

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY



Gioachino Rossini

Petite Messe Solennelle

Sarah Helsby-Hughes – Soprano

Susan Marrs – Mezzo Soprano

Joseph Buckmaster – Tenor

Jacob Phillips – Bass

John Gough – Piano

Simon Russell – Harmonium

John Naylor – Conductor

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

Saturday 2 July 2022

Chairman's Welcome

Good evening, and on behalf of Nantwich Choral Society may I give you a very warm welcome to our Summer concert. Tonight's performance is dedicated to the memory of Joy Roberts, who sadly passed away earlier this year at the magnificent age of 102! Joy was one of the founder members of the society 50 years ago. She was a loyal and dedicated member who served the society for 25 years as our accompanist, both in rehearsals and at concerts, before stepping down at the age of 77. In recognition of her tremendous contribution to the society Joy was made an honorary member upon her retirement in 1997.

We would like to once again thank the Nantwich Town Council for their continued financial support, which helps us to stage events such as these, and to the Harding Trust, who have also supported us handsomely over the years and who continue to do so. Special thanks must also go to Cheshire East Library service, who have been unfailingly helpful in supporting us to source and borrow musical scores for our concerts.

Finally of course I would like to thank you our audience for your continued support and attendance, and we look forward to welcoming you again in September when we restart after our summer break.

Graham Harbage

Chairman, NCS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Joy Roberts (1919 – 2022) – A Tribute

Skilled accompanists are born, not bred – this indicates that they are persons gifted with special talents to offer to the performance of music, which cannot be universally acquired.

Joy Roberts, whose memory we honour tonight, was one of this order; she was the accompanist of the Nantwich Choral Society for the first quarter century of its existence.

Completing her studies at the Royal Academy of Music Joy was greatly influenced by Professor Vivian Langrish, a renowned pianist and exponent of the work of J S Bach.

Leaving the Academy Joy embarked upon a career as a private piano teacher. A considerable reputation developed in this respect not least after the family move to Nantwich in the 1960s. The success of so many pupils, at the highest level, led to a jostling for places on her lists.

Although known to be a not inconsiderable pianist herself records of Joy appearing as a soloist are hard to find; her forte lay in the art of piano accompaniment. Here in Nantwich she was regarded as a safe pair of hands, when called upon to accompany singers and instrumentalists.

With a sure knowledge of many of the scores in the repertoire and always ready to attack a fresh score with zeal, Joy was in a strong position to understand and support the lead of conductors. For members of the Society, there was that instinctive ability, to help master problems and uncertainties from the keyboard.

During her time several invitations to sing in Europe were accepted. Joy always participated in these and was never far from the centre of the fun which they afforded.

Memories for some time ago but with continued gratitude for her support in the development of the Society.

Herbert Rowsell
NCS President 1988 – 2005

Petite Messe Solennelle - Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868)

Rossini is remembered primarily for his immense contribution to the Italian operatic repertoire, but he also produced two important pieces of sacred music that are notable, amongst other things, for their overtly operatic style. This incorporation of the music of the opera house into the sacred repertoire may appear to have been a bold innovation, but in terms of dramatic content it was a well-established practice. Most composers who were familiar with the theatre as well as the church used elements of the operatic style in order to give their sacred compositions greater impact. A prime example is Handel, but the tradition goes back to Monteverdi, the first great opera composer, who even borrowed his own overture to *The Coronation of Poppea* for the opening movement of his 1610 *Vespers*. What is original about Rossini's sacred music is not so much its dramatic power, impressive though that is, as its unashamed romanticism.

Like so many of the great composers, Rossini was born into a musical family. His father was the town trumpeter in Pesaro and his mother was an opera singer. Both parents worked in various theatres in the region, and from an early age Gioachino went with them. As a talented boy soprano he was soon in great demand, and by the time he had reached his teens he could play the viola and the horn and was rapidly acquiring a reputation as a first-rate harpsichord-player and pianist. He went on to study at the Bologna Academy of Music, composing his first opera whilst still a student.

From then on his rise to fame was meteoric. He received his first professional commission in 1810, which led to a string of further commissions. With the enormous success of his first full-length opera, *Tancredi* (1812), and the even greater triumph of *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813), he became celebrated throughout Italy and his international reputation was firmly launched. He was still only 23 when he was engaged as Musical Director of the two opera houses in Naples, for each of which he was required to compose a new opera annually, the ever-popular *Barber of Seville* being one of the happiest results.

