

Issue no.38 May 2009

Amici News

The newsletter of The Amici Singers
The Amici Singers is a Registered Charity No.277766



Dear Amicis,

Sincere apologies for the lateness of the newsletter but life has been very, very hectic for Carole and me for all of 2009 so far. I have been writing music seemingly not stop since January, composing music for a new musical ride, arranging music for the Spitfire flypast and arranging *The Water is Wide* for Soprano, Tenor, Clarinet and Orchestra, all for this year's Battle Proms. Then I was commissioned to compose a work for brass ensemble to celebrate the 100th anniversary of

the laying of the foundation stone of the University of Gloucestershire's Chapel of St. Mary and St. Paul in Cheltenham. The work, based on mainly fragments of Gloucestershire folk songs is called *Three Gloucestershire Dances*. With three movements, the work lasts for 14 minutes. The ensemble playing the work, which I shall be conducting in the Chapel on 5 June is basically the brass section of The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and they call themselves *The Prince of Wales Brass Ensemble*. The group consists of 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 French Horn, Tuba and Timps. It should be a good performance.

As a result of the AGM we have a new chairman, Beverley Goater. I have no doubt whatsoever that Beverley will continue the great tradition of having first class chairmen – so no pressure there. But help will be on hand as three previous holders of the post are serving on the 2009/10 committee – Rosemary Chapman, Ronnie White and Elizabeth Gammell so there will be plenty of experience to call upon. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking once again all the work undertaken by and all the guidance given by Elizabeth. Two of Elizabeth's parting shots from the chair came in the form of two jokes:

Q: Did you hear about the female opera singer who had quite a range at the lower end of the scale?

A: She was known as the deep C diva...

and

Q: What is the difference between a Wagnerian soprano and a Wagnerian tenor?

A: About ten pounds...

No comment!!! There are some new faces on the committee and at their first meeting the officers for the various positions will be decided. As soon as this happens I will let you know.

As I have mentioned the Battle Proms for this year, the nearest venues are Burghley House – 11 July; Blenheim Palace – 18 July; Hatfield House – 25 July and Althorpe – 22 August – all Saturdays. The concert starts with what I am told is a breathtaking air display by the Grace Spitfire to Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance No 5* and *Nimrod* (from *Enigma Variations*) and the rest

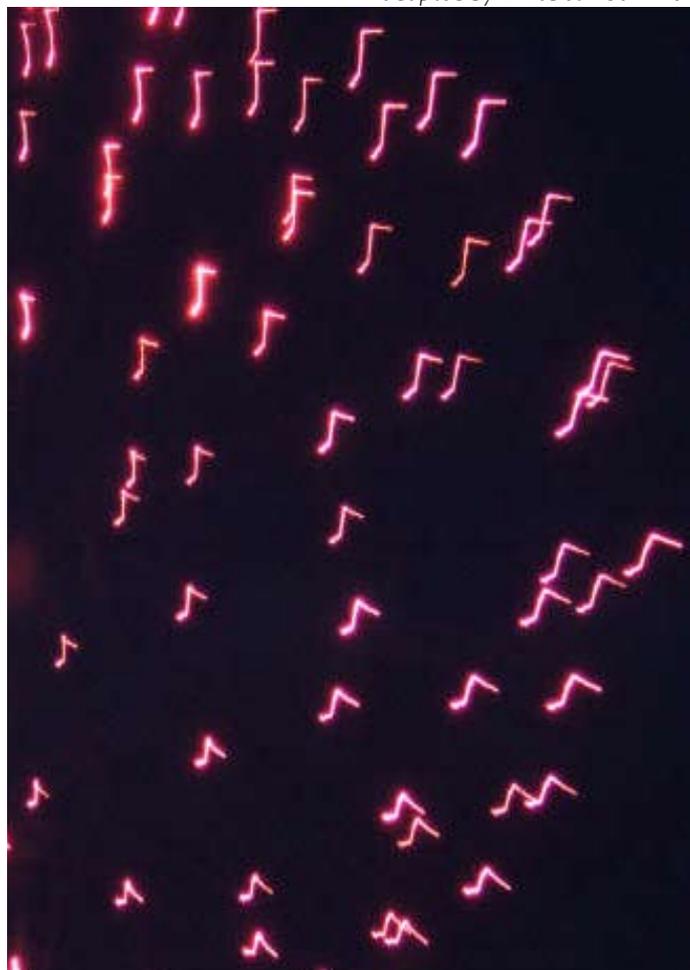
of the programme includes arias from Puccini's *La Boheme*, first movement of Weber's *2nd Clarinet Concerto*, Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave*, Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, Beethoven's *Battle Symphony* with 193 cannons and mortars and Strauss II's *The Blue Danube Waltz*. Before the concert there is a 19th century cavalry display given by The Napoleonic Association. I'm told that it's an outstanding show – but I never get to see it! More details can be found on the website: www.battheproms.com

