



# CAPELETTA

*No 11, August 1995*

## Chairman's Notes

The past year has been a successful one for Capel Choral Society.

Last December we gave a Christmas Concert which was varied and entertaining for Choir and audience and led us pleasantly into the intensive rehearsals for the Festival. The Festival programme was, as usual, a challenge which I certainly enjoyed despite my usual 'O help, I shall never manage to sing this' after my first look at the scores. Despite our lack of success in bringing home lots of trophies, I do feel we acquitted ourselves well and can only think that the other choirs had been working extra hard to bring themselves up to our standard!

Having said that I think we need to take on board the various comments made in adjudications in the last two or three years, about the balance within the Choir. I shall be asking Alan to move individuals about, as he thinks fit, to get a good, balanced sound. We shall try this as an exercise and I hope you will all enjoy the challenge of, perhaps, singing next to different people and voices. It should help us to be more confident in our own abilities. Those of us who sang in the Summer Concert certainly noticed that, with a small group, one had to be more self-reliant (and practise a bit more) and it was a very exhilarating experience.

To any who came to the Summer Concert, or took part, I'm sure you will agree that it was a lovely occasion. The combination of music and supper made a super relaxed evening. I have had many extremely favourable comments from members of the audience and requests that it be made an annual event. I certainly hope that will be the case. We will let you know as soon as possible about future plans for the summers.

I'm sure you are all looking forward to the new season. It will certainly be full of excitement, and difficulties, which I know you will surmount with your usual *sang froid*.

If anyone has any suggestions for our 'own choice' piece for the Festival, please let Alan, Anthea, or myself, have a copy of the suggested music before the end of October 1995.

Finally, I wish to give my warmest thanks to Alan and Anthea, without whom our musical efforts would not be possible, nor half so enjoyable.

Christine Wallace

## Eileen Myvall

Eileen has retired as our Secretary, a post she has held with great devotion for many years. Though we have already thanked her at the AGM I do want to take this opportunity to again record the great debt we owe her.

The continuity and stability which she has given the Choir through many changes cannot be sufficiently stressed and I know you will all join with me in this vote of thanks to her.

Christine Wallace

## Notes on the 1996 Full Chorus Pieces

The two major works for the 1996 Leith Hill Musical Festival are Haydn's *'Harmoniemesse'* and RVW's *'Serenade to Music'*. Both are compositions of great charm and vocal quality and they should present us with worthwhile and essentially musical, yet not insoluble, challenges.

Haydn wrote a total of twelve Mass settings during his long working life and these fall into two groups. The first six are early works followed by a lengthy gap occasioned by the decree of 1783 banning the orchestras in Austrian churches. Its subsequent repeal allowed Haydn to write six more Masses between 1796 and 1802, literally fruits of his old age - he died in 1809. This final period of composition was largely choral - these Masses follow the final set of 'London' symphonies and are contemporary with the two great oratorios, *'Creation'* (1798) and *'The Seasons'* (1801). Perhaps the best known of these late Masses is the *'Nelson'* (1798), but all were written for performance in the Bergkiche, the church at Eisenstadt, for Haydn's old employer, the Esterhazy family. The *'Harmoniemesse'* of 1802 is the last of the set and is so called because the orchestration contains very elaborate woodwind writing ('Harmonie' is the German for 'wind band' - a tradition had been established of accompanying sacred choral music by wind instruments alone). The Mass has the usual six sections and is throughout delightful to sing in ways characteristic of the very human and humane composer.

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the *'Serenade to Music'* in 1938 as a mark of homage to Sir Henry Wood. It originally contained vocal parts for sixteen solo singers who had been associated with Wood, including such celebrated names as Isobel Baillie, Elsie Suddaby, Parry Jones, Heddle Nash and Roy Henderson. It was first performed at a golden jubilee concert in the Albert Hall in October 1938, conducted by the dedicatee.

RVW subsequently rearranged the vocal parts of the *'Serenade'* for conventional SATB chorus with light (though fairly fully scored) orchestral accompaniment. The text is Lorenzo's famous lines from Act V of *'The Merchant of Venice'*, extolling, appropriately, the virtues of music. The restful quality and sheer beauty of sound of this work (at a time when VW was developing a more austere and dissonant style) marks it out among the composer's choral compositions, and, like the Haydn Mass, this too will be a delight to prepare and perform.

