



**A CHANGE IN  
DIRECTION?**



**NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR  
APPOINTED**



# THE CHORAL

## Changes Ahead

After the last few months of uncertainty about dates and agonising over “are we going to perform or not?”, we now have some big changes to announce. Changes in plans, changes in the key position of music director, and hopefully a change to some normality with concerts to look forward to in the time ahead. The frustrations of the year without a concert have to be weighed against the fact that - unlike our choral colleagues and friends across most of the world - at least we have had the joy of singing together for several extended periods of time. The last newsletter commented on the relief we felt to be out in numbers, singing both familiar and new repertoire. The shame is that we have yet to showcase all of this work.

Plans are now in place for an August return and a September celebration with both Carmina and the Beethoven to be performed live at the Villa. I know that we will all simply be keeping fingers crossed (but certainly not holding our breath) that this can go ahead. It is a great thrill to have both Graham Kirkland and Julian conducting in this concert. Graham, who has stepped in superbly to cover whilst Julian was recovering, will take us for the Carmina whilst, all being well, Julian will conduct the Beethoven.

The majority of this newsletter, however, is devoted to the big changes taking place in the musical leadership of this wonderful choir. Julian had decided to step down after a long and massively successful tenure as music director even before his recent illness. He outlines his thoughts on this and his appreciation of others in an article that makes up the main centrepiece of this edition. His stepping down means that his conducting of the Beethoven will be for him a farewell performance - there could hardly be a better, more celebratory way to sign off than with this masterpiece. We will sing our hearts out for him! He hasn't confirmed this yet, but it



is just possible that the Tenor ranks may swell by one in the future.

Julian also refers in his article to the process of choosing the person who has the mighty task of following him. This has now been completed and the Committee is thrilled to be able to confirm that Dr Amanda Griffin (Mandy from now on) will be taking the baton from the Autumn onwards in order to lead us in the Spring concert of 2022. The plan is to kick off Mandy's tenure by pairing the Weber Jubelmesse with the Mozart Requiem. I am sure we will all look forward to this very special occasion even if we are now tasked with searching for a suitable mezzo soloist. As a fun way of getting to know a little bit more about our new MD, we have a "ten questions for" Mandy in the article below. There is more ... read on, enjoy, and keep practising!

## Carmina Burana

Graham Kirkland writes:

I suppose it's ironic that we should be preparing a work about the wheel of fortune when at the same time, away from the music, we have been its victim over the past twelve months. When we eventually sing the last note of Carmina in the Villa Marina, if for no other reason I'm sure the audience will applaud our perseverance and determination to get the job done.

Behind the scenes everyone has been tremendously supportive. The orchestra are with us 100% and there has been a lot of goodwill and understanding in evidence when we've had to make so many changes.

We have plenty of time before rehearsals resume in August and it won't do any harm to leave the scores on the shelf for a little while longer. Nearer the time have a look at one of the recordings on YouTube for revision and try as much as possible to learn the words. Meanwhile I hope you're all keeping safe and well and I look forward to the time when we can get together and have a good sing.

## Reflections

### Julian's thoughts on:

**Carmina Burana** was an inspired choice by our committee when we met in May 2019, in that it has proved popular with our audience, with pre-sold tickets for the Carmina concert exceeding that for any previous concert. In addition it has

### *YouTube links.*

There are many YouTube links to the pieces we are doing with several versions already circulated.

Graham has sourced an excellent Carmina - performed by Temple University Symphony Orchestra and Combined Choirs.....well worth a look as you start to revise over the summer!

The Beethoven Choral Fantasia (Fantasy on YouTube) played by Martha Argerich with Seiji Ozawa conducting is (as most versions are) sung in German. Inspirational.

Mozart Requiem - there are many versions to pick from. We will post Mandy's recommendations in the next edition.

