough, David Watts; Jim Miles, Head of Leisure Services; and Nicola Gool. The purpose of the meeting was to let the Chief Executive of the Borough hear at first hand about the position in which the choir and the Society find themselves, because of the new Borough policy.

I will not go into the details of the discussion at the meeting except to say that, as far as the choir is concerned (I do not speak for the Society), David Watts said that he wanted there to be a good relationship between the Borough and the choir, as the Borough values us. He said that we were now autonomous and separated from the Office and the Orchestra, but that we should enjoy a special relationship with them. We are guaranteed one concert per year with them.

I must say that I was able to attend the meeting with confidence. I knew that, whatever the outcome, I was representing a strong, efficient choir that does not need Borough support; and, what is more, is well able to continue into the new Millennium standing on its own two (three hundred!) feet.



## Treasurer wanted urgently

**We desperately need a volunteer to come forward to fill this soon-to-be vacant position on the Committee. If you feel that you might like to take this on, please contact anyone on the present Committee as soon as possible.**

## Concerts



### Review of Mahler and Bruckner concert on 13 March – Linda Mowat, Surrey Advertiser

For its concert at Guildford Cathedral on Saturday, the Guildford Philharmonic Choir was joined by the Wooburn Singers and their shared conductor, Jeremy Backhouse.

Firstly, a fitting tribute was paid to Yehudi Menuhin, who died the day before the concert and whose famous music school is only a few miles from the Cathedral at Stoke d'Abernon.



For what was ostensibly a choral programme, a great deal of responsibility fell on the accompanying orchestra, the Forest Philharmonic, one of this country's best community orchestras, which undoubtedly attracts players of an extremely high standard.

Bruckner's *Mass in E minor* is scored for only wind and brass. The atmosphere of devotional sincerity was well set by the chorus, but against the secure instrumental ensemble the eight-part choral forces sounded at times rather unwieldy. However, the final plea for peace in the return of the *Kyrie* theme was

most confidently and pleasingly achieved in Bruckner's beautiful music.

Mahler's second (*Resurrection*) symphony, which followed, is music on a grand scale, lasting for some 85 minutes. In practical terms it needs a very large orchestra. Emotionally, Mahler's embodiment of his struggle with human mortality is enormous.

Mahler's music needs more than accurate note getting. The diminution of dynamics and tempi contrasts in the opening movements allowed only a glimpse of the composer's outrage and grief at the omnipotence of death. But in the climactic fifth movement, when the chorus entered, we were able to share Mahler's vision of another world where an overwhelming love would illuminate our being.

The chorus, with soloists Katy [Tansey] and Jeanette Ager, the orchestra with its dramatic percussion, off-stage band and organ, united in a swathe of glorious sound in the embodiment of the *Resurrection Ode* text 'What thou hast fought shall lead to God'.



### Notes on the composers of music for our May 29 concert

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986) as a boy was a chorister and student at Rouen Cathedral, where he developed his affection for Gregorian chant and modal harmonies.



In 1919 he went to Paris to study the organ, and then entered the Paris Conservatoire. He took first prizes for organ, harmony, accompaniment, counterpoint and fugue, and composition. In 1930 he became organist at the church of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, a post shared with his wife after 1953, and held until his death. In 1943 he was appointed professor of harmony at the Conservatoire.

He quickly gained a reputation as a virtuoso and skilled improviser, touring throughout Europe, the Soviet Union and North America. His compositions number but 14, and he credited the scarcity of his output in part to a crippling over-critical nature developed from years of teaching.



Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was an organist and teacher, especially known for his songs and his chamber music, though his larger scale works are also often performed, especially his *Requiem Mass*. In 1896 he became organist at La Madeleine, in

Paris, and also professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, where his pupils included Maurice Ravel.

His numerous compositions are distinguished by daring harmonies and other innovations, all disguised by an appearance of classical style and elegance. Deafness forced him to retire at the age of 75.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) was well known as a pianist and member of a group of French composers known as *Les Six*, who included Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud. (The cartoon shows Erik Satie standing next to Poulenc.)



He decided on a musical career while serving in the forces in World War 1, and picked up most of his musical education after the war ended. He was an outstanding pianist and wrote a number of works for the piano. His large output ranged from opera to songs.

Poulenc's music is at its best when it is witty and satirical; his harmonic structure tends to the traditional.

