

Nantwich Choral Society

**Edward Elgar
Sea Pictures
Salut d'amour
The Music Makers**

**Ralph Vaughan Williams
Serenade to Music**

**Susan Marrs – mezzo soprano
Alison Loram – violin
David Houlder – organ and piano
Simon Russell – conductor**

**St Mary's Church, Nantwich
Saturday 30th March 2019**

Welcome to the Nantwich Choral Society Spring Concert, and on this occasion a programme of typically English music by Elgar and Vaughan Williams.

This evening you will notice that we are not being conducted by our regular conductor, John Naylor, but rather by our regular accompanist, Simon Russell. In Simon we are fortunate to have a very competent conductor and musician, and we are grateful to him for taking on this role tonight. And the knock-on effects don't stop there, since we also still need an accompanist for this evening's music. To that end we are pleased to welcome David Houlder to participate in this NCS concert.

As always, it is a pleasure to welcome back Susan Marrs as our soloist this evening and also Alison Loram, accompanying on the violin.

All of this comes about because unfortunately, at this time, John is having to undergo knee replacement surgery. We wish him a speedy recovery and look forward to him being back with us as soon as he is able. This also has had some influence on our recent decision to cancel our summer concert for this year.

So for this 2018/2019 season, this concert is our final event. However, the choir will not be idle until the start of the 2019/2020 season, but rather it will be taking the opportunity to rehearse new music for the following year and build up its repertoire. Time gained for rehearsing will never be wasted. Then, all too soon, the society's 50th anniversary will be upon us in 2022/2023. Between now and then, major works being considered including the Bach *B minor Mass* and Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*.

And to finish, a few words of thanks are due to our sponsors and providers of grants, namely the Harding Trust, Nantwich Council and Cheshire East Council. Without their support we would struggle to stage performances on this scale and to the standard which we achieve. And finally we must thank our supporters - you, the audience - for your continued support and attendance. Without you none of this would be possible.

We will look forward to welcoming you once more to our first concert of the new season on Saturday 9th November 2019 when we will be performing Fauré's *Requiem* and Andrew Milldinhall's *Even such is time*.

Have an enjoyable summer.

Adrian Percy

Programme

Sea Pictures – Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934)

- 1 Sea Slumber Song
- 4 Where Corals lie
- 5 The Swimmer

Salut d'amour – Edward Elgar

Serenade to Music – Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

Interval of 15 minutes

The Music Makers – Edward Elgar

COMMENTARIES

Sea Pictures – Edward Elgar

The song cycle *Sea Pictures*, Op. 37 by Sir Edward Elgar consists of five songs written by various poets. It was set for contralto and orchestra, though a distinct version for piano was often performed by Elgar. Much of the vocal line of the first song, *Sea Slumber Song*, is heard again in other parts of the cycle; most notably, the second stanza is heard again almost in its entirety as part of the finale.

Elgar composed the songs on his 1894 Broadwood Square piano while living at Birchwood Lodge, Great Storridge in Herefordshire. The songs, composed in July 1899 were originally written in high keys for a soprano voice, but transposed to lower keys for the orchestral version, largely at the request of the contralto Clara Butt.

The premiere was on 5 October 1899 at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival with Elgar himself conducting and Clara Butt singing, dressed as a mermaid. On 7 October, Clara Butt gave the first London performance at St. James's Hall, with Elgar at the piano. Nearly two weeks later, on 20 October, Butt performed it for Queen Victoria at Balmoral.

Elgar's chosen texts often relate to the dichotomy of fear and fascination. Sometimes, when the singer represents humanity, as observer or participant, the orchestra will reflect the dispassionate deep, neither friend nor foe but something of both, almost synonymous with the "Hand of God".

The poems now seem rather dated; apart from the rather superficial link of the sea, there is no thematic interconnection between them and Elgar's settings make little attempt at a grand portrayal of the sea as other composers have successfully attempted. Despite this, the songs have remained firm favourites with singers and concert goers alike.

