



# Orpheus News

September  
2016

Aberdeen Orpheus Choir 2011

## ***Summer Concert 2016***

Friday the 27<sup>th</sup> of May was a special day for the Aberdeen Orpheus Choir as it saw our Diamond Jubilee Concert take place in Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen. To mark this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary the Choir pulled out all the stops and invited none other than Bob Chilcott to attend the concert and run a 'Come and Sing' the following day. You will find a review of the concert (including a fitting tribute to a certain young Alto in the Choir) and impressions of the Come and Sing later in the newsletter.

## ***The Wisdom of Yehudi Menuhin***

"I can only think of music as something inherent in every human being - a birthright. Music coordinates mind, body and spirit. That doesn't mean that each person must have a violin or piano: the greatest service to the population would be if every school day began with singing. If people sing together, they have a feeling of individual coordination as well as within the body of the group. I have never met a member of a choir who was depressed."

Thanks to Graeme Morrice for supplying that quote. In his email, Graeme not unreasonably opined that, perhaps, Yehudi never visited Aberdeen... Ed.



*The Orpheus Choir with their special guest, Bob Chilcott (far left) and guest soloists Rachel Groves and Christopher Smith (front right)*

### ***Review of our main Summer 2016 Concert by Alan Cooper***

Founded by Alex Elrick, their first conductor, in 1955, the Aberdeen Orpheus Choir celebrates sixty years of successful music making this year. Kyle McCallum another past conductor for many years was present in Friday's audience to enjoy the wide range of varied, colourful and reliably tuneful music that delighted the near capacity audience in Queen's Cross Church.

The celebrity guest for this Diamond Jubilee Concert was the renowned choral conductor, composer and arranger, Bob Chilcott. He first came to my notice when he was listed as Robert Chilcott the young treble soloist on my record, which I still have, of a world famous recording made of Fauré's Requiem in 1967. It was this recording that did much to popularise Fauré's work in Great

As today's programme informed us, Bob Chilcott was described in The Observer as 'a contemporary her of British choral music'. A former member of the King's Singers, Chilcott has conducted the choir of the Royal College of Music for seven years and he has been Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers since 2002. His catalogue of works reflects his broad taste of musical styles and his love of writing for singers. As Jane Murray, the present conductor of the Orpheus Choir said, we were privilege in having Bob Chilcott take part in the Choir's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

It was Jane Murray who conducted the opening Medley of pieces from West Side Story. Starting with “Tonight”, the choir, with a rhythmically exciting piano accompaniment played in stirring style by Erika Fairhead, brought out all the richness and warmth of Bernstein’s music. The female chorus were in fine fettle in “I Feel Pretty” followed by a caressingly attractive performance of “One Hand, One Heart” with the full choir. The men were to the fore in “Maria” of course and then there was the full choir on top form with a rip roaring rhythmically exciting attack on “America”.

Bob Chilcott took over as conductor for his own special arrangement of the “Londonderry Air”. It had attractive vocal harmonies and counterpoints and the choir was well balanced along with the strong piano accompaniment.

The Skye Boat Song was an arrangement by the Choir’s founder Alex Elrick (1924 – 2007). Here the counter melody sung by the tenors was most impressive and Jane Murray, taking over the role of conductor once more, invited us all to take part in singing the melody. She followed this with another special Chilcott arrangement, the attractive American folk melody Shenandoah made to sound very polished in this version.

Three songs from the Australian composer Ben van Tienen’s suite, “Across the Dark” had a very lush piano accompaniment (I note that van Tienen is himself a pianist). The singers had to work hard to get their words across but for the most part succeeded.

To close the first half we all enjoyed the five movements from Chilcott’s “Songs and Cries of London Town”, a wonderfully colourful vocal suite full of atmosphere. “Come Buy” throbbed with rhythmic excitement driven along by piano and with percussion (drums and bell) played by Graeme Morrice. “London Bells” had a busy piano part that brought to life the hustle and bustle of London streets illustrating the dashing activities of the ‘maids in white aprons mentioned by the choir.

