

For the Diary

Concerts

Saturday 16 December 2017 at 7:30pm
St Mary's Church, Church Street, Warwick.
Performing Handel's Messiah Part 1 and Christmas Music with soloists Wendy Whyte (soprano), Margaret Parker (alto), Ed Valenti (tenor), Robin Jeffreys (bass)

Friday 22 December 2017 time tbc
Stoneleigh Abbey Family Chapel
Christmas music performed by singers from the Coventry Philharmonic

Saturday 10 March 2018 7:30 pm
St Mary's Church, Church Street, Warwick
Performing Bach's St Matthew Passion

Social Events

Saturday 18 November 2017
St Barbara's Church Hall, Earlsdon, Coventry.
Quiz Night with Fish 'n' Chip Supper

Rehearsals

We rehearse every Thursday evening from October to July at Quinton Park Baptist Church Hall, Coventry. Rehearsals start at 7:15pm and finish at 9:30pm. Tea, coffee & biscuits are available at the interval. Rehearsals restart after the Summer break on 7th September.

AGM on Thursday 19 October 2017

Find us Online

Our official website is at <http://www.covphilsoc.org.uk/> and our official Facebook page is at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/27912395845/>

Membership enquiries

Email: secretary@covphilsoc.org.uk, or you are welcome to join us at one of our Thursday evening rehearsals



Welcome Back

The Summer break has come to an end and it's time to get down to some serious rehearsing for our December concert and other Christmas performances. Not that the Coventry Philharmonic has been idle on Thursday evenings with members joining in on the Summer Walks around Warwickshire. Apropos of which, it is clear that our intrepid walkers were on the track of something. Suitable captions please to news@covphilsoc.org.uk by the end of October 2017. No prizes this time – it's just for fun.

Looking ahead to Christmas, we have been asked to provide a small ensemble to perform in the inaugural Stoneleigh Abbey Christmas Concert in the Family Chapel under the leadership of Matthew Sandy. Luckily we will be drawing on the repertoire of music which the whole Choir is performing the previous Saturday so no extra rehearsals should be required. It will also be a unique opportunity to hear the John Crang English Chamber Organ dating from 1761.

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Steven Russell: In Profile



Steven has been Musical Director of the Coventry Philharmonic Choir since 2002. In 2015 he took a 2-year sabbatical returning to lead the Choir in May this year. I

caught up with him over the Summer break to find out a bit more about the MD who uses chocolate and humour as teaching aides, and who has a passion for Cavalier King Charles.

How old were you when you first discovered a love of music?

I always enjoyed Music as a boy. I never enjoyed popular music – even to this day. Aged 10, I took myself off to the local church and joined their choir. Church Music transformed me. It is still my passion today, not because of the religious aspect – but because of what the context of the lyric or building meant to the composer.

You compose, perform and teach - which do you enjoy doing most?

I am a teacher only. I do not perform, and I rarely compose now. I do not believe I have anything to say. I love to encourage others who are learning their craft.

If you had a time machine, which composer would you like to meet?

Stravinsky. He died 6 months before I was born. I would need an interpreter: not for language necessarily, but for his musical language. I may not understand his answers without help.

What's the secret of moulding a large group of people into a successful ensemble?

Music first. Composer first. Composers use musical notation to indicate their expectations of how their music should sound. So, choose inspirational programmes for performers and listening audiences. I also believe that MD's need to cut the cloth to fit the membership. We have an amazing ratio of men to women's voices. There is very little we should stay away from musically. However, we are a non-auditioning chorus and we have our audience to think of also. One of the reasons that the Cov Phil have been so successful in recruitment is that we are one of a few local musical societies that have an open membership and sing whole works with an appropriate musical accompaniment. We often with professional soloists and orchestras. We are a Society who performs Classical Choral Music. Having said that, we do not need to be stuffy or old fashioned. I personally

enjoy rehearsals, and I hope to enthuse membership offering engaging, high quality concerts and performance opportunities.

As music specialist teacher at the Coventry RNIB Pears Centre, what do you think music brings to students who face so many challenges?

