

# TOWCESTER

## CHORAL SOCIETY

October 2010

### Welcome to our New Musical Director - Helen Swift

Helen Swift (soprano) started her singing career in Liverpool as a member of the National Youth Choir of Great Britain at the age of fourteen and had early success in the BBC Choir-girl of the Year competition. She then went on to win a choral scholarship to Clare College Cambridge where she studied music and then went on to study opera in London and Dublin. Now based in Oxfordshire, she has performed in many of the major concert venues including St Paul's Cathedral, Grace Cathedral (San Francisco) and Domplatz (Salzburg). Recent opera roles include Pamina in the Magic Flute with the Magdela Opera Group, Oberto in Alcina with Cambridge Handel Opera Group and Susannah in Figaro.



Helen has worked as a choral director in London for many years both with children and adult choirs performing a variety of music from classical to jazz, folk and pop. She has worked with choral societies and church choirs, conducting several recordings for television and radio and has worked with the National Youth Choir of Great Britain. Helen took over as Musical Director of Towcester Choral Society in September 2010. She passionately believes in the power of the human voice and the widespread benefits that music and singing can have in people's lives.

She has worked with many distinguished artists, including Sir David Willcocks, Stephen Cleobury and John Rutter. She has appeared as a soloist on many CD'S including Lesley Garrett's album "Travel into Light", recently recorded a Max Richter film score and DVD for comic Lee Evans.

Helen has written music for children's choirs and orchestra with a performance in London of her adaptation of Roald Dahl's "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf". Outside her musical world Helen loves travel and enjoys sport from marathon running to kick-boxing and salsa dancing.

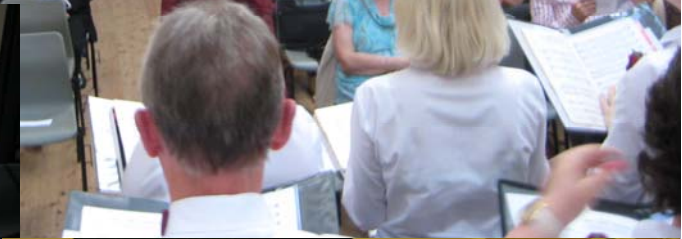
### From the Editors

We have started our season with a bang under the dynamic direction of Helen. The warm up exercises alone are going to keep us fit, and if we don't learn to breathe properly, it won't be Helen's fault! We have already taken part in the 123 Sing! initiative to encourage people to sing. Our venue at Towcester Leisure Centre coincided with the "wave and rave" in the pool, but we held our own, and the small transient audience seemed to enjoy it, especially those who joined in. The process of replacing our keyboard and amplification system is progressing, having tried out two so far. This has been made possible with funds for community purposes from Cllr. Rosemary Bromwich. The group who joined Fiori Musicale for the workshop certainly had their work cut out to learn the music in a short time, and the Concert in St. Lawrence Church was very enjoyable, and worth all their efforts. Thanks to all who have contributed items for this newsletter, and we are sure that everybody will enjoy this new season.

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The Concert



The Party

## Spring Concert 2010

A packed house enjoyed Mary Rice's final concert as conductor of Towcester Choral Society in the Town Hall on Saturday 12th June. Ex-members travelled from around the country to join the choir in a programme of music as varied as "In the mood" and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus".

Mary Rice has served with distinction as Musical Director for 23 years, joining in 1987, initially for one season. Although apprehensive, Mary soon discovered that she had found her niche and she was persuaded to stay. Under her direction, the choir has grown from 30 members to 55 and has established a reputation as one of the county's leading community choirs, presenting a varied programme of classical and light music.



The Mayor of Towcester  
Jacqueline Hart and  
Mary Rice at the concert

Mary Rice said 'My 23 years with Towcester Choral Society have brought great happiness and fulfilment. I am grateful for the support and friendship I have found with the choir and look forward to watching it go from strength to strength under its new conductor.'