Maurice Joseph Ravel (1875-1937) brought to French music an originality of thought that may have been due in part to his ancestry – a mixture of Swiss and Basque. During World War 1 he served as an Air

Force ambulance driver, but was invalided out with a nervous disorder which never left him. He found some comfort in his hobby of collecting mechanical toys.

At the age of 24, Ravel made his reputation with his piano solo *Pavane pour une enfante défunte*. He produced a stream of compositions, all characterised by a precise attention to detail, and to form and craftsmanship.



His music marks a reaction from the heavy, rich textures of Richard Wagner and his followers. It includes some fine chamber music, The ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*, written for Serge Diaghilev, and two operas. Ravel's orchestral music, however, which included such masterpieces as *Bolero* and *Rapsodie espagnole* (both showing the influence of his Spanish connection), must be ranked among his greatest.

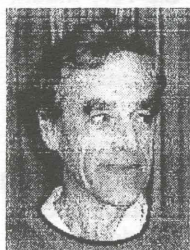
*These notes were mostly taken from 'Famous Composers' by Theodore Rowland-Enwhistle & Jean Cooke, published by David & Charles*



## Fund-raising

**DON'T FORGET** we have our own excellent, custom-designed GPC NOTE-CARDS on sale each Monday night at rehearsal. By buying these you'll be helping to support the choir and advertising it to your friends and colleagues.

### A choir for weddings – Christopher Robinson



The committee would like to establish from amongst choir members a small group to be available to sing at weddings at churches within the Guildford area. There is a demand for good choirs to provide this service, and it would be a very useful source of income for choir funds.

We need volunteers to help get this off the ground. We've already found a good professional organist who would act as the group's Musical Director. Initially we'd aim to establish a group of about 30

singers prepared to give up the occasional Saturday. We'd need to be able to produce a balanced choir of 12-18 singers on each occasion. There would be a minimum of rehearsal, and so volunteers would need to be competent sight-readers.

This is a fun way of raising both much-needed funds and the choir's public profile. If you're interested in joining such a group, have a word with either Elizabeth-Claire Bazin or Christopher Robinson.



### 100 Club – Noreen Ayton

Here are the winners and their ticket numbers for 1999 so far:

|          | £20 |                    | £15 |                      | £10 |                  |
|----------|-----|--------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|------------------|
| JANUARY  | 87  | Joy Hunter         | 24  | Stephen Jepson       | 28  | Graham Barwick   |
| FEBRUARY | 2   | Jean Munro         | 54  | Margaret Dentskevich | 22  | Chris Robinson   |
| MARCH    | 100 | Andrea Dombrowe    | 79  | Margaret Parry       | 96  | Jeremy Backhouse |
| APRIL    | 10  | Rosalind Plowright | 44  | Peter Herbert        | 66  | Christine Wilks  |

The 100 Club is open to all past and present members of the Guildford Philharmonic Choir and the Philharmonic Society. Numbers are renewed annually for £12, payable on 1<sup>st</sup> April, and profits go to Choir funds. New shareholders are welcome, as we'd like to sell all 100

numbers for the whole season.

A draw is made early in each month. June and July each year are special: there is a single prize of £100.

Please talk to me at a rehearsal, or phone 01932-221918 if you're interested. You've a far higher chance of winning a prize here than in the National Lottery!

(In the January Newsletter, the winners of the June and December 1998 special draws were inadvertently transposed. The winner in June was Susan Norton, and in December Constance Spivey.)

## And now *Welcome* to new & returning members!

### Andrea Bathory Nemeth, Alto I



Last September Andrea came to England from Hungary with her husband and two young children -- Mr Bathory is working here for a few months. Andrea is taking advantage of her time here by doing a course in Tourism and Marketing at college, adding to the good knowledge of this field that she has back home. Her two children, aged 6 and 8, are attending the local school.

It wasn't a surprise to discover that her favourite composers are Kodaly and Bartok, but she says that singing *Carmina Burana* last November was a great experience.

In Hungary Andrea belonged to a ladies' chamber choir with a high standard. After looking everywhere for a choir to join in the Guildford area, she found GPC on the information computer in the Guildford library and decided to join.

Andrea is enjoying the choir very much and says that everyone is very kind and helpful.

