

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

MESSIAH

**An Oratorio by
GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL**



SASHA MANNING JOHNSON – Soprano

SUSAN MARRS – Mezzo Soprano

STEPHEN NEWLOVE – Tenor

RICHARD STRIVENS - Bass

ANDREW MILDINHALL - Organ

JOHN NAYLOR - Conductor

THE METHODIST CHURCH, NANTWICH

Saturday January 3rd, 2009

Programme £2.00

MESSIAH

Last year (2008) marked the 200th anniversary of the building of The Methodist Church in Nantwich: 2009 marks the 250th anniversary of Handel's death. When Handel died, Great Britain was engaged in the Seven Years War with France, and when this church was first built the Napoleonic wars still had seven years to run. Even though both these wars were fought in far off places by a professional army, times were turbulent, the national economy was under great strain and people's thoughts would naturally turn from time to time to contemplate higher things. Perhaps there are some parallels today.

Might Handel have passed quite close to Nantwich on his way to give the first performance of Messiah in Dublin on April 13th, 1742? It is certainly possible, because he travelled from London to Chester (by which road remains unknown) where he was delayed by bad weather on the crossing route. Anxious to make good use of the time available, he prevailed upon the Cathedral organist to arrange a 'sing through' of his new work with some members of the cathedral choir who, quite reasonably, he expected to be proficient readers of music. He was very put out by one of them who, when the singer gave a very poor account of the music placed before him, told a dismayed Handel that he could sing at sight 'but not at first sight!'

We know that Handel wrote Messiah in an amazingly short burst of inspiration, between Saturday August 22nd, 1741 and Saturday September 12th 1741 in preparation for the series of concerts he was to give in Dublin, borrowing very little from previous compositions. He was uncertain what musical resources he would have at his disposal when he arrived, so he designed the work for very sparing orchestration – only continuo, strings and brief appearances by trumpets and kettledrums.

The majority of the arias have an obligato accompaniment by a single instrumental part with continuo. The chorus, though planned to be relatively few in number, is given a much more prominent role than in most of Handel's previous compositions. All this was designed for economy of cost, especially since the first

performance was presented to raise funds for Dublin's Charitable Music Society.

Charles Jennens, Handel's regular librettist, selected the words from the Authorised Version of the Bible and from the Book of Common Prayer. This combination of familiar Old Testament and New Testament texts illustrates the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of Messiah in the Gospel story. The work is divided into three parts:

Part One: Prophecies of Christ's coming, the Annunciation and the Nativity.

Part Two: Christ's sacrifice, his Suffering, Resurrection and Ascension, the Evangelism of the Apostles and a glorious view of the Kingdom of God.

Part Three: Christ's redemption and the immortality of the Christian soul.

In order to accommodate as large an audience as possible, the Dublin Charitable Society's Stewards asked 'Ladies not to come with hoops' and Gentlemen 'to come without their swords'. On the day there were 700 people in the room, £400 was raised, and the Dublin Journal wrote: "Words are wanting to express the exquisite delight afforded to the admiring crowded Audience. The Sublime, the Grand and the Tender, adapted to the most elevated, majestick and moving Words, conspired to transport the ravish'd Heart and Ear."

But when Handel returned and gave the first London performance as part of his Lenten Oratorio season at Covent Garden Theatre in 1743, the reaction was underwhelming. Some critics piously questioned the suitability of a playhouse for the performance of sacred texts, and most patrons preferred Handel's 'Samson' which was 'received with uncommon applause' whilst Messiah 'was but indifferently relish'd.'

Handel was born in Halle (Germany) in February 1685, and after youthful appointments as organist at the local cathedral and harpsichord player / violin player at the local opera house, he went to Italy in 1706 where he wrote numerous operas and cantatas in the Italian style. He returned to Germany, but between 1710 and 1716 he commuted regularly to London where

Italian opera had become very popular. He eventually settled in England in the service of the Duke of Chandos who, like many rich noblemen, maintained his own small musical establishment. In 1719 he became Music Director of The Royal Academy, formed by a group of noblemen to put on regular Italian opera performances.