Mary was presented with a number of gifts to mark her retirement, including a quilt signed by the members and made by soprano Petra Giffen and alto Gill Reeman. Chairman Margaret Hawkins said 'It has been a privilege to sing with Mary. Her dedication and conscientiousness are second to none and the quality and passion for which we are renowned are entirely due to her. Although we are looking forward to working with our new Musical Director, we shall remember Mary's reign with great affection. We look forward to seeing her in the audience at our concerts and are sure that she will continue to support us in any way she can.'

## A Really Big Adventure

### Faure's *Requiem* and the world premiere of Karl Jenkins' *Gloria*, commissioned by The Really Big Chorus – Royal Albert Hall, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2010

It is not often that a bunch of self-selected amateurs has the chance to sing in a world premiere, not even when the work is by so prolific a composer as Karl Jenkins, but having been presented with the opportunity, about 20 of us grabbed it with eager hands.

Our pre-concert preparations, using the specially prepared rehearsal CDs, were not encouraging. How could this harsh, aggressive score, with its punishingly high soprano line, turn into the frighteningly beautiful work of which we know Karl Jenkins to be capable? Would it be redeemed only by the lyrical and lovely Laudamus Te, which is at once engaging? The portents were not good.

This year, unfortunately, TRBC's summer singday coincided with the British Grand Prix, which closes the A43 between Towcester and the M40 and clogs every road for miles around. In spite of our having discussed an alternative route with the coach company, our driver seemed determined, our repeated queries notwithstanding, to take us to Silverstone, where we arrived some 90 minutes after leaving Towcester. The driver's incredulity when we pointed out that, much as we might have enjoyed the Grand Prix, it wasn't really



where we should be, quickly turned to embarrassment, but he stoutly set about picking his way through the car-filled lanes to find a route to London. We resigned ourselves to missing the morning rehearsal and sat back to enjoy the majesty of the red kites we spotted wheeling overhead. The driver put his foot down and we were pleasantly surprised that we were able to sneak into our seats just as the preliminary announcements were drawing to a close.

Performing a new work must be daunting for any conductor, especially one by a man claimed to be the world's most popular classical composer. But if Brian Kay found it a strain to lead his enthusiastic amateurs, then it did not show, not even when Karl Jenkins himself appeared. Brian Kay seemed calm and unruffled throughout, correcting us when necessary in so charming a manner that it was almost a pleasure to be admonished. The rehearsals went well and both conductor and composer declared themselves pleased. We hoped we would be able to maintain the standard during the performance.



Although the auditorium was not full, there was a respectably sized audience. We suspected that the attraction was Karl Jenkins, rather than TRBC. The first item on the programme was Faure's *Requiem*, surely one of the most beautiful pieces ever written. We sang well, but the quality of the soloists had us all green with envy.

Before we sang the *Gloria*, Don Munro, founder of TRBC, introduced Karl Jenkins for a short question and answer session. Was he not worried about entrusting his new work to us, Don Monro enquired? Karl Jenkins replied that many of his works were premiered by amateur choirs. Don Monro commented that some of these might be better than we were, but Karl Jenkins defended our honour. The rehearsal had sounded pretty good to him.

When we sang the *Gloria*, all the misgivings we had felt when practising with the CD disappeared. The phrases which had sounded so disjointed all came together – even the very high notes. With 2,500 voices and full orchestra, it sounded wonderful – as enthusiastic as a *Gloria* should be; muscular Christianity at its best. But Karl Jenkins being Karl Jenkins, the work had to include some idiosyncrasies. These came in the form of short devotional readings between the movements, each from a different faith – Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. Musically, these added nothing and the work would stand just as well without them. Personally, I found them a distraction. It was interesting, however, to read the translations from the programme. The Hindu and Islamic texts expressed sentiments very similar to those of the Christian faith, which, presumably, is a point Jenkins wished to make. It reminded me of Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi*, in which the eponymous hero managed to be a practising member of all those three religions at the same time. Perhaps Karl Jenkins has read it. The book claims it is a novel to make one believe in God. Maybe the same could be said for the *Gloria*. The Taoist and Buddhist readings were of a more philosophical nature, but spiritual nonetheless. Perhaps the work is not so much muscular Christianity as muscular religiosity, or even muscular spirituality. It is certainly possible to take it whatever way one likes.

