

Issue no.40 February 2010

Amici news

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



Greetings to everyone

DIARY DATES

If you look at the *Dates for your diary* you can see that we have another exciting and varied year ahead of us. Please note these dates straight away to avoid double bookings.

MUSIC

At a recent committee meeting I was asked to explain in the newsletter about the music we use. This music belongs to the Amici Singers as the society has paid for everything we use. Anyone can purchase a copy

whether or not it has been published. Most of the music I arrange and/or adapt myself and therefore the overall costs are not as expensive as music from other publishers. The music that I have written, which is published, is usually PURCHASED at a discount. To give you an idea of prices *Blow away the morning dew* is £3 (average price of comparable music from a publisher is £5.95), *Tapestry of British Songs* is £1.50 (£3.95) and *How can I keep from singing?* is 30p (£1.95). So you can note the costs and savings.

MUSIC MANAGEMENT

In the past, the Singers have relied on members to return the music on time, and because the music has been stored at home (Brook House) I haven't always had a chance to keep checking to see if all the music has been returned. Collecting, and particularly checking, is so time consuming. If you think it is easy, then have a word with Lindsay Nicholson who has been, over the years, the person who has done most of this work for me; but even her time is limited. Lindsay will tell you that on many occasions she will find music that should have been handed in 5/6 years previously, has been returned with a batch from a recent concert. Often when I have checked a file for music that I wish to do again, I find music is missing. If I have the time I try and track it down but usually I get another copy run off or purchase another copy. It is rather galling when the missing music turns up when that piece is finished with and handed in. The costs of these replacements soon mount up. I know that over the years a tighter check should have been kept on missing music but it just takes time which often I do not have.

Another problem is the time it takes to get music back when someone leaves the choir. You would think that such people would hand back property that does not belong to them. Margaret Prosser (Greeter and with her husband George does a brilliant job with the publicity) has done a great job in retrieving music and I know how long this takes her. So please remember this if you decide to leave the choir; please hand back your music promptly.

I would also be grateful if you would not use the music

as writing paper. By all means mark your copy regarding musical matters, but don't use them for sending messages, making notes about concerts and, yes, shopping lists. I am sure that you would not do this when borrowing a book from the library. The majority of you do not use the music as notelets and also do return music promptly.

As you know we now have a new system to deal with the music which for the moment Carole is supervising. As you have signed out for the music, so you will have to sign when you return the music. If music is lost then there will be a charge. Hopefully that will mean that a firmer control can be kept. In committee we discussed a number of ways in keeping a check but it was decided that we will see how the new system works. In the meantime all the Christmas music should have been handed back (except for the *Palestrina Benedictus*). If you should have copies please return them as soon as possible as Lindsay has almost come to the end of checking the Christmas music.

ABSENCE FROM REHEARSAL

On another issue, I have been asked to point out that if you are unable to attend a rehearsal, you must let the section leader know and not me. I know that some of you do this as an act of courtesy, but it is the section leaders who keep a check on the membership. In a number of choirs, members are asked to let the conductor know but the structure is different in the Amici Singers. I am often away during the week and any messages you send me could well be picked up late, as has often happened. It is the section leaders and the committee who run the choir. I just conduct. As I have said many times before, the Amici Singers is not my choir. I am delighted to call it our choir, but the membership run it. As has happened many times in the past, by going through the section leaders, we have picked up some problems and we have been able to help. This is not a moan – just information dissemination!

TALK TO YOUR SECTION LEADER

If you have any thoughts on the above or any ideas on anything, please let your section leaders know so that it can be discussed in committee.

PROGRAMMES TO WATCH OUT FOR

On another note, on Saturday and Sunday, 13 March and 14, I shall be at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank with the final of the *BBC Songs of Praise School Choir of the Year Competition 2010*. Having done workshops with all the choirs that took part in the previous round, the final should be a great one. We will be making three programmes and they will be transmitted on Sundays, 11, 18 & 25 April. You will have to check the newspapers/Radio Times etc for the actual times but as far as I know they are going out on BBC 1. They should be well worth watching.