Rossini was always greatly attracted to a life of leisure, and as he was of a somewhat indolent nature he would frequently put off until the last possible moment the completion of his latest commission. He would then work at an incredible speed; several of his operas were written in under three weeks, an astonishing feat by any standards. He travelled widely throughout Europe, and in 1824 settled in Paris as Director of the Théâtre Italien. A string of new compositions followed, culminating in his acknowledged masterpiece, *William Tell*, completed in 1829 when he was still only 37.

At this point Rossini's life changed dramatically. For no apparent reason he gave up composing, and apart from two important religious works, the *Stabat Mater* (1842) and the *Petite Messe Solennelle* (1863), he wrote nothing of significance during the last forty years of his life. It may be that he had run out of energy and inspiration - *William Tell* had

been his thirty-sixth opera in nineteen years - or perhaps simply that he was by now so immensely wealthy that he had no particular incentive to go on working. He retired to a luxurious villa specially built for him at Passy, on the outskirts of Paris, where he was able to live the life of idleness and self-indulgence that, as a renowned gourmet and *bon vivant*, he had always found so appealing.

A visit to his villa was obligatory for every musician of importance visiting the capital, and here Rossini would hold court, entertaining everyone with his sparkling wit and good food, and revelling in the adulation of the constant stream of admirers and eminent visitors. These included Wagner, of whom he once wryly observed, '*His music has lovely moments but awful quarters of an hour!*'. In his latter years Rossini turned once again to composition, producing what he called his *Péchés de Vieillesse (Sins of Old Age)*, a collection of light-hearted pieces for piano, some also with voices. Despite his withdrawal from the operatic world, he continued to be held in such enormous esteem that when he died 6,000 mourners, four military bands, a chorus of 400 singers and several of the finest opera soloists of the day attended his funeral.

The *Petite Messe Solennelle* is the most substantial of the works written during Rossini's Indian summer of composition. It was composed in 1863 for private performance and is scored for four soloists and chorus, with harmonium and piano accompaniment. It was not heard in public until 1869, the year after his death, when it was performed in the composer's own orchestral version at the Théâtre Italien. The work's title is misleading, since the *Petite Messe Solennelle* is neither *petite* nor particularly solemn. It lasts well over an hour, and despite the religious text is unmistakably operatic in style, in common with the *Stabat Mater* of twenty years earlier.

The music ranges from hushed intensity to boisterous high spirits, and abounds in the memorable tunes and rhythmic vitality for which Rossini became justly famous. The quiet A minor opening of the Kyrie Eleison contrasts sustained choral writing with a running bass part in the piano accompaniment. This soon gives way to a brighter mood as the music moves into the major. For the Christe Eleison, Rossini adopted a deliberately archaic style, echoing the church music of Palestrina some 300 years earlier. As the second Kyrie unfolds, the movement returns to the serious mood in which it began.

The Gloria begins with a short introduction for chorus and soloists, followed by four extended solo movements that are operatic arias in all but name. The chorus returns for the final section of the Gloria, an extended fugue to the words 'Cum sancto spiritu in gloria Dei Patris, Amen.' This is a real *tour de force* of musical craftsmanship, reflecting the thorough classical training in harmony and counterpoint that Rossini received all those years ago at the Bologna Academy.

In the Credo Rossini ingeniously uses the word 'credo' as a unifying motif to which he repeatedly returns. This section of the mass concludes with another brilliant fugue for the chorus, at the words 'Et vitam venturi saeculi, Amen.' There follows an extended piano solo, leading to a lyrical Sanctus and Benedictus, and the work ends with a moving Agnus Dei for the alto soloist and chorus.

There is a sense in which Rossini's extraordinary musical facility was one of his weaknesses as well as one of his strengths. He once remarked, *'Show me a laundry list and I will set it to music!'* and this neatly illustrates his complete confidence in his own ability to produce music to order, whatever the words. To some extent, this is what he has done in the *Petite Messe*. Of course, there are many sections which beautifully reflect the words, such as the Christe Eleison and the Agnus Dei, but in other places one feels that Rossini has paid little regard to the essential meaning and form of the text.

