

# PETERSFIELD MUSICAL FESTIVAL

Registered Charity no. 900489



## NEWSLETTER 27: APRIL 2018 The 2018 Festival in retrospect

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### Rock Choir kick-starts the Festival

*To open the Festival, 110 singers from Petersfield Rock Choir and three other Rock Choir groups sang their hearts out in front of a near-capacity audience. Local singer-songwriter Sertari and her band took a guest slot in each half of the concert. A collection after the concert in aid of HomeStart Butser and Blue Apple Theatre raised over £750, divided equally between the two charities. Georgiana Greenaert, Chairman of Blue Apple Theatre, called the evening 'one of the most contagiously happy events I have had the pleasure to attend'.*

Georgiana wrote:

A VERY big thank you for a wonderful evening last night. It was uplifting; such a joyful spirit around and absolutely everyone with huge smiles on their faces. Rock Choir were real fun; a tangible demonstration of the social importance of music making, as you said in your welcoming compering and in your

introduction to the printed programme. It was most enjoyable to be sitting at the front, as watching Danny Gortler conduct added a whole extra level to the evening.

Guest soloist Sertari and her band were accomplished, contributing beautifully to the well balanced programme for the opening evening of the Festival.

Without meaning to be over-poetic about it, the evening truly seemed a marriage of the spirit of ensemble performing, and how transformational that can be to each individual. It proved, as Blue Apple Theatre does in its own way, that you don't have to be a superstar before you perform; you become one as you perform.

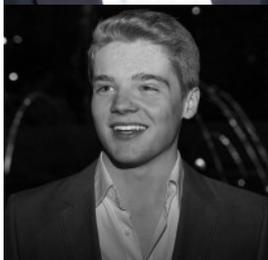
I hope we might see some of you at Blue Apple Theatre's performances in June, 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>, at the Theatre Royal, Winchester, when we might perhaps mirror you in the spirit of ensemble performance.

All smiles – Danny Gortler introduces one of the items



## Spell-binding Evangelist in dramatic St John Passion

Soloists Ruairi Bowen (Evangelist),  
Catrin Pryce-Jones,  
Hamish McLaren, James Geidt,  
Aaron Godfrey-Mayes,  
Sung Kyu Choi



Reading Piers Burton Page's excellent programme notes, one wondered what the good people of Leipzig, attending the first performance of Bach's *St John Passion* on Good Friday 1724, would have thought had they known the same work would still be being performed 294 years later. Surprised – well probably! Amazed by the standard of performance – well, yes! For this was the opening choral concert of the Petersfield Musical Festival's 2018 season, where Bach's genius shone through. The large audience were attentive throughout and one could have heard the proverbial pin drop at several points in the narrative.

Bach takes no prisoners when it comes to what he asks his singers to do. The opening chorus is demanding, long (21 pages in my copy, not including the *da capo* repeat) and quite relentless. The Festival Chorus handled this with aplomb – from the opening 'Hail!' through pages of semiquaver runs, a multitude of accidentals and some very high notes in all departments. I was particularly impressed by the range of dynamics Paul Spicer coaxed from his singers; there was some excellent quiet singing and good phrasing. In fact the choral singing throughout the evening was of a high standard. Alright, there was one moment when the basses parted company with the rest of the choir, but I doubt if many in the audience noticed unless they were following the score. The chorales, with Bach's spine-tingling harmonies, worked their magic and were sung with great sensitivity, excellent balance and one could 'hear the words!'

The five soloists were all accomplished, although one has to say Ruairi Bowen's magnificent performance as the Evangelist rather over-shadowed the rest. From his first recitative Bowen took the audience into his confidence and held them spellbound throughout; there were moments of high drama, compassion and tenderness – his word painting held us in thrall and his clarity and vocal range were splendid. This was a performance to be treasured. He was ably supported by Sung Kyu Choi's Christus. Choi has a rich, warm, very mellifluous voice ideally suited to the part.

