



Newsletter for Summer Term 2008

I hope that you had a good Easter!

Rehearsal Schedule

All rehearsals listed below are to be held at the Leys School (or St Hilda's Church where suffixed by **) and are as follows: -

March 31
April 7, 14, 21, 23**, 28
May 5, 12, 19
June 2, 9, 16, 18, 23, 30
July 7, 14, 21

Further Important Dates for your Diary

Emma and I had a very interesting meeting with the Marketing & Media Manager of Hatfield house. We have been asked to sing at their Rose Weekend event on Saturday and Sunday 21st & 22nd June 2008. There will be a sign up sheet for this. I would appreciate it if you could sign up if you are able to do either (or maybe even both!) of these dates. We will be performing for about half an hour at 3 o'clock on both days. We need to provide about 30 singers each day if that's possible. As an added incentive any performer will be given a pass to the event, so you will be able to wander around from 10am (and then after we have finished of course!). For those reading this on the website please visit: <http://www.hatfield-house.co.uk/EventsView.asp?Event=112&v=1&s=7>

Do you think the space here looks a little blank?

If you have any ideas for things I could include in this newsletter, please let me know!

JOINT HERTS CHOIRS

BERLIOZ GRANDE MESSE DES MORTS

Royal Albert Hall, Sunday 4 November 2007

Newsletter No. 8 and Final March 2008

Here at last is the promised final newsletter.

The concert was 4 months ago, but it takes time to finalise the accounts and to collect our views about what we have done and our thoughts on where we hope to go in the future.

A REVIEW OF THE CONCERT

IT WAS A SUCCESS!

We raised over **£25,000** for the BCPB, (and with donations sent direct to BCPB this brought the total to about **£30,000!**) which was one of the two purposes of the concert. The other purpose was to give members of the participating choirs the opportunity to perform a large work in a prestigious venue; an experience which they otherwise might not be able to enjoy. Clearly, this was also achieved.

Many thanks to all those people who helped to make the day a success and to all you singers, without whom there would not have been a concert! In particular to our conductor Derek Harrison, for bringing together those enormous forces so successfully.

Thanks also to Daniel Basford, who's world-premiered **Blast** aroused our senses at the start of the evening.

Special thanks are due to Musical Directors: Christopher Bayston, Neil Bell, Adrian Davies, Terry Edwards, Robin Osterley, Jonathan Rathbone, Jonathan Williams and Julian Williamson for rehearsing the individual choirs and also to all the Choir Contacts who coped so well with the demands from the Steering Committee and their own members! They are, in alphabetical order of choirs: Paul Davies, Gillian Gardner Smith, Richard Lewin, Kate Perera, John Malin, Alan Tree, Christine Muskett, Graham Poole, Bob Toll, Philip Waller, Heather Heritage, Geoffrey Harrison, Keith Wilson, Diana Jeffkins and Peter Gordon.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE PERFORMANCE

Firstly from Derek Harrison.

"4 November 2007 was another great JHC occasion. My congratulations and thanks to all those who put so much hard work into the singing and coping with the "route map" – perhaps one of the less appealing challenges in taking on this work. Another sincere "thank-you" also to all the Musical Directors who gave time and effort to preparing for this occasion.

I was delighted with the whole performance. Among many very good moments, I think Peter Neville (see below) was quite right to pick out the Quarens me; it was amazing given the logistics – not least having a large organ in the middle of the choir. We had a little wobble in the Kyries but

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perhaps that helped to hone the concentration. I am so pleased that a number of audience members specifically mentioned the diction of the choir - it is so important that the text we sing is heard. Justin Lavender was magnificent in the Sanctus and the swishing cymbals caught fully the atmosphere of the swinging censers. The orchestra were again on fine form and it was a pleasure to have another opportunity to work with them. Putting the bands quite so far away in the Gallery is a high risk strategy but, with that space, it was just too tempting not to do it. They were excellent and I am grateful to all the extra conductors up there; the technology we have nowadays is also very helpful in such situations.

Having the County Youth players involved was another special feature of the event. There is much more to remember with very great pleasure – so many timpani, excellent flutes / trombones ensemble, controlled pianissimo singing, the positive singing in the Offertoire, floating tenor lines, a great BLAST!, and so on. However, the ending sung from memory was stunning and the prolonged silence at the end said it all, reflecting the commitment of all performers and listeners to our performance. I am enormously grateful to have been able to be a part of another great Joint Herts Choirs project. Thank you all – and congratulations.”

There have been too many reports from members of the choir and people in the audience, saying how much they enjoyed the performance, to be included in this newsletter, but here are a couple of emails received from orchestral players.

Firstly from David Levesque, father of the WPO Chair and a Horn player.

An Experience of a Lifetime.

Being an amateur musician and living all my life in New Zealand, the Royal Albert Hall has been a kind of Mecca where one day I might just visit and if very lucky attend a concert. To actually be on stage there and with such a fantastic ensemble (such an ensemble would just not be possible in NZ) was beyond my wildest imaginings. The Hall, the atmosphere, the ensemble and the music was an experience beyond words. However, three things are really highlighted in my memory:

- The splendid instrument, with all its associations, that I was privileged to play;*
- the musical directorship of Derek;*
- above all, the friendliness and hospitality of the people I met.*

So if anyone is contemplating a visit to NZ, whether we met or not, please get my current contact details from Ange [WPO Chair - angelevesque@hotmail.com] and be in touch when you are here.

David Levesque (French Horn)

Secondly from Peter Neville, a double bass player.