“Composed upon Westminster Bridge” to a text by William Wordsworth had broad rich choral harmonies and finally in “Good Morrow!” the separate sections sung between male and female voice gave the music a special feeling of spaciousness.

The second half opened with “Over the Rainbow” from The Wizard of Oz. Christopher Hussey’s setting had very attractive piano writing but I found the vocal arrangement rather too fussy for this basically simple melody.

The choir however excelled in their only unaccompanied piece, Rheinberger's *Abendleid* – beautiful harmonies splendidly well sung. Possibly even more attractive was Eric Whitacre's "The Seal Lullaby" Here was the perfect balance of piano and choir in a really fine atmospheric setting of words by Rudyard Kipling.

The two Shakespeare setting, "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows" by Sarah Quartel (b. 1982) and "Sigh no more, Ladies" by Cecilia McDowall) came across particularly well, the first with lovely clear diction from the sopranos and the second with rich singing from the whole choir.

After the concert, on the way to the car a gentleman stopped me to say that the piece he most enjoyed in the whole concert was "Sure on this shining night" by Morten Lauridsen with beautiful words by James Agee. I think I have to agree with him. This is a marvellous piece and it was sung with deep feeling by the choir.

Great fun however was had in the final piece when Bob Chilcott took over the podium once again to conduct his special arrangement of *Buffalo Gals* – helter skelter top speed and thoroughly joyful singing.

Jane Murray had also brought back two instrumental soloists who performed to great audience acclaim at last year's Christmas concert. Rachel Groves is a multi talented musician. In the first half of the concert she played the *Allegretto Melancolico* from Poulenc's *Flute Sonata* – a dazzlingly fluent performance with a splendid piano accompaniment played by Jane Murray. In the second half, Rachel move from the flute to harp giving us an equally virtuosic performance of the *Valse de Concert* by Alphonse Hasselmans – tuneful and rhythmically exciting.

Oboist Christopher Smith gave us a very popular piece in the first half. It was *Gabriel's Oboe* by Ennio Morricone from the film *The Mission*- a smooth and well sustained performance. Christopher's offering for the second half was another piece by Poulenc, the *Élégie* from his *Oboe Sonata* – a challenging work with some very high notes but Christopher managed splendidly well. Once again it was Jane Murray who provided the piano accompaniments for Christopher.

All the performers were brought on stage for a final round of applause but there was one member of the choir who was also brought forward to receive a special plaudit. Alto Stella Reid has been a member of the choir since it was founded. She has been a committee member for many years and is the current choir secretary. Today, after sixty years of loyal service she was presented with a Life Membership of the Choir.

Perhaps Jane Murray could persuade Bob Chilcott to make an arrangement of Victor Young's song "Stella by Starlight" just for her?

*Many thanks to Alan for his insightful words.*

### ***A Message from Marian Bisset***

Marian sent Margaret Wood this message in March – apologies for the long delay in a newsletter appearing, hence a couple of the references being out of date! Ed.

60 years of the Aberdeen Orpheus is a mammoth achievement and congratulations from Hobart Orpheus Choir. They have existed for 125 years through wars, change of names and numerous changes of conductors. Yet what remains after 125+ years is a love of singing and I know that Aberdeen Orpheus has this at their core as well. The choir is under expert guidance with Jane at the moment and I see and hear great things that the choir is achieving. I remember the years I had as conductor with great fondness and still have a place in my musical memory for the choir. I wish everyone a fantastic evening at the Civic Reception and hope the performances for 2016 go well and many Aberdonians enjoy the music. I hope Aberdeen Orpheus Choir enjoys another 60 years of music making together.

Margaret also heard some fascinating news from Marian. Apparently when she moved most recently the lease on the flat she vacated was taken up by none other than...Ben Van Tienen! For those of you new to the choir, we sang three songs by Ben in our summer concert (UK premieres no less). What a remarkable coincidence!



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