### *Key Dates:*

Rehearsals start : **19th August**,

then weekly plus a few extras until:

Concert: **29th September**

Spring Concert: **3rd April 2022**

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

inspired several previous members of the late Alan Pickard's Youth Choir who sang this some years ago to come to join us. New and younger members are the life blood of a choir and we are always excited to welcome such new members

**The future:** After our March 2020 and March 2021 concert arrangements had to be shelved as a consequence of the pandemic, our current Carmina Burana and Choral Fantasia concert is now set for Wednesday evening 29th September (almost the only date that the Villa Marina could offer us). We have scheduled a few weeks of intensive rehearsals for the choir and IoM Symphony Orchestra beginning on 19th August to ensure that both these contrasting works will be performed to our usual standard. Judith Christian has been most gracious in accepting the changes of date – preparing for each performance of the Choral Fantasia is a major undertaking for the solo pianist!

**My illness, moving on and my successor :** My being diagnosed with cancer at end of August 2020 caused our Committee to appoint Graham Kirkland to conduct our Carmina concert. He is a wonderful musician and thus has exacting standards, so we do need to attend as many of the scheduled rehearsals as we can. I was subjected to very high doses of chemotherapy which fortunately had the desired effect of shrinking my tumour such that it could be surgically removed in January. Having recovered from the operation, I am now expecting to conduct Beethoven's Choral Fantasia. This is particularly exciting for me as it will be the last work I conduct for IoM Choral Society.

I told Jim Cowell when he was our secretary that, in the best interests of the choir, I would hand over the baton to a younger conductor before long. John Riley has been my deputy for many years and I know how much the choir enjoys his directing - but he and Graham Kirkland are the same age as me. Having considered numerous younger musicians to stand in my place, I recommended to our committee Dr Amanda Griffin. Mandy readily agreed and will formally take over from me as conductor at the end of this season and for our 2021/22 season onwards.



I asked Mandy to help with Locus Iste that we had planned to perform in February this year and because I spent so much time in hospital during January, I subsequently asked her to conduct the whole of that Weber Mass concert. Having helped with our singing of Locus Iste and taking some of our rehearsals, you all have some experience of her expertise. She will lead the choir on to new heights - we are most fortunate that she is able to devote herself to our choir in conjunction with all her other teaching and responsibilities.

The committee had appointed Mandy to take over from me long before I was diagnosed with cancer or had any symptoms. So why have I elected to retire? Not because I have run out of enthusiasm or ideas or works that I wish to

direct. Quite the opposite: conducting IoMCS has been one of my most enjoyable, exciting and highly demanding responsibilities. I decided to retire purely for the good of the choir. The hope is that a younger conductor will attract vital younger members to come and join us. In any event, having had a type of cancer that is likely to reoccur, it is most fortunate that the choir now has a reliable and extremely competent younger director.

**The Carmina Burana / Beethoven Choral Fantasia concert:** The Villa Marina concert arrangements with IoM Symphony Orchestra are complex. Not only the organisation of the seating etc in the Royal Hall but the engagement of the musicians who are not members of IOMSO, their travel and accommodation, the hiring of the orchestral scores etc. This work begins in earnest in January each year. We are most fortunate that Graham took over from me this responsibility and all this work for our potential March 2021 concert which he has now reorganised for the end September date. He knew Carmina well before I asked for his help - I told him what was involved but I doubt that he anticipated that it would be quite so time consuming and demanding. We are most fortunate that he has taken this on and that he continues to manage all this for us so readily and willingly. I and our committee cannot thank him enough for his drive, enthusiasm and dedication. To reward him, do please give him your energy and attention to the complexities of Carmina Burana by attending as many rehearsals as possible and focussing on a spectacular performance of this exciting work.

**Some special people:** 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 (she rarely misses a rehearsal!). The choral works that our committee has selected for us to perform are difficult to play but she has risen to each one of them, really supporting me and lifting the whole choir. It has been a real joy working with her.