This proved a musically successful but financially insecure venture, and so in 1729 he started seasonal programmes on his own account. During the 1730s he built up a flourishing and profitable reputation for seasons of Italian operas and English oratorios and odes at Covent Garden.

Thus Handel was essentially a man of the theatre, especially Italian opera, although he was also undoubtedly a man with a religious background. Biblical subjects (with which his audience would have been very familiar) proved a rich source for the libretti of very many of his compositions. After composing *Messiah* for Dublin he seems to have concentrated principally on oratorios to be performed in the theatre, but he did revive *Messiah* in 1745 and again in 1749.

Handel, by then 45 and more affluent, had become an establishment figure, and in 1750 began the English tradition of performing *Messiah* in support of good causes, in this case for the Foundling Hospital where he was a governor. All of a sudden *Messiah* 'was received with universal applause', its public reputation in England was transformed and it has enjoyed a uniquely unbroken history of performance ever since.

When King George II attended a performance he stood up at the beginning of the Hallelujah chorus, but nobody really knows why. The reasons may have been lofty, they may have been prosaic. However, the audience followed protocol and also stood, a tradition was begun, and most audiences have stood for this great chorus ever since!

In the 18th century Mozart famously produced a version with more lush orchestration; in the 19th century it became customary to give performances with staggeringly large resources (up to 2,500 performers). Every choral society

included *Messiah* in its repertoire, and it is tempting to speculate that the sentiments attached to performances at this time were as much socially worthy ('improving') as they were musical.

In the first part of the 20th century conductors including Thomas Beecham and Malcolm Sargent gave performances which today would be regarded as hopelessly romantic, but they were nevertheless very persuasive interpretations. In the latter part of the 20th century it became, and still is, more customary to perform baroque music with resources more closely aligned to those originally intended. Many performances have been accompanied by organ alone, and tonight's performance uses the lovely Binns instrument in this church for the last time.

Handel died in 1759, nine days after conducting his last performance of *Messiah*, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He is regarded, with his contemporary J.S. Bach, as the greatest of all the many Baroque musicians and composers: certainly he is one of the greatest of all the English composers. In *Messiah* he left us a legacy, which has truly stood the test of time.

Jennens quoted Virgil in the introduction to his libretto – *Majora canamus* (let us sing of Greater Things.) *Messiah* was considered in Handel's day a 'Grand Musical Entertainment' and since then it has properly gained a unique place in musical performance. Even in a cynical and more secular age it has the power to move and inspire. The words are still well known by most of us, Handel's music is at once familiar and fresh and the work has a curious propensity to engage performers and audience alike in a corporate musical experience quite unlike any other.

Handel himself said of the audience at one performance: "I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better." In this performance tonight, may we all find a glimpse of some of the 'Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge' to which Jennens so appositely also referred, and by singing of 'Greater things', may we gain confidence and resource to face the opportunities and challenges of the year ahead.

John Naylor

THE TEXT OF MESSIAH

MAJORA CANAMUS

(Virgil, Eclogue IV)

And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifested in the Flesh, justified by the Spirit, seen of Angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory. In whom are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge.

(1 Timothy iii, 16; Colossians ii, 3)

(These words, selected by Jennens, the librettist, formed a preface to the wordbook of the first performance of Messiah in April 1742 in Dublin)

PART ONE

1. Symphony

2. Tenor recitative: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. *Isaiah 40:1-3*

3. Tenor aria: Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low: the crooked straight, and the rough places plain. *Isaiah 40:4*

4. Chorus: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. *Isaiah 40:5*

5. Bass recitative: Thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come. *Haggai 2:6-7*

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. *Malachi 3:1*

6. Contralto aria: But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire. *Malachi 3:2*

7. Chorus: And He shall purify the sons of Levi that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. *Malachi 3:3*

8. Contralto recitative: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. *Isaiah 7:14*

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, "God with us". *Matthew 1:23*

9. Contralto aria and Chorus: O thou, that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou, that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! *Isaiah 40:9*