The two extended choral fugues are good examples of this; they are disproportionately grand in relation to the rest of the Gloria and Credo. Yet at no point in the work does the music become remotely dull or routine. Such was Rossini's genius that even when the spirit of the music seems to depart from the spirit of the text one can't help but be captivated by the beautiful melodies and sheer *joie-de-vivre* of the piece. As he himself said, *'Delight must be the basis and aim of this art'*, and that is what he has achieved – a work not of profound religious insight, but one that is a delightful, life-enhancing musical experience.

The Text

Rossini's inscription in the introduction to the first version of his score reads:

"PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE, in four voices with accompaniment of two pianos and harmonium (a small reed organ) composed during my country stay at Passy. Twelve singers of 3 sexes (men, women, and castrati) will be enough for its performance: that is, eight for the chorus, four for the soloists, a total of twelve cherubim..... Lord, rest assured, that (my cherubim) will sing properly and con amore your praises and this little composition which is, alas, the last mortal sin of my old age."

He ended the manuscript:

"Dear God, here it is finished, this poor little Mass. Have I written sacred music or damned music? You well know I was born to write comic opera. It contains scant learning, but all my heart. Praise be to you, and grant me entry into Paradise."

G Rossini Passy, 1863".

1. Kyrie: Soloists and Chorus

Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison
Kyrie eleison

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

2. Gloria - Laudamus te: Soloists and Chorus

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ
voluntatis.

Glory to God in the highest
And in earth peace, goodwill to all men.

Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
glorificamus te,

We praise you, we bless you, we glorify
you,

3. Gratias: mezzo, tenor and bass soloists

Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam,

We give thanks to you for your great
glory,

4. Domine Deus: tenor solo

Domine Deus, Rex cælestis, Deus Pater
omnipotens, Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu
Christe altissime, Domine Deus, Agnus
Dei, Filius Patris.

Lord God, King of Heaven, God the
Father almighty, only son of the Father,
Jesu Christ the highest, Lord God, Lamb
of God, Son of the Father.

5. Qui tollis: soprano and mezzo duet

Qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis,
qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis,
qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe
deprecationem nostram.

You who take away the sins of the
world, have mercy on us, you who take
away the sins of the world, have mercy
on us, you who take away the sins of
the world, hear our prayer.

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris miserere
Nobis.

You who sit at the right hand of God,
have mercy upon us.

6. Quoniam: Bass solo

Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus
Dominus, tu solus altissimus Jesu Christe.

You only are holy, you alone are the
Lord. You, O Christ, alone are the most
high.

7. **Cum Sancto Spiritu:** Soloists and Chorus

Cum Sancto Spiritu in Gloria Dei Patris,
Amen.

With the Holy Spirit you are (most high)
in the glory of God, Amen.

Part 2

8. **Credo:** Soloists and Chorus

Credo in unum Deum
Patrem omnipotentem, factorem coeli et
terrae, visibilium et invisibilium. Et in
unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium
Dei unigenitum et ex Patre natum ante
omnia saecula.

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty, maker of heaven
and earth and of all things visible and
invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God, begotten
of his Father before all worlds.

Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum
verum de Deo vero, genitum, non factum
consubstantialem Patri, per quem omnia
facta sunt. Qui propter nos homines et
propter nostram salutem descendit de
coelis. Et incarnatus est de Spiritu sancto
ex Maria virgine et homo factus est.

God of God, Light of Light, very God of
very God, begotten, not made, being of
one substance with the Father, by
whom all things were made. Who for
us men and for our salvation came
down from heaven. And was incarnate
by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary
and was made man.

9. **Cruxifixus:** Soprano solo

Cruxifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio
Pilato, passus et sepultus est.

He was crucified also for us under
Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was
buried.

10. **Et resurrexit:** Soloists and Chorus

Et resurrexit tertia die secundum
scripturas: et ascendit in coelum,
sedet at dexteram Dei Patris, et iterum
venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et
mortuos, cuius regni non erit finis.

And on the third day he rose again
according to the scriptures, and
ascended into heaven and sits at the
right hand of the Father. And he shall
come again with glory to judge both the
quick and the dead: whose kingdom
shall have no end.