The other soloists have less to do; I particularly liked soprano Catrin Pryce-Jones's *I follow thee gladly!* with its charming accompaniment of flutes and bassoon and I would mention here the excellent continuo playing of David Burrowes ('cello) and Mark Dancer (chamber organ). James Geidt has a big bass voice but the unforgiving acoustics of the Festival Hall occasionally got the better of him and the words were hard to hear. Not so though with Aaron Godfrey-Mayes (tenor) who, although somewhat overshadowed by Ruairi Bowen, sang with clarity and good diction. Hamish McLaren (countertenor) again had a pleasant if somewhat under-powered voice and was a little overwhelmed by the orchestra.

I was talking to someone after the concert who said, "I normally find the *St John Passion* a bit long..... but not tonight!". I wholeheartedly agreed. This was a performance with vigour, drama and musicality. Paul Spicer drove the narrative on with well-chosen tempi and his direction was, as always, meticulous and detailed and the pared down Southern Pro Musica were on good form.

I had heard via the grapevine that the rehearsals for this evening had been, at times, hard work. All I can say is that the hard work paid off. Congratulations to all.

David Francombe

Paul Spicer in rehearsal  
Photos: Tracey Howe



## Youth concerts were a showcase and inspiration for young musicians in our schools

*Hamish Newport, Head of Music at Churcher's College Junior School, enjoyed the opportunities the concerts gave for both junior and senior pupils. Hamish writes –*

This year was another resounding success for Petersfield's young musicians, with over 330 singers and instrumentalists coming together from the local area to collaborate in two concert performances on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March. There was a great breadth to the programme showcasing a wide genre of musical styles from the combined choirs.

The concerts started with 'Songs for Peace', three rounds skilfully handled by conductor Ben Harlan, who really drew out of the performers the different atmospheres created by each song. *O Lovely Peace* featured a beautiful duet from Harry Hetherington and Sage Bidwell, and *In Dangerous Times* closed the set with a rousing anthem-like quality. The choir were accompanied by instrumentalists from Bedales Prep School, Dunhurst.

One of the highlights for many of the junior/preparatory school aged children is the opportunity to watch the senior school instrumental ensembles. The Combined Schools Wind Band gave incredibly rhythmic and energetic performances of the theme tunes from *Mission Impossible* and *The Avengers*. Directed by Robert Peck and Sue Riggs, this large group of musicians were extremely secure and produced a powerful performance.

Later in the programme, the Combined Schools Jazz Band gave explosive performances of *Birdland* and the medley *Hard to Handle*. The audience were treated to some fantastic saxophone and trumpet solos and the band's professionalism and commitment clearly shone through, due to directors Helen Purchase and Natalie Voller.

A complete change of atmosphere was created as Samantha Wood conducted 'Music from Jamaica', giving the Combined Schools Choir a laid-back reggae feel as

they were ably supported by a band from TPS. Martha Fletcher gave strong vocal solos and the whole set allowed the audience to enjoy the enthusiasm and relaxed, up-beat performance that the children gave.

Congratulations to Ben Coles and Thomas Baynes on their winning compositions performed in Monday night's concert, from the event organised by the Michael Hurd Memorial Fund. Ben Coles' song *Truth and a Lie* was extremely well crafted and was well balanced with imaginative lyrics and a great vocal delivery. Thomas Baynes' composition *Morning*, for violin (Megan Bishop) and piano (Matteo Lewis) used a wide range of harmonic colours and really explored its musical material in a thoughtful and emotional way.

On Wednesday evening PASSO (Petersfield Area Schools String Orchestra) gave highly engaged performances of *Con Moto*, *The Legend of Deadman's*

*Cove* and *Rock Solid*. The orchestra were extremely together and they played with real energy and enthusiasm, testament to the assured direction of Sue Bint. It was encouraging to see such a wide variety of string players in the local area and the quality of sound which they produce when brought together.

The concerts ended with the

Combined School Choir singing songs for the football world cup. The wide range of styles from rock to African and Latin American percussion rhythms ended the evening in a joyous way. Ed Williamson deftly led the Combined School Choir and accompanying band and it was great to see the auditorium and performers come together in waving their arms triumphantly during *We are the Champions*.

With such a large age-range of children, the Youth Concerts are just as much about inspiring our young performers and their continued exploration of music-making as they are about showcasing their talents to the audience. Many congratulations to all our young musicians and their teachers for coming together for this special event.