Through all the changes of date for our Carmina and Choral Fantasia concert, Judith too has been a tremendous encouragement to me. I am so looking forward to my last MD role with IoMCS, with her playing the technically difficult opening piano solo of the Choral Fantasia, conducting Judith and IoMSO in the expressive and colourful middle section, before building up to the joyous choral ending with the piano and orchestra triumphantly pounding away.

**And finally:** The classical music critic, Ivan Hewett writes: “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 we know what each of us has to do!!

## Ten Questions for Mandy

**The first question must be ‘how do you feel?’ (about your new role)**

Oh gosh, many things – Julian first spoke to me about the possibility of his retirement and my taking over the role quite some time ago now. He rang whilst I was out walking my dog, and I suspect I was entirely unresponsive, partly because the conversation was so unexpected and partly because I just couldn’t quite take it in. I think I probably said something like, ‘oh, right, yes...’ Then he rang off and I spent the rest of the walk having a little cry to myself. I felt then, and



I feel now, tremendously honoured that Julian and the committee would put their trust in me. I am also very aware of the footsteps in which I am following – Julian has been inspirational with his energy, his knowledge, his musicianship and just the very ‘Julian-ness’ of him, and I’ve been so privileged to sing alongside of him conducting many times now. Then, of course, there is the legacy of Pam Duchars and Alan Pickard. Pam was my first singing teacher when I was 17 and was so encouraging of me and my singing, and then, when I returned to the Island, the first thing I sang with IOMCS was the Armed Man with Pam conducting which was very special – I think I started crying during the ‘Better Is Peace’ section at the end (mind you, many members of the



choir and audience were crying too!). Going further back, my first experience of singing in a large-scale choral work with an orchestra in the Villa was the Mozart Requiem with Alan conducting in 1991 – I will never forget it, it was at the time, the most special occasion of my life that far.

So: many, many emotions and special times tied in with the IOMCS for me. I still keep having to pinch myself though and, of course, it’s recently been a difficult time for the IOMCS and most especially Julian, so perhaps the circumstances are less than they might have been, but I’m a combination of excited, humble, honoured, and maybe just a little nervous too !

[Can you tell us a little bit about your qualifications and background?](#)

I have a BA(Hons) degree in music and drama, and an MA and PhD in music. When I first moved back to the Island, I worked for the Isle of Man Civil Service, first as the Clerk to Court of Appeal, then Head of Parliamentary Administration at Tynwald, and finally the Private Secretary to the Chief Minister. Alongside this, I had a small number of singing students and was, at the time getting more singing work off-Island that was proving difficult to balance with a ‘day-job’. I took the plunge into self-employment, and I currently work as a singer, a singing teacher, a sessional lecturer at UCM, and as the MD of the IOM Govt Staff Choir. I still have my own singing lessons with the mezzo-soprano Alison Wells (a professor at the RCM). I’ve undertaken short courses at the RAM and National Opera Studio, and vocal pedagogy courses (complete Estill voice training levels I and II, Janice Chapman’s Classical Voice Teacher Training, and soon New York Vocal Coaching’s Teacher Certification programme – via the magic of Zoom). I’m a certified Vocal Health First Aider (a new programme offered through Vocal Education). Oh, and most recently (and perhaps most proudly), I gained a distinction in Grade 8 piano performance!

[We know you best as a singer, how will you make the transition to leading the Choral Society from the front?](#)

I imagine most people will think of me as a singer first and foremost, and although I did concentrate on performance in the final year of my undergraduate degree in Liverpool, I was very fortunate that my course encouraged the development of a wide range of skills, including both choral and orchestral conducting. Since I’ve been back on the Island, I’ve used my choral

conducting skills working as assistant musical director with the Manx Gilbert and Sullivan Society, the Douglas Choral Union, and Taylorian Productions. I've also been the musical director and conductor of the Isle of Man Government Staff Choir since its inception in 2015, and most recently worked with Graham Kirkland to establish the Mannin Youth Choir, so I'm feeling confident that my skills, when it comes to working with the choir, will be fine-tuned and ready to go! It has been some time since I conducted an orchestra, but I am really excited to re-visit this again as I used both play in (I played first oboe in a number of orchestras in my student years – in fact, I played the oboe more than I sang for a while) and assisted with conducting the South Liverpool Rehearsal Orchestra, as well as smaller instrumental groups – I really enjoyed this and so am looking forward to studying scores and practising my beat patterns once more and working with the skilled members of the IOMSO.