Et in spiritum sanctum Dominum et

(And I believe) in the Holy Ghost, the

vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit, qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur; qui locutus est per Prophetas. Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.

Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the Prophets. And I believe one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem peccatorum et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins and look for the resurrection of the dead

Et vitam venturi saeculi, Amen

and the life of the world to come. Amen

11. Preludio religioso and Ritornello

Piano and Harmonium

12. Sanctus: Soloists and Chorus

Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
pleni sunt coeli gloria eius.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy is the Lord God of hosts, the
heavens are full of his glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of
the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

13. O salutaris: Soprano solo

O salutaris Hostia, quae caeli pandis
ostium: Bella premunt hostilia, da robur,
fer auxilium.

O saving Victim, opening wide
The gate of Heaven to us below;
Our foes press hard on every side;
Your aid supply; your strength bestow.

14. Agnus Dei: Mezzo and chorus

Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins
of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins
of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins
of the world, Grant us your peace.

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BIOGRAPHIES

SARAH HELSBY-HUGHES –Soprano

Sarah studied with Pamela Cook MBE at the Birmingham Conservatoire of Music. Since graduation, Sarah's career has taken her all over the world, including performances in Europe, the USA and Japan.

She has appeared for many opera companies, including Mid-Wales Opera, Carl Rosa Opera, Lyric Opera Dublin, D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, Opera North, Opera Ireland, Pavilion Opera, Focus Opera and City of Birmingham Touring Opera.

Concert work includes all the major oratorio soprano solos, with appearances in Italy, The Netherlands, Ireland, and all over the UK. Since 2011, Sarah has been the Artistic Director of Heritage Opera, responsible for producing, translating, and directing most of the company's output.

Sarah most recently sang with NCS in the Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022 concerts. We are delighted to welcome her back once again.

SUSAN MARRS – Mezzo Soprano

Susan graduated from Trinity College of Music, London, after winning The Ricordi Opera Prize and The Trinity College Singing Department Prize.

Susan works extensively as a concert soloist and her wide Oratorio repertoire includes performances of Elgar's major works, Verdi's *Requiem*, Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *C Minor Mass*, Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and *St. Matthew Passion*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* and *Stabat Mater*, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* and Karl Jenkins *The Armed Man*.

Susan enjoyed twelve years as a member of the Extra Chorus at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and performances included Wagner's *Parsifal*, Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Susan has also sung for English National Opera in their production of *The Pearlfishers*.

Susan sings with "London Voices" under the direction of Terry Edwards and Ben Parry, and has participated in numerous concerts and recordings of works by Bach, Stravinsky, Ligeti, Boulez, Sir John Tavener, Sir Michael Tippett and Sir Paul McCartney. Film score recordings have included *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, *The Hunger Games* and *Fantastic beasts and where to find them*.

Susan owns and teaches at Singing Centre Nantwich, occasionally runs vocal masterclasses and is also a peripatetic voice teacher at The King's School, Chester. Susan is a member of the Nantwich Singers and also conducts two choirs – Nantwich Ladies Choir and The Dee Ensemble, based in Chester.

Susan is a Fellow of Trinity College, London.

JOSEPH BUCKMASTER – Tenor

Joseph Buckmaster is a Lyric Spinto Tenor, he completed his MA at the Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Richard Berkeley-Steele and his vocal coach Iain Ledingham.

Joseph began singing in the Chester Cathedral choir at the age of six and continued to sing there in various roles until the age of twenty-four. He began his formal training at the Royal Northern College of Music where he developed a deep passion for the Operatic repertoire. He performed in the chorus for their operas.

For Heritage Opera Joseph has performed in *The Magic Flute*, *Così fan Tutte* and *Carmen*. For Flat Pack Music he has performed in *Così fan Tutte*, *La Bohème*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Magic Flute*. He also directed their production of *The Marriage of Figaro*. For Hampstead Garden Opera he has performed the role of Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. Joseph is also an extra chorister for both the Royal Opera House and the English National Opera and is currently appearing in Eugene Onegin for Opera Holland Park

Joseph most recently sang with NCS in February's Come and Sing *Messiah* and the Spring concert this year. He makes a welcome return this evening.

