

Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society

(Musical Director - DEREK WATMOUGH)

70th Season

Messiah

(HANDEL - Edited Watkins-Shaw)

Conducted by

MYER FREDMAN

Assembly Hall,
Tunbridge Wells

Sunday,
November 10th, 1974

Programme - Price 15p

IN RETROSPECT - 1904-1974

Today we can take concert facilities for granted. Probably few people realise that only seventy years ago audiences in Tunbridge Wells had not experienced even a violin concerto with full orchestral accompaniment, much less large-scale performances of *Messiah* or *Elijah*. In an attempt to remedy this deficiency, a talented young man formed a choir in Tunbridge Wells in 1904—and out of Mr. Francis J. Foote's Choir was to grow the present Choral Society.

Mr. Foote's first concert, held in May 1905, was quite an historic event, for it included the first provincial performance in this country of Brahms' *Requiem*. One of the players in the orchestra was an intimate friend of the composer and considered that the interpretation was exactly as Brahms himself would have wished. Such was the interest aroused by this concert that a few months later the Choir began rehearsing Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*. This was the principal work in a combined choral and orchestral concert in May of the following year, and similar programmes became a regular feature in the town. Early rehearsals of the Choir were held in Mr. Foote's studio in the Opera House, and concerts took place either in the Great Hall (now the Court School of Dancing) or in the Opera House itself. By the standards of the day, admission was expensive—2/- for a Gallery seat and 6/- for an "Arm Chair". In comparison, today's tickets are much more within the reach of everyone's pocket.

During the First World War the Choir was renamed the Tunbridge Wells Choral Society, and was associated with two notable musical events. By invitation of the military authorities, Mr. Foote conducted an open-air performance of *Messiah* in Crowborough woods before 5,000 officers and men. It was the eve of their departure for France, and the last memory of England for many who did not return. On another occasion a performance of *Elijah* was given on the hillside at Seaford, where the Canadian army was encamped. It was an impressive setting, long remembered for the effective echo "Hear and answer" in the Baal choruses.

In 1941 Mr. J. H. Johnson was elected Chairman and is now celebrating his 33rd year in office (latterly as President); throughout these years the Society has benefited from his continued guidance and encouragement. One of Mr. Johnson's first, and formidable, tasks was to recruit support from the army camps in the area. His powers of persuasion must have been considerable, for at a subsequent performance of *Messiah* in the Assembly Hall every seat was sold. In spite of attendants' efforts to close the doors early, a crowd four-deep surged down the gangways and order was restored only by the arrival of Mr. Johnson and three policemen.

Unfortunately, as the war dragged on membership fell to about 30. Early in 1944 the Society sang for the last time under the baton of Mr. Foote and for the next four years was without a permanent conductor. For two years activities were confined to a series of concerts in local churches, under the direction of Sydney Ansell; in 1946 Albert Croucher, the conductor of Maidstone Choral Union, agreed to officiate until a permanent conductor could be found. Mr. Croucher's two years in office will be particularly remembered for a festival performance of *Messiah* in November 1947—an indication that the Society was beginning to stand on its feet again.

The growth in membership continued with the appointment of Robin Miller as conductor in 1948, and the following season it exceeded 100—in spite of the fact that members were re-auditioned. Mr. Miller's enthusiasm led to an extension of the Society's musical activities during the 1950/1951 Season, when both a Carol Concert (now a popular annual event) and a special Festival of Britain Concert were held. For the Festival Concert the Society joined forces with the Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra in a programme which included Elgar's *The Music Makers*. Another memorable occasion was a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* in March 1953, when Heddle Nash sang *Gerontius* for the last time.

Robin Miller was succeeded by Dr. Harold May, and during his conductorship the repertoire of the Society continued to expand. From time to time visiting conductors were engaged and amongst these was Sir Adrian Boult, who conducted *The St. Matthew Passion*.

Trevor Harvey was the Society's principal conductor from 1964 to 1972 and during this period highlights were performances of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* (with the Symphony Orchestra) and an appearance at a Robert Meyer Children's Concert at the Festival Hall. The latter event enabled the Choir to compare the acoustics of the Festival and Assembly Halls; there are no prizes for guessing which one won "hands down"!

Currently the Society is fortunate in having a talented Musical Director—Derek Watmough. He is well known in Crowborough for his light hearted operas, but so far he has not composed for the Society. This he is now remedying, and his *Christmas Cantata* will be performed at the Society's Carol Concert on December 15th.

The conductor of today's concert—Myer Fredman—has been the Society's Principal Conductor and Musical Adviser since 1972. Memorable performances of Verdi's *Requiem* and Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* have taken place under his baton. Unhappily, this is his last concert with the Society, for he leaves almost immediately for Australia, where he will live and work. We wish him and his family every happiness in their new life.

