

Haydn - Nelson (Imperial Mass) Charpentier - Te Deum Pergolesi - Magnificat Karl Jenkins -  
 The Armed man, a Mass for Peace Joannes Brahms - German Requiem Ralph Vaughan Williams  
 - Five Mystical Songs Cecilia McDowall - On Angel's Wing George Shearing - Songs and  
 Sonnets yme Jo-  
 hannes Brahms - Lieberslieder Waltzes and Neue Lieberslieder Waltzes Handel - Messiah Vi-  
 valdi - Gloria Bob Chilcott - Requiem Handel - Dixit Dominus John Rutter - Feel the Spirit  
 Mozart - Requiem and Gloria Wood - Vivaldi -

# Appendix of Memorabilia

## a collection of out-takes



Gloria Vaughan Williams - Serenade to Music Chilcott - Gloria Elgar - The Dream Of  
 Gerontius Stanford - Songs Of The Fleet Handel - Zadok the Priest Edwards - Songs of



Gerontius Stanford - Songs Of The Fleet Handel - Zadok the Priest Edwards - Songs of  
 Love and Life Elgar - From The Bavarian Highlands Haydn - Maria Theresa Mass Howard

**David Johnson (back row, fourth from left) with a line-up of guest celebrities.**

**Sir Bernard Lovell, our then president, is standing far right.**

**Can you name any of the other dignitaries?**

**The instrumentalists were taking part in a Toy Symphony. Haydn or Mozart?**

**Answers on page two!**

Sonnets of Shakespeare Howard Goodall - Psalm 23 John Rutter - The Sprig of Thyme Jo-  
 hannes Brahms - Lieberslieder Waltzes and Neue Lieberslieder Waltzes Handel - Messiah Vi-  
 valdi - Gloria Bob Chilcott - Requiem Handel - Dixit Dominus John Rutter - Feel the Spirit

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## Answers to the quiz on the front cover - David Johnson writes:

The occasion was our concert on Saturday 13 October 1984 in the Town Hall. The photo shows the soloists from Haydn's Toy Symphony, which was performed during the concert. Also singing as soprano soloist that night in Haydn's *Marie Theresa Mass* was Susan Bullock, who has gone on to be a very famous opera singer (Royal Opera House and Last Night of The Proms performer).

From left to right:

- 1 - Gerry (C L) Williams, local architect and Secretary of CCS, who invited me to take over CCs in 1975. Playing Cuckoo.
- 2 - Ann Winterton MP, playing triangle.
- 3 - Harold Sheard playing rattle. He was Beryl Sheard's husband, and a Vice President at the time.
- 4 - A VERY young DRJ!
- 5 - The lady with the little pendant/chain was the Consort of the Town Mayor, who is to her right, with a bigger chain. The guy at the back between them is Charlie, the Town Mayor's chauffeur!
- 7 - Carrying on to the right on the trumpet is local organist at St Peter's church, Ronald Painter, also a Vice President.
- 8 - At the end, playing Nightingale, is Sir Bernard Lovell, our then President and an absolutely great supporter of CCS.
- 9 - On drums at the front is John Sebire OBE. Chairman of Berisford's in Congleton at the time. A great supporter of CCS.



## Trial By Jury: Congleton Town Hall



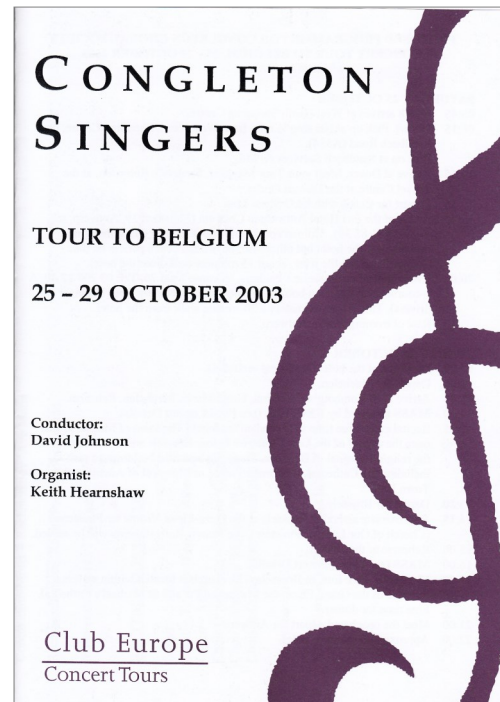
The performance in full swing



The audience getting into the swing of things too!



The Chronicle announces plans for a musical trip abroad



Brussels 2003: David Johnson advertising Congleton Singers, accompanied by some of the choir

FINAL CONCERT DETAILS

CONGLETON SINGERS

1) MASS/RECITAL: SINT ROMBOUTS KATHEDRAAL

ADDRESS: Grote Markt, Mechelen  
 DATE: Sunday 26 October 2003  
 TIME: 10:00  
 REHEARSAL: The Cathedral will be opened for the choir at 08:45 in order to rehearse.  
 CONTACT: Marc Witrouwen (verger) TEL: 0494 27 13 02  
 Mr Paul Van Bets (pastoral contact) TEL: 015 27 19 90

PARKING:

NOTES:

There is coach parking near the cathedral.  
 The choir has been invited to participate in the Sunday morning mass. The organ is available for the organist. Changing facilities will be provided. Please call the verger in advance so that he can be ready to open the cathedral for you on arrival. The choir will give a 30-minute recital following the mass.

Mechelen has been the residence of the Primate of Belgium for many years, and has been the archbishopric since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Mechelen Cathedral is easily recognisable from a great distance due to its unusual tower. St Rombouts Tower was due to be 160m in height but financial difficulties in the 16<sup>th</sup> century halted completion and the unfinished tower now stands at 97.28m with 514 steps. Inside the cathedral is a scale model of what it should have looked like. There are also some notable works of art in the cathedral, including some by Van Dyck.

2) MASS: O. – L. – V. TER FINISTERRAE (OUR LADY OF FINISTERE)

ADDRESS: Nieuwbrug 45 (rue Neuve), Brussels  
 DATE: Sunday 26 October 2003  
 TIME: 16:00  
 REHEARSAL: The choir will be able to rehearse in the church prior to the mass.  
 CONTACT: Canon Peter Böker (priest – no Eng.) TEL: 02 217 52 52 (church)  
 Dr Susan Carol Woodson (organist – TEL: 015 41 35 09 (tel)  
 speaks English) (0)475 89 42 25 (mobile)

PARKING:

NOTES:

As it is Sunday the streets around the church should be quiet. It is possible to drop off outside the church and the coach may find street parking nearby.  
 Canon Böker is delighted to welcome the choir to participate in the mass – he has a keen interest in music and particularly in English choirs. You have been invited to have tea/coffee from 14:00 onwards at the church. Changing facilities will be available.

