

NOTES

The Newsletter of the Formby Choral Society
No 16 September 2010

President-Stephen Threlfall

Conductor-David Holroyd

David 's 'Prospects for the New Season'

That's what I was asked to comment on - and my first thought was that I was supposed to be giving some sort of long-range weather forecast.

Given that the experts can get confused between *barbecue summer* and *wash-out*, I hesitate to go there.

Nonetheless, a challenge is a challenge.

This autumn is set fair to continue the fine performances from earlier in the year, with a serious little mass of Italian origin likely to occupy the air in Formby for the next ten weeks or so. However, there's no need to be depressed at this forecast, for in reality the atmosphere will lift for at least two hours every Wednesday, with the sounds of the torrential outburst of contrapuntal effervescence ringing in the ears until the following morning through some strange acoustic phenomenon which makes a good tune stick in the mind.

After that, things will turn distinctly chilly, with the approach of Christmas, and little more needs be said, except to point out that the sounds in the air during December are probably the most popular with the good people of Formby. Whilst the labourers in the musical fields find the toil tedious during this short period, they are duty bound to ensure that they maintain the quality of their produce for the public who often expect the best to be available in the run up to the festive period. Continued on reverse..

A Harmonium ??

If, like the Newsletter editor, the news that this instrument of our parents' and grandparents' time was to feature in the forthcoming Rossini performance came as an amusing surprise, you may be interested in these pieces of trivia.

- Invented by Frenchman Alexandre Debain in mid 1840s
- Very popular in the tropical colonies being lighter to transport over sea and land than a piano, staying in tune despite heat and humidity (often impregnated with chemicals to prevent insect, particularly termite, damage)
- Very popular in small churches and chapels unable to afford or fit in a pipe organ. Some models were as small as a large suitcase and favoured by missionaries et al.
- The sound is produced by air from an internal reservoir (as in a bagpipe) passing over brass reeds, the reservoir being filled by pedal operated bellows.
- It is still very popular in India, introduced originally by missionaries, where it is used as a melody instrument played one handed, seated or kneeling, having no substructure and operated by rear, hand- operated bellows.

Michael Ascot sang his last concert with us in the summer and here he writes about

Making Music for 65 Years

I was somewhat embarrassed by having two 'homilies' on my retirement from the Society and thought of replying to the second at the Dinner, but decided that writing a piece for the Newsletter would be the most appropriate response.

For over 50 years music was an important part of life for both Stella and me. We met in 1950 when I joined the choir at Christ Church, Crouch End, where Stella had already been a member for some years, as I had, indeed been a member of my school chapel choir, choral society and orchestra.

We were married in 1954 and in 1957 moved from Highgate to Blackheath where we were able to find a church choir to measure up to what we had become accustomed.

In 1963, with Alan and Frances, we moved to Mottingham and while I baby sat, Stella joined the Lamorbey Choral Society in Sidcup which was conducted by Owen Grundy, a St Paul's Cathedral bass 'Vicar Choral'. The children thereafter referred to St Paul's as 'Grundy's'.

We moved to Wolverhampton in 1969 and Stella joined the Wombourne Choral Society while I continued to baby-sit. Soon, however, Alan and Frances persuaded us to let them sit for each other, whereupon we negotiated a fee!

So, in the early 70s, my fallow years came to an end and in 1972 we moved to Southport.

We arrived in August and in November noticed that a choir -the Formby Choral Society- were performing the Verdi 'Requiem' and we got what were the last tickets at the Arts Centre. As the choir took their seats I thought I recognised John Booth. As the choir was named in the programme I could be sure that I was seeing a fellow bass from our school choirs. Stella and I made ourselves known to John in the foyer after the concert and this resulted in our attending the next Wednesday rehearsal when we were auditioned by Martin Merry and passed fit for purpose.

The Society made us very welcome from day one. Stella was taken in hand by Joy Harman and as a result we became close friends of both Joy and Tony. John of course took me under his wing. Not long after, Frances joined the Society for two years while in the Sixth Form at Merchants.

I did a couple of stints on Committee and on the second occasion worked closely with David Holroyd producing publicity material, programmes and, in the case of our first Verdi Requiem at the Phil, the covers for the scores. I used mine again this year.

I need not go through what THE Society has achieved over the last 30 years as there is an excellent 'history' which does that. Stella and I were both members for over 25 years and our commitment was such that we never 'played truant' other than for 'just cause and impediment'. The quality of the music and the society membership ensured our dedication. Thank you all very much indeed. I shall continue to support your concerts but will be sitting where there will be no excuse for not watching the conductor!

- Nordic folk music, especially in Finland, uses the harmonium, typically in trios with violin and double bass.
- The Beatles, with their church hall skiffle origins, used it in 'Doctor Robert,' 'We can work it out' and other numbers.