### Neil Burton, Bass II

Neil is studying music at Surrey University and was recommended to the GPC by **Richard Austin**. In the past he has sung with the Bournemouth Youth Choir, Gli Amici Della Musica (Bournemouth) and the Surrey University Choir.

Neil's interests include languages, and playing the flute and piano. He particularly likes 20<sup>th</sup> Century composers such as Poulenc and Duruflé. He says he's having a great time in GPC and really enjoyed the Mahler concert.

### Maura Dearden, Soprano I

Maura has recently returned to the choir after a break of 4-5 years. Previously she sang with G.H.O.S.T.S (Guildford Hospital Theatres) and Godalming Operatic Society, and at church. Her interests include music, swimming and reading.

She's fond of many kinds of music, but likes classical choral music the best. Lately Maura has given up work to become a full-time carer, looking after her mother-in-law. She says that she enjoys being back in GPC and finds it a lot friendlier than it used to be!

### Sonia Guscott, Alto I



Sonia came to England from Australia over two years ago and has been living in the Guildford area since last December. She's a music teacher, having gained a Music degree at Melbourne University. However, at the moment she is filling in with office work. In her spare time, Sonia enjoys playing the piano, reading and tennis. She likes pop and classical music, but her favourite group is "Corr", from Ireland.

Sonia found out about GPC from an ad at Surrey University. She enjoys the weekly rehearsals very much, as well as the performances.

### Jill Scott, Soprano II



Jill recently moved back into the Guildford area. In the past she sang with the Guildford Singers and Guildford Choral Society, but decided to join GPC now because a friend was already a member.

When asked what kind of music was her favourite, Jill said she found it almost impossible to choose, but it would have to be Classical. She has greatly enjoyed singing in the last two concerts, but was completely bowled over by the Mahler.

Jill enjoys sports, theatre, music and outdoor activities.

### Rosey Storey, Alto II

Rosey is a full-time management assistant for the Thomson Corporation. She and her husband moved to Guildford from London last August to get away from the City. They celebrated their first wedding anniversary on May 2 -- our warmest congratulations to them both!



Previously Rosey sang in Ripon School choir and with Durham University Choral Society. She likes music ranging from rock to Mozart, but is particularly excited about our May concert because Fauré is her favourite composer.

Rosey was introduced to the choir by **Penny Baxter** (Sop I) in January.



## Historical moments

### "An Enterprising Concert" – Roger Penny

This was the headline to a review by William Mann in *The Times* of 10 November 1975. This was the London *Times*, the Paper that Top People used to Take.

"An Enterprising Concert" was how the concert season brochure labelled those concerts, in which Tod Handley introduced to the musical audiences of Guildford and West Surrey the more obscure parts of the orchestral and choral repertoire. And some of it was certainly obscure! Some of us remember the *Requiem* by Boris Blacher, of which we gave the world première (and possibly its only performance!) in the mid-1970s, after several false starts. Peter Andrews thinks we should be given a Philip Moore Bar to add to our Blacher Requiem Campaign Medal, awarded for courage and commitment in the face of adversity and hemi-semi-demiquavers!

But back to William Mann:

*On Saturday I drove a few miles on the A3 to hear Vernon Handley conduct the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra in Holst's Hammersmith, Elgar's First Symphony and, with the Guildford Philharmonic Choir, Delius's Songs of Farewell. ... The*

*finest performance was of the Delius, whose muted ecstasy was strongly conveyed by a secure, enthusiastic choir and by Mr Handley's passionately sympathetic conducting, scrupulous about melodic line and harmonic detail and firmly-filled musical structure, most uplifting ... It was a greatly enjoyable concert, which also included Parry's Songs of Farewell, and assured me that Guildford's "enterprising concerts" are worth any enterprising concert-goer's attention.*

Felix Apprahamian of the *Sunday Times* was also there, and said:

*In the finest performance of Delius's Songs of Farewell of all those I can remember ... Vernon Handley and his Guildford Philharmonic forces made a Saturday excursion into Surrey unusually rewarding.*

This was typical of Tod at his most inspiring, days that many of us still remember with great affection.

### "First Concert in New Civic Hall" – by "A.L." in the local press, 11 October 1962

A long-felt need of Guildford music lovers was fulfilled on Sunday when the new Civic Hall made its debut, filled with an enthusiastic audience. What a change it made to listen to first-class music in more than first-class surroundings.