This church is part of the parish including St Michiels en St Goedelekathedraal and St Niklaaskerk. St Niklaaskerk is one of the oldest churches in Brussels and is currently undergoing restoration. The Church of our Lady of Finistère was begun in 1708 and completed in 1730. It was designed in a classic Renaissance style but with Baroque elements on the façade. Some beautiful works of art are to be seen inside and the confessionals and pulpit are made of wood. The church was restored between 1988 and 1996. A side chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of Prosperity (Onze- Lieve- Vrouw van Voerspoed). The statue came from Aberdeen.

3) RECITAL: ST BAAFS KATHEDRAAL

ADDRESS: St Baafsplein, Ghent  
 DATE: Monday 27 October 2003  
 TIME: 10:30  
 REHEARSAL: N/A  
 CONTACT: Rector Ludo Collin TEL: 09 225 16 26  
 Edward de Geest (organist) TEL: 09 377 32 59 / 18 52

PARKING:

NOTES:

Coach access within Ghent is restricted, due to the narrow roads, pedestrianised areas and trams. I have been advised that the coach should drop you either at St Jacobskerk (with a permit) or at Graaf van Vlaanderenplein and then park outside the town. A permit has been requested.

You are performing a short recital (approx 30 mins) of sacred music in the Cathedral. The organist has given permission for the organ to be played.

The cathedral stands on the site of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Eglise St Jean of which a few traces have survived in the crypt. It was built in stages and shows various different architectural styles: the Romanesque (the crypt), the high Gothic and the late Gothic. There are several famous paintings to be found in the cathedral including 'The Mystic Lamb' by Jan van Eyck, dating from 1432, and 'The entry of St Bavo into the Monastery' by P. P. Rubens. The pulpit, by Delvaux, is finished entirely in oak and marble. In the crypt are several beautiful tombs and frescoes.

4) CONCERT: ST NIKLAASKERK

ADDRESS: Klein Turkije, Ghent  
 DATE: Monday 27 October 2003  
 TIME: 15:00  
 REHEARSAL: The choir may arrive at 13:30 to rehearse.  
 CONTACT: Luc Serneels TEL: 09 234 28 69  
 0476 846 851 (mobile)

PARKING:

NOTES:

St Niklaaskerk is a short walk from St Baafs Kathedraal. The coach will have to park in one of the official coach parks in Ghent.

The choir will be warmly welcomed at St Niklaaskerk. Frequent concerts are held here, in one of the most well-known churches of Ghent. Changing facilities will be provided. Permission has been given to use the organ.

Right in the heart of Ghent stands the St Niklaaskerk, one of the oldest churches of the city. An older version stood here until the 12<sup>th</sup> century when it burned down. Thanks to their growing wealth the citizens of Ghent were able to construct a new and much bigger church, and the present-day version was finished between 1220 and 1250. During its long history it has belonged to traders, who did their business in the nearby harbour; served as a bell tower until the Belfry was completed and even been attacked by iconoclastic Protestants and used as horse stables by the French revolutionary army.

Congleton Singers' itinerary for their European tour, 2003



Congleton Singers rehearsing at Bruges Cathedral, 2007



**Singing the services at English cathedrals; Congleton Singers, led by David Johnson**



**Gloucester 1994**



**Eating together, Gloucester 1994**



**Lichfield 1994**



**Worcester 1997**



**Worcester 1997 - David Johnson remembers:  
'We were all evacuated with the rest of the hotel guests at 2am.... A fireman's wedding party was taking place, and a guest thought it would be fun to press the fire alarm. We still managed to sing beautifully on the Sunday!'**



...and nearer home



David Johnson recalls:

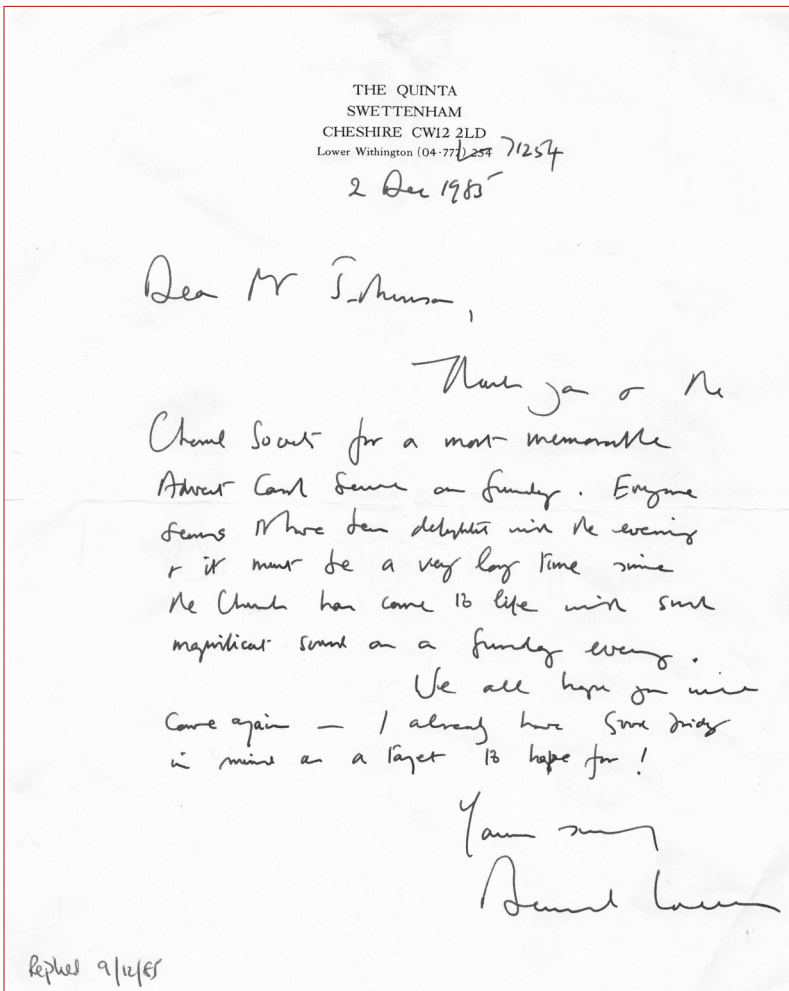
'At Little Moreton Hall, all calm and dignified...



...until a certain Alto decided to get in on the act!

In 1985, David Johnson received this letter from our then President, Sir Bernard Lovell. David recalls: ' This was after we had first sung the Advent carol service in Swettenham church. Afterwards we were invited back to The Quinta (Sir Bernard's home) for wine and mince pies.'