So should Towcester Choral Society introduce this weird and wonderful work to the citizens of Northamptonshire? Like many of Karl Jenkins' works, the *Gloria* needs a large chorus and an orchestra to be heard to best advantage. Nevertheless, we managed a creditable performance of *The Armed Man* by roping in a few instrumentalists to augment the piano accompaniment. Why not try something similar for the *Gloria*? If we think we could not do justice to the work on our own, why should we not enlist other choirs and musicians and have our own singday? TCS as initiator of a Northamptonshire premiere. That sounds good to me.

Margaret Hawkins

**Venetian Pageant Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010**  
**St. Lawrence Church. Towcester**

The Choral Society had been approached earlier in the year by Penelope Rapson, director of Fiori Musicale, a locally based choir, providing principally baroque and classical music performances outside London, to take part with them in a concert of Venetian music, as part of the BBC's Choral Ambition scheme.

After one false start, when it was planned to include this performance of "grand and ceremonial music" in the Towcester Midsummer Music in June, a new date in September was proposed, and following the Committee's decision to respond favourably to Dr Rapson's approach, a number of Choral Society members put their names down for the event. Probably not many of them had much idea at that stage about what they would be singing, and what other involvement there would be for the Society on the day.

In fact it took some time for that information to reach us, and with only two or three weeks to go, we received our music for Andrea Gabrieli's La Battaglia an eight part 'battle piece' and Giovanni Gabrieli's In Ecclesiis, a four part piece for soloist and choir. The singing to be accompanied by a brass ensemble made up of two players of His Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornettes, supplemented by additional local brass players. These were to be the two items that the two choirs, including other local singers including the Watling Singers, and children and young students from local schools, would perform together in concert.

Many of us had clearly not sung this sort of music before, and as the first piece was in Italian some of us were a bit nervous. However after two rather hectic rehearsals without the Fiori Singers, and a final dress rehearsal with them on the day, we approached the concert in the evening with reasonable confidence, the word 'glorious chaos' being somewhere in our thoughts however.

As the evening's performance was to include some separate Fiori and brass ensemble pieces only, along with dances by local Primary school, and a procession, there were some difficult logistical problems to sort out at rehearsal. Indeed one got the impression that the programme was probably a bit ambitious, especially where the dancing children were concerned, who were clearly under rehearsed, but who were obviously enjoying themselves. Their presence however must have contributed to the size of the audience that evening, which without these attending children's parents and friends might have been a bit thin.

It would probably be fair to say that the experience was unusual but rather exhausting. Although the instrumental playing was of good standard, especially the playing of the sagbutt by Abigail Newman, the pieces sung by the Fiori choir only were, for a group of their apparent standing, perhaps a little disappointing. Also the making of their invited singers to feel welcome and comfortable as part of the whole group of singers was perhaps a little lacking, with for example brass players suddenly thrust amongst the singers, who were already tight for space. However it was an introduction to that era of music and singing for many of us, and in that respect a useful experience, but lacking in "WOW" factor for me.

John Barnett

**AN APPRECIATION from Ann Whatton**

As many of you know I have left the Choir after nearly 30 years as a member. Having had a heart op. last year, I have been having breathing problems when I am singing, so it is now time to stop! I shall miss the meetings on a Tuesday, the concerts, the workshops, the holidays abroad with large international choirs and their concerts. However I shall not miss the cold, no, very cold churches we have suffered rehearsals and concerts in.

After 6 months with Audrey, John became our Conductor, and when John finished Mary came, and the rest is history. I have seen the Choir grow from 20+ to our present numbers. I have seen 'anything goes' as uniform for the members to the present smart dress and capes that we now wear. I have seen the soprano section grow, the alto section grow, the bass section grow, but the poor tenors have a hard time over the years but those we have had have performed brilliantly, well done!

In the future I hope to make your concerts, and any social events that I am invited to.

Good luck everyone.

All best wishes,

Ann

P.S Thank-you once again for the wonderful flowers you sent me.

