

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW?

As you will be aware, the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic is far from over. While vaccinations are helping to make us safer as a community, the easing of restrictions is rightly a gradual and cautious process.

At this time of year we would usually be reflecting on another successfully completed season, and planning ahead for another one. Sadly of course that has not been the case this year because of the various lockdown restrictions.

The Orchestra has begun to rehearse again, although unfortunately this has not proved possible for the Choir yet. Our own Covid19 Sub-Group of Matthew Andrews, David Dunnett, Caroline Dixey, Catrina Nixon, Sally West-Lindell, Rob Barnes and Alison Rhodes have

continued to meet and to review the situation and the Government guidelines as they evolve. A number of alternative strategies have been developed, in preparation for different scenarios as Covid restrictions ease.

As before, we are very grateful to members who have continued to support the Society through paying their subscriptions and generous additional donations, which will help to ensure that our finances remain healthy.

This newsletter outlines the current situation with regard to the Phil's activities, and we will continue to update members via email as things progress.

Stay safe and healthy.

Caroline Dixey



Matt Andrews and Caroline Furniss have kindly agreed to host an extra SUMMER quiz on **Friday, 24th September, 2021.**

The quiz will be on-line again - with a few refinements from last time to simplify the experience!! Please put the date in your diaries.



Wednesday 23rd June, 2021

7:30pm via Zoom

An opportunity for you to hear about more details of future plans for the choir and orchestra.

The meeting Agenda and Papers are available here:

<http://www.norwichphil.org.uk/agm.htm>

Please do join us and help shape our plans.

A link to the online Zoom meeting has already been sent out to members, and a reminder will go out a week before.

Fancy hearing some live orchestral music?

There's a chance to hear the orchestra give an open rehearsal and play-through performance of Dvořák's 7th Symphony at the Showground Arena on **Tuesday 8th June at 7.15pm**. Conductor Matt Andrews will introduce the rehearsal and tell you something about the special edition of the work which they are playing - the virtually unheard original version with extended slow movement.

Places are limited to 30 people only on a first-come, first-served basis, so hurry. If you would like to go please get in touch with Sally West-Lindell (sallyfish@msn.com) as soon as possible. Full COVID restrictions will apply in the Hall, so bring a mask, and come early to allow extra time to be seated.

There will be 2 more open play-throughs in coming weeks. Details in the Orchestra article on page 3.

Chorus can't make joyful noise just yet

When the lockdown restrictions were eased on 17th May, there was an expectation that the rules for choirs would be relaxed, at the same time as shops, bars and hairdressers opened up. However despite scientific evidence to the contrary, the advice from the DCMS was that amateur choirs in England could only gather in groups of six people indoors and 30 outdoors; rules more draconian than the ones in place last September and October, when infection rates were higher, and no-one had been vaccinated.

Choirs across the country were understandably very disappointed. Social media was buzzing, and many petitions were launched, including one on the UK Parliament website. The next review point is 21st June. Let's hope the decision will be different then. Choir members will be notified as things progress.



Elgar and Mozart Choir groups rehearsing in St Andrew's Hall back in the autumn

Choral Workshop

COVID guidance permitting, we are hoping to do a Choral Workshop on Saturday 24th July. Please pencil the date in your diaries. Updates will follow soon.



Volunteers needed

The Norwich Phil couldn't run without the dedicated team of Committee members who oversee everything from our hall bookings and rehearsal arrangements, to concert planning and financial matters.

We are looking for people to help with that work, particularly to support our publicity activities. If anyone is interested, or would like more information, please contact Caroline Dixey, caroline@dixey.co.uk

Caroline is the new Sheriff of Norwich

We are delighted that our own Phil Chairman, Caroline Dixey (Jarrod) has been appointed Sheriff of Norwich for the forthcoming year. The ceremony took place at St Andrews Hall on 24th May. The Phil presented Caroline with some flowers, by way of congratulations.