Douglas

for your DIARY



AMICI DIARY DATES

2010

Thursdays, 7 January – 25 March

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Friday 19 March – Amici Social, including

Dinner at Simply Oak

Thursdays, 8 April – Thursday 1 July

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday, 8 May – Conducting Day – Trinity Methodist – 2.00pm -10.pm. There will be a concert in the evening – see below for detail about the day

Thursday, 20 May – AGM then rehearsal at Trinity Methodist – Start time will be 7.30pm

Saturday 26 June - Summer Concert at Dunton Parish Church, Bedfordshire
Rehearsal 2.00 – 5.00pm Concert 6.30pm

Thursdays, 2 September – 2 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday 9 October – CD recording
1.30-6.00pm at Trinity Methodist

Saturday, 4 December - Christmas concert
Venue to be confirmed.

2011

Thursdays, 6 January – 14 April

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Thursday 21 April – Sunday 1 May

10th tour of USA

Thursdays, 5 May – 30 June

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Thursday, 19 May – AGM then rehearsal at Trinity Methodist – Start time will be 7.30pm

Thursdays, 1 September – 1 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday, 3 December - Christmas concert
Venue tba.

OTHER EVENTS IN 2010

Saturday 13 February – Valentine Show with Shannon Express, Time After Time (the Quartet who sang in our Christmas Concert), Evolution (2009 UK Gold Medallist Quartet) and Gamlingay Village College Choir – 7.00pm - Holmemead School, Biggleswade. Tickets are available from John on 01462 700454. £8 and £6 for children under 16.

Saturday 27 March – St Swithun's Singers Sing for their Supper – 7.00pm – St Neots Road Methodist Church, Sandy – a cheerful evening with songs – Tickets from Elizabeth Gammell

Saturday 10 April – St Mary's Singers Spring Concert – 7.00pm at St Mary's Church, Potton. Programme will include *The Armed Man* (Mass for Peace): Karl Jenkins; *Hear My Prayer*: Felix Mendelssohn; Elgar: *String Serenade*

Wednesday 14 April Choral Workshop directed by Douglas Coombes 7.45-9.45pm at St Mary's Church Hall, Potton. This is a free event – all are welcome for a musical fun evening

Friday and Saturday 2 & 3 July
7.30pm St Mary's Singer's Summer Concert. Programme with include the first performance of *A Bedfordshire Folk Song Suite* by Douglas Coombes

Wednesday 14 July St Swithun's Singers Summer Concert – 7.30pm at Sandy Parish Church. Programme to include a new work by Douglas Coombes based on poems about birds. (At the time of going to press, 3 songs have been composed. D.C.)

Friday and Saturday 10 & 11 December
St Mary's Singer's Christmas Concerts
7.00pm at Dunton Parish Church

from l to r: Ronnie White (former Chairman), Elizabeth Gammell (immediate past Chairman), Beverly Goater (current Chairman) snapped at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, on the Amici Singers' USA Tour 2008.



Chairman's report

Beverly Goater writes ...

I can hardly believe how the time has flown since I took over the reins as chairman for The Amicis from the very capable hands of Elizabeth Gammell in September 2009. It was quite daunting taking over from someone who had performed the task with such apparent ease and grace. However, I was encouraged by the support proffered to me from Elizabeth, the rest of the committee and choir members.

The beginning of my term of office commenced with our move to Trinity Methodist Church, after a sad goodbye to Brook House but a welcome to more room! In true Amici style we embraced the change, quickly settled in, and under the expert guidance of Douglas began to rehearse.

The move to our new venue entailed some extra paperwork, including the need for a formal risk assessment for our rehearsals. This has now been completed, and you can be reassured that all committee members now carry torches! This is to assist us all in the very unlikely event of a power cut. Various other potential risks were looked at and if there is a need for medical advice we have several medical professionals within the choir to support this.

We were all involved in welcoming our many new members, the result of fantastic efforts by our publicist, George Prosser - supported by his wife Margaret - choir members bringing along friends, and even as a result of chatting in the swimming pool! We had an entertaining evening for the new members to meet

the choir in a social gathering on 21 November 2009, discovering high levels of competitiveness among us with Douglas's musical quiz!