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. *Isaiah 60:1*

10. Bass Recitative: For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. *Isaiah 60:2-3*

11. Bass Aria: The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. *Isaiah 9:2*

12. Chorus: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:6*

13. Pifa (Pastoral Symphony)

14. Soprano Recitative: There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. *Luke 2:8-9*

15. Soprano recitative: And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2:10-11*

16. Soprano recitative: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: *Luke 2:13*

17. Chorus: Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, goodwill toward men! *Luke 2:14*

18. Soprano aria: Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is the righteous Saviour and He shall speak peace unto the heathen. *Zechariah 9:9-10*

19. Contralto recitative: Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. *Isaiah 35:5-36*

20. Contralto aria: He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. *Isaiah 40:11*

Soprano aria: Come unto Him, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him; for He is meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. *Matthew 11:28-29*

21. Chorus: His yoke is easy, His burthen is light. *Matthew 11:30*

PART TWO

22. Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. *John 1:29*

23. Contralto aria: He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. *Isaiah 53:3*

24. Chorus: Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. *Isaiah 53:4-5*

25. Chorus: And with His stripes we are healed. *Isaiah 53:5*

26. Chorus: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53:6*

27. Tenor recitative: All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn: they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying, *Psalms 22:7*

28. Chorus: He trusted in God that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him. *Psalms 22:8*

29. Tenor recitative: Thy rebuke hath broken His heart; He is full of heaviness: He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man; neither found He any to comfort Him. *Psalms 69:20*

30. Tenor Aria: Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow. *Lamentations 1:12*

31. Tenor recitative: He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken. *Isaiah 53:8*

32. Tenor aria: But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. *Psalms 16:10*

33. Chorus: Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in! Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. *Psalms 24:7-10*

38. Soprano Aria: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! *Romans 10:15*

40. Bass Aria: Why do the nations so furiously rage together, why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed. *Psalms 2:1-2*

41. Chorus: Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. *Psalms 2:3*

42. Tenor recitative: He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in derision. *Psalms 2:4*

43. Air: Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. *Psalms 2:9*

44. Chorus: Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:6* The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 11:15* King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign for ever and ever, Hallelujah! *Revelation 19:16*

PART THREE

45. Soprano aria: I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. *Job 19:25-26* For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. *1 Corinthians 15:20*

46. Chorus: Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. *1 Corinthians 15:21-22*

47. Bass recitative: Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

48. Bass aria: The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. *1 Corinthians 15:52-53*

49. Contralto recitative: Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. *1 Corinthians 15:54*

50 and 51. Alto and Tenor duet,: O death, where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. *1 Corinthians 15:55-56.*

53. Chorus: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. *Revelation 5:12-14*

54. Chorus: Amen

There will be a pause of 15 minutes between each part.

JOHN NAYLOR - Conductor

John Naylor, conductor, singer and organist, combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance. Following a successful business career he now devotes most of his activities to conducting and choir development.

His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister, a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and worked with John Eliot Gardiner, Louis Halsey, Neville Mariner and Richard Hickox, appearing under their direction at The Proms, The South Bank, The Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Christ Church Oxford, Carlisle and Chester.

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since 1980 with whom he has performed extensively in the North West and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation. He is also Musical Director of the renowned Newport & District Male Voice Choir and conducted the Combined Shropshire Male Voice Choirs (some 300 voices) in their most recent concert. In 2006 he conducted the Lydian Singers and N&D MVC on concert tours to Castile and Slovenia.

He was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has conducted highly acclaimed performances of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', Bach's 'St John Passion' (in Chester Cathedral), and Monteverdi's 'Vespers of 1610', Bernstein's 'Chichester Psalms' and Fauré's 'Requiem'. In July 2007 he conducted a memorable joint performance in Nantwich

of Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon and in November a much-praised performance of Mozart's *Requiem* with the 18th Century Concert Orchestra.