In the Summer of 1888, Edward Elgar and Alice Roberts were heading towards marriage. Edward decided on a holiday with his long-standing friend, Dr Charles Buck of Settle, Yorkshire. As he left Worcester, Alice presented Edward with a poem she had written and entitled *Love's Grace*. While on holiday in Settle, Edward reciprocated by writing a short piece of music for her, which he called *Liebesgruss* (Love's Greeting). The work carried the dedication "To Carice", a contraction of his future wife's forenames Caroline Alice with which they subsequently christened their daughter. On his return from Settle, Elgar presented the work to his wife and proposed to her. They married at the Brompton Oratory in South Kensington, London in May the following year.

Towards the end of 1888, Edward submitted three arrangements of the work - for solo piano, for violin and piano, and an orchestral arrangement - to the music publishing firm of Schott who agreed to buy the work outright for a fee of two guineas. At first, the work sold slowly. Apparently with Elgar's approval, Schott's retitled the work *Salut*

d'Amour and gave the composer's name as Ed. Elgar, believing that the French title and a less obviously English composer would help the work gain wider international approval. It did, much to the publisher's satisfaction but with no financial benefit to Elgar.

It is easy to dismiss *Salut d'Amour* as an insignificant trifle, salon music not deserving a wider audience. However, for the work to establish itself so forcefully in what was a fiercely competitive field says much for its charm and quality. And, as Elgar's first published work, it has a historical value, containing pointers to the skills that Elgar was to develop and display in his later works.

Serenade to Music – Ralph Vaughan Williams

Originally set for 16 singers and orchestra, this was composed in 1938. The text is an adaptation of the discussion about music and the music of the spheres in Act V, Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare. Vaughan Williams later arranged the piece into versions for chorus and orchestra and solo violin, chorus and piano. The piece was composed in 1938 as an homage to Sir Henry Wood (1869-1944), who conducted the Proms for almost 50 years. Vaughan-Williams' *Serenade to Music* also pays tribute to the greatness of Shakespeare by adapting to music a poetic discussion about music from Act V Scene 1 of his *Merchant of Venice*. In this scene, declarations of love juxtapose with comparisons of music to the movement of celestial bodies and contemplation of the beauty of music by night and by day.

Lorenzo and Jessica are at Belmont awaiting the return of Portia from Venice. The scene is famous all through for the lyric beauty of the verse:

The moon shines bright. In such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise, in such a night,
Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls,
And sigh'd his soul towards the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night ...

Later - and this is where Vaughan Williams comes in - the lovers sit listening to music, gazing at the stars and revelling in the magic of the night. The words are set to music of the most exquisitely sensuous sweetness, totally discrediting that idle old fancy that only mediocre poetry gains from being translated into its sister medium. Vaughan Williams encompasses uncertainties and reflections as well as hedonistic rapture and contentment, and the piece is flawlessly shaped.

One of its greatest admirers on the occasion of its first performance was Rachmaninov who, having played his Second Concerto in the first half of the concert, joined Lady Wood and other guests in her box for the second half, where he heard the Serenade. The conductor Felix Weingartner (also in the box) recalled that Rachmaninov sat at the

back, his eyes filled with tears; later Rachmaninov told Sir Henry that he had never before been so moved by music.

Knowing the kind of man Rachmaninov was, and the music he composed himself and liked to hear and play, there is no reason to suppose he was being insincere.

The Music Makers – Edward Elgar

Op. 69 is a work for contralto or mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra. It was first performed at the Birmingham Festival on 1 October 1912, conducted by the composer, with Muriel Foster as the soloist.

The text of the work is the 1874 poem *Ode* by Arthur O'Shaughnessy, which Elgar set in its entirety. He had been working on the music intermittently since 1903, without a specific commission

The words of the poem no doubt appealed to Elgar's nature, as it celebrates the dreaming artist - by 1912, he was established as part of British artistic society, but was ambivalent at best about that society. The mood of the Ode is clear in the first lines, which depict the isolation of the creative artist. Later verses celebrate the importance of the artist to his society.