This traditional Advent celebration happened annually for many years, up until Sir Bernard's death.



Transcript of the letter:  
Dear Mr Johnson  
Thank you and the Choral Society for a most memorable Advent Carol Service on Sunday. Everyone seems to have been delighted with the evening & it must be a very long time since the Church has come to life with such magnificent sound on a Sunday evening.  
We all hope you will come again— I already have Good Friday in mind as a target to hope for!  
Yours sincerely  
Bernard Lovell



# A Victorian Christmas Evening, 22nd December 1984 at Congleton Town Hall

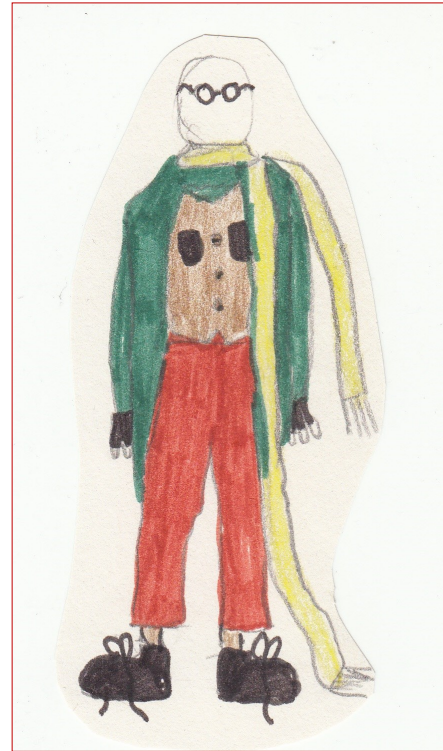


## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Players, in order of appearance:

CHARLES DICKENS	MR RUSSELL BROMLEY
EBENEZER SCROOGE	MR JOHN BAYLEY
SCROOGE'S NEPHEW	MR TONY BARTLEY
BOB CRATCHIT	MR ALEC NEEDHAM
SOLO CAROL SINGER )	
BELINDA CRATCHIT (ACT II)	MISS PIPPA MURPHY
GHOST OF JACOB MARLEY )	
SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS TO COME (ACT II)	MR RONALD MILNE
SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PAST )	
CAROL SINGER (ACT I)	MISS KATE MURPHY
SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT	MR ROY THOMAS
MARTHA CRATCHIT )	
CAROL SINGER (ACT I)	MISS CLARE MURPHY
MRS CRATCHIT	MRS MARGARET WILLIAMS
PETER CRATCHIT )	
CAROL SINGER (ACT I)	MR RICHARD MURPHY
TINY TIM )	
CAROL SINGER (ACT I)	MISS ELIZABETH MURPHY
RAGGED URCHINS )	
CAROL SINGERS (ACT I)	MASTER ANDREW BAYLEY MASTER TIMOTHY MESSHAM
PAGE AND CAROL SINGER (ACT I)	MASTER DANIEL MILNE
MUSICAL DIRECTOR	MR DAVID JOHNSON
STAGE DIRECTOR	MR CECIL WALKER
STAGE MANAGER	MR WILLIAM FOX
LIGHTING	MR PAUL DRAGE
SOUND )	MRS SALLY ROBINSON
MAKE-UP )	
COSTUME	MRS JILL MILNE ) MRS PATTI PINTO ) MRS LINDA MESSHAM ) MR TIM WILLIS )
PROPERTIES	
FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER	

## A Christmas Carol: the players



Costume design for Bob Cratchit

Scenes from 'A Christmas Carol' adapted for the stage by Mrs J Milne  
Chorus of 'Souls in Torment' specially composed by Mr David Messham



The Cratchit family: left to right Martha, Peter, Belinda, Mrs Cratchit, Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit





Right: Ebenezer Scrooge



Above, left to right: the spirits of Christmas  
Future, Past and Present

Right: the Ghost of Jacob Marley




Costume designs by Master Daniel Milne (age 10)



# 1980s: Hallowe'en fun and games



There will be a  
**HALLOWEEN PARTY**  
 on Saturday 27 October  
 at Cloud House Farm, Cloudside, Congleton  
 from 8:00pm.  
 by kind invitation of Ruth & Alec Needham.  
 Price per person: £2  
 to include a glass  
 of witch's brew  
 & a spooky supper.



There will be a  
 prize for the most  
 outrageous attire.  
 Please bring a bottle  
 of your favourite poison.

RS.V.P on this slip to Alison Tottle.  
 I will be coming to the party.  
 I will/will not be bringing a partner.  
 Signed:





# A home-grown entertainment and fundraiser: the programme



This Evening, Saturday June 14th  
1930, will be presented  
a Tragedy in One Act,

entitled **MARIA  
MARTEN,  
OR  
MURDER  
IN THE  
RED  
BARN.**



**Dramatis Personae**  
(in no particular order):—  
Maria Marten Mrs. Murphy  
Nancy Marten Miss Hargreaves  
Seth Robins Mr. Bayley  
Jemmy Hogan Mr. Johnson  
Mrs. Marten Mrs. Ward  
Mr. Marten Mr. Tait  
Sarah Herne Mrs. Milne  
Belle Mrs. Bromley  
Abigail Mrs. Bayley  
William Corder Mr. Fray  
Dora Mannering Miss Judge  
Jasper Ryan Mr. Pinto

The scene: a green before  
Mr. Marten's cottage, some  
time during the Nineteenth  
Century.

Stage Director Mr. Milne  
Musical Director Mrs. Robinson  
Scenic Artist Mr. Lowe  
Lighting Manager Mr. Robinson

Wardrobe by courtesy of  
Mrs. Brown of the Congleton  
Players, and members of the  
Company.



The Director wishes to  
record his special thanks to  
The Congleton Players &  
The Congleton Pantomime



## THE "LEOPOLD" SKIRT-GRIP.



THE PICTURE TELLS ITS OWN STORY.  
Price 3d. each.

May be had of all the principal Drapers throughout the United Kingdom.  
Patentee: L. MARKS, London Road, Leicester.



**CHRISTY SADDLE.**  
O.K. for COMFORT



Used by the  
Army and Navy  
Do not wear a  
stiff saddle.

CHRISTY SADDLE CO., 14, Belfry Street,  
LONDON, E.C.

Indispensable to all dress, but more par-  
ticularly when you wear a blouse.  
Prevents your dress skirt from drooping  
or sagging at the waist.  
The small grip holds the back of the  
skirt in such a manner that it is impossible  
to fall in the slightest degree.

Do not wash and spoil your belt  
or suspenders by passing your fingers  
through them every day, but have only the  
"LEOPOLD" SKIRT-GRIP,  
which costs only one penny more than  
1,000 others, and is available without  
delay.