JACOB PHILLIPS – Bass

Jacob Phillips was born in London and raised in Cheshire where he was a student of the JRNCM studying singing with Thomas Schulze. Jacob was later awarded an entrance scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music where he now studies under the guidance of Professor Mark Wildman and Matthew Fletcher. While at The Royal Academy of Music, he has been the recipient of the Rutson Memorial Prize and Harry Fisher Memorial prize and supported generously by the Philip Hattey Scholarship. Jacob is the 2016 winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Society Bursary award and the 2017 winner of the Somerset Song Prize's Most Promising Young Singer Prize.

In June 2017, Jacob gave his debut solo recital at the Lymm Festival, performing works by Schubert, Schumann and Vaughan Williams. Jacob also recently made his debut with the RAM's prestigious Song Circle at the Austrian Cultural Forum, singing songs by Butterworth, Somervell and Finzi.

On the operatic stage Jacob performed in the chorus of the RAO's performance of Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*. In the summer of 2017 Jacob performed the Roles of Guglielmo and Il Conte in opera scenes across the Italian province of La Spezia under the direction of Iain Ledingham.

Future performances as a soloist on the concert platform include Mozart's *Requiem* for Lymington Choral Society and Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* in Amersham under the direction of Iain Ledingham. In June 2018 he performed an Austrian themed recital in the Italian Cultural Institute of London for the Royal Academy of Music.

Jacob has previously appeared with Nantwich Choral Society in performances of *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation* and Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*.

JOHN GOUGH – Piano

John is a Tutor in Piano at Undergraduate and Post Graduate level, as well as a Tutor in Accompaniment at Postgraduate level.

He studied at RNCM on Associated Board Scholarship and was first pianist to graduate with a First Class Honours Degree and the Professional Performance Diploma with Distinction in the same year. He won the John Ireland Centenary Piano Competition and has since broadcast many of his works on BBC Radio. He has distinguished experience in solo and chamber music playing and more recently, song recitals.

John is a regular accompanist to Nantwich Singers and other performers at concerts in St Mary's Church.

SIMON RUSSELL – Harmonium

Simon was born in Liverpool. He studied organ at Birkenhead School with Timothy Lawford and then at Cambridge as Organ Scholar at St. Catharines's College, where he continued studies with Gillian Weir and the late Peter Le Huray. After Cambridge he was appointed Assistant Organist

at Chester Cathedral but decided after a while to keep music as a hobby and gain fortune from computer keyboards.

He was firstly accompanist and then Music Director of the Hoylake Choral Society from 1982 until he moved, in 2000, to Nantwich where he is Organist at St Mary's Parish Church. He is an annual recitalist at Chester Cathedral and is on the 'reserve' organist list covering holiday periods and other absences. He is also in demand as an organ tutor and has many Associated Board and other pupil distinctions and diploma successes to his credit.

Simon is currently the Regional Manager for the RSCM Central and East England Region and enjoys a flourishing freelance programme as an organ recitalist in great demand.

Simon was appointed accompanist to Nantwich Choral Society in 2010.

JOHN NAYLOR – Conductor

As conductor, singer and organist, John combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance.

Following a successful business career, he now devotes most of his activities to conducting, choir development and church administration. His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister (1957-61), a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and The Monteverdi Choir and Louis Halsey Singers, appearing at The Proms, The South Bank, and The Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings.

John was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has now conducted highly acclaimed performances of many of the works in the mainstream choral repertoire including *Elijah*, the *Dream of Gerontius*, *Verdi Requiem*, *Monteverdi Vespers*, the *Armed Man*, *The Peacemakers*, *Mozart Requiem*, *The Creation*, *The Seasons*, *Mass in Blue*, *Chichester Psalms*, *St Paul*, *Israel in Egypt*, *Petite Messe Solonelle*, *B minor Mass* and *St Matthew* and *St John Passions*.

John founded the Lydian Singers in 1980 (disbanded in 2021) who became one of the leading chamber choirs in the NW, and over 40 years sang in almost all the cathedrals in the UK. He also directs the Open University Chapel Choir whose visits in 2022 include St Mary's Edinburgh and Ripon Cathedrals.

In addition to his musical activities, John was a member of the General Synod (2015 – 2021) and has been Chairman of the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Finance since 2012. He is also Chairman of the Members of Three Spires Multi-Academy Trust and a Trustee of Shallowford House. He has recently been appointed Lay Canon at Lichfield Cathedral.



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