The Society strives to provide audiences in Tunbridge Wells with a high standard of choral music, and spares no effort in engaging first-class soloists and musicians to achieve this aim. Without generous grants from the Tunbridge Wells District Council and from the Arts Council of Great Britain (through the National Federation of Music Societies) the concerts could never take place; but financial assistance alone is not enough. The full support of music-lovers is essential if the Society is to maintain its standards and continue its performances on the scale it has achieved in the past.

Messiah

G. F. HANDEL -

edited by Watkins-Shaw

Rae Woodland - *Soprano*

Jean Allister - *Contralto*

John Kingsley Smith - *Tenor*

Brian Rayner Cook - *Bass*

The Capriol Orchestra

Leader : Reginald Morley

Anthony Smith-Masters - *Harpsichord*

Clifford Haines - *Trumpet*

Conducted by

MYER FREDMAN

The Watkins-Shaw edition of "Messiah" aims to recreate the sound as Handel originally conceived it; that is, for an orchestra of strings, woodwind, and continuo, with choral resources to match. The result is a performance much more in the Italian baroque style than those to which we have become accustomed in the last one hundred and fifty years or so. These latter performances might be compared to the architecture of St. Pancras' Station, whereas the original should be thought of in terms of one of Wren's delicate City churches.

M.F.

Part 1

From the opening Recitative "Comfort ye my people" to the last Chorus "His yoke is easy", Part 1 prepares us for the coming of the Messiah and His Birth.

INTERVAL - 10 Minutes

Part 2

"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world" prepares us for the Messiah's sacrifice. "But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell" and we are assured that He shall reign for ever and ever. "Hallelujah".

Part 3

"I know that my Redeemer liveth" leads to an assurance that "in Christ shall all be made alive". "The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised". "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain; blessing and honour, glory and power be unto Him". Amen.

TODAY'S SOLOISTS

RAE WOODLAND has made several appearances with the Society—in "Aida", in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, "Elijah" and Verdi's "Requiem". She has always been a welcome visitor to Tunbridge Wells and we look forward to hearing her in a role quite different from that to which we have become accustomed.

JEAN ALLISTER is also no stranger to the Society. In fact, we claim credit for having recognised her very great talents early in her career. Verdi's "Requiem" (twice), "The Dream of Gerontius" (twice), and Elgar's "Music Makers" have been amongst her engagements with the Society. Now firmly established in her career, Miss Allister finds time for teaching and adjudicating, as well as singing.

JOHN KINGSLEY SMITH. This is his first appearance with the Society. After studying music from an early age, John Kingsley Smith was awarded a place at the Royal College of Music in 1968, and a year later won an Exhibition in singing. He obtained his A.R.C.M. in Singing with Honours. His wide repertoire includes oratorio, solo recitals and opera. On BBC 2 Television he was soloist with the English Chamber Orchestra in a concert of Baroque music from Holkham Hall, and appeared in a Master Class programme on Schumann, with Thomas Hemsley. He comes to Tunbridge Wells fresh from performing in the Bath Bach Festival.

BRIAN RAYNER COOK read music at Bristol University where he developed his interests in organ-playing and in conducting before finally deciding upon a singing career. He won all the major singing prizes at the Royal College of Music and in 1969 was awarded a Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship.

Previous performances with the Society include "The Dream of Gerontius" and "Belshazzar's Feast". His last appearance in Tunbridge Wells was in August, when he was married to Miss Angela Romney! The Society take this opportunity of wishing them both every happiness.

OUR NEXT CONCERT AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL

Sunday, December 15th
at 3 p.m.

Carols

FOR CHOIR AND
AUDIENCE

The Crowborough Beacon Junior Choir
The Mayfield Silver Band
(Bandmaster: Ken Rich)
Anthony Smith-Masters - Piano

Conducted by **DEREK WATMOUGH**

Tickets at 50p, 40p and 30p

Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra

Leader - BARRY COLLINS

Conductor - **ELGAR HOWARTH**

Sunday 1st December, 1974 3 p.m.

Children's Overture	<i>Quilter</i>
Piano Concerto	<i>Khachaturian</i>
Philip Martin	
Music for Children	<i>William Walton</i>
Suite from 'La Fille mal Gardée'	<i>arr. John Lanchbery</i>
Till Eulenspiegel	<i>Richard Strauss</i>

*Tickets: Reserved 80p, 70p, 60p, 50p from the Assembly Hall Box Office
Unreserved 35p at the Door only*

The Green Room Club of Royal Tunbridge Wells

Assembly Hall Sunday, 17th November 3 p.m.

Young Musicians

MEDICI STRING QUARTET

Playing string quartets by Haydn, Mozart and Smetana

Tickets: 95p, 80p, 65p, Group Bookings 35p

Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society

(Founded 1904)

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Sunday, April 13th
at 3 p.m.

At the Assembly Hall

**Bedfordshire
Symphony
Orchestra**

HOLST - Hymn of Jesus
VERDI - Four Sacred Pieces
WALTON - Coronation Te Deum

**Royal
Tunbridge Wells
Choral Society**

Conducted by **DEREK WATMOUGH**

Tickets at £1, 75p, 50p and 40p