



The Stray Stave

June 2017

Newsletter of the Harrogate Choral Society

Walton and Poulenc

Some souvenirs of a memorable concert at the Royal Hall



← Before

– in rehearsal

Looking good but, by general consensus, not at our singing best – not uncommon at the afternoon run-through. Was Andrew worried? It didn't show, though he admitted to it later.

Anyway, surely it'll be alright on the night. Won't it?

During →

– in performance

..... Yes indeed it was.

Critical acclaim. The couple of small glitches passed virtually unnoticed. An exhilarating evening for performers and audience alike. But disappointing ticket sales. If only the public knew the entertainment value of the jollity in the Poulenc, and of the drama and crash-bang-wallop in the Walton, surely many more would have come along. Publicity and persuasion are huge challenges.



← After

– in t'pub

A number of us singers and audience de-camped to the Old Bell for some refreshment. An enjoyable way of celebrating and winding-down after the concert, and one which it might be nice to establish as a regular fixture.



With thanks to Simon Littlewood for the photographs.

The fall of Babylon – what actually happened on the night of Belshazzar’s Feast

Jill Heyes provides an authoritative account of the historical circumstances around Belshazzar’s feast

Babylon was a great city and the last obstacle to the ambitions of the expanding Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great. What could not be gained by might was actually achieved by cunning, and it makes quite a story.

The impregnable city of Babylon with its towering walls and fortifications was actually taken in a single night while its inhabitants feasted. They realised only too late what was happening – by which time great Babylon had indeed fallen. So what were the events of that night and how did the Persians bring about the fall of Babylon?

Nebuchadnezzar ruled in Babylon for around 45 years. He was a massively powerful king and managed to drive the Egyptians out of Syria, to storm Jerusalem and carry the Jews into captivity and to overrun Egypt itself. As a result of his conquests, he was able to turn Babylon into a most magnificent city full of amazing palaces and home to the famous Hanging Gardens – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This was largely done by the excessively cruel use of forced labour by prisoners from his campaigns, including many Jews. The Greek historian Herodotus describes its mighty fortifications which apparently stretched round a 56 mile perimeter. He says Babylon “is surrounded by a broad deep moat full of water and within the moat there is a wall 50 royal cubits wide and 200 high” (approximately 80 and 340 feet, but probably an exaggeration). No wonder Babylon withstood invasion. The River Euphrates ran through the middle of the city and the wall went right down to the water at both the entry and exit points.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by Belshazzar, who was probably actually his daughter’s son. Belshazzar’s Feast was almost certainly held on a traditional religious feast day. The Persians knew that the Babylonians would then be taken unawares. However, it was much greater Persian cunning that won the day. King Cyrus ordered his troops to divert the course of the Euphrates into a canal. This meant that the invading soldiers could walk along the river bed and enter the city beneath the walls and under cover of darkness. This is exactly what they did and as Herodotus relates, “even while the city was falling (the Babylonians) continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until hard facts brought them to their senses”. So Babylon fell and her peoples were divided. In fact, Cyrus sent the Jews back to their homeland.

Stranger than the Biblical legend? The truth often is!

Footnote: My sources for this have been Herodotus Histories Chapter 1, with quotations taken from the de Selincourt translation (Penguin Classics); J B Bury, History of Greece; and of course the books of Isaiah and Daniel in the Old Testament. The story as related in Daniel states that the Persian King was Darius. This is not quite correct. What is described in Belshazzar’s Feast is the great fall of Babylon in the reign of Cyrus in 539 BC; however, the city was retaken by the Persian King Darius in 520 BC.

AGM: Wednesday 28 June, 7.30pm, Christ Church
Please be there!

This issue of *The Stray Stave* may seem a bit thin. That is because we depend on you the readers to provide material, and we haven’t received much. There’s plenty of time for submissions before the next issue, which will not be until August at the earliest. Please have a word with the editor, or simply send to newsletter@harrogatechoral.org.uk Tony Latter, editor

A message from our Chairman

Phew! My legs have still not recovered from the Belshazzar effect but what a great night it turned out to be, for which we must give Andrew enormous credit in 'getting us there'! The whole evening's performance rounded off a memorable season, comprising as it did our visit to Fountains Abbey, a great Messiah, the acclaimed Carmina Burana (not forgetting the Little Jazz Mass) and now our latest venture.

And next season looks exciting too! Talking of which, members have asked me what the Opera Gala Night comprises. We have already had a taste of the content at our most recent Wednesday rehearsals.