The hall is modern in design, but not aggressively so – and the acoustics are extraordinarily good. Any new building has teething troubles, and naturally this hall has one – a slight hum that disturbed a number of listeners. But I am assured that this, a mechanical difficulty, is being dealt with.

Orchestra and audience at this first concert stood in silence in memory of Mr J Crossley Clitheroe on Sunday, and the programme included Mr Crossley Clitheroe's *Pastoral*. ....

Undoubted high spot of the concert was Gary Graffman's performance of the Rachmaninoff *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor*. .... The climax of the work was magnificent, with the full orchestra stating the theme sharply, clearly and accurately, and Mr Graffman, making his piano heard over the top with crashing

chords, brought instant and prolonged applause, and, by my reckoning, at least five recalls.

#### THE VOCALISTS

The *Serenade to Music* by Vaughan Williams was impeccably performed .... The Festival Choir was on form – words clear, balance good – and not a single mistake that I could hear throughout the concert.

Pleasant to hear, if sometimes rather academic, was *Pastoral* by Crossley Clitheroe. ... Miss Godfrey, Mr Barrow and Father Nash gave polished performances. The choir also did exceedingly well. ...

Unfortunately the vagaries of the British climate made themselves felt. The air conditioning was set by the Town Clerk's men for warm, and the sun by the Weather Clerk's men for hot. And so the Civic Hall became like a Turkish bath. During the second half the conditioning was set to cold, and an improvement was noticed.

## Some lighter moments making music

– Tony Macklow-Smith



I joined a choir as a 14-year-old schoolboy. At my first rehearsal I found myself singing the treble part of the Mozart *Requiem*, with Dr Henry George Ley conducting, and I was hooked. I also started to learn to play the flute. At 17 ½ years I joined the Navy as a Cadet.

My first adult choir was the Worthing Municipal Choir. The conductor was the elderly Herbert Lodge, who chainsmoked cheroots and sat on a stool in rehearsal. He made the two rehearsals available for the annual Messiah performances interesting and demanding, as he brought out hidden delights each year.

On one occasion he called for a dozen of the Choir to attend a working-day afternoon rehearsal of Brahms' *Alto Rhapsody* for orchestra and soloists. As I was on leave, I could attend, and was just behind Kathleen



Ferrier, who was sitting – or, rather, lying – in a corporation deck chair. I thought that she would leap to her feet for the Intro, and indeed I thought she must be about to miss her entry, when, right on cue, she filled the whole hall with that wonderful voice: I thought 'THAT is Singing'.

A few months later I had a chance to talk with her when she was singing in the Three Choirs Festival. She was having dinner with my Captain and his wife and they invited me to join them.

I was home only during leave periods, but I was determined to sing in the last concert of Herbert Lodge's reign. He must have been at least 70 years old. The Council offered him a gala performance for his retirement and he invited Sir Adrian Boult to conduct us in *The Dream of Gerontius*. Sir Adrian was famous for using a very long baton and for his eyes, that seemed somehow to be focused on each individual member of the choir. It therefore seems apt that his portrait in the Royal College of Music shows him with three heads, each facing in a different direction.

During two stints with the Frigate Squadron based in Derry, I sang in the Cathedral Choir, which was the most highly disciplined choir I ever sang in.

Whilst serving at a Naval Air Station at Nuneaton I was first flute in the Nuneaton Symphony Orchestra. My last performance as a flautist took place when I was on the Naval staff at Portsmouth. The most memorable occasion was when we played Bach's fourth *Brandenburg Concerto*, when the other Flute was a midshipman, who had been in the N.Y.O. – he's just retired as First Sea Lord!

Since leaving the Navy and coming to live in Farnham I've continued singing with various choirs, including the Waverley Singers and of course the GPC.



## Patrons and friends – Susan Ranft

After a slow start -- we notified many former choir members but had little response -- the list of our supporters grows weekly. The published lists certainly add to our credibility and prestige: the money gained, always spent wisely, comes without strings attached.

Patrons pay upwards of £25 per year. They are notified of coming events, invited to our social events and may reserve two seats of their choice at our own concerts. (This particular privilege was much appreciated this season at our Cathedral concerts.) Some Patrons like



to appear under the names of their firms or businesses to gain some advertising exposure.

