

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

Come and Sing

HANDEL'S

MESSIAH

Soloists from Heritage Opera:

Heather Heighway – Soprano

Serenna Wagner – Mezzo Soprano

Joseph Buckmaster – Tenor

Matthew Kellett – Baritone

Nantwich Sinfonia

Alison Loram – Leader

John Naylor – Conductor

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

Saturday 2nd February 2019 6.00 pm

Welcome to Nantwich, to St Mary's Church, and to the annual "Come and Sing" event hosted by The Nantwich Choral Society. This year we return to the music with which these events started, and which has been a feature of many of these: Handel's 'Messiah'.

At these events we actually look forward to the size of the choir being larger than the size of the audience and this is reflected in the layout of the church, with the choir occupying the nave seats whilst the audience occupies the choir stalls under the tower. Please bear with us as we try to accommodate everyone.

As is always the case for "Come and Sings", we attract visitors from across the North of England and the Midlands. In determining the timings for the day, we try to respect the fact that people have large distances to travel and thus have the concert starting at the early time of 6:00pm. The finish should therefore be around 8:30pm to 9:00pm.

In addition to those travelling long distances, we have people attending en-masse from other choral societies within the local area. Again, welcome to all.

Today's rehearsals and concert are, as usual, under the direction of our Music Director, John Naylor. The orchestra is Nantwich Symphonia, an orchestra composed of professional musicians who are brought together for such concerts, and the organist is Alan McGuiness. The soloists are from a local opera company, "Heritage Opera".

Part of the enjoyment of a day such as today is the opportunity to sing in a large choir and to sing with high quality soloists and orchestra. However, this is an expensive undertaking and the Nantwich Choral Society is, as always, grateful to our supporters, sponsors and advertisers who regularly provide grants and sponsorship to support our aim of bringing high quality classical choral music to South Cheshire, and promoting such music in the area. In particular I would thank Cheshire East Council, Nantwich Council and the Harding Trust for their continued support.

I trust an enjoyable day is being had by all, whether you are here as an audience member for the concert, whether you are accompanying a choir member and have had the opportunity to spend the day looking around our attractive market town of Nantwich, or whether you, as a choir member, have been inside for the rehearsals and have seen little of the town, other than, maybe, for the odd cafe or restaurant.

Whatever your own personal wish or aim for the day, I hope it has been fulfilled and that the final concert has been an enjoyable experience. Assuming you have enjoyed the day and you think you may be interested in taking part again next year, please leave your details with anyone from the Registration team or any member of the Front of House team.

And finally, if you think you would like to sing on a regular basis with the Nantwich Choral Society, then contact any member of the choir, who will direct you to the relevant officer.

Adrian Percy
Chairman

Commentary

MESSIAH

Today's performance of *Messiah* will unite many people who have gathered from far and wide to sing, play and hear this, the best known of all the works in the choral repertoire. Indeed, there is no more fitting work than *Messiah* for us to mark musically and spiritually the beginning of another new year. The previous successes of our early January 'Come and Sing' events have encouraged us to perform once again with orchestral accompaniment. We very much hope that it will be enjoyed by all involved.

Handel may have passed quite close to Nantwich on his way to give the first performance of *Messiah* in Dublin on April 13th, 1742. It is certainly possible, because he travelled from London to Chester (by which road remains unknown) where he was delayed by bad weather on the crossing route. Anxious to make good use of the time available, he prevailed upon the cathedral organist to arrange a 'sing through' of his new work with some members of the cathedral choir who, quite reasonably, he expected to be proficient readers of music. He was very put out by one of them who, when the singer gave a very poor account of the music placed before him, told a dismayed Handel that he could sing at sight 'but not at first sight!'

We know that Handel wrote *Messiah* in an amazingly short burst of inspiration, between Saturday August 22nd, 1741 and Saturday September 12th 1741 in preparation for the series of concerts he was to give in Dublin, borrowing very little from previous compositions. He was uncertain what musical resources he would have at his disposal when he arrived, so he designed the work for very sparing orchestration – only continuo, strings and brief appearances by trumpets and kettledrums.

The majority of the arias have an obbligato accompaniment by a single instrumental part with continuo. The chorus, though planned to be relatively few in number, is given a much more prominent role than in most of Handel's previous compositions. All this was designed for economy of cost, especially since the first performance was presented to raise funds for Dublin's Charitable Music Society.