The dress skirt is held in position  
the instant the waistband or belt  
is put on.

Superior PETTICOATS  
"KAL" KNICKERS  
ONCE TRIED ALWAYS WORN

JACKSON'S  
VARNISH STAINS.  
MADE BY  
All the Principal Stainers,  
WORKS-188, OLD KENT ROAD, S.E.

ASK YOUR DOCTOR



ASK YOUR DOCTOR



## Press cuttings from the Congleton Chronicle



The Congleton Chronicle is and always has been our 'go to' place to advertise and publicise our events to the local people who form the mainstay of our audiences. In acknowledgement of our regular adverts, placed in two issues before each concert, the Editor is always willing to publish reviews and articles submitted by our publicity officer. Here's an early example of such a review.

In October 1980, CCS hosted an exciting visiting choir

**ONE of the pleasures, as winter comes on, is the first of the season's concerts by Congleton Choral Society.**

The powers that be in the Society have a happy knack of devising programmes and engaging artistes just a shade off the beaten track. Saturdays concert, in the Town Hall, was no exception.

Apart from the singing talents of the Society itself the audience was treated to a visit from 'Homin' — a Ukranian Male Voice Choir of high repute and much experience.

The concert opened with performances of two of the songs of farewell by Hubert Parry. This is far from fashionable music, but it is nevertheless attractive, by no means easy, and was sensitively presented.

Unaccompanied singing tests a choir in every way — for tuning, clarity of words balance between the parts, and specially for tuning. Well, the tuning could have been better, but the tonal quality throughout the evening was excellent, and this was particularly true of the basses.

The Welshman Parry was followed by two Irish songs and then a very attractive folk song from America. This was particularly well sung and equally well-received.

The Society has found itself a tenor soloist of considerable quality. Barrie Cheshire — one of the many BBC Northern Singers who have appeared with the Society — sang beautifully two of the well known folk arrangements of Benjamin Britten.

The difficult Elgar songs were illustrative of all the good qualities of the Society mentioned in earlier reports and the Society's first half contribution ended with pieces by Brahms and Jones.



### In costume

And then came Homin, in national costume.

The choir members live in and around Manchester and their singing is one of the ways in which they ensure that their cultural traditions are maintained so, after their signature tune, they treated (and it was a treat), the audience to ecclesiastical music from 18th century Ukraine.

They sing like the Welsh, only more so! They make gargantuan amounts of noise, but equally they know the meaning of pianissimo, so they are very exciting, and if their tone is harsh, then so be it.

They concluded the first half of the concert with the Soldiers' Chorus from Faust and their performance would have put the Covent Garden chorus to some considerable effort to match it.

The society began the second half with a catchy American number by Aaron Copland (Why is it that the new world has yet to produce a great composer?), and then the highlight was a Cornish folksong arrangement by Gustav Holst.

Barrie Cheshire's second Britten arrangement was followed by another Copland, and then by two folk song arrangements by David Willcocks, former director of music at King's College, Cambridge.

Musically, these were disappointing as the arrangements added nothing significant to the original. After Sullivan's "The Long Day Closeth," the Society concluded with John Rutter's "Down by the Riverside." This was the participative number which has become something of a Society trademark over its ten year history.

The Choral Society standards were maintained and audiences can look forward to an interesting and worthwhile series of concerts, the *piece de resistance* being Elijah, to be performed next April.

Homin returned to close the concert with four pieces of wide variety, which showed the choir in all its moods. In particular, few could remember hearing bass choral singing of the quality they showed, for many a long day.

But that was not all — their diction and ensemble, especially in a Robin Hood story, were impeccable. They sent listeners away thrilled and excited by their enthusiasm and uninhibited singing.

Review and photograph from the Congleton Chronicle

## Old-time music hall comes to Astbury

Ladies and gentleman resplendently costumed in period style down to top hats and feather boas gathered at Astbury Village Hall on Saturday for an evening of Victorian and Edwardian variety.

Sitting at candle-lit tables with an ample supply of beverage, members of Congleton Choral Society and their families and friends relaxed while volunteers took it in turns to leave their tables, take the stage and entertain the assembled company.

Each act was introduced by Russ Bromley in true "master of ceremonies" style, with extravagant alliteration and poetic panache.

A variety of acts in vaudeville style followed; scintillating solos, both suggestive and romantic; dazzling duets; a fast and furious piano trio; a Lancastrian monologue; a comedy band of decrepit old soldiers; an unaccompanied vocal quartet; all interspersed with relays of chorus artists who led the audience in community singing of many well-known songs of the period.

The eye as well as the ear was delighted by the display of colourful costumes, from the skimpy to the grand, accurate in period detail and worn with elegance by performers and audience alike.

Applause was enthusiastic throughout the entertainment. However, the "show stopper" was undoubtedly the "Congleton Choral Society song", a setting by David and Linda Messham of new words to George Formby's "When I'm cleaning windows".

This song claimed to tell the truth about what it was really like to be a member of C.C.S., and every line was greeted by howls of hilarity from the audience.

Anyone interested in joining is invited to find out the "behind the scenes" story for themselves by telephoning Congleton 273057 or 279067 for further details.

## 'Below stairs'

During the interval a hot pie supper was served by a team of ladies from "below stairs". The society's thanks went to Margaret Williams, Patti Pinto and Martin Henderson, who arranged the splendid evening.

Artists in order of appearance were:

Master of ceremonies, Russ Bromley; "Burlington Bertie", Jill Milne; "Congleton Choral Society" Song, David and Linda Messham; tenor and baritone, David Johnson, Gerald Stevens; "Linden Lea", Alec Needham; piano trio, Angela, Worswick, Sue Willis, Julia Tunley.

Monologue, Chris Garbutt; "My old man", Margaret Williams; The Three Busketeers, John Bayley, Russ Bromley, David Messham; "Hello, hello, who's your lady friend?" Roy Thomas; "Ma, he's making eyes at me", Patti Pinto; "Sweet Genevieve", Ken Turner; "Roses of Picardy", Jean and Bernard Leese; Rossini's "Cats' duet", Jill Milne, Derek Acock.

"Oft in the stilly night" and "Come where my love lies dreaming", Anne Anderson, Ruth Bones, John Robinson, Tim Flint; "Christopher Robin", Anthea Howell; "Buttercup", John Bayley; "She was poor but she was honest", Jill Milne, David Messham, Betty Evans.

Ladies and gentlemen of the chorus: Anne Anderson, Ruth Bones, Elma Bradley, Nigel Buckley, Betty Evans, Tim Flint, Chris Garbutt, Martin Henderson, Anthea Howell, David Johnson, Ruth Needham, Patti Pinto, Sally Robinson, John Robinson, Roy Thomas, Alison Tottle, Julia Tunley, Margaret Williams, Sue Willis, Alec Needham, Ken Turner.