Alan Drake

### Music for the 1996 Leith Hill Festival

Full Chorus:	Harmoniemesse	Joseph Haydn
	Serenade to Music	Ralph Vaughan Williams
Part Song:	Parley of owls (Nos 1 & 2)	Michael Hurd
Ladies' Song:	Two Morning Songs	Gordon Jacob
Men's Song:	How sweet the answer	Geoffrey Shaw
Madrigal:	Flora gave me fairest flowers	Wilbye
Ensemble:	Parley of owls (No 3)	Michael Hurd

Note that an Ensemble class replaces the Quartets this year. Ensembles may consist of up to 12 singers, so it is still permissible to enter a quartet if so desired. The Class will also allow the interesting possibility of balancing one strong voice with two or three weaker voices in another part.

## LHMF Annual General Meeting 13th October 1995

For the record, and for the benefit of anyone who didn't attend, there follows a summary of the Meeting from my own notes. You will probably be able to find more detail in *Festival News* which should be out soon.

**The Chairman, Deirdre Hicks**, in her introduction, talked about the move of the Festival to Charterhouse for this season. She mentioned that there would be a Vaughan Williams exhibit during the Festival.

**Hon. Secretary's Report.** In her final Report, retiring Secretary Renée Stewart spoke of the success of the 1995 Festival. *Messiah* and the *Verdi Requiem* had been sellouts. Renée also thanked the many people with whom she had worked during her term as Festival Secretary (which started in 1980).

The **Box Office Manager, John Hicks**, proudly announced that "We did it!" - the 1995 Festival had made a profit of over £5000 and in addition to the *Messiah* and *Verdi Requiem* sellouts, the Division I concert had sold 77% of the tickets and the Division II, 57% (The latter deserved to be much better supported as I thought it was the best of the three concerts, with an excellent and moving performance of *Dido and Aeneas*).

**Jill Sorrell** reported that the **Youth Choirs Competitions** had seen fifteen choirs competing, with between 11 and 60 singers per choir and ages from seven to eighteen.

**Elections** Eileen Myall was elected to the General Committee.

**Bill Llewellyn** was not present but sent a written report. In a short report on his last Festival he said that the *Messiah* orchestra had played the work nine times in two weeks! He said that his farewell party had been wonderful, and paid tribute to Renée Stewart who had been a good friend and guide. He predicted that Brian Kay would teach us a lot about singing(!).

Bill was afterwards elected Vice President of the Festival.

**Brian Kay** had sent a written report in which he apologised for not being present at the AGM. He said that he was looking forward to carrying on the Festival tradition while preparing for the next century - he would be trying to introduce some contemporary music.

In **AOB** Deirdre Hicks admitted drawing a blank in her search for new choirs to participate in the Festival. It was suggested that the Division names should be dropped so that choir numbers could be balanced.

(See separate note on this subject).

It was also suggested that the winning choir in the Madrigal class should sing the piece at the Festival concert, so that it could be performed with more appropriate numbers.

The **1996 AGM** would be on 11th October in the Christian Centre.

### Music for the 1997 Leith Hill Festival

The full details of the music should be in the forthcoming *Festival News*, but the Full Chorus pieces are as follows: Division I have the *Rutter Gloria* and *Paul Patterson's Magnificat*, while the Advanced Division have *Parry's Blest Pair of Sirens* and *Elgar's The Music Makers* and Div II have *Schubert's Mass in G* (1996 is the bi-centenary of Schubert's birth). (1996 is also the centenary of Bruckner's death, but he seems to have been left out.)

### Music Folders

You are probably aware that the music folders have not proved to be very durable and have been splitting. As a result we have decided to only issue them for concerts, so if you happen

to still have one in your possession, could you please return same to Ian Moir.

## **Ralph Vaughan Williams - a short biography**

Ralph Vaughan Williams was born on the 12th October 1872 in the village of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire. RVW's father was the Reverend Arthur Vaughan Williams, and his mother Margaret was the daughter of Josiah Wedgwood III and Caroline Darwin (an elder sister of Charles Darwin). They were married in Coldharbour church, so the Dorking connection began before RVW's birth.

When Ralph was two his father died, and his mother brought him and his brother Harvey and sister Margaret to live in the family home of Leith Hill Place. Here he spent most of his childhood. His interest in music and composition started early, under tuition from his Aunt Sophy Wedgwood, and he wrote his first piece at the age of six, a four bar long piano piece called 'The Robin's Nest'.

After attending prep. school at Rottingdean in Sussex, RVW spent three years at Charterhouse where he played the viola in the school orchestra. His early aspirations for an orchestral career foundered on family disapproval. In 1888 he took his first serious step as a composer when he gave a concert of compositions by himself and another pupil in the school hall. His maths master afterwards said to him 'Very good, Williams; you must go on'. In his autobiography RVW writes 'I treasured this as one of the very few words of encouragement I ever received in my life!'