The music is for the most part reserved and personal, and Elgar quotes his own music several times. Sometimes there is a specific verbal cue: for example, the word "dreams" is accompanied by a theme from *The Dream of Gerontius*, and "sea-breakers" by the opening of *Sea Pictures*.

The music also quotes the first and second symphonies, the Violin Concerto, "Nimrod" (from the *Enigma Variations*), *Rule, Britannia* and *La Marseillaise*. However, it is possible to make too much of the self-quotations. Most of the music is original, and Elgar more than does justice to O'Shaughnessy, displaying a perfect ear for the sounds of the chorus and the mezzo-soprano.

Whatever the past and current views of O'Shaughnessy's poetry, there can be no doubt that Elgar felt a strong affinity with the words of the poem, identifying himself with the 'dreamer of dreams' in the first line of the poem. And accepting the autobiographical links Elgar saw in the work, what should be more natural than that he should recall his earlier career through a series of quotations from those works.

Fortunately, the public does not slavishly follow the critics. The work achieved an immediate popularity, receiving frequent performances in the years following its composition. And while its initial popularity may have declined somewhat, the work is still performed regularly if infrequently, with the quotations adding a certain novelty value to what is undoubtedly a mellow and heartfelt work.

[Commentary compiled by John Naylor]

TEXTS

Sea Slumber Song

Sea-birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;

"I, the Mother mild,
Hush thee, O my child,
Forget the voices wild!
Hush thee, O my child,
Hush thee.
Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lull'd by whispering waves,
Veil their marbles
Veil their marbles bright,
Foam glimmers faintly white
Upon the shelly sand
Of this elfin land;

Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song,
My slumber-song,
Leave woes, and wails, and sins,

Ocean's shadowy might
Breathes good-night,
Good-night...
Leave woes, and wails, and sins,
Good-night... Good-night...

Roden Berkeley Wriothsley Noel (1834 1894)

Where Corals Lie

The deeps have music soft and low
When winds awake the airy spry,
It lures me, lures me on to go
And see the land where corals lie.
The land, the land, where corals lie

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,
When night is deep, and moon is high,
That music seeks and finds me still,
And tells me where the corals lie.
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,
But far the rapid fancies fly
To rolling worlds of wave and shell,
And all the land where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,
Thy smile is like a morning sky,
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go
And see the land where corals lie.
The land, the land, where corals lie.

Richard Garnett (1835 –1906)

The Swimmer

With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam;
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
And waifs wrecked seaward and wasted shoreward
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, grey coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men –
Where the battered hull and the broken mast lie,
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love! Love! when we wander'd here together,

Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer and shores were firmer
The blue sea over the bright sand rolled;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold –
See! girt with tempest and winged with thunder,
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
The strong winds treading the swift waves sunder
The flying rollers with frothy feet.
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on
The skyline, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun,
That strikes through his stormy winding-sheet.

Oh, brave white horses! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, on your high arched manes.
I would ride as never a man has ridden
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden,
To gulfs foreshadowed through straits forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes

Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833- 1870)

Serenade to Music

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn!
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.
I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
The reason is, your spirits are attentive –
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted.

Music! hark!
It is your music of the house.
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.
Silence bestows that virtue on it
How many things by season season'd are
To their right praise and true perfection!
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion
And would not be awak'd.
Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

William Shakespeare (The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene I)

The Music Makers

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;

And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself in our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

A breath of our inspiration
Is the life of each generation
A wondrous thing of our dreaming
Unearthly, impossible seeming...
The soldier, the king, and the peasant
Are working together in one,
Till our dream shall become their present,
And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing
Of the goodly house they are raising;
They had no divine foreshowing
Of the land to which they are going:
But on one man's soul it hath broken,
A light that doth not depart;
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

And therefore to-day is thrilling
With a past day's late fulfilling;
And the multitudes are enlisted
In the faith that their fathers resisted,
And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,
Are bringing to pass, as they may,
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

But we, with our dreaming and singing,
Ceaseless and sorrowless we!
The glory about us clinging
Of the glorious futures we see,

Our souls with high music ringing;
O men! It must ever be
That we dwell in our dreaming and singing,
A little apart from ye.