Accompanists: piano, Bernard Leese, Sally Robinson, Julia Tunley, Sue Willis, Angela Worswick; guitar, Linda Messham; piano accordion, David Messham.



***The Conductor's Song***

**To the tune of *I'm leaning on a lamp post***

Wearing my DJ  
 You wonder why I'm dressed this way  
 Maybe you think I've come to serve behind the bar.  
 But no, that isn't me  
 Though you may think it's where I ought to be,  
 I'll tell you why I'm here and what my motives are:  
 I'm waving' round me baton and I'm fluttering me hands  
 Hopin' once or twice I catch your eye  
 Oh me, oh my  
 I hope that once or twice I catch your eye  
 I don't know if you'll look at me,  
 You hardly ever look at me,  
 It's all enough to make me want to cry  
 Oh me, oh my,  
 It's all enough to make me want to cry.  
 You ask what I get in a state for -  
 You forget which bars I'm beating eight for,  
 Each entry you come in late for;  
 You're always singing flat - why must you sing like that?  
 I'm absolutely wonderful and marvellous and beautiful  
 And I can't really understand why  
 I'm waving' round me baton and I'm flutterin' me hands  
 Hopin' once or twice I get to catch your eye,  
 Hopin' once or twice I get to catch your eye.

***The Congleton Choral Society Song***

**To the tune of *When I'm cleaning windows***

Come and let your voices soar  
 Even if you've never sung before  
 We can't get better so let's have more  
 In our choral concert.  
  
 The alto singing is sublime  
 The tenors too are doing fine  
 Singing the soprano line  
 In our choral concert.  
  
 We practise all our diction so it is of the best  
 Then we can stop together when we come to every rest.  
  
 The gents perform in shirts so clean  
 The well-dressed ladies can be seen  
 Wearing fifteen shades of green  
 In our choral concert.  
  
 We sit on wooden benches tightly packed into our rows  
 The people just in front of us are sitting on our toes.  
  
 Come in after 1,2,3,  
 Watch the conductor carefully,  
 We must be there but we can't see  
 In our choral concert.  
  
 We sit on wooden benches tightly packed into our rows  
 If we all breathe together, the end soprano goes.  
  
 Each instruction we recall  
*Sotto voce*, do not bawl,  
 Then the trumpets drown it all  
 In our choral concert.

***The Conductor's Song and***

***The Congleton Choral Society Song***

**words © Linda and David Messham, 1986**



David Johnson writes:

'In my 34 years as MD, every concert was remarkable and exhilarating. But one that stands out as the most wonderful, inspirational, and of the highest professional standing, was this majestic performance of the Bach B Minor Mass. The Choral Society sang as though they were inspired. And tears flowed at the end - from everyone.

Forever in my memory.'

CONGLETON  
CHORAL  
SOCIETY

SATURDAY 9TH MAY  
7:30 PM.  
ASTBURY CHURCH  
CONGLETON  
CHESHIRE



J.S. BACH  
MASS IN B MINOR

CONDUCTOR DAVID JOHNSON  
WITH THE NORTHERN BACH ORCHESTRA

## A memorable evening with Bach

Astbury Parish Church was the splendid setting on Saturday night for a magnificent (the word is used advisely) performance of Bach's B Minor Mass by Congleton Choral Society under David Johnson, and the Northern Bach Orchestra, led by Nigel Jay.

Arguably, this is the most taxing choral work in the repertoire, and makes enormous musical and physical demands on the singer. The cumulative effect of the "Confiteor," "Sanctus" and "Hosanna" towards the end can undermine the resolve of the best disciplined and numerically strong societies. Yet Congleton Choral Society — by no means a large chorus — was truly inspired. The dedication of the concert to Chris Garbutt, whose untimely death in December robbed the choir of a much-loved member, couldn't have been more fitting, and surely he and J. S. Bach were both present in spirit!

A full church was privileged to hear a consistently high level of choral singing, which captured the mood and spirit of each section of the Mass admirably.

Meticulous attention to clear articulation of the text meant that throughout, all the contrapuntal detail could be heard. Only in the "Hosanna" did the second chorus seem to lose its way a little, but by them, who cared!

There were so many good moments it's hard to chose one — the "Gloria" danced along, "Cum Sancto Spiritu" (a notorious graveyard for faint-hearts) ended Part One in a blaze of glory.

"Et Incarnatus est" was magical, the massive "Sanctus" was taken by the scruff of the neck, and the momentum continued in the following "Pleni Sunt Coeli," bringing the movement to a wonderful climax.

"Dona nobis pacem" is in Bach's setting no plea for peace, but a confident affirmation of his faith. No greater tribute could be paid to the chorus than to say that its performance expressed this in every way.

The marvellous playing of the Northern Bach Orchestra enhances any concert, not least because it supports and never dominates the singers.

The balance between chorus and orchestra was especially good in the more complex passages, where the accuracy and solidity of the bass playing seemed to encourage everyone.

And how pleasant to hear oboe d'amore in "Qui Sedes" and "Et in Spiritum."

The pick of the five soloists were Yvonne Howard (contralto), whose "Agnus Dei" was beautifully con-

trolled, and Simon Keenlyside (baritone). His 'Et in spiritum' was a delight.

Competent solo accounts were given by Adele Mason (soprano), Sarah Fryer (mezzo-soprano) and Deryck Webb (tenor) and they joined together to sing "Qui Tollis" and "Crucifixus" — movements normally performed by chorus.

Altogether it was a memorable evening, when Congleton Choral Society really got inside the skin of one of the world's great choral masterpieces.

A.D.

Review in the Congleton Chronicle of our performance  
of Bach's Mass in B Minor, 1987



## Hidden history, from the pages of the Congleton Chronicle



The story of David Johnson's epic weekly commute of 400 miles in 24 hours to conduct the choir at Monday rehearsals. This story and picture from 1987, appeared under the headline 'The Lightning Conductor'!



### 'Worthwhile'

"People ask me why I continue to do it now I am working in London," he said, "But when we have successful concerts, such as the Bach B. Minor Mass at Astbury in May, and the Benjamin Britten St. Nicholas which we've just performed at St. Peter's Church, it definitely makes the travelling worthwhile."

The Choral Society is now busy rehearsing for its Christmas season, which includes an Advent carol service in Swettenham Church on 27th November; a children's carol concert at Dane-side Theatre on Friday, 18th December; and a concert on Saturday, 19th December, which includes Finzi's "In Terra Pax" and Britten's "Ceremony of Carols."