As the weeks progressed with Douglas skilfully guiding us through the new music, we focused on our Christmas concert. I think the Hebridean '*Christ child's Lullaby*' especially captivated us all.

This new and exciting phase of The Amicis, however, was tinged with sadness. We were all deeply affected by the news that choir member Maggie Wright had suddenly become unwell with a very poor prognosis, and were then shocked at her sudden death earlier than had been expected in November. The emotion felt by the choir for Maggie was beautifully expressed by their singing at her funeral. I think many of us often recall her comments, looks during rehearsals and her infectious laugh! Although only with the choir for a comparatively short time, Maggie gave much of her time and efforts to support the choir; she is greatly missed.

The hidden talents lurking within the choir often surprise us. If you feel you may have a talent or skill that could be offered to support The Amicis, please speak to your section leader or any committee member. One of the many jobs Maggie used to perform was designing and printing posters and tickets for our concerts; if any of you feel you have the skills for this task please let us know.

As we settle into our second term at Trinity and look forward to singing together in 2010, I thank you all for your support to one another and to myself.

BATTLE PROMS 2010

The venues and dates of this year's concerts are:

Burghley House – 10 July
Blenheim Palace – 17 July
Hatfield House – 24 July
Highclere Castle – 21 July
Borde Hill – 7 August
Althorp – 14 August

You will find all the details on the website:
www.battleproms.com

Also on the website is a short promo film which certainly captures the excitement and flavour of the event as well as an extensive photo gallery

Happiness is like a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but, if you will sit down quietly, may alight on you.

Nathaniel Hawthorne



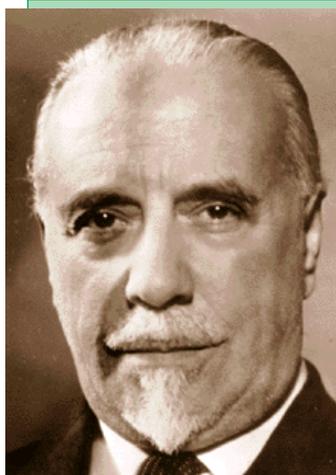
CONDUCTING DAY AT TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH, BIGGLESWADE ON SATURDAY MAY 8TH 2010

As we have a number of Amici Singers who have not experienced a day like this I thought it would help to give you some idea of what it involves. The delegates come from various parts of the country, very few having come from the immediate area. It is a very full day and it starts for me at 10.00am, usually at Brook House. This is when I meet the conductors for the first time and discuss the music that they will be conducting in the afternoon. They would have already been sent 2 pieces of music that I grade according to the delegates' ability, based on what they have said on their application forms. Very occasionally I get this wrong, as some conductors state that they are more experienced than they really are! I soon find out about this in this morning session. The music that is chosen for them is from the current Amici repertoire which you know well. This enables the delegates to concentrate on the techniques of conducting and not having to worry about note-bashing! This session should finish around 12.30pm. We then break off for lunch and then journey over to Biggleswade.

In the afternoon, starting at 2.00pm in Trinity Methodist Church the conductors take it in turns to rehearse the choir for 20 minutes. I try not to interrupt but sometimes help is needed; or a conductor may blame the choir for something which is the conductor's fault. For example on one occasion, one conductor kept blaming the choir for getting slower. I had to step in to tell that person that he was the one getting slower and all that the choir was doing was following. Another time one conductor got an attack of the nerves and just could not get the choir started. This session is probably the most fascinating aspect of the day; sometimes it is also quite amusing when the choir struggle to follow; and at times facial expressions really are a picture. The choir's reaction varies tremendously to the different conductors and the sound of the choir frequently changes. The hardest thing for the choir is to really follow the conductor and not to sing the music as they do for me. In the past I have been so impressed how well the choir has adapted.

Tea at Trinity follows and choir members bring their own food. Then at 7.30pm there is a concert with the delegates conducting in concert conditions. This will then be followed by an open forum between conductors, choir and audience, another fascinating aspect of the day.

A recent advert stating that Egham Choral Society were looking for a conductor declared that there were 100 members and that the choir performed 300 concerts a year. So I don't want anyone to complain that the Amici Singers do too much!