### Will you be doing any particular preparation for your role with IOMCS?

You can see from above that I'm an avid learner and I'm always seeking to grow my skills. To that end, and depending upon Covid restrictions, I'm committed to undertaking some study with the Association of British Choral Directors – they have general courses and also focussed study on the 'The Twelve', the most well-known choral works in the repertoire, and I'd definitely like to undertake some of these. I'll also obviously be doing lots of preparation in respect of really getting to know the works for the concert and calling upon the expertise and knowledge of Julian, Graham and others. IOMCS can rest assured that I'm never one to sit back and rest on my laurels and will always be seeking new ways to see how I can develop to serve them best.

### You asked the committee whether they'd agree to the Mozart Requiem being the featured work at the 2022 concert (alongside the rescheduled Weber). Why was this?

It's a really special work for me. I mentioned earlier that it was my first large-scale choral work, sung with the Youth Choir and the then Teachers' Choir – I have such vivid memories of that performance, and it was the start of a bit of an obsession with the piece and an obsession with choral singing. I also know the work really well, having studied it musically as part of my course as an undergraduate, and having sang the soprano solo in Winchester Cathedral and the alto solo here with IOMCS. I am confident that I'll be able to bring that knowledge to the rehearsals, which will hopefully mean the choir will quickly be able to place their trust in me to lead them to the 2022 concert. After the committee agreed that this would be an ideal work for 2022, I played it full blast and had (another) little cry as I imagined time-hopping back to whisper in the ear of awestruck 16 year old me who couldn't quite believe that she was part of such an event – 'hey, guess what...?'

### What qualities do you think you will bring to IOMCS?

That's a good question. I'm not planning on any sort of radical overhaul or huge change - I'm in a really fortunate position because the choir has had such a great leader in Julian, and so things are in a strong position. I'm not sure I can promise to bring more energy than Julian, but I will hopefully match his enthusiasm, positivity, and passion for choral singing. I think I have a broad knowledge of vocal technique, lots of patience, and commitment to continuing to build upon the brilliant work IOMCS has done under Julian's guidance and leadership. I know that change is never easy, but I'm hoping that my long association with IOMCS and my involvement earlier this

year will smooth the transition, plus I know that Julian has faith in passing the baton to me which really means a lot.

### Why do you think choral singing is important?

It's so important for so many reasons. So many studies have been done about the mental and physical health benefits of singing in a choir – I think this is even more vital after the pandemic as we're no longer taking any of it for granted. Then there's the music – whether singing or listening, it provides such catharsis and unites people like nothing else. Choral singing allows people to be part of something larger than themselves, if that makes sense – it doesn't matter whether it's a smaller choir, or a huge choral society like ours, that sense of community and a common goal really unites us.

### What is your favourite piece of music?

That's a difficult one. Choral music, I think it would be a tie between Mozart's Requiem and Verdi's Requiem. I think my save from the waves 'desert island disc' though would be Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony – the opening of that second movement...sheer bliss. I also love listening (singing along) to most musicals, 70s and 80s pop (I'm an avid Barry Manilow 'fanilow'!), and some modern artists – at the moment, I'm loving listening to Ayanna Witter-Johnson, and Marcin Patrzalek – do check them out if you don't already know them. It's my neighbours I feel sorry for, although I'm very lucky as Ann Wilson is a member of IOMCS and she and her husband Charles haven't yet complained about the sounds emanating from my house – I would hate to live next door to me.