During his holidays Ralph practised the organ - an instrument had been set up in the hall at Leith Hill Place. The servants used to avoid him at such times as the organ had to be pumped manually.

From 1890 VW spent two years at the Royal College of Music - he used to walk home from London! - and then three years at Trinity College, Cambridge where he obtained a BMusB in 1894 and a BA in History in 1895.

Although he was determined to become a composer, others had misgivings; a Darwin cousin, Gwen Raverat, remembers Ralph being referred to as 'that foolish young man who would go on working at music when he was so hopelessly bad at it!' His output at that time consisted mainly of songs including 'O Mistress Mine' which we sang in July, and also the 'Songs of Travel'.

In 1897 RVW married Adeline Fisher, one of a family almost as talented as the Darwins and Wedgwoods - one of her brothers was Admiral Sir William Fisher and another H A L Fisher OM, historian and President of the Board of Education. The couple settled in Chelsea where RVW concentrated on becoming a composer. Although he had studied with both Max Bruch and Maurice Ravel, he was determined to acquire a distinctive English style. This determination was shared by Gustav Holst whom RVW had met at RCM and with whom he developed a friendship which lasted until Holst's death in 1934. RVW's quest for an English style led him to folksong, and in the 1900's he began collecting songs from all over England - between 1903 and 1913 he collected over 800, the first being the Essex song 'Bushes and Briars'.

VW worked extensively in the field (or more accurately in the pub., where a pint or two of ale helped to persuade the locals to sing). He actually made recordings of these songs using a portable phonograph and amazed his performers by playing their voices back to them. His desire to bring these folksongs to a wider audience led RVW to accept the post of music editor of the English Hymnal. This hymn book contains 35 tunes based on English folksongs, including Monk's Gate ('He who would valiant be') and one of the tunes to 'O little town of Bethlehem'.

From this association with traditional English music, RVW's very distinctive style slowly emerged. One of the earliest examples is the song cycle 'On Wenlock Edge' to words by A.E.Housman, and the work which most totally embodies both the evocation of the English countryside and the folksong idiom is 'The Lark Ascending', written in 1914 and portraying an England which was about to disappear for ever.

By this time Vaughan Williams had written his first two symphonies; the first, the 'Sea Symphony' is a choral work based on the poems of Walt Whitman. It is a splendid sound picture of the sea in all its moods, while the London Symphony which followed is a rather more impressionistic portrait of pre-WWI London.

RVW never shirked what he saw as his patriotic or civic duty - during the First World War he joined the RAMC as a wagon orderly, and was actually billeted at Dorking for a while. He was apparently a very dis-organised soldier - his cap was never straight and his puttees were a nightmare! Route marches must have been a real trial for a rather overweight 42 year-old. However, he did come into his own when required to play the organ for church parades, when he was known to improvise on popular songs of the day as an introit. Later in the war he saw active service in France as a gunner and was there when the Armistice was signed. He obviously would have found it impossible to sit at home writing music while others died in the trenches. Some of the sadness he felt manifests itself in the Pastoral Symphony, written between 1919 and 1921 but originally sketched while he was in France.

Sir Adrian Boult, who became a close friend of RVW and respected interpreter of his works, tells how when he rehearsed the Pastoral for its first performance, the composer kept on insisting on a faster tempo. Several years later Sir Adrian and VW met at a rehearsal of the Symphony in Prague. Afterwards, RVW said to the conductor 'Well it's alright, you know, but the whole thing is too fast!'. Sir Adrian of course reminded him of his earlier instructions. 'Oh yes', he replied 'well, I think you were right. I've conducted it a bit since then, and I've found it's not as boring as I thought. So it can go a bit slower'. RVW was in fact always prepared to listen to criticisms of his 'tunes' as he called his compositions, and welcomed suggestions for changes.

After WWI, Vaughan Williams found he was regarded as an established composer, and, starting with an honorary DMus from Oxford, he acquired many honours from the musical world, culminating in an OM in 1935. He refused a knighthood, saying 'I have always refused all honours which involved obligation to those in authority - the OM involved no obligations'.

RVW was an agnostic, but in addition to his work for the English Hymnal, he wrote many works with a religious text. A fine example is the Mass in G, a beautiful a capella work, written in response to a revival of interest in the English polyphonic school, and in Byrd in particular. In complete contrast there is the Benedicite, a spectacular and rousing work. He also wrote several motets and other works on religious themes.

In 1929, RVW moved from Chelsea to Dorking due to the ill-health of his wife, and lived there until his return to London in 1951 after his second marriage. His involvement with the Town and the Leith Hill Festival, and his latter years, will be covered in the second part of this article.

Ian Moir