We are awaiting news from Sarah Fox as to her choice(s) before we complete the line-up, but I can say that for the choir the pieces listed opposite are almost certain to feature.

There are also plans to include a couple of joint choir and soloist items, so plenty to go at and every reason for members to entice their friends to come!

A lot has been done behind the scenes this season in order to formulate the necessary documentary evidences required under our CIO status. At times this has been mind-boggling in its tediousness but we are almost through it all and we can get back to concentrating on the important things again next season. The committee is being slightly re-jigged but is short in one or two areas and therefore we are looking for a couple of members to step forward with their support. I've already made an appeal for a Concert Manager which is badly needed as we can't expect Ruth/Gill and others to continue to take on these additional responsibilities on top of their existing busy roles.

So a great season gone and one to follow coupled with our 70th Anniversary year in 2018. I hope you've enjoyed the season as much as I have and hope to see you at the AGM.

Peter Thompson

Wagner

- Procession and Chorale from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*
- Sailors' Chorus and Spinning Chorus from *Der Fliegende Holländer*
- Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser*
- Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin*

Tchaikovsky

- Chorus of Peasant Girls from *Eugene Onegin*

Leoncavallo

- Bell Chorus from *Pagliacci*

Verdi

- Anvil Chorus from *Il Trovatore*
- Chorus of Scottish Refugees from *Macbeth*
- Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves from *Nabucco*
- Triumphal Scene from *Aida*

Puccini

- Humming Chorus from *Madame Butterfly*

Please come and support
Halycon Singers and Beati
who will be performing on Friday June 16th at 7.30pm in St Roberts Roman Catholic Church
in aid of Carers Resource
Tickets £10 including refreshment

Notes from Committee Meetings

Ruth Pridmore gives a summary of key points from meetings held on 20 March and 15 May

Artistic Ambition

Work has been ongoing on the Artistic Ambition project. In March Trustees approved the final report which was then sent out by email to all members, and at the meeting in May they received a report from the small group led by Paul Jackson who are working to improve the choir's recruitment and retention of members. Although progress on all this may seem slow we have moved on considerably from the position in January when the focus groups were just getting going. The trustees have already made some decisions based on the recommendations in the report - ie ticket prices will be cheaper for some concerts next season and we will be performing in St Wilfrids instead of the Royal Hall - and more changes will happen.

Roles within HCS

The Trustees have also spent some time reworking the document which lists the duties of all HCS roles, mainly to remove the CEO role and reinstate the Deputy Chair role but also adding some other role descriptions and amending others to try and ensure the document reflects what each trustee / post holder is supposed to do. Although some members have come forward to help with various matters, more helpers are always welcome – in particular the marketing team still needs some help getting things published in the press and someone to co-ordinate distribution of leaflets. We also need someone to come forward to be Concert Management Trustee.

Governance

During the course of the 2016-17 season work has been ongoing to bring our governance up to scratch now that we are a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) and the groundwork is now complete. Over the summer Ruth will be making a page on the website where all the policies agreed by the Trustees can be found.

Concert Planning

Forthcoming concerts are listed below. The main news since the last newsletter is that on 9 June 2018 we will be singing a mixed concert of music in St Wilfrid's church in which we hope to involve the whole of the HCS family. Programme content for the 2018-19 season still being discussed.

Choir Archives

Former member Sally Halls had, over the years, amassed a large collection of material related to the history of the choir and has now kindly donated this to us. Liz Danskin is working her way through it, "digitizing" it so that it can be shared and used when appropriate for marketing or anniversary events.

Dates for the diary

16 June 2017

St Robert's Roman Catholic Church. Halcyon and Beati joint concert.

28 June 2017 AGM

14 October 2017

Royal Hall. Opera Gala Night with Sarah Fox, John Cunningham and the Amici Ensemble.

9 December 2017

Royal Hall. *Messiah* with Manchester Camerata.

16 December 2017

HICC. Harrogate Christmas Concert.

10 March 2018

Royal Hall. Mendelssohn *Elijah*, prospectively with Samantha Hay (Sop), Gaynor Keeble (Alto), ?(Tenor) and Alex Ashworth (Bass) and probably Amici Ensemble.

9 June 2018

St Wilfrid's Church. Programme to be decided.

20 October 2018

Royal Hall. Brian Kay to conduct. Programme to be decided.

8 December 2018

Royal Hall. Possibly *Messiah*, but awaiting final outcome of artistic ambition review.

15 December 2018

HICC. Harrogate Christmas Concert – to be confirmed.