

THE FRIENDS OF THE MUSIC

Newsletter

Number 24, Spring 2017



Dear Friends

I am delighted to be writing to you as the new Chairman of **The Friends of the Music of Holy Trinity Church**. The AGM on 29 January already seems to have receded into the past. Since then I have been working intensively with the new committee in fortifying and expanding the enormous amount that Jane Hornby and the previous committee have achieved over the last five years.

My earliest memories of Holy Trinity Church are vivid. I well remember what seemed like a long walk from the centre of Stratford to visit Shakespeare's grave for the first time in about 1978. I remember the organ music that was playing: could the organist have been Peter Summers or, perhaps, even John Strickson? Little did I imagine that many years later Holy Trinity was to become the epicentre of my own musical life. Still less did I anticipate, as an inhabitant of Stratford-upon-Avon in the mid-1980s, that an organisation called *The Friends of the Music* was quietly coalescing, and that one day I would have the great privilege – and also the enormous responsibility – of being its Chairman

Returning to the Stratford area in 2014, I soon became aware of *The Friends of the Music* as it had developed during the intervening years. I quickly came to admire its enrichment of the musical life of Shakespeare's Church and, in particular, its support of the activities and the education of young musicians.

My first direct encounter with the *Friends* was as a performer at *Soundbites* in 2015 – by kind invitation of Benedict Wilson. Having had many experiences of church recital series languishing under limited audience support and meagre musical resources, I was gratified to find a tightly-run ship, a welcoming atmosphere, a keen and numerous audience, all fortified by Benedict's own reassuringly optimistic presence. A lunchtime recital series *with lunch!* The concept has an elegant simplicity; yet it is rarely to be encountered and thus bestows on *Soundbites* its distinctive identity. As I gradually became aware of the Herculean efforts of Benedict and the previous committee to establish and sustain as ambitious a venture as a series that runs most weeks of the year, showcasing a panoply of performers from soloists

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The Friends of the Music Annual General Meeting took place on Sunday 29 January at 16.30 in the Parish Centre. Of the previous committee, Jane Hornby (Chairman), Sarah Cushing (Secretary), Ronnie Mulryne, Tania Fisher, Patrick Pilton and Philip Cheshire, having completed their statutory five years, stood down. John Cohen, Anne Grey, Philip Miles, Laura Taylor, Roger Taylor, Benedict Wilson (ex-officio), Stephen Dodsworth (ex-officio), remained and were joined by Rohan Stewart-MacDonald (Chairman), Jane Taylor (Secretary) and Rebecca Mills. After the AGM Martin Stanley put himself forward for the vacant post of Treasurer. His appointment was confirmed at the first meeting of the new committee.

Do join *The Friends* on May 18, 19, 20 for a special Spring Concert Series which will feature up and coming performers: **Laurens Macklon** (pictured), **Abigail Davies**, **Mackenzie Paget**, and **Antonio Oyarzabal**.

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Soundbites needs you! See Back Page



to orchestras, I soon came to regard *Soundbites* as the 'jewel in the crown' of *The Friends of the Music*. Consequently, one of my central priorities as Chairman is to work with the new committee in building on the magnificent success of *Soundbites* by raising its profile to a level commensurate with the national — and international — stature and significance of Shakespeare's Church.

To that end, as well as occasionally engaging overseas performers-on-tour, we are reaching out to various national training institutions, offering opportunities for budding professional musicians to perform in Shakespeare's Church, with the promise of an attentive and supportive audience, excellent musical resources that Holy Trinity boasts and, of course, *lunch*. One immediate consequence of my initial, speculative letters to the Birmingham Conservatoire, the Royal Academy of Music, the Royal College of Music, Warwick Arts Centre and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, has been the emergence of a 'series-within-the-series', consisting of recitals by RCM students keen to try out their end-of-year recital programmes before a live audience in a famous and prestigious venue. Many of those recitals are taking place in May and June with one or two later in the year. My hope is that this inaugural step will portend further contributions from the RCM and from other institutions of equivalent standing.

We continue to profit greatly from our established, local links: we have our regular supply of performers from King Edward VI School, and are gradually forging connections with other Stratford-based training institutions. In our avid engagement of new performers we do not wish to neglect our 'regulars' who have performed several times since the series began and on whose musical excellence we continue to depend.

Increasing the profile of *Soundbites* entails an expanded publicity mechanism. We now display 'traditional' types of publicity material (posters and handbills) in many more locations within Stratford, and have widened the geographical purview to include towns and villages in the surrounding region. An expanded email list gives me regular contact with the entire *Friends'* membership. I hope that my bi-monthly Chairman's Bulletins, as well as providing basic information, will foster further the existing spirit of inclusivity and solidarity within the organisation as a whole. Symptomatic of the rising profile of *Soundbites* is the increasing possibility of engaging performers months ahead. As I write, most of the recital slots are now filled up to the end

of November 2017, with some performers already engaged for 2018. In order to attract a widened audience base we will continue to expand the range of music performed. A common misconception — and, I suspect, a factor forestalling participation in some cases — is that recitals must consist of 'music suitable to be performed in church'. No such stricture exists; and I hope that the heightened representation of jazz, folk and other popular styles of music in the current year's series — via the input of first rate performers like Marion Fleetwood — will convey our increasingly inclusive outlook, whilst echoing new orientations, for instance, in the choices of choral repertory: witness the excitement of Bob Chilcott's *Little Jazz Mass* at Easter, complete with jazz trio!

axiomatically *The Friends of the Music* is our support of young musicians. And 'young' can mean anything from the earliest stages of musical training to the frontiers of the professional sphere. Our most recent initiative, the **Spring Concert Series**, running on 18, 19 and 20 May is a modified continuation of the *Sounds for Shakespeare* series from last spring, and features up-and-coming professional musicians, mirroring the contents of the May and June *Soundbites'* recitals. This year we are delighted to be welcoming baritone Laurens Macklon, a student at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (Thursday 18 May), who will be accompanied by Benedict; Abigail Davies (cello) and Mackenzie Paget (piano), from the Royal Northern College of Music (Friday 19 May); and Antonio Oyarzabal (piano), former student of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. This series of three evening concerts, taking place at 7.30pm at Holy Trinity, has been conceived as a festival-like event and those who attend all three concerts receive a free glass of *prosecco* at the final concert! We will continue our usual policy of free admission with a retiring collection.