Music is a form of communication. For people with disabilities and communication issues, Music can transform how they feel themselves and their relationships with others.

What has been your favourite Coventry Philharmonic concert in your years as MD?

I often programme works that I personally do not enjoy. I have enjoyed all the concerts apart from anything by Verdi.

How do you think Handel would have reacted to your new lyrics?

He would have loved them.

If gender was not an issue: What voice type would you want to sing?

Baritone. It would be nice to be able to sing well.

You suggest our musical programmes and the Committee casts votes on your proposals. How do you choose?

We are a large Choral Society and we have the resources to perform Masterworks with appropriate accompaniment. We attract new members because we sing whole works rather than a recital of choral music. When deciding on future programmes I consider our membership and the audience. It is also prudent to check the last time we sang a certain era or genre. We sing Mozart Requiem around every five years. Audiences flock to hear it. I programme a different work, often a lesser known gem with it. Our next Mozart Requiem is partnered with a Haydn Mass in Bb 'Creation'. Audiences may not attend the lesser known work on its own merits.

What else do we have to look forward to?

Next year we celebrate our 75th Season (that makes the Cov Phil Singers 5 years old). We will start to plan our 80th Season soon. We welcome ideas from members on how to move forward in retention and recruitment, programming and socialising.

Newsletters

We would love to hear from you with suggestions for articles. Our next issue will be published in December so if you have any articles, events, photos or other contributions for this one (deadline end of November) or future issues please email news@covphilsoc.org.uk or speak to any committee member.

Some words from our patron

As part of its 70th anniversary celebrations the Coventry Philharmonic Choir announced the appointment of its new patron Roger Coull, leader of the renowned Coull Quartet based at the University of Warwick. Roger reflects on the connection between singers and instrumentalists and starts with a surprising admission!



I can't sing..... well that's not strictly true, I can sing, but I haven't done much of it since student days. I get tired quickly when I sing, I don't seem to have a useful range (I'm always having to jump octaves in hymns) probably because I don't do it often

enough, and also as I don't have any vocal technique to talk of. At music colleges string players are encouraged to imitate good singers and ironically singers are encouraged to imitate good string players, so what interests me is this link between the two.

As a violinist when I play melodic passages I always imagine how I would sing a phrase and the relationship between each note is always from a vocal perspective. The singer's breath control is my bow control, and a singer at any level will necessarily breathe, which when done in the right place will give meaning to the words and phrases. This is one of the essentials to the good string player, who needs to think like a singer and breathe in order to make natural sounding music. I am almost allergic to hearing computer generated music, as unless the originator has gone to a great deal of trouble it will rarely sound convincing to me for more than a few notes at a time. It is interesting that computers are quite good at imitating short percussive notes, but it is the singing lines that are normally too even and therefore unnatural.

Within a melodic phrase a singer would not dream of making one or two notes stick out (unless asked to by the composer) and yet the inexperienced string player does this quite regularly when they run out of bow or

find themselves in the wrong part of the bow. The myriad of different articulations, consonants and vowels, accents and inflections that a good singer will produce are my true inspiration rather than the fairly ambiguous use of terms such as sforzando, rinforzando, or forte piano, all of which need to be interpreted in context.

Yet another area that I feel should be modelled on the good singer is the tasteful portamento. String players who need to shift from one position to another sometimes indulge in portamenti which are based on their technical requirements rather than imitating the more natural vocal vehicle of producing legato.

Vocal registers and the balance between them are highly significant to the string player whose equivalent is the actual string they are playing on and the position on the string. Composers such as Elgar were particularly skilful at using these registers, often compounding the difficulty, but to great musical effect.

There are many more similarities between instrumentalists and singers in their processes of making music. The most important for all of us is the fulfilment that can be attained from it.

I can sing..... but I'm better with my violin!