2008 has included a recital of A Capella English Pastoral Music, Tewkesbury Abbey, recitals in Perugia, Assisi, Orvieto, Spoleto and Todi cathedrals and Hexham abbey and Bangor Cathedral with The Lydian Singers, together with recitals, a new CD recording and filming an excerpt from 'Miss Saigon' with Newport & District MVC. With NCS he conducted an impressive performance of *Brahms Requiem* in March a highly enjoyable *Opera Gala Evening* in July, and a memorable performance of J.S.Bach's Mass in B minor in November.

After the usual round of Christmas concerts, future plans include *Gounod's St Cecilia Mass*, *Haydn's 'The Seasons'* and *Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius'* (Chester cathedral) with NCS, together with Hexham Abbey, Peterborough Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Durham Cathedral with the Lydian Singers and recitals in Barcelona Cathedral and the Abbey of Montserrat with Newport MVC.

John's solo singing performances have recently included a Shropshire performance of Vaughan Williams 'On Wenlock Edge' with the pianist Vivian Redfern in May and a recent lunchtime concert as part of the Goostrey Festival in October

ANDREW MILDINHALL studied the organ and piano with Nicholas Danby, Vivian Langrish & Eric Thiman. After a long career in fund-raising & marketing he is now operates as a freelance musician, playing the organ, piano and harpsichord for concerts, special occasions and church services throughout Cheshire.

He was organist of Nantwich Parish Church for 12 years and until recently ran 'Sounds Musical', a specialist cd shop in Nantwich. He is the regular accompanist of Nantwich Choral Society.

SASHA JOHNSON MANNING
- Soprano

Sasha studied voice, cello, piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music and currently sings each week for BBC Radio 4's Daily Service. She has performed throughout Europe with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Deller Consort, Britten Singers (formerly BBC Northern Singers), and has performed as soloist in the film 'My Kingdom' with Lynn Redgrave and Richard Harris. She sang the title role in James Whitbourn's new work, 'Annelies' about Anne Frank, which was recorded with The BBC Philharmonic. She has appeared as guest soloist with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra the Goldberg Ensemble, Musical Offering and the Northern Chamber Orchestra amongst others.

Her recent performances with Nantwich Choral Society and The 18th Century Sinfonia include Monteverdi's Vespers and Mozart's Requiem.

Sasha is also a prolific composer gaining international acclaim for her work. She is currently composer in residence for the St Louis Chamber Chorus, Missouri and is published by Escorial Edition and John Turner's Contemporary Recorder Series (Peacock Press). Several of her choral works have been broadcast by the BBC and performed in Holland, Portugal, Spain, Australia and the USA. Recent works include pieces for John Turner and settings for the London Baroque Ensemble with Emma Kirkby, a requiem for St Louis Chamber Chorus and songs for James Bowman, Lynne Dawson and Claron McFadden.

Christmas 2007 saw the world premiere of The Manchester Carols which was the result of collaboration between Sasha and the poet, Carol Ann Duffy. The pair created fourteen brand new carols, which were first performed at the Royal Northern College of Music in December 2007 and most recently were broadcast on BBC Radio 4 last Sunday morning.

SUSAN MARRS - mezzo soprano

Susan graduated from Trinity College of Music, London in 1993, after winning The Ricordi Opera Prize and The Trinity College Singing Department Prize. Her oratorio repertoire includes performances of Elgar's "The Dream of Gerontius" (at Ypres Cathedral, Belgium), "The Kingdom" and "The Apostles", Verdi's "Requiem", Dvorak's "Stabat Mater", Mozart's "Requiem" and "C Minor Mass", Bach's "Mass in B Minor" and "St. Matthew Passion", Handel's "Messiah" and "Dixit Dominus", Haydn's "Nelson Mass" and "Paukenmesse", the Vivaldi "Gloria", Rossini's "Petite Messe Solennelle" and "Stabat Mater" and Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky". Opera roles have included "Cherubino" in Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" for British Youth Opera and "Mrs Noye" in Britten's "Noye's Fludde" at The Royal Albert Hall.

Susan has enjoyed twelve years as a member of the Extra Chorus at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and recent performances have 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".

