



CARMINA BURANA



FIRST REHEARSALS



IN A NEW ROLE

THE CHORAL

We are back

As spring approaches, we are now well and truly into the schedule of rehearsals for our April 3rd concert at the Villa. Despite interruptions and with a significant degree of trepidation and uncertainty at first, the decision to aim for an April concert now looks at least “possible”. Rather better than that in fact, the programme of rehearsals is going well and although our numbers are down, there are some fine sounds being made.

The newsletter is also back. I am sorry that there has been such a delay but my ability to draft this newsletter has also been interrupted by a nasty bout of the dreaded bug. A version prepared in November was incomplete before the virus struck and with work commitments the delay required a serious re-think and re-write. So here it is, a belated celebration of the wonderful Carmina concert and plenty more besides. Enjoy.



We did it!

At last we performed both Carmina and the Beethoven. What a celebration and what a joy it was as well! After years in the making, many delays and disappointments, in front of a packed audience at the Villa we delivered a resounding YES to culture and to the joy of making music here on the Isle of Man.

The feeling now as we emerge from what is hopefully the worst of the Covid crisis is that IOMCS has weathered the storm and is now looking confidently forward. The changes mentioned in the last newsletter are now in full swing with the first rehearsals under our new Director of Music under our belt. This newsletter celebrates by both looking back at Julian's last performance as conductor and looking forward at Mandy's different approaches that promise much.

And what a year it has been ...

It is easy to forget that throughout much of the last year we have been able to rehearse and sing for significant periods of time when our friends in nearby islands didn't have that opportunity. In the early summer this resulted in the very successful Big Sing. This event in itself was a statement that we intended to carry on. The plan to then do a crash course of rehearsals starting in mid-August for the September concert which may have seemed risky in the end worked incredibly well. This intensive period of time was great fun, and although there were moments when many must have felt that it isn't going to work, the calm and simultaneously tireless efforts of Graham and Julian kept us firmly on track.

As I said last time, it was a great thrill to have both Graham Kirkland and Julian conducting. Graham stepped in superbly to cover whilst Julian was recovering, and then saw us through with a triumphant performance of Carmina. This was preceded by an amazing "send off" for and by Julian who opened the concert, his last as Director of Music. The almost full house added to a superb atmosphere.



Rehearsing and practicing

Many of you will have already noticed our Director of Music's eye for detail. She brings her experience of teaching to bear and no doubt will help coach us to develop not just singing but every aspect of performance.

Mandy has now posted several clips on our Facebook page with advice on a range of issues. No doubt more to come, so keep an eye open for them.

Don't get caught out by your diphthongs.

Fish out your straws!

Breathe.

Practice.

....and look up & watch!

Key Dates:

Rehearsals every second Thursday with extras on 26th and 31st March.

Spring Concert: **3rd April 2022**

Keep an eye on Brian's emails for any changes.



Reflections

The Villa was almost full. The orchestra and choir in their places, feeling a whole range of things from uncertainty to excitement to disbelief 'we are here at last!' and grateful for the fact that we were. Conversations were had about the seats (or steps), about the fact that we hadn't through- performed either work, and about who we could see in the audience. It was time for a concert again, at last.....

Beethoven Choral Fantasia

As the first sounds from the Steinway at the hands of Judith Christian settled around the Royal Hall it felt as though we were in for something special. The opening solos set the tone, sometimes intimate, others powerful, always secure. It was such a pleasure to hear this lovely introduction followed by the concerto-like passages played with such feeling. So secure was our wonderful soloist that the orchestra - followed a little later by vocal soloists and then ourselves - had no choice but to deliver! It was notable that none of us had rehearsed the work as a whole and yet it seemed entirely natural, it flowed, all held together by Judith's wonderful playing and Julian's inspired conducting. If we had enjoyed Judith's playing in rehearsal (and we had, despite the trials of distinctly dodgy instruments), then this was a new level.

It has to be added that all our vocal soloists, many from within the choir hit the spot with some superb singing that simply added to the thrill of a wonderful start to the evening.

Then at last we sang the song, an ode to art as the bringer of bliss. What could be more apposite after months and months in which all of the arts had been shut down and locked out of our lives. Yes, we had sung this before, and yes, it is a joyful sing, but in just a few minutes it felt as though yes, we are back!