Caroline at the online appointment ceremony, and appropriately-coloured flowers + card from the Phil

Malcolm Arnold centenary



2021 marks the centenary of the birth of **Sir Malcolm Arnold** (1921-2006), one of the towering figures of twentieth

century British music. He had close associations with Norfolk so we are hoping to perform his **5th Symphony** in December. If you don't know it do have a listen - there is the most glorious tune in the slow movement that returns in the finale: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvtfK2rwdDw> (at 10'30" on this recording)

Orchestral manoeuvres

As of 18th May, the Orchestra is finally back together rehearsing again. The Norfolk Showground has afforded a space large enough to accommodate a complete, socially-distanced orchestra, and everyone is delighted to be back.

The immediate plan is to rehearse four works over the summer. Each set of rehearsals will conclude with a final 'performance', which an audience of up to 30 Society members and supporters can attend at the Showground (performance dates below) :

Dvořák, *Symphony No. 7* - 8th June

Malcolm Arnold *Symphony No. 5* - 6th July

Liszt *Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 2* - 27th July

Sally West-Lindell (sallyfish@msn.com) is currently taking bookings for the Dvořák on a first-come, first-serve basis, and bookings for the other two will follow in the near future.

We are very fortunate that Alexander Ullman, who recently performed two Rachmaninov Piano Concertos with us, is doing a recording of the Liszt Concertos with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the autumn. In preparation for this, he would like to join us for our final rehearsal of the Liszt Concertos on 27th July. A special treat for Phil members who would like to hear that performance.



Alexander Ullman



Recent rehearsal with the Norwich Phil Orchestra at the Norfolk Showground

180

Happy Birthday, Norwich Phil!

One Hundred and Eighteen!!! Perhaps not quite as significant as the 175th anniversary, but the Phil is 180 years old this year. Sadly no opportunity this time to celebrate the way we did in 2016 with such a splendid birthday concert, but we're still here, hoping to play and share great music again soon. Hang on in there folks, the concerts will be back, and we're really looking forward to it!

REMEMBER THIS?

Returning to the Showground Arena for our orchestral sessions brings back vivid memories of our triumphant performance of **Mahler's 8th Symphony**, as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival 5 years ago. How could we forget?! Such a huge undertaking with the Arena transformed into a concert hall for over 2,000 and a stage especially built for over 450 performers – 8 soloists, the orchestra vastly augmented not just by many extra players but also a Steinway grand piano, celeste and huge Allen organ, while the chorus were joined by singers from 3 other Norfolk choirs. It was really quite a feat but we pulled it off spectacularly and brought 1,800 people to their feet – the EDP declared *“There was a tremendous sense of occasion throughout the evening, and the spontaneous standing ovation at the end said it all.”* Others described it as *“a monumental musical event for Norwich and Norfolk, which many people will remember for years to come”* and *“a fantastic thing to be part of and something that will probably stay with me for the rest of my life.”*



Final performance of Mahler's 8th Symphony at the Norfolk Showground on 21st May 2016



Setting up the hall



Final rehearsal

From the very first rehearsals in the previous September, through the outreach project with local young musicians in January, and Arts Council-funded artistic development for both choirs and orchestra in April and May, to the sheer logistical complexity of planning such an event with the Norfolk and Norwich Festival and the RNAA, and the huge team of volunteers who helped set up and man the site, and who were so essential to the event's success ... all of it coming together to produce what was hailed as *“one of the outstanding voluntary musical achievements of the year”* in the UK. Are we proud of it? You bet. **Matt Andrews** and **David Dunnett** look back, and give us their own particular perspectives on the concert, and the events leading up to it, below.

Matt Andrews - Memories of Mahler 8



Our Mahler 8 performance had its origins years earlier. Mike Nutt had called me in Canada during the summer of 2009 to discuss an ambitious plan for what would be my first - trial - concert with the Phil. "What do you think about performing Mahler 2?" "Err... OK" was my somewhat hesitant response, having never met or heard the orchestra or choir at that point!