The next big step in Amici history is the move, in September, to a new rehearsal place – Trinity Methodist Church, Biggleswade. Yes, I shall be sad for the Amici's to leave Brook House but as I outlined in my musical director's report at the AGM (which is printed in this newsletter) there will be a number of advantages. Tell people about the move and invite them to the first rehearsal on 3 September. In the meantime we have the Baldock concert to look forward to on 27 June.

Many thanks for your continued friendship, loyalty and your singing

Douglas

A photo of the Battle Proms fireworks cleverly adapted by Elizabeth Gammell



AMICI DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 16 April – 25 June

Rehearsals at Brook House

Saturday 27 June Concert at St. Mary's Church, Baldock

3.00pm rehearsal

7.00pm concert



St. Mary's
Baldock

Thursday 3 September – 3 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist Church, Shortmead Street, Biggleswade

Saturday 5 December Christmas Concert - Details t.b.a.

OTHER DATES OF INTEREST

Sunday, 5 July St Mary's Singers 40th anniversary concert at 3.00pm in St. Mary's Church, Potton. Tickets (including a glass of wine or soft drink) at £6 (adults) and £3 (children at school) are available from G. Tysoe & Son, Market Square, Potton, or by ringing Terry Moxham – 01767 260800 or from members of St Mary's Singers. A number of former members who have moved away are returning which means that there will be a choir of over 100 voices. The music is a selection from the past 40 years and includes music from the shows, church music, art and folk songs – a real eclectic mix.

Wednesday, 8 July St Mary's Parish Hall starting at 7.45pm and ending at 9.45pm. A Singing Workshop with St. Mary's Singers, directed by Douglas Coombes. This will be a fun workshop and there will be something for everyone whether you read music or not or whether or not you are in a choir. Admission is FREE and the evening will end with some light refreshments. Come along and bring a friend.

Thursday 16 July The St Swithun's Singers Summer Concert at St. Swithun's Church, Sandy (Parish Church) at 7.30 pm, conducted by Elizabeth Gammell.

As this will be 'St Swithun's Day + 1', the Singers are risking opening the concert with *Singing In The Rain!* The programme also contains music from: *My Fair Lady*, *Mamma Mia*, 'Four Folk Songs', arranged by Douglas, as well as a couple of Frank Sinatra numbers and some other surprises... Trevor is accompanying and Douglas will be adding percussion parts. The tickets will be available from beginning of June (cost £4.00/£3.00 concessions) and there's a refreshing glass of wine or juice in the interval. If you haven't been to a St Swithun's Singers concert for a while, do come and experience their new SATB sound. Tickets can be purchased from Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Gammell - Chairman



CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT at AMICI AGM

Thursday 21 May 2009

Douglas, Carole, Amici sisters. Is it just my impression, or has this been an extremely quick year? Going back though my diary to recall the events since 22 May 2008 was most pleasurable – and this is my opportunity to relive what we've done together in the

momentous year that has marked the 30th Anniversary of the Amici Singers.

As a choir we are extraordinarily fortunate to have a Musical Director of the calibre of Douglas. I'm sure we'd never take him for granted, but after 30 years of impeccable conducting it might have made us a tad blasé. Therefore, it was salutary to have a reminder that the Amicis can sound very different with someone else up in front waving their arms about – as we experienced last June when we became the guinea pig choir for 6 different conductors to experiment on! Even singing music we know extremely well became a challenge when we didn't get the direction we have come to expect. This was the second time we'd held a Conducting Day Concert and we all had our awareness deepened of the art of conducting.

The year's highlight has to be our Anniversary Concert in the Corn Exchange, Bedford on 5 July. The spine-tingling effect of singing with New English Concert Orchestra raised us to the coveted 1st Division (a rare accolade from Douglas) and it was also wonderful to share our music-making with friends from St Mary's Singers and Gamlingay Village College.

The first rehearsal back last September found us in Potton Lower School with the gentlemen of Shannon Express. We all really enjoyed such a different musical genre and meeting such a friendly group of singers.