The Choral Society has about 70 members, and meets each Monday evening in Trinity Methodist Church, Waggstreet, Congleton, from 7.45 to 9.45 p.m.

It is always ready to welcome new members, and is particularly short of tenors at the moment.

S B

Congleton Choral Society has many dedicated members, but none more so than its musical director, Mr. David Johnson, who makes a round trip of 400 miles to conduct the choir at its Monday evening rehearsals.

Mr. Johnson, of Priory-close, Congleton, works for Barclays Bank in its computer department, close to St. Paul's Cathedral in London, where he is head of personal sector systems planning.

For the past seven months, while he has worked in London, he has commuted to his job on Monday morning, leapt on the 5 p.m. train to rush him back to Congleton ready for the choir rehearsal, and returned south on the 5.08 a.m. from Crewe on Tuesday.

He frequently arrives for rehearsals in city suit, clutching a suitcase in one hand and his baton in the other.



Another performance of *Trial by Jury*, 1980s, raising funds for the fixtures and fittings of the new Daneside Theatre, then under construction.

Extracts from a review in the Congleton Chronicle

1. THE 400 people who attended the concert arranged by the Daneside Theatre Trust Fund-raising Committee in the Congleton Town Hall on Friday, enjoyed a splendid evening's entertainment, and by generously supporting the raffle and purchasing the refreshments and merchandise on sale, helped raise over £200 towards the fitting-out of the new theatre.

During the evening, they also learnt of the progress already made with the theatre and of the various ways in which they could help with fund-raising, or even contribute their skills as plumbers, bricklayers, electricians or unskilled labourers in the form of voluntary labour on the site.

2. Under the heading "September Show", local operatic, choral and drama societies had volunteered their services to provide a nicely balanced mixture of music, drama and comedy, while a "Discovery Spot" enabled less established local artistes to present their talents before an enthusiastic audience — a valuable experience, if also an awe-inspiring one!

A rollicking start was ensured as soon as the curtain rose on the beautifully costumed staged "Trial by Jury", which some 30 members of Congleton Choral Society presented in a production by Ron Milne.

4. The Choral Society can only have widened its circle of supporters and admirers with this praiseworthy venture into the field of light entertainment.

3. The individual lunacies of the male juniors and the "giggly" coyness of their female couterparts soon had the audience in the right frame of mind for the irreverence to come and the principals were later to lay on expertly, melodically and thickly.

David Johnson's punctilious baton and the twinkling fingers of Wilfred Reddish (accompanist), never allowed the pace to flag and ensured that Sullivan's chinking music did full justice to the scintillating libretto of W.S. Gilbert.

Despite the unlikelihood of a breach-of-promise case before a convened jury in this day and age, the splendid singing and acting of the principals and the tuneful balance of the jury members in the choral passages awakened an instant rapport with the audience, which resulted in sustained amusement until the final curtain.

Editor's note: Chronicle mis-print.

For 'juniors' above, read 'jurors'



## Concert report in the Congleton Chronicle

**It was the evening we had all been waiting for as we rehearsed *Messiah* every Monday, sure that it would be wonderful on the night. And it was indeed as wonderful as anyone could have wished!**

The concert was dedicated to the memory of our late President, Sir Bernard Lovell, so it was an especially meaningful occasion for us. We were happy to welcome as our guests Sir Bernard's granddaughter, Lucy Driver, with several members of the Lovell family. The Town Hall was a sell-out, so the atmosphere was already buzzing as people took their seats. The choir members had already heard the orchestra at the afternoon rehearsal, whereas the audience were still unaware of the treat which awaited them.

Before the performance began, Lucy Driver spoke movingly to the choir and the audience about her grandfather's love of music and his long association and strong bond with the Choral Society.

The opening bars of music left no one in any doubt that the musicians, the Philharmonic Ensemble led by Andrew Orton, were going to deliver a full-bodied performance. And it seemed to go on just getting better, as the rich tones of the tenor soloist's first aria *Comfort Ye* settled over the audience and the magic of Handel's majestic re-counting of the Christmas story took hold.

Our young soloists thrilled the audience with both their expertise and artistry; the trumpeter came as a revelation, with every note seeming effortless; the harpsichord provided that beautiful authentic period sound; the orchestra was polished and hugely professional. The choir reached their best standard yet, achieving the notes, the entrances and the interpretation which *Messiah* deserves. The moment when everybody stood for the *Hallelujah Chorus* was a moment to remember in an evening full of memorable moments.

And our Music Director, Christopher Cromar, was the one who pulled it all out of the hat, with his commitment, raw energy and knowledge. He has helped the choir to be their best yet.

There were numerous plaudits from the people who packed the Town Hall:

'tears came to my eyes'; 'the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the music by the choir was inspiring'; 'the diction was brilliant'; 'each section of the choir was as one voice'; 'the music filled the hall'; 'timing excellent, the music made me feel alive'; 'if the spirit of Handel was looking down on us, he must have been smiling!'; 'you all seemed super-charged with ambition and desire to do your utmost to rise to the occasion and from this side of the stage, you certainly lifted yourselves into the higher echelons of musical ambition'; 'under Christopher Cromar's masterly direction the choir, orchestra and soloists gave a performance which came from the heart and lifted the spirit of everyone in the hall'.

We have now put *Messiah* away and on Monday evenings are rehearsing for our *Christmas Carols for Choir and Audience*, which takes place in Congleton Town Hall on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2012. We will be singing carols old and new, with lusty audience participation required! We have already been reserving tickets, so do get yours early to avoid disappointment.

SB

### And from the Chronicle Letters Page:

Dear Sir

Standing ovations have been devalued in recent years through their overuse at party conferences, but there could be no doubting the spontaneity and sincerity of the one given by a packed Town Hall to Congleton Choral Society on Saturday evening for their thrilling performance of Handel's 'Messiah'. Rejuvenated by their brilliant young conductor, Christopher Cromar, the choir can seldom have sounded better. The sopranos and altos led the way with a performance of astonishing assurance and verve, ably underpinned by strong and confident singing from the men. All four young soloists interpreted Handel's arias with great sensitivity and skill, though special mention must be made of the contralto, Emma Stannard, whose warm persona and beautiful articulation of both words and notes compelled attention. The Congleton audience was afforded the now rare privilege of hearing live a full, professional orchestra, complete with brass and timpani, in its home town. It was really more than we had a right to expect. As the performers got into their stride, their increasing sense of enjoyment communicated itself to the audience, earning a warm and well-deserved response. At the end the applause was so enthusiastic that the performers had to take three bows before we would let them go. Then we too departed, humming and happy. Goodness knows how the Society will follow this, but for all those privileged to have been there it was an unforgettable evening.