For we are afar with the dawning
And the suns that are not yet high,
And out of the infinite morning
Intrepid you hear us cry ...
How, spite of your human scorning,
Once more God's future draws nigh,
And already goes forth the warning
That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers
From the dazzling unknown shore;
Bring us hither your sun and your summers;
And renew our world as of yore;
You shall teach us your song's new numbers,
And things that we dreamed not before:
Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,
And a singer who sings no more.

Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844 - 1881)

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BIOGRAPHIES

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. London Voices work has taken Susan to sing in Paris, Lucerne, Berlin and New York City. 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.

ALISON LORAM – violin

Alison began playing the violin first as a pupil of John Flint through Shropshire's County Music Service and later with Robin Thurlby. She led the Shropshire Schools' Symphony Orchestra from 1980-81, and in 1983 she was one of the joint equal winners of The Shropshire Concerto Competition. Alison went on to study at the Royal College of Music with Hugh Bean, John Ludlow and Rodney Friend, subsequently leading the orchestra of the National Centre for Orchestral Studies at Goldsmith's College, with which she was also soloist in a performance of Barber's Violin Concerto.

A persistent shoulder problem led Alison to the Alexander Technique which she studied with Brian Door, qualifying as a member of the Professional Association of Alexander Teachers in 1992. Since that time, in addition to teaching the Technique at Birmingham Conservatoire, Alison has developed a career as a research scientist gaining a BSc and a PhD from the University of Birmingham and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield.

Alison now has resumed her career as a freelance concert violinist. She is Leader of Nantwich Sinfonia, guest leads other orchestras, appears as a concerto soloist and gives regular chamber music performances with the Nowotarski Quartet and the pianist Christopher Symons. As a member of the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine, she combines her experiences in music, teaching and science into research into the neuromuscular aspects of playing the violin and viola.

DAVID HOULDER – piano and organ

David was born in Liverpool but is also a proud Prestonian. Educated at Preston Grammar School, he studied organ there with John Robinson, gaining his FRCO at the age of seventeen. He read Music at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge for the M.A. degree, continuing his organ studies with Arnold Richardson in London. He embarked upon a teaching career as Music Master at Wirral Grammar School for Boys. From 1981 to 1999 he was Director of Music at Liverpool's historic Blue Coat School.

In 1987 David was appointed Sub-Organist of Liverpool Cathedral, latterly combining that work with a freelance career as recitalist and accompanist. He has played all the English cathedral organs and in 2001 he enjoyed a stint as Acting-Assistant Organist of York Minster. He appeared in concert regularly with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and has recorded with them on several occasions. More recently, he has collaborated with the famed Black Dyke Band playing in a spectacular concert at Birmingham Symphony Hall that was recorded and released on DVD.

In November 2003, after nearly thirty years' music-making on Merseyside, David accepted the position of Sub-Organist at Leeds Parish Church (now called Leeds Minster.) Here, he does the lion's share of the playing. He is also organist to St. Peter's Singers with whom he has made several concert tours in Europe.

David specialises in organ and piano transcriptions of orchestral scores. He is Organist & Associate Conductor of Doncaster Choral Society. He has a real affinity with English music, both choral and orchestral (not forgetting the organ repertoire of course!) His non-musical interests are centred upon Ships, Trains and Buses and he is a keen photographer.

SIMON RUSSELL – conductor

Simon was born in Liverpool. He studied organ at Birkenhead School with Timothy Lawford and gained his ARCM and FTCL diplomas while still at school then on to Cambridge as Organ Scholar at St. Catharine's College, where he continued studies with Dame 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 his 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 Bangor and Chester Cathedrals and is on the 'reserve' organist list playing for visiting choirs and covering holiday periods and other absences. He is also in demand as an organ, piano and theory tutor and has many Associated Board and other pupil distinctions and diploma successes to his credit.

