



NCS Newsletter

New Cambridge Singers Registered Charity Number 1042801

Website www.newcambridgesingers.org.uk

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'Big Sing' at Great St Mary's



On Sunday 10 January the New Cambridge Singers hosted a 'Big Sing' at Great St Mary's to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society. With the snow still thick on the ground and temperatures refusing to rise above freezing, there were fears that

numbers would be significantly down on those of our previous Big Sing (for Hospice at Home in 2007). In the event, months of organisation by choir members George Smerdon and Judith Hall paid off, singers flocking to Great St Mary's in their hundreds. During the afternoon the massed forces rehearsed motets by Bruckner and Mozart's Requiem under the inspiring direction of Tim Brown and Chris Brown respectively, with members of NCS providing a quartet of soloists for the Requiem. The evening's performance, which attracted a good audience, was entertainingly hosted by TV presenter Pam Rhodes. Altogether the event raised well over £4,000. Our thanks to those of you who contributed to its success by coming either to sing or to listen.

Liebeslieder

Our spring concert for 2010 brings together a number of interrelated themes: Romanticism, love songs, dance, and music for piano duet (with a couple of composer anniversaries thrown in for good measure). The title of the concert, 'Liebeslieder' (Love Songs), is taken from two of the main works in the programme – the *Spanische Liebeslieder* by Schumann (b. 1810) and the *Neue Liebeslieder-walzer* by Brahms, both settings of love poetry for a quartet of soloists with piano duet accompaniment, though often performed with more than one voice to a part. (Our performance will include both solo and choral movements.) The dance theme of Brahms's *Liebeslieder* waltzes will be taken up in selections from two popular works for piano duet, Brahms's own Hungarian Dances and Dvořák's Slavonic Dances, to be played by James Sherlock and Peter Foggitt. Schumann makes another appearance with his Four Choruses for Double Choir, while the odd man out among these great Romantics is the twentieth-century American composer Samuel Barber, who claims a place in the programme by virtue of an anniversary (he was born in 1910). We shall be performing his *Agnus Dei*, Barber's own transcription for choir of his well-known Adagio for Strings. We hope you'll enjoy this somewhat less well known version for voices (to which Barber added words from the final movement of the Mass). The concert will take place in the fine singing space of Emmanuel United Reformed Church, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, on Saturday 27 March at 8 pm. Tickets may be purchased on the door (£12, students £5), or reserved in advance by phoning 01223 844513.

For your diaries

The first of our two summer concerts, entitled 'Bach and Beyond', will take place in Jesus College Chapel on Saturday 22 May. Graham Ross, whom you may have seen direct the choir when Chris was on sabbatical last term, will then be returning to take up the baton again, directing a concert at St Peter's Church in Horningsea on Sunday 11 July as part of the Horningsea Music and Arts Festival. For details of times and programmes, please keep an eye on the choir website.

A view from the choir – Colin Bell (tenor)

Classical music is something so integral to my life that I'm not sure how I'd exist without it. I grew up with Radio 3 and my parents' extensive record collection, and early on developed a taste for the weightier end of the repertoire, one which completely baffled my school friends, who had neither heard of Mahler, nor could understand why anyone would willingly listen to an hour of orchestral music written a century earlier.

Arriving in Cambridge as a student, I fortunately found people who shared my tastes, and having the double trump card of being both a viola player and a tenor – both heavily in demand – I was able to join numerous music groups from barber-shop quartets to full orchestras and massed choirs, gaining experience throughout. Probably my only regret was that I seemed to be spending so much time performing in concerts that I wasn't in the audience for very many!

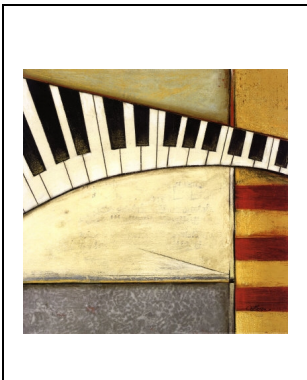
Staying on in Cambridge for full-time work meant that I couldn't commit to as much, so I selected just one chamber choir, where I had many happy years. Having left Cambridge and then returned, I found the choir had folded, which is when a friend already singing in NCS pointed out that they had a vacancy and suggested I audition. I was sure I wasn't good enough, but they disagreed and I joined the choir last October.

Being with more experienced singers than previously is a challenge – particularly having to sight-read and then quickly learn music that the rest of the choir already knows. But it's also a blessing, in that you can (usually) rely on others to be singing in time and in tune, and can therefore spend rehearsal time concentrating on expression and blend of sound rather than on learning the notes. I'm sure I'm singing better myself as a result.

Part of the beauty of NCS is the size: you can get to know everyone in the choir well, and every voice counts (though it's not so small that you very often have to sing your part alone); the attitude is serious but relaxed, so rehearsals can feel like a community of friends coming together to give the most beautiful and thoughtful rendition of a piece they are capable of. I hope that's how it comes across to you in the audience too.

The wide selection of music is also welcome, from the sixteenth century through to the present day, and from the familiar to the relatively obscure. A particular highlight for me has been the opportunity to sing a couple of pieces by James MacMillan. His music had, I confess, previously eluded me, but seeing it from the inside, so to speak, meant that his sound-world now made considerably more sense, seeming – at least in the pieces we performed – to have captured some element of the divine.

Although I fear that my time with NCS may be short – my future is uncertain and work may take me away from Cambridge again – I'm sure it will be a period that I enjoy and value enormously



Member news

In early January soprano Grace Clements won the women's pentathlon in the England Athletics Indoor Combined Events Championships in Sheffield. As a result, she was invited with seven other athletes to represent Great Britain in an international combined events competition in the Netherlands at the end of the month, where she came eighth overall. Well done, Grace: we're very proud of you!

Associate member Hatty Harris, who continues to be a great supporter of the choir, is currently taking time out to study Lake District Landscape and Environment at Lancaster University. We shall miss seeing her at rehearsals over the year, but wish her the very best for her course.

Rachel Wroth

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Rachel Wroth, a former member and indeed chairman of the choir. The choir's success has been due in no small part to Rachel's contribution as chairman, which was characterised not only by great efficiency but by unflinching consideration for both performers and audience. After leaving the choir she continued to attend concerts regularly, always providing Chris with perceptive feedback. Her brother Peter Britton will be directing a concert in memory of Rachel in Emmanuel College Chapel on Saturday 27 February at 3 pm, during which Tallis's *Spem in alium* and Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* will be performed by singers from various Cambridge choirs. Anyone who knew Rachel is welcome to attend.