Sue sings with "London Voices" under the direction of Terry Edwards, and has participated in numerous concerts and recordings in London and Europe of works by Bach, Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, John Tavener and Sir Michael Tippett, among others, and several works conducted by the late Sir Georg Solti, Sir Simon Rattle, Seiji Ozawa and Richard Hickox. Film score recordings have included "Star Wars", "Lord of the Rings", "Harry Potter" and "The Phantom of the Opera".

Recent solo appearances have included performances of Verdi's "Requiem", Vaughan William's "Hodie", Elgar's "Sea Pictures" Bach's "B Minor Mass", and "St. Matthew Passion", and Elgar's "The Music Makers".

Appearances with Nantwich Choral Society have included 'Elijah' in November 2005 and "Messiah" and 'The Armed Man' in 2007. Susan is a Fellow of Trinity College, London.

STEPHEN NEWLOVE - tenor

Stephen Newlove was born in East Yorkshire and sang as a chorister in Beverley Minster before studying for a music degree at Huddersfield, followed by a Masters in composition at the University of Hull. He studies singing with Nicolas Powell.

As an experienced cathedral singer in the choirs of York Minster and Chester Cathedral, Stephen has broadcast on radio and television and has featured on a number of acclaimed recordings. He is currently a member of the Britten Singers, Canzonetta and Chudleigh's Company.

Recent solo engagements include Monteverdi *Vespers* with the Orchestra of the Golden Age and His Majesty's Sackbuts and Cornetts, arias in Bach *St John Passion* with the English Haydn Orchestra, Evangelist in Bach *St Matthew and John Passions*, and, *Christmas Oratorio*, Handel *Messiah and Saul*, Haydn *Stabat Mater and Creation*, Puccini *Messe Di Gloria*, Janacek *Otcenas*, Sir George Dyson *Canterbury Pilgrims*, Britten *St Nicolas Cantata* and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies *Solstice of Light*. Future events include the solos in Bach *Mass in B minor* with Manchester Camerata Orchestra, Dvorak *Stabat Mater*, Haydn *Marie Theresa Mass* and Bach *Cantata 78 - Jesu, der du meine Seele* with Ripon Choral Society.

Members of Nantwich Choral Society recall with great pleasure Stephen's superb performance of the notoriously challenging tenor arias in the Society's performance of Bach's *St John Passion* in April 2006, and in *Messiah* (2007)

As well as performing, Stephen is Director of Music at Carmel College in St Helens, Merseyside.

RICHARD STRIVENS - bass-baritone

Richard Strivens, bass-baritone, originally from Kent, grew up in Belgium and graduated from Oxford University in Chemistry. He studied singing at the National Opera Studio, the Royal Northern College of Music and EurOperaStudio, Milan.

He has sung Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*) for English Touring Opera, the Stage Technician (*The Makropulos Case*) for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Colline (*La Bohème*) for Scottish Opera on Tour, Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) at Cologne Opera, and Tergisto (*Messalina*) at the Batignano Festival in Italy. More modern roles include Boatman/Lightning in Julian Philip's children's opera *Dolffin* for Welsh National Opera, Håkon in Maxwell Davies' *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* for The Opera Group and Richard created the role of Abbot Samson in Judith Bingham's *The Ivory Tree*.

Other operatic roles include Don Giovanni and Figaro for Ryedale Festival Opera, the Count for Pimlico Opera, Simone (*La finta semplice*) for the Classical Opera Company, Zoroastro (*Orlando*) and Ariodate (*Xerxes*) for the Cambridge Handel Opera Group. Richard has appeared twice on Channel 4 as Giovanni - in a masterclass with Sir Thomas Allen and in Opera Anywhere's modern translation of the opera.

Concerts include Bach *Ich habe genug* with Nicholas Daniel and *St Matthew Passion* and the *Christmas Oratorio*, all with Nicholas Cleobury and the Britten Sinfonia. With the Joyful Company of Singers he has recorded Strauss *Deutsche Mottete* and *Messiah*. He has sung Verdi's *Requiem* at the Bridgewater Hall with the combined North West Choral Societies, *Pulcinella* with the Birmingham Royal Ballet conducted by Barry Wordsworth, *The Apostles* at Eton College with Ralph Allwood, *The Kingdom* at St David's Cathedral, *The Dream of Gerontius* at The Sage in Gateshead and *Elijah* with Stephen Williams and St George's Singers.