**Editors:** TCS wishes Ann and Gill Reeman, who have left since the summer, all the best for their futures.

**Our fame spreads to New Zealand**

If you look back through your collection of newsletters, you will find that in the May 2008 edition, we reproduced a programme from 50 years earlier. This included contributions from two soloists – Joan Gascoyne (Soprano) and Graeme Dreadon (Tenor), as well as from two grand pianos. At the end of the article, I asked if anyone knew what had become of either of these soloists. In August, we were contacted by Graeme Dreadon, who had been alerted to the article by his son who, presumably, had come across it while surfing the web. I asked him how he had come to be singing with TCS, especially as he now lives in New Zealand. I have reproduced his reply below.

I went to London in 1956 and taught for nearly 4 years at a Secondary Modern in Hornsey. Tough work! Did all my singing study part time with Dawson Freer and in 59 a couple of terms with Reinhold Gerhardt at the Guildhall. It was through Michael McAdam that I came to Towcester. I had met his parents through a friend from school days, and they were very hospitable. I spent many weekends and a Christmas at their home in Oundle. Sorry I cannot give you any information about the soprano soloist. On my return to N.Z I did a good deal of singing, Oratorio work with choral societies but chiefly recitals and a great deal of radio broadcasts. My main interest was in lieder and there is not much public interest in that genre.

In 1963 I married and my wife and I returned to the UK in 1966/7 where we lived with Michael McAdam's parents in Oundle for two terms before moving to London where I taught part time at hospitals which allowed me time to continue singing lessons. These I had with Helen Issep, Janet Baker's teacher ( I don't think she liked me very much as she seemed to develop migraines half way through my lessons!) She stopped teaching because of illness and I had two interesting terms with Roy Henderson who was much more encouraging. On our return to Auckland I did more broadcasting and recital work and was lucky to meet David Newbold, a Trinity College Examiner and excellent pianist. He and I gave recitals in Auckland and several Broadcasts on two of his visits to NZ

In 1973 my wife and I with 2 sons moved to Wellington to teach at a small private boys' school where we stayed until 2001. I did some more oratorio work and initially a large amount of radio work but after I became Principal of the school in 1977 I did less and less. Life became very hectic and broadcasting funds rapidly diminished.

My wife had been involved in choir work in Auckland, in the Cathedral Choir and the Dorian Choir both of which were conducted by Peter Godfrey who had come to N.Z in 1958 or 9 from Marlborough College He later became Professor of Music at Auckland University. By another of life's extraordinary coincidences I had sat next to him at a dinner at the Talbot Hotel in Oundle given by Mrs Brudenall of Dene Hall who was hosting the North Northants Music Festival. He was one of the judges. Peter had an enormous influence on choral music throughout the country. I was delighted to sing as soloist several times under his conductorship. The Godfreys, too moved to Wellington when Peter retired from university and he took over music at Wellington Cathedral. He asked my wife in 1982 if she would help out over the summer and the result of that was that we ended up both singing in the choir for 5 or 6 years!!

In 1994 I retired. We had visited UK for several weeks in 1990 after an absence of 25 years. We came again in 1991, again in 95, 98 and 2003. We are great Anglophiles! On our 98 trip we called in at Barnwell and saw Michael McAdam. I did notice he was listed as a bass in the 1948 programme.

At the time I sang for your concert I think he was curate.

In 2001 we shifted to Hawke's Bay to be close to my wife's family. After a long time of not singing at all, last year we both joined a small choir of 30 voices and do 2 or 3 concerts in Napier Cathedral and in Hastings each year. Really enjoying the involvement.

Thank you so much for getting in contact. It has been great fun reliving events that happened so long ago.

I was very interested to hear of Graeme's exploits and it is good to know that he is still singing, even though he is now in his late 70s. If he visits the UK again, let's hope that he has the opportunity to call in and see us.

By the way, does anyone remember Rev. Michael McAdam?