Charles Jennens, Handel's regular librettist, selected the words from the Authorised Version of the Bible and from the Book of Common Prayer. This combination of familiar Old Testament and New Testament texts illustrates the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah in the Gospel story. The work is divided into three parts:

Part One: Prophecies of Christ's coming, the Annunciation and the Nativity.

Part Two: Christ's sacrifice, his Suffering, Resurrection and Ascension, the Evangelism of the Apostles and a glorious view of the Kingdom of God.

Part Three: Christ's redemption and the immortality of the Christian soul.

In order to accommodate as large an audience as possible, the Dublin Charitable Society's Stewards asked 'Ladies not to come with hoops' and Gentlemen 'to come without their swords'. On the day there were 700 people in the room, £400 was raised, and the Dublin Journal wrote: "Words are wanting to express the exquisite delight afforded to the admiring crowded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport the ravish'd Heart and Ear."

But when Handel returned and gave the first London performance as part of his Lenten Oratorio season at Covent Garden Theatre in 1743, the reaction was underwhelming. Some critics piously questioned the suitability of a playhouse for the performance of sacred texts, and most patrons preferred Handel's *Samson* which was 'received with uncommon applause' whilst *Messiah* 'was but indifferently relish'd.'

Handel was born in Halle (Germany) in February 1685, and after youthful appointments as organist at the local cathedral and harpsichord player / violin player at the local opera house, he went to Italy in 1706 where he wrote numerous operas and cantatas in the Italian style.

He returned to Germany, but between 1710 and 1716 he commuted regularly to London where Italian opera had become very popular. He eventually settled in England in the service of the Duke of Chandos who, like many rich noblemen, maintained his own small musical establishment. In 1719 he became Music Director of The Royal Academy, formed by a group of noblemen to put on regular Italian opera performances.

This proved a musically successful but financially insecure venture, and so in 1729 he started seasonal programmes on his own account. During the 1730s he built up a flourishing and profitable reputation for seasons of Italian operas and English oratorios and odes at Covent Garden.

Thus Handel was essentially a man of the theatre, especially Italian opera, although he was also undoubtedly a man with a religious background. Biblical subjects (with which his audience would have been very familiar) proved a rich source for the libretti of very many of his compositions. After composing *Messiah* for Dublin he seems to have concentrated principally on oratorios to be performed in the theatre, but he did revive *Messiah* in 1745 and again in 1749.

Handel, by then 45 and more affluent, had become an establishment figure, and in 1750 began the English tradition of performing *Messiah* in support of good causes, in this case for the Foundling Hospital where he was a governor. All of a sudden *Messiah* 'was received with universal applause', its public reputation in England was transformed and it has enjoyed a uniquely unbroken history of performance ever since.

When King George II attended a performance he (allegedly) stood up at the beginning of the Hallelujah chorus, but nobody really knows why. The reasons may have been lofty,

they may have been prosaic. However, the audience followed protocol and also stood, a tradition was begun, and most audiences have stood for this great chorus ever since!

In the 18th century Mozart famously produced a version with more lush orchestration; in the 19th century it became customary to give performances with staggeringly large resources (up to 2,500 performers). Every choral society included *Messiah* in its repertoire, and it is tempting to speculate that the sentiments attached to performances at this time were as much socially worthy ('improving') as they were musical.

In the first part of the 20th century conductors including Thomas Beecham and Malcolm Sargent gave performances which today would be regarded as hopelessly romantic, but they were nevertheless very persuasive interpretations. In the latter part of the 20th century it became, and still is, more customary to perform baroque music with resources more closely aligned to those originally intended. Tonight's performance uses the forces available to us, and on this occasion it is just as much about performing as it is about hearing this glorious work.

Handel died in 1759, nine days after conducting his last performance of *Messiah*, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He is regarded, with his contemporary J.S. Bach, as the greatest of all the many Baroque musicians and composers: certainly he is one of the greatest of all the English composers. In *Messiah* he left us a legacy which has truly stood the test of time.