Almighty and most merciful conductor we have erred and strayed from thy beat like lost sheep

We have followed too much the intonation and tempi of our own hearts

We have offended against thy dynamic gestures

We have left unsung those notes that we ought to have sung and sung those notes that we ought not to have sung

But thou, oh Conductor, have mercy on us miserable singers, succour the vocally challenged

Spare thou those who hit wrong notes and have faith that hereafter we will follow thy directions

And sing together in perfect harmony.

Merseyside Cultural highlights in the coming months

Editor's (eclectic) pick.

At the Philharmonic Hall:

- Paco Pena Dance Company. *Flamenco Sin Fronteras*. Nov 8th
- Petrenko and LPO:
Shostakovich 15, Sept 25th
Mahler 4, Nov 4th
Mahler 5, Nov 7th
- National Youth Orchestra under Kristjan Jarvi
Jan 5th

At St George's Hall

- Tasmin Little (violin) Nov 10th
- Katona Twins (guitars) Dec 14th

At The Floral Pavilion New Brighton

- 'Annie' with Sue Pollard Sept 27th to Oct 2nd

At The Playhouse

- *Anthony and Cleopatra* directed by Janet Suzman
Oct 8th to Nov 13th
- Mark Kermode-*It's Only a Movie*. Nov 16th only

At the Everyman

- 'The Game'. A Northern Broadsides production.
21st to 25th Sept
- *Hit Me! The life and Rhymes of Ian Dury* Nov 9th
to Nov 12th

At Tate Liverpool

- Biennial. 'Touched' exhibition. Sept 18th to Nov 28th

At The Walker Art Gallery

- The John Moores Painting Prize exhibition Sept 18th to Jan 3rd. 45 shortlisted works on show.
- Exhibition of John Moores Prizewinners 1957-2006. Sept 20th to December 31st

At the National Conservation Centre

- Art Merseyside. An exhibition of the best work from Open Exhibitions in Sefton, Wirral, Liverpool, Knowsley and St Helens. September 24th to January 16th

Gioacchino Rossini 1792-1868

- Professional musical family-Dad a trumpeter (or horn player?) Mum a singer. Rossini was pianist/harpsichordist, cellist (viola?) and horn player.
- First works at age 12 showing influence of Mozart and Haydn and leading to his being nicknamed 'the little German' at the Bologna Conservatory
- First opera at 18yrs, 39 by 1829 when he wrote his last, *William Tell*. Wrote at breakneck speed.
- Beethoven wrote, hearing Barber of Seville, 'Never try to write anything but opera buffa; any other style would do violence to your nature'. Wagner said 'His music has lovely moments but awful quarters of an hour.' Said to have remarked of his own abilities 'Show me a laundry list and I will set it to music'
- In Bologna, his contract with the impresario included a share of the profits from the theatres' gaming tables and in Paris King Charles X gave him an opera contract that gave him a pension for life plus big salary. He became very rich.
- Was a noted gourmand (with an appropriate figure in later life) and also a celebrated chef, several dishes being either created by him or for him.
- After 1832, he wrote little, settling eventually in Paris and his house becoming a centre of artistic society
- *Petite Messe*, 1863, was one of his few later works-his 'sins of old age' as he termed them.

This is another aural phenomenon, which while often hidin' all over Europe is described in Austria as *Missa in Angustiis* and in Britain as *The Nelson Mass*. Its first discovery in Austria in 1798 has caused one commentator to say that "for the first time in history, one has heard the presence of real fear, nay terror". It is a spectacular event, and when circumstances conspire to combine with a magnificent outburst emanating from somewhere near Cambridge, as well as a relatively new phenomenon of Welsh origin, gaining in strength and coverage all the time - then we look sure to see a tumultuous response of considerable sonic levels.

There is every chance, given appropriate cloud-seeding by the people of Formby and Birkenhead, that there will be a huge thunder-cloud of local origin, centred on a small area in the City Centre. A bizarre temperature effect will be observed in-doors during that spell, and anyone undertaking strenuous activity will be advised to consider wearing appropriate clothing.

The early summer sees a return to somewhat less extensive, but nonetheless energetic activity, with a glorious mass of auditory experience emanating from Italy. The regular outbursts will be interspersed with lighter moments of more local origin, and should combine to bring the season to a most pleasant close.

Well, I think I'm pretty safe with that, and reckon I've more chance of influencing the prospects than the professionals at the Met Office. But I can't do it on my own, and hope you're all looking forward to the forthcoming season of delights as much as I am.

Prospects for New Season (continued)

The New Year should see a spring return to our steps with some wonderful moments, again concentrated in a small window during a Wednesday evening, before clearing sometime later in the night. Some people may experience sleep deprivation brought about by constant interference to the brain caused by the unexplained effect of certain sequences and progressions of aural aurorae within the invisible spectrum of sound waves. Immediately before the Vernal Equinox, there will be a mass of troubled times. (Continued next column)