A few years after the success of our Mahler 2 came the 1st symphony, and I half-jokingly said to the committee "does this mean we're doing a Mahler cycle?". When early ideas were discussed for a suitably grand work for the Society's 175th anniversary started, Mahler 8 was repeatedly mentioned. But I don't think anybody seriously thought we would do it.

But as the months went by we somehow became more convinced that we might be able to do the Eighth. We had meetings, we had a site visit.. and we pitched the idea to the Norfolk & Norwich Festival team. Ultimately, they were not reluctant. Rather, they requested we make it bigger by adding an education element and partnering with the Philharmonia! And so the already eye-watering budget grew. I repeatedly returned to my tiny pocket score, increasingly anxious with every repetition of the question 'can we really do it?', trying to work out if it was musically viable, or some form of insanity. This time, I knew the orchestra and choir's capability, but with so much riding on it, I had to be sure. I think we were all nervous to make the final decision.

When we eventually took the plunge, I ordered a full score, all £170 of it! Gulp. And so months of study began, with all the usual Mahler challenges - embedding a vast amount of music, and translating the composer's highly detailed, sometimes contradictory rehearsal notes from his rather archaic German.



Grappling with the logistical implications of the score was more of a challenge: How many musicians would we need? How many could we handle?! How can we possibly layout the stage so that everyone that needs to hear each other, can? How will we rehearse it? (at this stage I must say without David Dunnett shouldering a huge amount of the burden, I wouldn't have even tried!).

And the most daunting part? Finding the right soloists. My wife - and eventually our Mater gloriosa - Kate and I spent weeks poring over the score, writing lists and listening to recordings to narrow the search. Every one of the eight solo parts had such exacting and sometimes extreme demands. The Tenor for example, needed to have the flexibility of a lyric tenor, but the power and stamina of a Heldentenor. A rare beast! The soloists had to be balanced and blend with one another, and have the skill and experience to maintain ensemble through very dense part-writing across a very wide stage. Oh, and they had to be available. And

do it for our budgeted fee! It took many months of communications with agents, but we eventually secured our crack team.

As an aside, I must share one funny dressing room moment: Kate's pivotal but brief Mater gloriosa role was all of 25-bars long, rather than the other soloists' epic contributions. As we waited to go on she broke our pre-concert tension saying to the other soloists "Well, I've memorised my part.. how about all of you?"

One thing I love that seems particular to big Mahler projects is the way it engages and immerses the musicians. Invariably when I'm rehearsing one of these totemic works, players will appear after rehearsals with a copy of the score to ask a question, debate a tempo variation on a particular recording, or show me the tickets and share memories from their first experience of the work. On hearing of this project, a good friend of mine who is a highly-accomplished professional jazz guitarist shared his lifelong desire to play in an orchestra and committed to learn the mandolin over the next nine months. Another mutual friend heard this, and decided to do the same. The mandolin teacher they'd then hired, loved Mahler and 'wanted in' too.. and so we had the luxury of three mandolinists! (And what a magical moment it was!).



Mandolinists

Before long, we were through the rehearsals and workshops and I stood in the arena watching a huge organ and its 11(!) speaker array being delivered to the purpose built stage by forklift truck! The result of months of hard work and fundraising by so many people. A herculean effort ensued with volunteers setting the stage out and putting out 1,800 audience seats.

And then everyone was there for the evening rehearsal. Everyone. With events of this scale the real stress comes from the unrelenting worry that something or someone is missing. A choir coach brakes down. A soloist misses the plane. I've had it all! But everyone was there.

And then a curious thing happened. Waiting to start rehearsing the 450 people in front of me, I had a calming revelation: there really wasn't anything I could change. It was a liberating moment! Everyone's learnt their music, and we've rehearsed it. I just needed to trust the musicians and get everyone through it. You can't start focusing on the minutiae, fiddling with odd notes while everyone waits.

During the rehearsal someone in the choir shouted down "can we start from three bars earlier?" Easy answer: "No!" I quickly shouted back (chortles from the orchestra ensued). But it's like trying to turn an oil tanker. It uses valuable minutes to get all 450 people to find the new place. Some people don't hear and are in the wrong spot. You restart... and very, very quickly your 2 hour rehearsal for a 90 minute work has vanished.