If the Corn Exchange concert was our musical tribute to 30 years of singing together, our dinner at the John O'Gaunt Golf Club, held at the end of September, was the social occasion to mark the anniversary. Round the tables, each named from the Amici repertoire, we chatted, reminisced and then listened to our President, Bryan Shaw, as he entertained us with a flow of anecdotes about his distinguished musical career. A thoroughly fun evening.

We had the opportunity of two performances of our Advent and Christmas music: firstly travelling to Haverhill, at the invitation of Jill Morton and then back on more familiar territory in Dunton, the following week.

A number of the choir also got together just before Christmas to entertain the mince-pie consuming revellers at Simply Oak as we sang carols, tastefully arranged up the staircase, an atmospheric log fire blazing.

It is always lovely to sing for an enthusiastic audience in a good

acoustic; that was the case at the end of April when we went to Letchworth. Pam Rhodes' vox pop interviews of some choir members during the concert was a 'first' – and it was wonderful that over £800 was raised for the Garden Hospice.

Another 'first' was caused by the arctic weather we experienced early this year which meant we had to cancel two consecutive rehearsals! We still managed 31 Thursdays together though. We have also in true Amici fashion, done our best to support those of our members who've been through really tough times in the year: they know who they are – we will always try to "soothe, uplift and comfort" whenever it's possible and appropriate.

As always, I would like to pay tribute to everyone who has served so willingly and with such cheerfulness on the Committee. To my Vice-Chairman, Ronnie, our Secretary, Jennifer and Treasurer, Rita, I want to say an enormous thank-you and I'm certainly not overlooking the vital parts played by Maggie, Beverly, Ann, Rosemary, Pat, Margaret Webb, and Margaret and George Prosser. It's been lovely to have George at our meetings – his work on publicity has certainly been a big factor in the excellent audiences we've attracted throughout the year.

To Carole, we owe such a lot; her behind-the-scenes work ensures we have music to sing, a Newsletter and so much more. To Douglas, as ever, we acknowledge our good fortune in having a Musical Director of rare quality.

As this will be my last Report because I'm not standing as Chairman again, would you mind if I make some personal observations? I joined the choir over 23 years ago and being an Amici has made a very big difference to my life. It's taken me to places I would never have seen otherwise: introduced me to so much wonderful music: actually led to my own involvement with conducting and has meant I've made some very special friends. I'm extremely proud to have been your Chairman for the last eight years and seen the choir reach the impressive 30th Anniversary milestone. In September a new chapter begins with the move to rehearse in Trinity, Biggleswade, I have every confidence that we will flourish there too. This choir has a touch of true magic about it. To be an Amici is a privilege and a pleasure – long may the music and friendship continue. Thank you...

Elizabeth Gammell
Chairman

How NOT to treat a piano - we came across this one in a middle school somewhere in the South of England



MUSICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT at AMICI AGM – Thursday 21 May 2009

Friends, we are at the threshold of a new era in the 31 years of Amici existence. Except for two very short periods, Brook House has been the Amici home and Carole and I always refer to this room as The Amici Room. In my mind and I am sure in many of yours, it still will be, even when the Amicis start in a new home in September. I cannot deny that it will be the end of an era regarding our rehearsal room, but I like to think that we are now starting a new, and I am sure, an equally exciting era. Of course it will be different. For me, one of the major differences will be rehearsing in a place and not being surrounded by our mementos that are on the walls. As you look around I am sure that for many, the posters, pictures and various gifts and souvenirs will bring back memories of Amici history. Incidentally what is to become of them? Well, Elizabeth has a plan which will be discussed by your new committee. However, though it is great to look back, if we dwell on past achievements it can get in the way of development and progress; and as I am sure many of you know, I am always looking to the future. When it comes down to it, buildings and rooms do not make the Amicis. It is you and me together that are the Amicis.

So what will you miss when you leave this room? You will miss the closeness of the chairs, the proximity of bodies, the lack of air-conditioning, the all-year-round heat that quickly builds up, the unusual acoustics, the thrill as someone pulls on the fan cord – (will it break or not?), the cool refreshing air of the fan that hits you, the way that the air does not get to you, the interesting ways you have to adapt when you do physical warm ups, the general lighting which is not the greatest, the space you do not have for holding up your music copies when you stand, the chats you can have when queuing up for the toilet, the comfort of the chairs, especially the wooden ones (but they are better than the home-made benches that we had at the very beginning – I know some of you will remember that), nowhere to place wet coats on inclement nights, the way you can see me or not see me when you stand up, the sound of the keyboard depending on where you sit, the difficulty of moving around into a different seating plan, the cramped space you have when you are trying to get your new music out of your folders in the boxes and the interesting parking arrangements.