Jennens quoted Virgil in the introduction to his libretto – *Majora canamus* (let us sing of Greater Things). *Messiah* was considered in Handel's day a 'Grand Musical Entertainment' and since then it has properly gained a unique place in musical performance. Even in a cynical and more secular age it has the power to move and inspire. The words are still well known by most of us, Handel's music is at once familiar and fresh and the work has a curious propensity to engage performers and audience alike in a corporate musical experience quite unlike any other.

Handel himself said of the audience at one performance: "I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better." In this performance tonight, may we all find a glimpse of some of the 'Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge' to which Jennens so appositely also referred.

May this occasion also inspire us to continue our tradition of meeting together at the beginning of each year to make music spontaneously for many years to come.

John Naylor

THE TEXT OF *MESSIAH*

MAJORA CANAMUS

(*Virgil, Eclogue IV*)

And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

In whom are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge.

(*1 Timothy iii, 16; Colossians ii, 3*)

(These words, selected by Jennens, the librettist, formed a preface to the wordbook of the first performance of *Messiah* in April 1742 in Dublin.)

PART ONE

1. Symphony

2. Tenor recitative: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. *Isaiah 40:1-3*

3. Tenor aria: Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight, and the rough places plain. *Isaiah 40:4*

4. Chorus: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. *Isaiah 40:5*

5. Bass recitative: Thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, a little while, and I will

shake the heavens, and the earth, the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. *Haggai 2:6-7*

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. *Malachi 3:1*

6. Contralto aria: But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire. *Malachi 3:2*

7. Chorus: And He shall purify the sons of Levi that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. *Malachi 3:3*

8. Contralto recitative: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, "God with us". *Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23*

9. Contralto aria and Chorus: O thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou, that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! *Isaiah 40:9*

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. *Isaiah 60:1*

10. Bass Recitative: For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. *Isaiah 60:2-3*

11. Bass Aria: The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. *Isaiah 9:2*

12. Chorus: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:6*

13. Pifa (Pastoral Symphony)

14. Soprano Recitative: There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. *Luke 2:8-9*

15. Soprano recitative: And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2:10-11*

16. Soprano recitative: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: *Luke 2:13*

17. Chorus: Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill toward men! *Luke 2:14*

18. Soprano aria: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is the righteous Saviour and He shall speak peace unto the heathen. *Zechariah 9:9-10*

19. Contralto recitative: Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. *Isaiah 35:5-6*

20. Contralto aria: He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. *Isaiah 40:11*

Soprano aria: Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him; for He is meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. *Matthew 11:28-29*

21. Chorus: His yoke is easy, His burthen is light. *Matthew 11:30*

Interval of 15 minutes

PART TWO

22. Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. *John 1:29*

23. Contralto aria: He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. *Isaiah 53:3*

He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting. *Isaiah 50:6*

24. Chorus: Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. *Isaiah 53:4-5*

25. Chorus: And with His stripes we are healed. *Isaiah 53:5*

26. Chorus: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53:6*

27. Tenor recitative: All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn: they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying, *Psalms 22:7*

28. Chorus: He trusted in God that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him. *Psalms 22:8*

29. Tenor recitative: Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness: He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him. *Psalms 69:20*

30. Tenor Aria: Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow. *Lamentations 1:12*

31. Tenor recitative: He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken. *Isaiah 53:8*

32. Tenor aria: But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. *Psalms 16:10*

33. Chorus: Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. *Psalms 24:7-10*

38. Soprano Aria: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! *Romans 10:15*

40. Bass Aria: Why do the nations so furiously rage together, why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed. *Psalms 2:1-2*

42. Tenor recitative: He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision. *Psalms 2:4*

43. Air: Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. *Psalms 2:9*

44. Chorus: Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:6*

The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 11:15*

King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:16*

Pause

PART THREE

45. Soprano aria: I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. *Job 19:25-26*

For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. *1 Corinthians 15:20*

46. Chorus: Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the

dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. *1 Corinthians 15:21-22*

47. Bass recitative: Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

48. Bass aria: The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. *1 Corinthians 15:52-53*

49. Contralto recitative: Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. *1 Corinthians 15:54*

50. Alto and Tenor duet,: O death, where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. *1 Corinthians 15:55-56.*

53. Chorus: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. *Revelation 5:12-14*

54. Chorus: Amen

Nantwich Sinfonia	
Alison Loram	Violin
Jayne Robinson	
Kate Pelling	
Jac McKeigue	
Kate Spiers	
Julian Robinson	Viola
Nick Smith	
Ruth Henley	Cello
Becca Nelson	
Tim Jones	Bass
Richard Weigall	Oboe
Marcia Ferran	
Jane Williams	Bassoon
Wendy Jones	Trumpet
Andrew Farrow	
David Pugh	Timpani
Alan McGuinness	Harpsichord / Organ

Nantwich Sinfonia

Nantwich Sinfonia (leader Alison Loram) appear regularly with Nantwich Choral Society. The professional players who make up the orchestra all have extensive experience with major orchestras in the Midlands, Wales and North of England.