RM



We all dressed up in glamorous evening wear to add to the theatrical atmosphere of this exciting evening!

## A night at the opera – and what a brilliant night it was

People ask “What is opera”? It is stylish, funny, dazzling, often beautiful, often sad, cruel, warm-hearted, serious and even sexy.

It is a form of music and drama that has enriched our lives for hundreds of years.

That is what Congleton Choral Society, with four excellent guest artistes, gave us on Saturday night, 5th April, in the town hall.

It was an evening to cherish and remember and to be proud that we, the audience, could hear such quality in our own town.

True to form the concert began with an overture to Mozart’s “*Marriage of Figaro*”, transcribed for piano with four hands and performed by the conductor, Christopher Cromar and the guest accompanist Dominic John. It was dynamic, exciting, full of character, with both players in complete harmony with each other.

We’re off to North East Spain and heard our chorus, now as gypsies, singing and celebrating the joys of wine, pretty girls and hard work as they wake everyone up with their anvil bashing.

Our first guest, mezzo-soprano Jessica Gillingwater, sang with great sincerity and simplicity the moving aria *What is life without Eurydice* from Gluck’s opera *Orfeo*.



Congleton Choral Society presents

## A Night at the Opera

Christopher Cromar - conductor

Congleton Town Hall

Saturday 5th April 2014 at 7.30pm

On our musical journey, suddenly we were enjoying the *Easter hymn* from Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*. This is the first opera I ever saw at the age of 17 after saving three weeks’ pocket money for a seat in “the gods” (back three rows, upper gallery!). I was enchanted by it all.

The devotional singing of the chorus celebrating Christ’s victory over death and allowing us to hear the second guest soloist, soprano Helen Massey, was very moving and led to a lovely climax.

Up until now we had not heard the third guest soloist, tenor Aaron Cawley. As he sang the aria *When the stars were brightly shining* from Puccini’s *Tosca*, I was amazed at the power of the voice from such a slender young man.

At times the voice almost had a light baritone quality as well as the lyrical sound of a young man awaiting execution.

Now, off to Russia for the *Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin’s *Prince Igor*. This was one of the most beautiful moments for me as the sopranos began to sing. Their sound was absolutely stunning, so well blended and pure in quality. A word too for the altos who blended so well together.

This is a difficult chorus with its changing moods, exotic dance rhythms, key changes and various vocal contributions, but this was no problem for our chorus.



We are still in Russia, now enjoying a party to which all the locals had also been invited. What a feast! What joy! This was so apparent in the performance as they rejoiced in food, drink and dancing. This was not the waltz of Vienna but one full of rustic, unsophisticated charm!

Our guest soloists then gave us some operatic treats, the ever-appealing *Oh my beloved father* from Gianni Schicchi, followed by the ever-popular *Nessun Dorma* from *Turandot* and the *Habanera* from Bizet's *Carmen*, an aria in which Carmen sings of her untamed love. She is manipulative and yes magnetic. She is sensual and sexy! The chorus try to warn and young men of the danger but....!

Here Jessica Gillingwater produced a lovely sound, but a little more seduction and sensuality would not be amiss here.

For half a century Verdi dominated Italian opera and at his funeral at the age of 87, over 20,00 people attended.

*Caro nome* from *Rigoletto* is sung by Gilda, Rigoletto's daughter. She has fallen in love with a student (in reality the Duke of Mantua — a rapish noble).

This is a very demanding aria, both technically, dramatically and musically and was sung so well by Helen Massey — bravo!



Guest artistes Dominic John, piano and Helen Massey, soprano

The end of this tremendous programme nears with Verdi's *La Traviata* and finally the triumphant scene from *Aida*.

*Brindisi* from *La Traviata* brought in the tenor and soprano soloists who were well-matched and the joy captured by the chorus and soloists was uplifting, although to those who know opera realise that all will soon change (as it does in so many operas!).

On a final journey, we rejoice in the triumphal scene from Verdi's *Aida*. Having seen this opera at least twice in Verona with the great Serafin conducting, it never ceases to thrill.

Again, the joy of Radames's triumph in battle between Egypt and Ethiopia in the scene of a triumphal march into Thebes (soon to introduce many tragic situations). Well done to the male chorus too.

But thanks to all who took part in this evening's operatic journey with so many memorable moments to cherish. We can but say a big thank you to their great inspirational conductor Christopher Cromar who made all this possible. He must be proud of you all.

I don't usually add a PS, but for once I must make a special mention of the guest accompanist, Dominic John, whose playing throughout was absolutely brilliant — the best accompanist I have ever heard.

GJ



# Mendelssohn ~ Elijah

Saturday 21st March 2015

## Truly exceptional concert by choir

Dear Sir, — What an outstanding performance last night of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Congleton Town Hall.

Congleton Choral Society performed the concert under its conductor, Christopher Cromar with The Philharmonic ensemble, assembled by its leader Andrew Orton.

To complete the picture there were four soloists from the Royal Northern College of Music.

The whole programme was truly exceptional with a perfect blend of choir, voice and orchestra, especially considering they had only practised together once earlier in the day.

To me, the highlight was the powerful experience of the whole choir in full voice, perfectly blending with the remarkable orchestra at the beginning and end of the concert.

The soloists were all magnificent and the Town Hall provided a perfect setting, all brilliantly orchestrated by the unobtrusive conductor. — Yours faithfully,  
**PH, Sandbach**

Dear Sir

Last Saturday evening I was a member of the audience that stamped and cheered Congleton Choral Society's thrilling performance of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah'. The compliment was well deserved.

In an evening of superb musicianship and high drama CCS demonstrated once again that for them the extraordinary is becoming almost routine. One of the most striking features of the performance was the perfect balance between choir and orchestra; each blended seamlessly with the other in a way I don't think has been equalled at this venue.



Chris Cromar conducts a rehearsal of *Elijah* at the town hall

The amateur choir more than held its own against a professional orchestra – complete with brass, timpani and organ – and the Philharmonic Ensemble paid the choir the compliment of playing to the highest standard. Credit for this must go to conductor Christopher Cromar, who commanded and inspired the tremendous forces at his disposal with authority and guile. He made it look effortless. I'm sure it wasn't.

The tenors achieved a sweet tone and it was pleasing to see their numbers have been augmented by some welcome returnees. Some fine new singers, too, among the basses, who showed great musicality and taste throughout.

Though there were slightly fewer altos than usual, this did not diminish their customary excellence. The sopranos were a revelation. Gallantry forbids me from estimating how many grandmothers make up their numbers, but with each concert their confidence soars, along with their voices

The ladies were some way into the sublime chorus "Lift thine eyes to the mountains" when I became aware that the orchestra had fallen silent, and it was only then that I realized that the section was unaccompanied; they maintained their pitch throughout, a fact confirmed when the orchestra came back in.