Audience and inter-school choir listen to the combined jazz bands of TPS and Churcher's College, directed by Helen Purchase. Photo: Amanda Inkley

## Family Concert took young audience on a journey to the Teddy Bears' Picnic.

*The 40 players of Basingstoke Chamber Orchestra treated a big family audience to a delightful trip through the world of film music to reach the scene of the teddy bears' picnic.*

A four-foot teddy bear on the stage, complete with little teddies, picnic basket and accessories, kept the destination in everyone's mind as the music travelled across the sea with *Barnacle Bill* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and flew through the air with *Mary Poppins*.

*Coronation Scot* evoked the world of steam trains, amidst sighs of nostalgic recognition from older members of the audience. During the travels, we stopped off to enjoy *Tubby the Tuba*, with delightful performances from tuba and piccolo, at the very bottom and top of the orchestra's range.

Sarah Scotchmer skilfully kept the young audience engaged as she narrated 'Tubby' and introduced the other pieces, charmingly assisted by her own teddy. At the end, everyone joined in a rousing chorus of the 'Teddy Bears' Picnic', holding up the teddies (and other creatures!) they had brought, and then the junior members of the audience had a chance to talk to the players and to try the instruments. Amidst the happy cacophony, you could hear several budding bassoonists! Refreshments provided by Sheet W I were free to mums and grans, in honour of Mothers' Day.

Many thanks to conductor Stephen Scotchmer, Sarah Scotchmer and the members of Basingstoke Chamber Orchestra for our third Family Concert, introducing the youngsters to the wonderful world of the orchestra!

*Philip Young*



Young members of the audience try the instruments after the concert



## Concerts in St Peter's Church

### A full house for the 'Trout'

*St Peter's Church was packed for the free lunchtime lecture-recital given by Angela Zanders, piano, with a fine quartet of string players. A retiring collection raised an amazing £1000 for the Festival's fund for the support of young musicians, the Michael Hurd Memorial Fund.*

The Lunchtime Recital on 13 March was a performance of Schubert's masterpiece, the Piano Quintet in A major – known as the 'Trout' Quintet – for piano, violin, viola, cello and double bass. It was introduced by Angela Zanders, the pianist of the quintet, who gave us a fascinating illustrated talk about the work, which uses the composer's song – *Die Forelle*, 'The Trout' – as the theme for a set of variations in the fourth movement.

This tuneful, evocative work was given a warm performance, but in the acoustics of St Peter's the violin and viola were somewhat overshadowed by the cello and double bass.

*Ann Pinhey*

### Varied programme in organ recital

*The Festival's third biennial organ recital at St Peter's was given by Timothy Ravalde, Assistant Organist at Chichester Cathedral and well known to Petersfield Festival audiences as the conductor of Fernhurst Choral Society. Tim was also heard in action at the Festival Hall in the final concert.*

The programme for Timothy Ravalde's organ recital on 14 March was wide ranging, from the Elizabethan composer William Byrd to an exciting piece by Edward Picton-Turbervill, a very talented 25 year old composer whose grandmother lives in Petersfield. His piece was a delight and much appreciated by the audience.

We had music by Bach, Couperin, César Franck, Mendelssohn and Reger, all played with love and precision, using a wide variety of registration. Timothy Ravalde's introduction to each piece was illuminating and delivered with great clarity and enthusiasm.

*Ann Pinhey*

## Petersfield Orchestra excels in Rachmaninov



Conductor Mark Biggins



Soloist Austen Scully

The Petersfield Orchestra's concert for this year's Festival was the third with their new conductor, Mark Biggins, but his first at the Festival; and with the prospect of Rachmaninov's mighty second symphony as the major work in the programme, the event was eagerly awaited and drew a capacity audience. They were not to be disappointed.

The first half of the concert prefaced the symphony with two works of very different styles and nationalities. Humperdinck's Overture to *Hansel and Gretel* was strongly characterised, from the gentle but perilously exposed opening horn quartet to the sprightly woodwind themes and dramatic climaxes for full orchestra that follow. Austen Scully was the virtuoso soloist in Saint-Saens' Cello Concerto no. 1. In contrast to the sentiment of Humperdinck and full-blown romanticism of Rachmaninov, this was a performance that relished the Gallic poise and wit of the music. The orchestra accompanied with elegant precision in the deliberately old-fashioned minuet section, and the soloist really came into his own in the final section, with its swirling lines, rhetorical flourishes and extrovert finish.