Margaret Hawkins, with her Archivist's hat on

## **Health and Safety considerations for Christmas.**

### **Health & Safety and Equality Considerations for Christmas Songs**

#### **The Rocking Song**

*Little Jesus, sweetly sleep, do not stir;  
We will lend a coat of fur,  
We will rock you, rock you, rock you,  
We will rock you, rock you, rock you:*

Fur is no longer appropriate wear for small infants, both due to risk of allergy to animal fur, and for ethical reasons. Therefore faux fur, a nice cellular blanket or perhaps micro-fleece material should be considered a suitable alternative.

Please note, only persons who have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and have enhanced clearance will be permitted to rock baby Jesus. Persons must carry their CRB disclosure with them at all times and be prepared to provide three forms of identification before rocking commences.

#### **Jingle Bells**

*Dashing through the snow  
In a one horse open sleigh  
O'er the fields we go  
Laughing all the way*

A risk assessment must be submitted before an open sleigh is considered safe for members of the public to travel on. The risk assessment must also consider whether it is appropriate to use only one horse for such a venture, particularly if passengers are of larger proportions. Please note, permission must be gained from landowners before entering their fields. To avoid offending those not participating in celebrations, we would request that laughter is moderate only and not loud enough to be considered a noise nuisance.

#### **While Shepherds Watched**

*While shepherds watched  
Their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground  
The angel of the Lord came down  
And glory shone around*

The union of Shepherd's has complained that it breaches health and safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without appropriate seating arrangements being provided, therefore benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs are now available. Shepherds have also requested that due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year that they should watch their flocks via CCTV cameras from centrally heated shepherd observation huts.

Please note, the angel of the lord is reminded that before shining his / her glory all around she / he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with glasses capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Glory.

#### **Rudolph the red nosed reindeer**

*Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer  
had a very shiny nose.  
And if you ever saw him,  
you would even say it glows.*

You are advised that under the Equal Opportunities for All policy, it is inappropriate for persons to make comment with regard to the ruddiness of any part of Mr. R. Reindeer. Further to this, exclusion of Mr R Reindeer from the Reindeer Games will be considered discriminatory and disciplinary action will be taken against those found guilty of this offence. A full investigation will be implemented and sanctions - including suspension on full pay - will be considered whilst this investigation takes place.

**Little Donkey**

*Little donkey, little donkey on the dusty road*

*Got to keep on plodding onwards with your precious load*

The RSPCA have issued strict guidelines with regard to how heavy a load that a donkey of small stature is permitted to carry, also included in the guidelines is guidance regarding how often to feed the donkey and how many rest breaks are required over a four hour plodding period. Please note that due to the increased risk of pollution from the dusty road, Mary and Joseph are required to wear face masks to prevent inhalation of any airborne particles. The donkey has expressed his discomfort at being labelled 'little' and would prefer just to be simply referred to as Mr. Donkey. To comment upon his height or lack thereof may be considered an infringement of his equine rights.

**We Three Kings**

*We three kings of Orient are*

*Bearing gifts we traverse afar*

*Field and fountain, moor and mountain*

*Following yonder star*

Whilst the gift of gold is still considered acceptable - as it may be redeemed at a later date through such organisations as 'cash for gold' etc, gifts of frankincense and myrrh are not appropriate due to the potential risk of oils and fragrances causing allergic reactions. A suggested gift alternative would be to make a donation to a worthy cause in the recipients name or perhaps give a gift voucher.

We would not advise that the traversing kings rely on navigation by stars in order to reach their destinations and suggest the use of RAC routefinder or satellite navigation, which will provide the quickest route and advice regarding fuel consumption. Please note as per the guidelines from the RSPCA for Mr Donkey, the camels carrying the three kings of Orient will require regular food and rest breaks. Facemasks for the three kings are also advisable due to the likelihood of dust.

**Dates for your diary: Christmas Concerts**

**Second Venue (*still to be confirmed*)**

**Rehearsal** Tuesday 30th November 7.30 pm

**Concert** Tuesday 7th December 7.30 pm.

**Towcester Town Hall**

**Rehearsal** Monday 13th December 7.30 pm.

**Concert** Tuesday 14th December 7.30 pm.