Heather Heighway – Soprano

Chester born Soprano Heather Heighway graduated from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire with First Class Honours in 2013. She now studies at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Ruby Philogene.

Heather was involved in many of the Conservatoire's productions playing a fox cub in Janacek's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Kurt Weill's Rose Maurrant in *Street Scene*, and Emperor Nerone in Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* (Opera Excerpts). Since leaving the Conservatoire Heather has played numerous operatic roles including Susannah in Mozart's *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, Adele Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Valencienne in Lehar's *The Merry Widow*, Olympia in Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman*, Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Micaela in Bizet's *Carmen*, Donna Elvira in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*.

In August 2014, Heather sang with Co Opera Co in London in *The Cunning Little Vixen* playing the Frog and Frantik. In 2016 Heather had her debut role with Heritage Opera playing Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and has performed with them as Despina in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, 1st Lady in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Mabel in *Pirates of Penzance*. Heather has also performed with Flat Pack Music as Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, Mimi in Puccini's *La Bohème* and the Countess in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Heather has won many prizes across the North West including a Recital Prize at the Mrs Sunderland Music Festival in Huddersfield and she was the Chester Young Musician of the year in 2011. Whilst at the Conservatoire Heather won The Reginald Vincent Lieder Prize, second place in The Edwards Brooks English Song Prize and was a finalist in the Mario Lanza Opera Prize. Heather was also awarded the Ella Cheshire Scholarship and The Gordon Clinton English Song Prize. She also won both the district and regional NODA awards for her portrayal of Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin* in 2017.

Heather has been the soprano soloist in choral works: Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Finzi's *In Terra Pax*, Faure's *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Schubert's *Mass in G*, Mozart's *C Minor Mass*, Haydn's *Creation* and Bach's *Saint John Passion*.

Serenna Wagner –Mezzo Soprano

Serenna has performed extensively as an opera, oratorio and concert soloist since graduating from the Royal Northern College of Music. She continues to study singing privately with Kathryn Harries.

On the operatic stage, highlights have included Carmen, Suzuki, Dorabella and Fanny Price, the latter being a role she created in the world premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park* directed by Michael McCaffery. After completing the Opera Works course at English National Opera, Serenna appeared as a chorus member at The Coliseum in productions of *The Magic Flute*, *The Damnation of Faust*, *Madame Butterfly* and *The Flying Dutchman*.

Serenna has performed many times on the oratorio and concert platform, both in the UK and in France. Perhaps most notably she was a soloist in Janacek's piece *The Diary of one who Vanished* with The Halle Orchestra at The Bridgewater Hall under Ed Gardner. She has also given many opera gala performances, and appeared on several occasions as a guest artist with Swan Hellenic cruises.

Joseph Buckmaster – Tenor

Joseph Buckmaster graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) where he studied with Peter Alexander Wilson and David Maxwell Anderson.

Originally from Chester, Joseph began his vocal tuition at the age of 6 in the Chester Cathedral Choir. Whilst singing as a Chorister for Roger Fisher, a Choral Scholar for David Poulter and a Lay Clerk for Philip Rushforth he gained a love for the English choral tradition. Joseph has performed as soloist throughout the country including Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Handel's *Messiah*, Stainer's *Crucifixion*, Carissimi's *Jephthah*, Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb* and Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*.

In 2009 Joseph began his training at the Royal Northern College of Music where he developed a deep passion for the Operatic repertoire. He performed in the RNCM chorus for several of their operas, including Offenbach's *La Belle Helene*, Mozart's *La Clamenza di Tito*, Bizet's *Carmen* and Barber's *Vanessa*. Joseph has performed in the RNCM's Opera Excerpts as Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Gennaro in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, Raoul de Gardefeu in Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne* and Rinnucio in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. In 2012 he covered the role of Giove in the RNCM's production of Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulise in Patria*.