You may be interested in what Imogen Holst, the daughter of Gustav Holst the composer, and from whom I received some conducting lessons, says about the rehearsal room in her book *Conducting a choir*:

"If possible the practice room should have a window that opens. Lack of air can transform willing, intelligent choir members into sullen slackers who sing flat. Never allow anyone in the room to smoke at any time during a practice, for the air the singers breathe is the raw material of their singing. A practice room without any windows must be air-conditioned. The room must not be too warm for hard work."

So when you think about it, yes it will be different in September, but think about the plusses including the possibilities of new members.

The most important thing is for Amici life to go on and to continue as it has done especially during our 30th anniversary year. There have been some stunning concerts over this period and it is so welcome to have comments, especially from those who have not heard us before. I think of the letters of apprecia-

tion printed in the newsletter after the anniversary concert in the Bedford Corn Exchange; the comments from Haverhill and the invitation to return – we must follow that up; the continued warm welcome at Dunton and the reception at Letchworth. It all adds to making Amici life worthwhile.

So on to the future – immediately there's the concert in Baldock, and then the Christmas concert which could be at Trinity Methodist. I had planned to record our 3rd CD this October, but I have decided to do this in 2010 just in case we get new members because of our move, and so give them a chance to learn especially Blow Away the Morning Dew, the Somerset Folk Song Suite which will be the main item on the CD. This will also be the main part of our concerts on the 10th Easter Tour of the USA in 2011. Yes plans are underway already. As soon as I have discussed other ideas with the new committee for the rest of 2010 and 2011 I will let you know.

Mentioning the committee reminds me that there will be changes there – new members and some stepping down. I would like to single out three members for special mention – Rita for all her work over the years as Hon. Treasurer. My biggest compliment to her is the way she has always made me understand things when I have asked financial questions and now I am even beginning to understand the spread sheets. Then there is Jennifer, our Secretary. I have never known anyone who makes such succinct minutes, usually taking just one page – but it is all there. And so we come to Elizabeth who is standing down as Chairman. We have always had marvellous guiding hands and under Elizabeth this has continued. Elizabeth always has the right things to say, whether they are planned or impromptu, and always makes and creates the right impression. Thank you for all you have done and I know, will continue to do in whatever ca-

capacity. I would like to thank all committee members as well, who all make valuable contributions and also make committee meetings enjoyable, and at times, almost hysterical. And if you want to know how that happens then you have missed the boat for this year. Come on board at the next AGM in 2010. There's one person we must never take for granted – certainly not me – and that's Carole. The Amicis would not be the same without her. In fact if it wasn't for Carole, whose idea it was in the first place, this choir may never have existed. Once again Carole, many, many thanks for all the time and energy you put into the running and performance of the choir.

Personally, there is one aspect of the move that I feel is important to bring up. The Amici Singers is not my choir, though some people do say this and I soon put them right. By moving out of Brook House I do feel that choir members will no longer feel duty bound to elect me as conductor every year and that any awkwardness in voting for someone else will no longer exist, as there will be now no personal connection. I also feel that there is every chance of the choir continuing when, for whatever reason, I am not 'out front.'

There is a Navajo saying that I think of many times when you are singing well, with freedom, love and joy. It is about Walking in Beauty, a phrase they use to denote complete harmony with everything around them

*Now I walk in Beauty,
Beauty is before me,
Beauty is behind me,
Above and below me.
Your world is so beautiful.*

May you always walk and sing in Beauty.

Douglas

JUST IN CASE WE EVER TOUR CHINA – LEARN CHINESE IN 5 MINUTES!!!

(Better if you read them out loud, or they may not make much sense)

ENGLISH WAY

That's not right.
Are you harbouring a fugitive?
See me ASAP.
Stupid Man.
Small horse.
Did you go to the beach?
I bumped into a coffee table.
I think you need a face lift.
It's very dark in here.
I thought you were on a diet.
This is a tow away zone.
Staying out of sight.
He's cleaning his automobile.
Your body odour is offensive.
Great!
What's up!
For the losers who didn't get it.

CHINESE WAY

Sum Ting Wong
Hu Yu Hai Ding
Kum Hia Nao
Dum Faylo
Tai Ni Po Ni
Wai Yu So Tan
Ai Bang Mai Ni
Chin Tu Fat
Wai So Dim
Wai Yu Mun Ching
No Pah King
Lei Ying Lo
Wa Shing Ka
Yu Stin Ki Pu
Su Pah
Wa Sa Pen Ing
Yu steel dum