The spring season's round of activities culminates in the **Summer Choral Concert** at Holy Trinity on Thursday 25 May at 7.00pm. Several choirs will perform: Holy Trinity Choir; The Croft Preparatory School Choir and Staff/Parent Choir and the Junior Saint James's Singers. The programme will include 'The Heavens are Telling', from Haydn's *Creation* and 'O Fortuna' from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. These choral performances will be interspersed with solo contributions.

The ensuing summer will see very little slackening of the pace. *Soundbites* continues; and the evening of Saturday 24 June will see an event directly spawned by *Soundbites*. Kathryn Ellis (soprano),





SOUNDBITERS! Kevin Cahill (guitar), Marion Fleetwood (folk), Petra Hajduchova (piano) and Clive Letchford (tenor plus)

Sue Robertson (mezzo-soprano); Clive Letchford (tenor), David Borsada (bass) and Stephen Robertson (piano) will perform ***A Victorian Valentine's: Exploring Love Songs from the Nineteenth Century***. A shortened version of this compendium of solo songs, vocal ensembles and readings – including some fascinating, almost totally unknown music by Prince Albert – was so enthusiastically received at *Soundbites* in February that the committee immediately arranged for the longer version to be performed as an evening event. The aim is to provide a second hearing for those who came to *Soundbites* and a first-time experience for those who were not present in February.

Amongst the most exciting, recent developments in the musical life of Holy Trinity have been the outreach projects, pursued by Benedict in collaboration with Rebecca Mills. Benedict and Rebecca have made frequent visits to local schools with the aim of promoting and teaching church music in an accessible and engaging manner. One of the many positive consequences of this work has been the progressive expansion of the chorister ranks of Holy Trinity. Amongst the most important, formative experiences available to those young choristers who become members of the choir are opportunities to visit and sing in the nation's cathedral churches. To this end, and following the success of the trip to Lincoln Cathedral in July 2015, *The Friends of the Music* will be supporting a weekend trip to Manchester Cathedral on 22-23 July where the choir will sing in three services. Coach places will also be made available to Friends other than choir members and their families: watch this (and other) spaces!

An intense round of recitals and concerts perhaps leads inevitably to an 'event-orientated' outlook. But we must not lose sight of our responsibilities towards our Choral and Organ Scholars, whose work with the

Choir is of such importance. We are currently looking at ways of increasing our support of the Choral and Organ Scholars, whilst enlisting applications from schools for the next academic year. We also wish to increase the input of music into forms of worship beyond the remit of the Choir. It has been particularly eye-opening for me, in the last few months, to have experienced and taken part in those services that, as a choir member, had been beyond my experience.

Reflecting on my first few months as Chairman of *The Friends of the Music* stimulates feelings of intense gratitude. Firstly, I am grateful to the network of Friends who regularly attend events, who help us in our work through donations, through membership subscriptions; and I greatly value the contributions of those who regularly devote their time and effort as volunteers at *Soundbites* and other events. Without this support it would be impossible for us to sustain the demanding and increasingly ambitious programme of events we have at present and are planning for the future. My wholehearted thanks also go to Jane Hornby and members of the previous committee for the smooth transition that they facilitated, and for their willingness to continue to offer extra help with managing events, with publicity, and to act as ongoing sources of advice and encouragement. My warm thanks also go to the present committee for their unfailing support, their encouragement, their positivity, their receptiveness to new initiatives. In my role as Chairman I am particularly privileged to be collaborating with valued musical colleagues and friends, Benedict, Rebecca and Stephen, whose collective vision, indefatigable zeal, enthusiasm and talent are so indispensable to the musical life of Holy Trinity Church and beyond.

Rohan



Sound**BITES**

Further volunteers are needed to assist with the serving of food and drink at **Soundbites**. Refreshments are served from 12.30-13.00 with setting up at 12.00-12.30. If you are able to help and happy to have your name added to the rota, please contact Roger Taylor roger.taylor36@btinternet.com or Rohan Stewart-MacDonald rohan.stewart-macdonald@cantab.net

Friends of the Music presents:

Spring Concert Series

at Holy Trinity Church

featuring upcoming professional musicians



LAURENS MACKLON, baritone

Benedict Wilson, piano

With Rohan Stewart-MacDonald, piano

Thursday 18 May, 7:30pm

ABIGAIL DAVIES, cello

Mackenzie Paget, piano

Friday 19 May, 7:30pm



ANTONIO OYARZABAL, piano

Saturday 20 May, 7:30pm

Admission FREE with retiring collection. Free glass of prosecco on the Saturday evening if attending all three concerts.

This free recital each Wednesday starts at 1pm, and lasts for just half an hour. What could be a more perfect way to spend your lunch break, than listening to glorious music being performed in such a beautiful setting.

Artists in

MAY

Wednesday May 3

Laura and Patrick Taylor
(vocal group)

Wednesday May 10

Ana Bursac
(piano: RCM student)

Wednesday May 17

Ana Manastireanu and Jonna Järvitälo
(piano and flute: RCM students)

Wednesday May 24

David Borsada
(voice)

Wednesday May 31

Angela Lau
(piano: RCM student)