Since graduating he has performed professionally the roles of Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* for Heritage Opera, as well as Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* and Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Bohème* for Flat Pack Music.

Joseph is currently studying on the master's course at The Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Richard Berkeley-Steele. He recently performed the role of Apollo in the Academy's opera production of Handel's *Semele* and will be playing the role of Almerick in their upcoming production of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*.

Matthew Kellett – Baritone

London born baritone Matthew Kellett is a graduate of The Royal Northern College of Music and Trinity College of Music where he was awarded the TCM Trust's Silver Medal for vocal studies.

Matthew is an experienced concert soloist with past performances including: Fauré *Requiem*, Haydn *Nelson Mass*, Mozart *Requiem*, Bach *Magnificat*, Verdi *Requiem*, Brahms *Requiem* and Handel *Messiah*. Other concert and oratorio roles include Christus in *St. John Passion*, *Elijah* conducted by Sir David Willcocks and Polyphemus in *Acis and Galatea* under the direction of Sir Charles Mackerras.

As an opera performer Matthew has appeared as Shaunard in *La Bohème* (Charles Court Opera), Martino in *L'occasione fa il Ladro* (Opera Minima), Antonio in *Le Nozze Di Figaro* (British Youth Opera) and Ko Ko in *The Mikado* (Silk Opera) amongst many others. Matthew also performed the baritone role in the UK premiere of *Flatpack: An Opera in IKEA*, a contemporary opera entirely staged within the showrooms of a working IKEA store.

Forthcoming engagements include a variety of opera and concert work including Shaunard in *La Bohème* for Heritage Opera and several Messiahs over the Christmas period.

Heritage Opera

Heritage Opera began in Leyland, Lancashire in 2006, when conductor Chris Gill arranged a short tour of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, which visited several Lancastrian venues. The tour went well, and he arranged and conducted at least three opera tours a year until 2011.

His wife, soprano Serenna Wagner, is still a company member but Gill decided to concentrate more on his teaching career and he handed over the reins to Sarah Helsby Hughes and Nick Sales who have been running the company ever since.

Chris remains as emeritus musical director and he is also the chairman of the charity that runs the company. Gill was also far-sighted enough to realise that producing operas in small stately

homes, while a pleasant occupation that brought pleasure to many, would not put the name of Heritage Opera on the musical map. He had the audacious idea of commissioning a new opera, conceived for just their type of country house performance, and he approached arguably the foremost opera composer in the UK today, Jonathan Dove, to write it for him. The world première of Dove's *Mansfield Park*, based on the Jane Austen novel, was given at Boughton House, the home of the Duke of Buccleugh, in Summer 2011. It toured Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire, and eventually appeared at the trendy London opera festival, Grimeborn, to rave reviews from the national press.

Chris Gill's ambition to make Heritage Opera an artistic force to be reckoned with has paid off, and Heritage Opera is now regularly invited to play at top stately homes, large theatres, festivals and for corporate and private entertainment. One of the reasons for Heritage Opera's continued success lies in its uncompromising musical standards. Only professional singers are used, and wherever possible, performers with a northern link are given preference.

Recent developments include touring to various new venues in Scotland and Southern England, a repeat booking with the Northumberland Music Festival, a Young Artists Programme, intimate "A Passion For..." concert tours, and young musical dynamo Benjamin Cox becoming their regular accompanist.

Unfortunately Nick Sales became seriously unwell early this year and so he and his wife Sarah Helsby Hughes had to withdraw from this event. We wish Nick a rapid and successful recovery and are very grateful to Heather Heighway and Joseph Buckmaster who have agreed at short notice to sing in their place.

Alan McGuinness – Keyboard continuo and rehearsal accompanist.

Alan began studying the organ while he was a pupil at Liverpool's historic Blue Coat School. He continued his studies at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he was a prize winner, graduating in 1997 with BMus (Hons). During this time, his tutor was Margaret Phillips, however he performed in many master classes led by prolific organists of our generation, including Dame Gillian Weir, David Sanger, David Briggs, Ludger Lohmann, Jacques Van Oortmerssen and Naji Hakim, the successor to Messiaen as organist at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris.