Rachmaninov's Second Symphony has had a chequered history, often – as Piers Burton-Page's programme note explained – subject to cuts and alterations even in the hands of the most experienced conductors and orchestras. But on this occasion the ensemble of 74 players – perhaps the largest group the Petersfield Orchestra has ever assembled? – demonstrated that this generously-proportioned work can be entirely convincing in its original form. Under Mark Biggins' nuanced direction, the music kept a sense of purpose through its huge paragraphs. In the first movement there was an unhurried sense of forward movement, with attention always focused on the instruments carrying the musical material. Leading voices sang out; subsidiary parts were kept in the background; the conductor was evidently in contact with every section of the orchestra. The second movement sprang onto the scene with vigour, the strings providing a lush texture in the episodes of rich melody. There was fine solo woodwind playing in Giacomo Pizzuto's cor anglais solo early in the work, and in Rob Blanken's expressive clarinet melody in the third movement, where the slowly rising and falling orchestral climaxes were carefully graduated. The final movement was again full of character: excitable – even light on its feet – at the start, and powerful in the climaxes, when the volume of the full brass section called for a bigger space than the Festival Hall.

At the interesting pre-concert discussion between Piers Burton-Page, Austen Scully and Mark Biggins, Mark commented that his aim was 'to ride the wave of the music'. He succeeded – magnificently!

*Philip Young*

## Cabaret night: Kit and McConnel – hilarious, thought-provoking and occasionally risqué

*Near the knuckle at times, but the audience lapped it up!*

Having individually survived a lengthy passage on the M25, our two cabaret performers still arrived in time to provide their audience with an evening's musical entertainment positively packed with an abundance of subtle wit, biting satire, humour and poignancy.

The intimacy of the setting invited plenty of interaction with the audience, particularly those in the front row. Some very timely heckling at the start from young Miriam who, at 13 weeks was arguably the youngest member of the audience, only added to the joy of the evening. As for, at eighty six, possibly the oldest member, she was last seen leaving the Festival Hall at the end of the show with Kit Hesketh-Harvey in tow, after a very romantic love song, never to reappear, leaving poor James McConnel to conclude the proceedings by himself!

In between we were entertained with a song warning us of the perils of dining at Nando's, set to the tune of Abba's 'Fernando', and then an irreverent rendition concerning Donald The Effluent (Trump) set to the tune of Nellie the Elephant. Next we were treated to a demonstration of how some of →

the more popular West End melodies may have been plagiarized from classical favourites. Try singing Lloyd Webber's 'Don't Cry for Me, Argentina' to an accompaniment of Bach's first Prelude in C for example, and you will get the idea ! Hypocrisy? Very probably, but who cares!



Notwithstanding his 'Soggy Bottom', James McConnel opened up his heart to us about his love for Mary Berry, and then of living with, but clearly not suffering from, Tourette's syndrome, which he does. But perhaps, for me, the highlight of the evening was an astonishing piece of improvisation based on the Christian name letters of a lady named Clare, randomly selected from the audience and translated into notes on the piano keyboard via a system devised, we were told, by Liszt. The end result was a beautifully melodic and haunting serenade which had a suggestion of Rachmaninov about it . . . or was I still thinking of the previous evening's concert?!

There were many more highlights throughout. Sadly I have no room here to describe them, but they constituted a delightfully varied, hilarious, and often thought provoking cabaret show. Never again shall I consider the letters STD to have anything to do with a standard dialling tone! Please can Kit and McConnel come back again soon?!

John Whitaker

## Mozart's Requiem: 'a fitting climax to a splendid week's music-making'

This year, Hampshire County Youth Chamber Orchestra made their first appearance at the Festival, accompanying the choir in Mozart's Requiem. In the orchestral items in the first half of the concert, they were conducted by Carl Clausen (below), County Ensemble Director – Hampshire County Youth Orchestras.



The final concert of this year's Petersfield Musical Festival was, on paper, something of a mixed bag. But not in practice! The programme, ranging from string quartet to full orchestra via wind and brass ensembles and organ showed off the splendid talents of the Hampshire County Youth Chamber Orchestra.