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The choirs and the brass bands made this a real "Hertfordshire" event. Although only a few of the orchestra were from Hertfordshire, I was one of them, with my double bass. Berlioz specified 18 double basses and, as the Westminster Philharmonic has only two regular double basses, I was invited to augment their number. This was a double pleasure, as my wife is in one of the Joint Choirs.

The orchestra had a five-hour rehearsal a fortnight before Harlow, without choirs, timpani, or brass bands. The music struck us as thin and uninteresting, a contrast to Berlioz's normal lush and colourful orchestral writing. At Harlow, despite the boomy acoustics, we could begin to see this was a major work, and a huge event.

On arriving at the RAH, I was relieved to see that the backstage facilities had been much improved since my only other performance there, which was a decade or four ago, in the orchestra for the first "bring & sing" Messiah.

The passage leading to the platform is called the "Bull Run", significantly so, as it emerges straight into the double bass section. We therefore had to organise ourselves to allow the orchestra (and Derek) to walk safely through our section. The rehearsal revealed the dry acoustic and the time delays in this unique auditorium. Grappling with these gave us food for thought.

At the end of the rehearsal, we did the usual thing of leaving our double basses on the platform, rather than humping them through the crowded corridors to our changing room. At the performance, we were first onto the platform, in order to tune our instruments while it was still quiet. We tasted the atmosphere of expectation pervading the auditorium.

Now for the real thing as, quietly and deliberately, Derek brought down his baton to start the Berlioz. I could feel the 100% concentration all around me. The choral entries all had extra accuracy and quality. The brass bands were dramatic and effective. And for me, the high point, which justified all the preparations, was the Quaerens Me: with the orchestra silent, the choral singing was celestial.

It must be admitted that one person did not enjoy the concert – the Times critic – though from her review one wonders if she was somewhere else on the night! It was also clear that, despite the overall success of the performance, there were some things which could have been improved upon and your committee has addressed these.

While most members of the choir had worked hard to achieve the highest standard they could there were, unfortunately, a few who gave the impression that they thought they were at a 'come and sing' concert. This was upsetting to those near them as it made their experience a little less enjoyable. Without those people we would have reached an even higher standard of performance. For the next JHC concert, it will be made clear that everyone is expected to have thoroughly rehearsed and learnt the work.

Each member of the Steering Committee has reviewed those areas of the planning and organisation which came within their remit and prepared notes on these which will be passed on to the next committee, so that the next concert will be managed even better than this one. So, what of the future?

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THE WAY FORWARD

When the Steering Committee met earlier this year, it firstly reviewed the concert and all the organisation that went towards it, then asked the question – “Do we want another one? Or, more importantly, do we believe the members of the choir want another?” The answer was a unanimous YES! So keep your diaries clear for a date in early **November 2011**.

The committee then discussed and approved a proposal which would put the Joint Herts Choir on a more established footing and make it more certain that these concerts would continue to take place well into the future. This proposal has been set out by our Chairman, Robin Osterley and is attached to this newsletter as a separate document so that it can more easily be disseminated to those in each choir whose role it is to consider such matters.

PLEASE STUDY THIS PROPOSAL AND RESPOND WITH YOUR COMMENTS BY THE END OF APRIL. While we would like to receive considered responses from the committees of each choir we will also be interested to hear from any individual choir members.

This will enable the Officers of the committee to amend the proposal, should that be the wish of the choirs, and then to commence actioning it. Although 2011 seems a long way away, some of the planning for these concerts has to start 3 years ahead, that is, in the autumn of this year!

Once again, many thanks to all who contributed to making this such a successful concert and we look forward to meeting again in **2011!!!!**

JOINT HERTFORDSHIRE CHOIRS – THE FUTURE?

Robin Osterley

At its meeting in early February, the Joint Herts Choirs Steering Committee considered how best to take forward the events in the future. After some discussion, and with the agreement of all the committee, we have come up with a proposal for the future of Joint Herts Choirs:

To create a properly constituted charitable association called Joint Hertfordshire Choirs, which would register as a charity and would thus have some independent legal status. JHC the charity would:

- Appoint a steering committee to run the events
- Appoint a musical director for each event
- Select the repertoire for each event in conjunction with the musical director
- Select the charity which is going to benefit from each event

Once the above had been done, the charity would hand day-to-day running of the event over to the steering group.

It is suggested that the charity should have a maximum of four trustees, including one external trustee from outside Hertfordshire and who would be able to offer objective advice. Current suggestions for the three “internal” trustees would be Robin Osterley, Diana Salthouse and

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Keith Wilson, who have held the positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer respectively for this and previous JHC concerts.

The reasons for taking this approach can be described as follows:

- The selection of musical director and repertoire would be seen to be made independently rather than behind closed doors; any MD could approach the charity and any repertoire suggestions could be duly considered
- The selection of the steering group would likewise be seen to be democratic and objective, as they will be appointed by the Trustees who will create an open and transparent process for the identification of interested people and their skills.
- A charity would be able to call on additional resources; it would make fundraising easier and might enable us to claim Gift Aid on the capitation fees
- A properly existing entity would find it easier to undertake contracts, take out insurance, etc etc
- Most importantly, it would create a legacy which would outlast any of the existing personnel, and enable the baton to be passed to new and dynamic trustees as appropriate.

**The current JHC committee would very much welcome comments on this proposal. Please let us have them by the end of April. You can email them to Robin Osterley at robin@makingmusic.org.uk, or to John Jefkins at johnjefkins@tiscali.co.uk. Suggestions for appropriate external trustees would also be very welcome.

****Note from Heather** – If you have any thoughts/comments please could you give them to me and I'll forward them to John or Robin (I think it may be easier that way after all if EVERYBODY goes back individually that's going to be 700 plus responses!!!).

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