In September 1997, Alan became organ scholar at Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral and just over a year later he was appointed assistant organist at St Asaph Cathedral. As well as accompanying the many services held in the cathedral, he was given the task of promoting, establishing and directing a new cathedral girls' choir.

In January 2004, at the age of 28, he was appointed as the Organist and Master of the Choristers, continuing until August of last year.

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. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Carlisle, Christ Church Oxford and Chester where until recently he could still be occasionally spotted on the back row!

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since founding the choir in 1980. They are now one of the leading chamber choirs in the North West and have performed extensively in the North West, Spain, France, Italy and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation. He also conducts The Open University Chapel Choir.

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.

Recent performances have included Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Rutter's *Magnificat* and *Sprig of Thyme*, Verdi *Requiem*, Dvorak *Stabat Mater* and Jenkins 'The Armed Man' with NCS, Durham, Peterborough, Lichfield and Southwell cathedrals and Will Todd's *Mass in Blue* at The Lymm Festival with The Lydian Singers, and Blackburn, Liverpool, Oxford, Winchester and Portsmouth cathedrals with OUCC.

In addition to his musical activities, John has been Chairman of the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Finance since 2012. He is also a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

Acknowledgements

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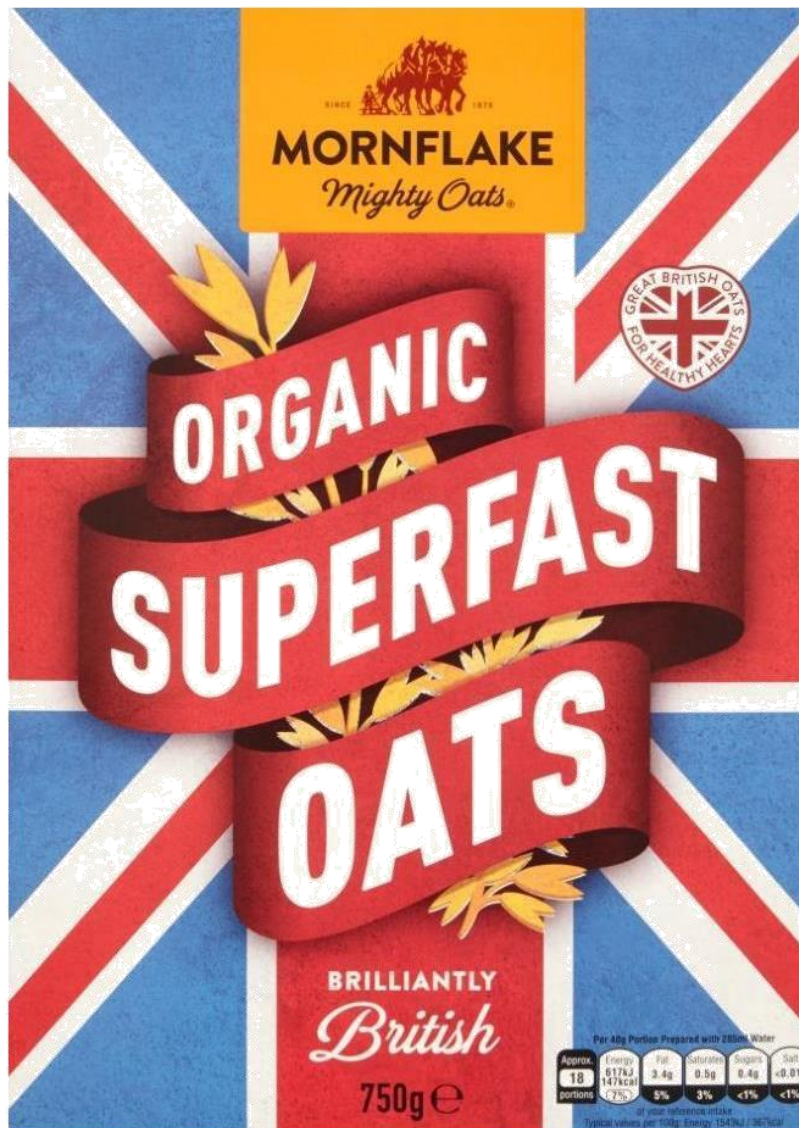
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