Organisation

Julian noted in the last newsletter that the Villa Marina concert arrangements with IoM Symphony Orchestra are complex. He (and others) put a huge amount of energy into setting the concert up in the months, weeks and then days before. Not only the organisation of the seating etc in the Royal Hall but the engagement of the musicians who are not members of IOMSO, and a whole range of other tasks. The committee, notably our secretary Brian seen here deep in conversation with Charlie, supported the project with aspects such as keeping everyone informed, membership, music and a range of other tasks.



Rehearsal

Without Jennifer Bird we would have had no concert. She patiently and superbly supported every rehearsal, and it was good to see that she had a role in the performance playing one of the two pianos placed directly in front of the sopranos for the Carmina. It is worth repeating Julian's appreciation from last time:

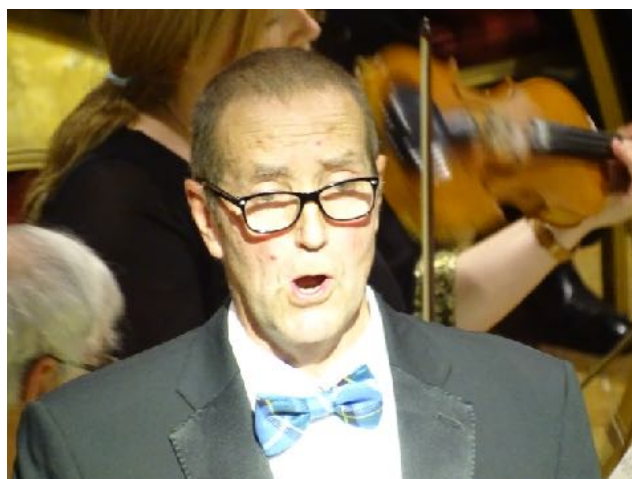
"Jennifer as our accompanist for many years, has contributed greatly to the enjoyment of our rehearsals. The rhythmic energy of her piano playing is an inspiration to us all – the choir is most fortunate to have benefited from her professionalism and dedication". From the body of the choir and as someone who sits near to her husband Hinton, it is impossible to disagree. Indeed I would add that I am in awe of the fact that she always seems to know exactly where to start from when we basses are scrambling around looking at each other for information and a word as to where we are going back to!

Now of course we are back in rehearsal, but it is worth remembering those days up at Bemahague not least for the fact that the evenings were light, it was warm, and we still had a wonderful concert to look forward to. The following are a selection of reminders taken in the lead up to the main concert.



Carmina Burana

Was this an inspired choice by our committee? Some people love it, some, like me were not so sure, and others distinctly dislike it. It is almost impossible to be neutral. It is also a far from easy sing. For the orchestra there are some fiendish passages, and let's face it - when in the Taberna, it is very b****y difficult to get your tongue round those words. But it is a thrilling piece, it is one that has to be listened to and refuses to be ignored. Graham had worked us in rehearsal, he had deconstructed sections, but we hadn't sung (or played) the piece straight through.



How would it go?

The die was cast, or the answer somehow already set with the preceding Beethoven, and when we declaimed O Fortuna it suddenly felt as though this was going to work, and work well.

Unlike the Beethoven, where the choir has to wait, we were already on a helter-skelter through the first three numbers before another Graham, this time of the Crowe variety, joined the fun and brought the sun into the Villa with some magnificent singing. None of this is for the faint hearted of course and Graham was up to the fiendish combinations of language and none too easy music. Similarly, orchestra and choir are frequently challenged by changing and unusual rhythms, but throughout we all maintained an irresistible momentum guided by the inspirational confidence from the podium. There are, of course some lovely passages, none more so than the wonderful In Trutina sung with exquisite feeling by Kristene who also provided us with the magical Dulcissime. She was wonderful, but not only that, she had prepared and supported the girls of the children's choir. Their short but crucial interventions were simply breathtakingly beautiful. They sang with sweet composure and gave the Amor Volat Undique the loveliest of effects to support and complement Krissie's part.