Friends pay only £10 and for that sum have their names printed in our programmes and, of course, receive that lovely warm glow of knowing their money goes to a splendid cause! The list is heavily dominated by my own family and friends, but I'm sure that all of you know someone out there who would love to join. Please let me know!



## Dates for your diary



7 June

Bring and Buy **plant sale** to raise money for choir funds.

28 June

The **Annual General Meeting**, followed by a **party**. Hilary will be organising the food, as usual.



## General items

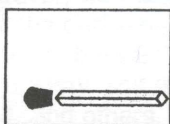
### Our logo

Apparently not everyone has worked out what our logo (*see the top of page 1*) represents. The brainchild of ace designer Jeremy Backhouse, it shows three rows of choir members performing with their folders held in front of them in the approved fashion, singing until they're blue in the face ...

### Don't try this at home .... – sent as an e-mail

*August, 1998, Montevideo, Uruguay*

Paolo Esperanza, bass-trombonist with the Simphonica Mayor de Uruguay, in a misplaced moment of inspiration decided to make his own contribution to the cannon shots fired as part of the orchestra's performance of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* at an outdoor children's concert.



In complete seriousness he placed a large, ignited firecracker, which was equivalent in strength to a quarter-stick of dynamite, into his aluminium straight mute and then stuck the

mute into the bell of his quite new Yamaha in-line double-valve bass trombone.

Later, from his hospital bed he explained to a reporter through bandages on his mouth, "I thought that the bell of my trombone would shield me from the explosion and instead would focus the energy of the blast outwards and away from me, propelling the mute high above the orchestra, like a rocket."

However, Paolo was not up on his propulsion physics nor qualified to use high-powered artillery; and in his haste to get the horn up before the firecracker went off, he failed to raise the bell of the horn high enough so as to give the mute enough arc to clear the orchestra.

What actually happened should serve as a lesson to us all during those delirious moments of divine inspiration. First, because he failed to sufficiently elevate the bell of his horn, the blast propelled the mute between rows of players in the woodwind and viola sections of the orchestra, missing the players and straight into the



*to Rod Cuff*

stomach of the conductor, driving him off the podium and directly into the front row of the audience.

Fortunately, the audience were sitting in folding chairs and thus they were protected from serious injury, for the chairs collapsed under them, passing the energy of the impact of the flying conductor backwards into row of people sitting behind them, who in turn were driven back into the people in the row behind and so on, like a row of dominoes. The sound of collapsing wooden chairs and grunts of people falling on their behinds increased logarithmically, adding to the overall sound of brass cannons and brass playing as constitutes the closing measures of the *Overture*.

Meanwhile, all of this unplanned choreography notwithstanding, back on stage Paolo's Waterloo was still unfolding. According to Paolo, "Just as I heard the sound of the blast, time seemed to stand still. Everything moved in slow motion. Just before I felt searing pain to my mouth, I could swear I heard a voice with a Austrian accent say "Fur every akshon zer iz un eekvul un opposeet reakshon!" Well, this should come as no surprise, for Paolo had set himself up for a textbook demonstration of this fundamental law of physics. Having failed to plug the lead pipe of his trombone, he allowed the energy of the blast to send a superheated jet of gas backwards through the mouth pipe of the trombone which exited the mouthpiece, burning his lips and face.

The pyrotechnic ballet wasn't over yet. The force of the blast was so great it split the bell of his shiny Yamaha right down the middle, turning it inside out while at the same time propelling Paolo backwards off the riser.

And for the grand finale, as Paolo fell backwards he lost his grip on the slide of the trombone, allowing the pressure of the hot gases coursing through the horn to propel the trombone's slide like a double golden spear into the head of the third clarinettist, knocking him unconscious.

The moral of the story? Beware the next time you hear someone in the trombone section yell out "Hey, everyone, watch this!"



### Listening to music - serious moments!

Val Edwards



I hope you've enjoyed reading this second edition of the GPC Newsletter. If you'd like to make a comment or a suggestion for an item to be included in a future edition, please don't hesitate to contact me, either during rehearsal or on 01483 768 789. -- **Margaret Dentskevich (Editor)**

You can find a colour version of this newsletter on the Choir's Internet Web site, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/rodcuff/gpc.htm>. In that version, many topics in the text are treated as "clickable" links that will take you to other sites that may be of interest.

Newsletter design and layout by **Rod Cuff**.