The evening began with a spirited and rhythmical performance of the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. There was some finely detailed playing from the woodwind and the whole was well shaped and phrased. Next came a charming *Canzonetta* by Mendelssohn for string quartet followed by an arrangement for wind band of Peter Warlock's *Capriol Suite*. I, like I suspect many others, struggled through the piano duet version in my youth so it was nice to hear it properly played! Bruckner's *Locus iste*, with its sonorous and rich harmonies works well in this setting for brass choir, although this *old fogey* still prefers the choral version.

Britten's setting of part of the mystic Christopher Smart's *Rejoice in the Lamb* was, for me, the highlight of the evening. I sang the alto solo as a very small boy at my boarding school in the late 40s, only a few years after it was written, and it has remained one of my favourite pieces ever since. Britten marked his score with a plethora of instructions to his performers and Paul Spicer, chorus, organ and percussion followed these to the letter.

From the *ppp* opening, with Tim Ravalde's meticulous and detailed organ playing, through to the *fff* "For the Trumpet of God is a blessed intelligence" the choir sang with clear diction and enthusiasm. Alright, the size of the chorus was probably larger than Britten envisaged, but this didn't seem to matter given the commitment of the singers.

The four soloists were equally matched. Claire Ward's soprano paean to cat Geoffrey was delightful and very moving with its beautiful climax, "For he knows that God is his Saviour". Mezzo-soprano Hannah Bennett's witty recounting of the valorous mouse standing up to the predations of a cat brought a smile to the audience and Aaron Godfrey-Mayes' tenor blessed the flowers with warmth and excellent phrasing. Britten doesn't give the bass much to do; Niall Anderson's turn came in the Mozart. I had not come across this version with organ and percussion before but the latter provided discrete drama coupled with Tim Ravalde's incisive and virtuoso organ playing. →



Soloists Claire Ward,  
Hannah Bennett,  
Aaron Godfrey-Mayes  
and Niall Anderson

After the interval came Mozart's *Requiem*. From the rich opening D minor *Requiem aeternam* – excellent entries here from all parts – to the piano and rhythmical *et lux perpetua* followed by Claire Ward's beautiful *Te decet hymnus*, we knew we were in for a treat. Whenever I hear this piece, I always look forward to the *Kyrie* fugue and I was not disappointed. Taking it at a cracking pace, Paul Spicer was rewarded with some strong singing by the chorus and the following *Dies Irae* was equally exciting. I particularly liked the basses interspersions, "quantus tremor est futurus".

Bass Niall Anderson came into his own in the *Tuba mirum* section. Mimicking the trombones, Niall's rich voice filled the hall. He was joined in turn by the other soloists, who blended together very well and the *sotto voce* section, *Cum vix Justus* was magical, as was their *Recordare* quartet.

Space does not permit me to highlight the many felicitous moments that followed except to say that the chorus sang with energy and vigour throughout the piece and seemed to me to be particularly well balanced. There was much good phrasing and dynamic range and one could hear the words – and one can't always say that! The four soloists were very well matched and the young players of the Hampshire County Youth Chamber Orchestra provided a very professional and attentive accompaniment. The orchestra's Director of Music, Carl Clausen, conducted the *Figaro* overture and Paul Spicer was in charge for the Britten and Mozart. Both coaxed excellent performances from their players and singers and the whole evening was a fitting climax to a splendid week's music making.

David Francombe



Paul Spicer rehearses the Festival chorus in Petersfield Methodist Church  
Photo: Tracey Howe

## Saturday 29 September 2018

10.30 am – 4.30 pm in the Quad at Bedales School

# Sir George Dyson *The Canterbury Pilgrims*

An open choral workshop directed by Paul Spicer  
Accompanist Mark Dancer

An introduction to George Dyson's vivid celebration of English history and character, by Dyson's biographer and leading international exponent. The workshop will explore all the choral sections of the work and will be equally suitable for Festival singers preparing for 2019 and for those who would enjoy a one-day tour of this unjustly neglected masterpiece.

Click here for a booking form or visit  
[www.petersfieldmusicalfestival.org.uk](http://www.petersfieldmusicalfestival.org.uk)

