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# The sound of music

Fresh from winning the music accolade at this year's Norfolk Arts Awards, Sally West-Lindell and Rob Barnes from the Norwich Philharmonic Society talk to *Emma Harrowing* about what delights their new season holds.





“When the Norwich Philharmonic Society made its public debut on March 5, 1841, Queen Victoria was 21 years old and the mother of a three-month-old daughter. In November that year she was to give birth to a son who became King Edward VII and, as Prince of Wales, bought Sandringham Estate in Norfolk,” says Sally West-Lindell proudly, punctuating the importance of the date with a sip of her frothy coffee.

It’s an exciting start to the year for the Norwich Philharmonic Society, or the Phil as it is affectionately called. Celebrations for its 175th anniversary began with a bang for the 200-plus performers in the choir and full-size symphony orchestra, as the Phil won the Norfolk Arts Award for music as it launched its 2015/16 season in September.

“It’s an exciting year for us as we celebrate 175 years,” adds Rob Barnes. “The Phil is stronger than ever and we are looking forward to performing an ambitious programme of classical concerts at our home in St Andrews Hall from November to

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Sally and Rob are joint secretaries for the Phil - Sally on behalf of the choir and Rob the orchestra. As one of the oldest music societies in the country, the Phil’s programme covers a wide range of works from the great oratorios, concertos and symphonies to less familiar works and lighter repertoire.

“The secret to choosing a strong programme of concerts is all in the mix,” says Rob. “When planning performances you need to create a balance between the popular works, which will bring in the crowds and increase ticket sales, to

the lesser-known works, which may be unknown but can educate and challenge the audience. Usually you need to leave a five to six year gap between performing the same work again.”

A season runs from September to March, with performances from November to mid-March. There are four concerts per season - two are orchestra only, one is choral and one is when both strands come together.

“This season the show when the choir and orchestra come together is in the performance of Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* in November,” says Rob. “As it is a special season for us we are also doing



another joint concert in March which is our 175th Birthday Concert. Orchestra and choral combine for an evening of classical pops such as the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's Messiah and the Adagio from Khachaturian's ballet Spartacus."

Adds Sally: "The finale will be the rarely performed choral version of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture complete with cannon and mortar effects!"

It is fitting in its anniversary season that the programme includes a number of major British works. Notably in December the orchestra will perform the Norfolk Rhapsody by Vaughan Williams for the first time.

"The season will also have some box office favourites such as Beethoven's Emperor Concerto for the February performance, which will see the return of pianist Mihkel Poll as soloist," says Rob. "And of course there will be many familiar pieces performed at our 175th Birthday Concert in March.

"Of course, sometimes themes work in

a performance and we have collaborated with our friends over in Koblenz, Germany before. The choir tends to travel over there alone to perform with their orchestra as it is difficult for us to travel with our instruments - especially the percussion section. But when they come over here both the Norwich Phil orchestra and chorus join in.

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There is also a rumour that the Phil will be performing an additional concert in May at the Royal Norfolk Showground as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. As Resident went to press, funding for this was still unconfirmed, but both Rob and Sally hope that this will end their season on a high.

"The Phil is totally reliant on sponsorship (the 2015/16 season is sponsored by Hansells solicitors and financial advisers), subscriptions and ticket

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sales," says Sally. "We also do a bit of fundraising throughout the year and next April we have our ball and luncheon in the Noverre room at The Assembly House. This is quite apt as Frank Noverre whose family the room is named after, was the founder of the Norwich Philharmonic Society."

Adds Rob: "We tend to break even each season, but if we do have any money left over it goes back into the Phil. We recently bought a celesta after years of hiring one in. This means that other orchestras in Norfolk can hire this from us. Before we had one ➔

the nearest celesta was Cambridge, which meant a lot of transport costs to bring the instrument to Norwich and back.”

The Phil also works with the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) at the Royal Opera House, offering the chance for up and coming performers to play with the orchestra and gain experience.

“It can be a bit of an unknown at times when a young musician joins us from the YCAT,” says Rob. “However, in our experience all of the young people have been exceptional. It’s always exciting to see the

next generation of classical performers.”

Maintaining an exceptionally high quality in its performances is at the heart of the Phil. Although it is an amateur organisation with many of its performers rehearsing and performing in their free time (Rob is also an artist and Sally works in Waitrose), this is high-quality amateur music-making and many in its number are professional.

“There are stringent auditions for both singers and musicians to go through before they can be part of the Phil,” explains Rob.

“For the orchestra, part of the audition is that musicians are sent a piece of music in advance of their audition and will usually sit with their section within the orchestra to play.”

Adds Sally: “Auditions for the choir involve a 10 minute audition with conductor David Dunnett, which involves scales and sight reading a piece of music for which there is no prep beforehand.

“We also re-audition the current choir every three to five years to maintain standards - we don’t take any passengers!”



**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

The Norwich Philharmonic Society season 2015/16

**Saturday November 7, 7.30pm**

**Elgar:** Dream of Gerontius  
With Diana Moore - mezzo-soprano,  
Robert Murray - tenor, Adam Green -  
baritone, and the Norwich Philharmonic  
Chorus and Orchestra. Conducted by  
David Dunnett.

**Saturday December 5, 7.30pm**

**Dukas:** The Sorcerer’s Apprentice  
**Canteloube:** Songs of the Auvergne  
**Ravel:** Pavane Pour Une Infante Défunte  
**Rachmaninov:** Symphonic Dances  
With Alison Roddy - soprano  
(Canteloube) and the Norwich  
Philharmonic Orchestra. Conducted by  
Matthew Andrews.

**Tuesday December 22, 7.30pm**

Family Christmas Concert, including

carols for choir and audience.

With the Norwich Philharmonic Choir  
and guests. Conducted by David  
Dunnett.

**Saturday February 6, 7.30pm**

**Vaughan Williams:** Norfolk Rhapsody  
**Beethoven:** Piano Concerto No 5 in E  
flat ‘Emperor’  
**Walton:** Symphony No 1  
With Mihkel Poll - piano (Beethoven) and  
the Norwich Philharmonic Orchestra.  
Conducted by Matthew Andrews.

**Saturday March 19, 7.30pm**

175th Birthday Concert  
A night of orchestral and popular classics  
**Orff:** O Fortuna (Carmina Burana)  
**Dvorák:** Slow movement from  
Symphony No. 9 (New World)

**Verdi:** Chorus of the Hebrew  
Slaves (Nabucco)

**Khachaturian:** Adagio from Spartacus

**Borodin:** Polovtsian dances from Prince  
Igor (with chorus)

**Rossini:** Overture William Tell

**Handel:** Hallelujah Chorus (The  
Messiah)

**Faure:** Pavane (with choir)

**Elgar:** Nimrod

**Tchaikovsky:** 1812 Overture (choral  
version with cannons)

With the Norwich Philharmonic Chorus  
and Orchestra. Conducted by David  
Dunnett and Matthew Andrews.

✦ All of the concerts are held at St Andrews Hall.  
Tickets are available from Prelude Records,  
St Giles Street or online at [www.norwichphil.org.uk](http://www.norwichphil.org.uk)