BEECHAM STORIES

On clearing out some of the bookcases in the Amici room so that Carole can have more storage space, I came across a small book containing stories about Sir Thomas Beecham. Here are a few about his encounters with female singers:

When he was rehearsing Massenet's opera *Don Quichotte* with Chaliapin as Don Quixote, the voice of Dulcinea twice came in too late as the Don died. Beecham said to the soprano, 'Twice Mr. Chaliapin died in bed, with the most affecting realism, and twice you

have sung too late. Why?'

'It's not my fault, Sir Thomas,' replied the soprano in panic. 'It's – it's Mr. Chaliapin. He dies too soon.'

'My dear,' said Beecham, 'no opera singer ever dies too soon!'

- O - O - O -

Asked by Beecham to sing the soprano part in Handel's *Messiah*, the singer confessed that she did not know the part, but she accepted the offer. Meeting her sometime later, he asked how the task of learning was progressing.

'I've been working hard on it.' She replied. 'The score

goes with me everywhere – to work, to meals, up to bed at night.....'

'Then,' he replied, 'may I trust we may look forward to an immaculate conception?'

- O - O - O -

Of one *Walküre* soprano – Beecham said her singing reminded him of a cart coming downhill with the brake on.

- O - O - O -

A soprano was rehearsing the dying Mimi in the last act of *La Bohème* with Beecham conducting. He called out: 'I want more tone – I can't hear you.'

'Don't you realise,' she protested, 'that one can't give of one's best when one is in a prone position?'

'I seem to recollect,' he replied, 'that I have given some of my best performances in that position.'

- O - O - O -

Incidentally, it was Sir Thomas Beecham who when asked by his father, to alter some of the verses in the annual *Beecham's Pills Christmas Carol Annual*, penned the following immortal words:

Hark! The herald angels sing!

Beecham's pills are just the thing.

Two for a woman, one for a child...

Peace on Earth and mercy mild.

'These sentiments,' Beecham related, 'especially the ellipsis, seem to me admirably to express the rapture which is occasioned by a good effortless release.'

Posture

I have noticed at rehearsals some of you sit and stand in a way which does not help singing. So here is an article I wrote a while back for the newsletter of Up Beat, an association for conductors (and would be conductors) I founded last year. (Incidentally it has been very successful as there are now 196 members – and still growing.)

Standing

- The feet should be firmly on the ground and slightly apart, not wider than the shoulders with an even distribution of weight - do not put weight on one hip with a resulting one stiff leg and the other bent.
- Legs should never be crossed. Also legs must not be locked, but knees should be relaxed and very slightly bent.
- Tension in the legs affects the whole body and the breathing.
- Feel tall with shoulders back and chest reasonably high - but never raise the shoulders, especially when taking a breath. This will break up the flow of air and restrict the quality of sound. Raising the shoulders often takes place when singers (especially young ones), are asked to take a big or deep breath.
- The head should be relaxed, held up evenly and naturally and not pushed to one side.
- The hands should be at the sides. They should not be behind the back or grasped in front, or folded, which will cause body tension
- Always remember that if we stand incorrectly, we put many muscles under stress, and often we will not notice or feel the problem at the time - but we will pay for it later

Sitting

- Do not cross the legs. This is often done out of habit and to rest music on the lap
- When music is on the lap, this makes the singer look down, causing tension around the neck and encourages the body to sag. Then when the singer looks up, the back of the neck becomes tight. Constant straightening up from the sagging position, which often means pulling back the shoulders, raising the ribcage and arching the back is tiring and also causes wear and tear on the voice and brain. So always hold up the music in a relaxed comfortable position, so that only the eyes move, and not the head, to look at the teacher/conductor
- So when sitting, it is a good idea to sit forward with both feet on the ground, at right angles to the ground and with legs slightly apart. Make sure that you are sitting on the two bony knobbles of the



Michaelangelo's *David*.
Great statue, but terrible posture for singing.

buttocks. These can easily be found by sitting on the hands. No matter how well padded the individual, these knobbles can be found.

Douglas