Since May 2014, he has been a full-time professional freelance musician and as well as being accompanist to the Nantwich Choral Society, he is also accompanist to the Jubilate Chamber Choir, based in Cheltenham. Simon is also an examiner for the London College of Music and the Regional Coordinator for the North of England for the Royal School of Church Music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nantwich Choral Society gratefully acknowledges the support during the recent past from the Arts Council, the Harding Trust, Cheshire East Council, Nantwich Town Council, the advertisers in our programmes and other sponsors and donors.





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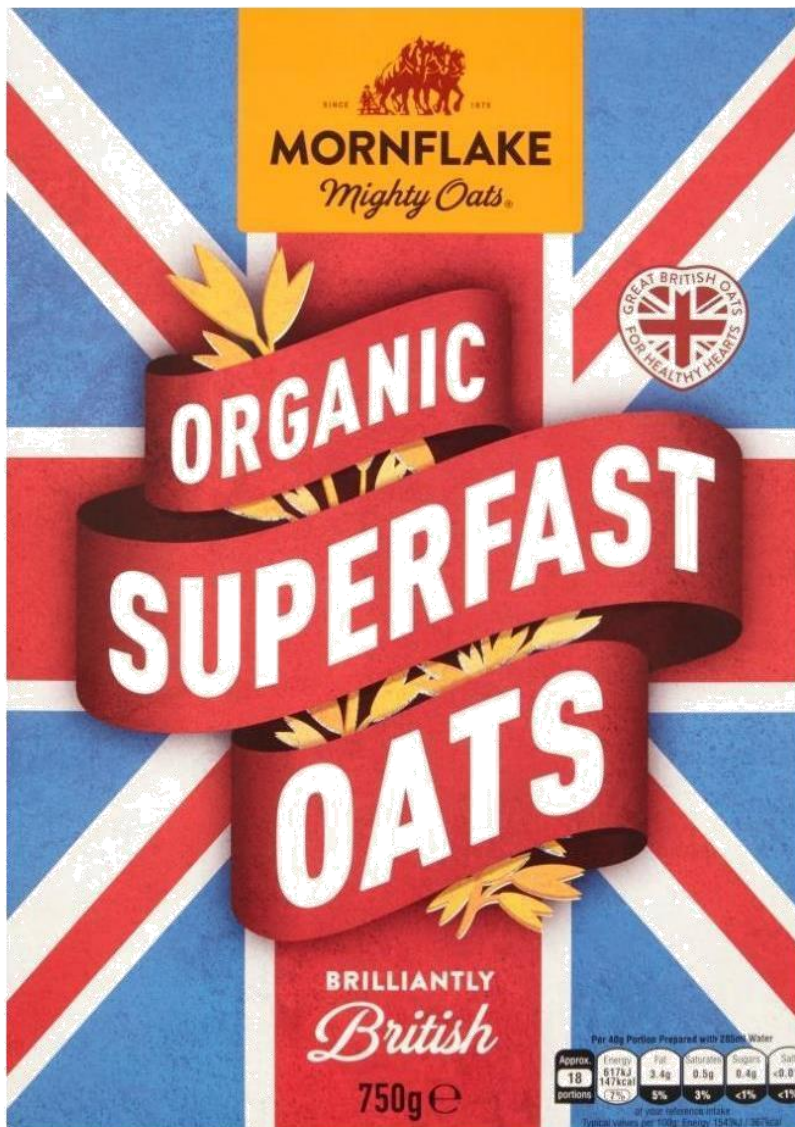
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Programme of events 2019/2020

Saturday 28 September 2019

St Mary's Church Acton

Singing Day

English Choral Music

Saturday 9 November 2019, 7.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Fauré – *Requiem*

Mildenhall – *Even Such is Time*

Saturday 21 December 2019, 6.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Family Carol Concert

Saturday 1 February 2020

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Come and Sing

Mendelssohn – *Elijah*

Saturday 21 March 2020, 7.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Bach – *Mass in B minor*

Saturday 23 May 2020, 7.30 pm

St Mary's Church Nantwich

Rossini – *Petite Messe Solonelle*

Saturday 27 June 2020, 7.30 pm

Ludenscheid Exchange Visit

Rossini – *Petite Messe Solonelle*