Roger Coull

“Friendly rivalry”

The annual Coventry Philharmonic Choir Sunday Lunch at the Windmill Village Hotel in July was an unqualified success with feedback* including “superb”, “very enjoyable”, “great value” and “well organised”. The Social Committee did a fantastic job, not only in choosing the meal, which judging by the empty plates was well received, but in laying on the entertainment which consisted of music themed quizzes. The six tables were all named after Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and there was a “little” friendly rivalry in evidence despite the relaxed atmosphere!

I was on “The Gondoliers” table and we were fortunate in having team members who knew their Puccini from their Vivaldi. However the laurel wreath went to “The Yeomen of the Guard” – hardly surprising as Antoine was on the team. Raffle tickets were on sale and the draw for the prizes seemed never ending – I think we were all winners. All in all, it was a lovely way to spend a Sunday afternoon and a great opportunity to chat to other CovPhil members and their guests.

Sue Scanlon (Alto)

Performing at the “Fringe”

Last month, I took my school production *One Good Soul* (a brand-new musical based on a play by Brecht) to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.



The Fringe is the biggest arts festival in the world, with an astonishing 53,000 performances of 3,400 different shows. The atmosphere is extraordinary, the streets crowded with artistic types, and street performances on every corner. There's a lot of comedy, with almost all the 'big beasts' performing as well as a small army of newcomers and hopefuls. There's theatre, of all kinds. Then circus, cabaret, concerts, art exhibitions and a considerable number of performances which cannot readily be categorised! If it can attract an audience (often even if it can't!), it has a place on the Fringe: there's no artistic or aesthetic filter, so anyone can join in.

The first step is to find a venue. You need to do this in January. There are 300 to choose from – and many of those have multiple spaces (up to 20 or more) within their venue 'umbrella'. Each space will programme up to 10 shows a day, often starting at 10 am and finishing at midnight or later - thus we had 5 minutes before each performance to set our show up, 5 minutes afterwards to dismantle it and put it all away tidily, and no opportunity whatever to rehearse on the stage!

The next thing is to find accommodation: easy enough if you do it in January, but very urgent once you have your venue – imagine being committed to performing and having nowhere to sleep!

You can then relax until April, when you need to register with the Fringe, so that you appear in the printed programme and on the website, and start to think about publicity. With so much competition, how do you get your show noticed? We had 20,000 flyers

and 500 posters and put a lot of thought into our press releases, but that wasn't really enough. Our total budget was over £20,000 for a two-week stay, including £9,000 for our accommodation, £3,500 for the venue hire, and £3,000 for travel and transport. Parents paid for the accommodation, and we recouped around £1,500 from the Box Office, but we still needed to put a stupendous effort into fund-raising.

Was it worth it? Absolutely! The inspiration and enrichment were priceless. The performances were excellent and much appreciated – we had three four-star reviews and a very good review by a nationally-known critic (writing in *The Scotsman*). We made a lot of good professional contacts (including Eddie Izzard, who turned up to our Saturday night performance!) Students also had the opportunity to see a very wide range of performances, and got a great buzz just out of being in this beautiful city at an extraordinary time in its year.

If anyone fancies seeing *One Good Soul*, there's one final performance – before members of the cast take up University places – at the Blue Coat School Theatre in Terry Road on Thursday September 21st (I know, I know, but it was the only date that worked) at 7 pm. The show is an hour long. Be warned - it's a dark political allegory about the difficulty of being 'good' in the modern world, and not for the faint-hearted. However, the music - written by a really exceptional Sixth Former who is just about to take up a place to read Music at St John's College Cambridge, and performed by a four-piece, onstage jazz-rock band - is lively, funky and exciting. The whole thing, to quote our critics, is 'a cracking show that makes a lasting impression', 'fun to watch and entertaining', 'extraordinarily engaging' and 'bloody marvellous'. Come if you can!

Andrew Kyle (Bass)

We had a really good response to our request for feedback following the Sunday Lunch, which we will reflect on, and do very much appreciate everyone taking the time to share their views. We do really value the ideas for potential future social events, and so we will see how we might progress some of those. Thanks from us all on the social committee for supporting the social events throughout the year.... we hope to see you at the next one.

Sheila Cowen, Chair of Social Committee