### What are your interests and hobbies outside of music?

I don't actually have that much free time because my job is also my hobby, so if I'm not practising or teaching, then I'm often attending rehearsals. I'm very lucky because I do love my job, but it can sometimes be difficult to switch off from it especially as it doesn't really involve conventional work hours. However, I do love walking in the Island's hills, hanging out with my dog Fernando, having dinner with friends, listening to podcasts, and (to my shame) watching trash reality tv – Below Deck is a favourite.

### ....and lastly !!! Tell us one thing that most people don't know about you.

I was the Merseyside schools senior girls shot put and discus champion for two years in a row!

**Editorial comment:** That is pretty comprehensive, and whilst I agree with much of what she says I cannot agree with the notion about "Below Deck" - it is not trash! Any more questions for Mandy? Send them in.

## Sub - Committee News and Events

The Choral Society Committee recently decided to keep alive the possibility of a summer "Come Sing" event. Initially, this was going to be held on Good Friday, singing Stainer's Crucifixion, it was then subsequently moved to June. At the time of the Committee meeting and at the time of

## The Really Big Manx Sing

### Come Sing Messiah!

writing, this date seems so uncertain that it was decided to ask the Sub - Committee to explore the possibility of an event later on in the summer.

The choir sub-committee is now working to put together a COME SING MESSIAH in July in Trinity Church, Douglas. In deciding to call it THE REALLY BIG MANX SING, the Sub - Committee point out that "we have all been restricted in our singing over the last year and we all think it will be a good opportunity to celebrate our choral freedom with a work we all love to sing and people love to hear." They add that "we appreciate this could still be subject to change if the situation worsens suddenly, but we are looking at it positively and hope

that everyone will join us in what will be a very special event". The proposals will include a rehearsal in the afternoon and a "concert" in the evening to which the public and of course family members are welcome to make up the audience. All singers from across the Island will be invited and most welcome. There will be no charge, just a retiring collection to help cover the costs. Full details will be published once the arrangements are finalised.

Whilst there may be some uncertainty, it was felt that keeping the idea alive would be a positive step to maintain spirits, and it could be a super and relatively easy to organise way of celebrating the summer. Furthermore, if we do manage to do this, it will be a celebration of singing for the sheer joy of it as well as getting our vocal chords well prepared for the late summer return to rehearsals to prepare for our September concert at the Villa.

As we hopefully approach 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](mailto:gloriabal@hotmail.co.uk).

Bill Creer: [billcreer@hotmail.com](mailto:billcreer@hotmail.com)

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Carole Sutherland: [timocar@manx.net](mailto:timocar@manx.net)

## The Newsletter

As I noted last time, it is intended to produce a regular update including news and articles with about four copies a year. The regularity or timing of this will normally be dictated by the ebb and flow of our activities. This year has been hugely different for so many reasons, and it may be possible to do the odd extra edition to help keep people in touch. This is especially so with the need to keep a sense of normality in mind for all our members in these difficult times. Any ideas and articles, comments and photos will always be welcome. Please send them to me by email at [edmund.j@live.com](mailto:edmund.j@live.com) or to Brian at [choral@manx.net](mailto:choral@manx.net)

And as a hopeful reminder - this is what we look like when in full flow:





## Finally, from Charlie

”Whilst Julian may be doing more of this ...



..... I want to pay tribute to and thank everyone in the choir for their endurance through the last twelve months. I particularly feel it is appropriate to thank Julian, Graham and Mandy for providing us with such amazing and inspirational leadership. Our soloists, particularly Graham, Karen and of course Judith for giving us their time and so many memorable moments during the stop start of rehearsals. Julian has rightly acknowledged Jennifer’s superbly invaluable accompanying in his contribution above. Thanks also to our Committee and in particular our wonderful secretary Brian for keeping us all in order and fabulously up to date. I conclude by congratulating Ed for creating this newsletter, enjoy it, enjoy your spring and I really look forward to seeing everyone back singing sometime later in the Summer”