It's more of a logistical exercise at this point, save perhaps sorting a lot of detail with the soloists. And everyone on the stage that night (soloists included), needed to know they could get through the piece together. And they did.

And the reassurance of knowing that allowed for the magic to happen on the night. Mahler 8 is a curious beast. It can shift so quickly from the shock and awe of the opening (the thought of Ashley Grote's opening chord and the full forces of the choirs is still indelibly marked in my memory!), with these grand gestures guiding these vast forces, to small intimate chamber music-like moments with perhaps just a dozen musicians playing.

It was a dazzling spectacle, a glorious, heartfelt, overwhelming, exhausting and thrilling experience. I shall be forever grateful for the opportunity. Not because of the eye-catching headcount, but because performing with such a large gathering of musicians so singularly focused on this extra-ordinary work was deeply moving and truly unforgettable.

And then it was over. I stayed to thank as many performers off stage as possible. To see friends in the audience. The venue had emptied and was already being dismantled. The official NNF cars had disappeared with our soloists. So, still in my concert tails, I walked in the darkness across the show-ground fields to the dressing rooms... exhausted, but with a huge smile on my face.

Matt Andrews.

David Dunnett - Mahler 8 recollections

As I started my planning for choir recruitment for this massive project I did some basic maths. If this is the Symphony of a Thousand and the orchestra is likely to number maybe 150 players then does that mean that I have to recruit 850 singers? Help! Fortunately Mahler himself did not call for that number of singers which meant that I could limit my search to most of East Anglia and not the whole of Northern Europe! The choral score is very demanding needing a double choir. For ease of rehearsal it was decided that the Phil chorus would sing Choir 1 and we would recruit another choir(s) to sing Choir 2. The most obvious collaborations would have been with the UEA choir – they joined us for Britten's War Requiem in 2013 - and the Cambridge Philharmonic with whom many of our singers performed the Berlioz Requiem in Ely Cathedral in 2016. They both said yes! I was delighted. Then a little while later they both said they couldn't do it after all! I was deflated and the sleepless nights began! However, eventually there were two other groups who came on board and for whom we shall always be grateful as they did an excellent job. The King's Lynn Festival Chorus and the Sheringham and Cromer Choral Society did us proud and Tom Appleton the KLFC conductor was particularly helpful in making the collaboration work. We also had a number of singers from other choirs who swelled the ranks valiantly.

Fortunately we were able to call on the boys and girls of Norwich Cathedral Choir to provide the Knabenchor under the direction of my wonderful colleague Ashley Grote – although for the final rehearsal and performance we agreed that I would be the roaming choirmaster and he would play the organ – he got to play the very first note very loudly!

Tuesday night rehearsals were intense as there was so much difficult music to get through but it was hugely rewarding as it came together and confidence grew. We also had a very enjoyable and amusing session with the great Norbert Mein – a wonderful language coach. So eventually, having finally decided on which of the numerous scores to use and with our German crisp and precise (?) we all came together at the Showground, filing on from the cowsheds, hoping we would make enough noise to compete with the huge orchestra and soloists. The choirs, orchestra and soloists rose to the occasion, superbly directed by Matt Andrews, and the audience



Choirs waiting to go on at the Norfolk Showground

response confirmed that all the hard work in rehearsal had indeed been worth it. It was a fantastic project and a privilege to be involved – for a predominantly amateur musical society to put this on was a wonderful achievement - surely a major highlight in the long and distinguished history of the Phil – bravo everyone!



Hannah Perowne Wolterton Hall open air concert

Hannah Perowne, Norwich-born violinist and former associate leader in the Gewandhaus Orchestra, is organising and playing in a couple of open air recitals at Wolterton Hall with a group of professional players called the Wolterton Ensemble on 10 and 11 July. Details and tickets can be purchased here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wolterton-park-recitals-tickets-153491391885>