In the course of the oratorio the choir has to perform several roles, alternately pious and profane, righteous and ungodly, angels and idolaters. The choir seemed to be more comfortable being angels than sinners; I should have liked a bit more wickedness.

But that quibble cannot diminish Congleton Choral Society's outstanding achievement. I was on the edge of my seat for most of the evening, and I don't think I was alone.

Yours faithfully,  
**RM, Congleton**

# Superb performances of Haydn and Mozart masses

Congleton Choral Society has excelled itself once again. With a programme of masses by Haydn and Mozart, it performed to a packed audience in Congleton Town Hall on Saturday, 7th April.



It was complemented by a chamber group from the Stockport Symphony Orchestra and soloists Sarah Parkin, soprano; Felicity Buckland, alto; Jonathan Cooke, tenor, and Stuart Orme, bass.

Under the direction of Christopher Cromar, the concert began with the *Maria Theresa Mass* by Haydn.

Haydn had a comfortable life and a jovial personality, which is reflected in a lot of his music.

The opening few bars of the work were played warmly by the orchestra followed beautifully by the quartet of soloists. The choir took over with an instantly lively *Kyrie*. The singing was articulate and impressive. The *Gloria* section was sung joyfully by the quartet. The *Credo* alternated with strong powerful passages from the choir and gentler sounds from the quartet. The *Sanctus* was immediately exciting and energetic. In contrast, the *Agnus Dei* was gently portrayed with an impressive and effective staccato in the choir and orchestra. The *Mass* concluded with a surprisingly joyful and uplifting setting of the *Dona Nobis Pacem*.



In the second half of the concert the light-hearted, joyful mood of the Haydn *Mass* was replaced by the sombre intensity of the *Requiem* by Mozart. He dictated this from his deathbed and it was completed by Sussmayr. The work is shrouded in mystery as to how it came to be written.

Mozart, by this time, was plagued by angst of poverty, illness and debt. He was desperately short of money. But who commissioned it and why? Was it a foreboding of his own death?

From the outset of the performance, there was a sensation of driving intensity in this mass for the dead. The opening chorus, pleading for eternal rest and light, was passionately and beautifully sung. The *Dies Irae*, the *Wrath of God*, was powerfully dramatic. The incessant rapid string playing added tension to the terror of punishment for sin — the destruction of the world and mankind by forever burning in flames.

The quartet mellowed the mood as they sang of the redemption of the world through the *Crucifixion of Christ*, pleading for mercy and absolution. The following *Confutatis* was suddenly a chorus of contrasts. A fierce rhythmic theme was repeatedly pounded by the heavy stringed instruments underpinning the dramatic voices of the men as they re-emphasised the terror of burning in hell. This was contrasted gently by the ladies' soft voices and the tenderness of the upper strings pleading for mercy and the peace of eternal rest.

The *Lacrimosa* was emotionally expressed. The choir described the *Day of Weeping* when the ashes of the dead would rise, and all humanity judged.

This was stunningly portrayed in a driving, passionate crescendo of rising staccato quavers. Following all this drama and passion, there was a mood of growing optimism in the belief of the *Glory of God* and *His* forgiveness and redemption. The *Hostia* and *Sanctus* were driven on with power and purpose. The quartet inserted a gentle *Benediction*.

Finally, the choir drove the *Requiem* to a heart-warming and uplifting conclusion through the *Agnus Dei*, *Lux Aeterna* and *Cum Sanctus*, with the promise of eternal light, forgiveness and peace.

Cromar impressively brought together two dramatically differing settings of the mass. The joyful and spirited version by Haydn contrasted with heavy, serious, driving force of the Mozart with all its different dramatic emotions. The choir sounded fantastic.

Its tone, articulation and contrasting moods were all very well-rehearsed. The orchestra enhanced the performance magnificently throughout. The four stunning soloists integrated well with the choir and orchestra combining to make a superb and enjoyable evening.

WHLJ

Mozart.

Haydn - Nelson (Imperial Mass) Charpentier - Te Deum Pergolesi - Magnificat Karl Jenkins -  
 The Armed man, a Mass for Peace Joannes Brahms - German Requiem Ralph Vaughan Williams  
 - Five Mystical Songs Cecilia McDowall - On Angel's Wing George Shearing - Songs and  
 Sonnets of Shakespeare Howard Goodall - Psalm 23 John Rutter - The Sprig of Thyme Jo-  
 hannes Brahms - Lieberslieder Waltzes and Neue Lieberslieder Waltzes Handel - Messiah Vi-  
 valdi - Gloria Bob Chilcot - Requiem Handel - Dixit Dominus John Rutter - Feel the Spirit  
 Mozart - Requiem Haydn - Harmoniemesse Douglas Guest - For the Fallen Maurice Duru-  
 fle - Requiem Joseph Hadyn Nelson Mass Mendelssohn - Elijah Rutter - Gloria Fauré - Requi-  
 em and Cantique de Jean Racine Handel - My Heart is Inditing Works by Parry - Wood -  
 Stainer - Maunder Bach - St. John Passion Vaughan Williams - Five Mystical Songs Vivaldi -  
 Gloria

# The End

Geron  
 Love a  
 Good:  
 uiem Mozart - Great Mass in C minor Mozart - Solemn Vespers John Brunning - Amazing Day  
 Bob Chilcott - Five Days That Changed The World John Rutter - This Is The Day Henry  
 Wood - Fantasia on English Sea Songs Haydn - The Creation Handel - Dixit Dominus  
 Haydn - Nelson (Imperial Mass) Charpentier - Te Deum Pergolesi - Magnificat Karl Jenkins -  
 The Armed man, a Mass for Peace Joannes Brahms - German Requiem Ralph Vaughan Williams  
 - Five Mystical Songs Cecilia McDowall - On Angel's Wing George Shearing - Songs and  
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 Stainer - Maunder Bach - St. John Passion Vaughan Williams - Five Mystical Songs Vivaldi -  
 Gloria Vaughan Williams - Serenade to Music Chilcott - Gloria Elgar - The Dream Of  
 Gerontius Stanford - Songs Of The Fleet Handel - Zadok the Priest Edwards - Songs of  
 Love and Life Elgar - From The Bavarian Highlands Haydn - Maria Theresa Mass Howard  
 Goodall - Eternal Light Beethoven - Missa Solemnis Mozart - Solemn Vespers Chilcott Req-  
 uiem Mozart - Great Mass in C minor Mozart - Solemn Vespers John Brunning - Amazing Day  
 Bob Chilcott - Five Days That Changed The World John Rutter - This Is The Day Henry  
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