One of the great disappointments of all of the Covid related delays and cancellations meant that we no longer had the services of two soloists from across. One, Helen Power was greatly missed, and must have been in particular by Julian and Hilary. Kristene proved, a more than adequate, indeed superb replacement. Perhaps harder to replace, was the Tenor soloist, but in David



Williams we were fortunate indeed. Graham (Kirkland) supported him superbly to deliver a telling and fiendishly difficult passage about roast swans on a spit in the pub. He did incredibly well and captured the essence of this somewhat weird passage leading on to even more drunkenness from Graham and then all of the men. Yes, I do know what we were singing about, and yes the men were all sober as judges as they sang about just about everyone who drinks (too much). Did anyone notice who isn't included in the list of drinkers? (answers on a postcard)

By this time, and having managed somewhere in the region of ninety five percent of the words in the pub, it is becoming clear that the performance is going well. Really well. The orchestra were playing out of their skins, occasional glances were had, with affirmatory nods of acknowledgement and pleasure, and we were heading to the joyous Blanzifor et Helena and thence to a final resounding O Fortuna.

At risk of being repetitive, Julian has previously quoted the critic, Ivan Hewett saying, “You know you are in for a good performance when the performers are visibly enjoying themselves. Pleasure in coordinated action always enlivens the sound as well as the look of a concert and it gives extra warmth to the music’s emotional qualities”. So, did we enjoy ourselves? It was so obvious that we did. Did the audience enjoy it? With the wonderful ovation we had, and that doesn’t happen anywhere, most certainly not here on the Isle of Man when an audience do not enjoy themselves, the answer is clearly yes.



As a last word as I was on my way out (floating, it was a real high) I spoke to one of our fine orchestral players who was equally thrilled. I surmise she was thinking about a range of tricky last issues in the final rehearsal when with a huge smile she said “ where on earth did that come from?” Inspired choice? No doubt!

Sub-committee news and events

The choir sub-committee was busy during last summer and autumn since it set up the successful COME SING MESSIAH in June. They organised the social at “Sight Matters” enjoyed by a large number of choir members.

Plans for a Christmas knees-up were regrettably shelved as there was a general Covid reluctance to commit to social events at the time. Look out for more ideas and plans in the next period.

As the committee said last time the summer, “Come sing” was a celebration of singing for the sheer joy of it. Now as we hopefully continue a more normal life any other ideas for events are always welcome ... so please contact any of the sub-committee:

Gloria Balakrishna: gloriabal@hotmail.co.uk. Bill Creer: billcreer@hotmail.com

Rosie Snape: rosie.snape61@gmail.com. Carole Sutherland: timocar@manx.net

Our friends in IOMSO

Whilst we prepare for our next collaboration, there is more to enjoy from them. Support them! The November concert was a memorable concert with a superb soloist and a mouth-watering programme for lovers of dramatic, romantic Russian music.



The Spring Concerts 2022 of music by Mozart (Symphonies 31, 32 & Flute Concerto), Strauss (Serenade for Wind) and Sibelius (Andante Festivo) are at:

QEII High School Peel Saturday 12th March at 7.30 and;

Ballakermeen High School Douglas Sunday 13th March at 2.30.

Depending upon when you read this, either GO, or I hope you enjoyed one of them.

The Newsletter

Keep the articles coming - share thoughts on events past and present. If you have any snippets about current or past choir members please send them to me by email at edmund.j@live.com or to Brian at choral@manx.net

Our next concert

Mandy has regularly circulated notes including many encouragements and things to work on. The following are edited highlights of recent exhortations:

“We have work to do, so between now and our next rehearsal – please do listen to both works regularly, in particular the Weber. Ideally, I’d like us to be so familiar with them that if our scores were to spontaneously combust, we could still keep singing and, for me at least, repetition and constantly having the works playing in the background and singing along whilst going about everyday tasks can really help with this.

- Please practice your lines individually. I’ve shared YouTube links in an earlier reflection to the different parts of the Mozart and there are also apps like the excellent Choraline app which makes practising your individual parts at home easier. For the Weber, please use the internet link already advised by Brian. I think listening and becoming really familiar with the work will assist.
- Practise singing consecutive movements of the works together, in particular Mozart [first two movements] as it is a bit of a stamina test, and we don’t want to run out of steam.
- Go overboard on consonants the whole way through. You will never be doing too much!
- Think about dynamics when you are practising - every phrase needs to be shaped and we will not go for subtle dynamics, so if something is Forte, then really practise it at that dynamic so it becomes second nature.”

Recent advice has included singing the first pages of each movement looking up (if your copy hasn’t spontaneously combusted). Indeed looking up throughout helps the sound and creates a better look.

**In short: sing, practice, enjoy and sell some tickets.
Be there either as a performer or in the audience. You will not be disappointed.**