You can find out more from www.richardstrivens.com

J J Binns Organ-builders

The organ in this church was built by the firm founded by James Jepson Binns (1855-1928), one of the most successful and prolific of the numerous Yorkshire organ builders working at the turn of the 20th century. The firm's most distinguished work was produced between the 1890s and the First World War. Binns was initially apprenticed to the Leeds firm of Radcliffe and Sagar, and from about 1873 to 1880 he worked for Abbott and Smith, latterly as head voicer. He established his Bramley Organ Works in 1880. The Revd Theodore Brocklehurst, writing his reminiscences of Binns in 'The Organ' quarterly, July 1929, reported that:

"There was at that period a very fine musician in Leeds, namely J. W. Broughton, who had a Schulze chamber organ in his music room, which was tuned by Mr. Binns on behalf of Messrs. Abbott & Co. Mr. Broughton became so interested in young Binns, that learning of his great ambition to start organ building on his own account, said to him: "If you can make a pipe and put it into one of the diapason stops so that I cannot detect the difference between your pipe and the rest, I think I might be able to put you in the way of starting." This put Binns on his mettle, and the result was that he succeeded in pleasing Mr. Broughton. The upshot was that Mr. Broughton spoke to three or four wealthy Leeds men, and they advanced Binns the money to begin."

His work is characterised by sturdy - almost heavy - design and workmanship, and the solid construction of the organs earned them the nickname 'Battleship Binns'. There is a conservative continuity of style throughout the mainstream of the firm's production, which draws heavily on the German influence which attracted so many northern organ builders in the latter half of the 19th century. There are particular similarities with the work of Kirtland & Jardine and Brindley & Foster - all devotees of the 'Schulze' school of thought.

Binns wisely avoided the tonal and mechanical eccentricities which proved the downfall of many of his contemporaries, but he did invent an ingenious and entirely mechanical piston setter mechanism. He was acclaimed particularly for his flue-work including the Schulze-inspired diapasons, but his instruments never had the cachet of those by more prominent firms and his smaller church organs, built to standard stop lists, have sometimes been criticised on ground of dullness. But, as is amply proven by the famous Albert Hall organ in Nottingham, his best work was outstanding.

Although many of Binns' smaller organs still survive in churches and chapels throughout Britain, few of his larger organs remain intact: one of the best surviving is the four-manual, 53-stop instrument from 1912 at St Mary, Shrewsbury. As some of the larger chapels closed in the North of England in the latter part of the last century, a number of the best Binns organs were rescued and found new life as the basis of new instruments.

One of the most famous examples is the large Binns organ formerly in the Upper Independent Chapel, Heckmondwike which has been transformed into the magnificent Nave Organ in Southwell Minster. It is much to be hoped that a similar fate might befall the organ in this church after it finally closes.

FUTURE NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY EVENTS

Feb 28th, St Mary's Acton

SINGING DAY

HANDEL - CORONATION ANTHEMS

ELGAR – GREAT IS THE LORD

with **Philip Rushforth**,
Director of Music, Chester Cathedral

March 28th, St Mary's Nantwich

ST CECILIA MASS - GOUNOD

PSALMFEST – JOHN RUTTER

Serenna Wagner – soprano, Andrew Lockwood- tenor, David Butt Philip – bass
Andrew Mildinhall – organ, Conductor – John Naylor

June 27th, Nantwich Civic Hall

THE SEASONS – HAYDN

Jane Johnson – soprano, Matthew Minter – tenor, Marcus Farnsworth – bass
with Cheshire Sinfonia, Conductor - John Naylor

November 7th, Chester Cathedral

THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS – ELGAR

with Romsey Choral Society, The Border Singers and The Lydian Singers
The Northern Concordia Orchestra
Conductor – John Naylor

December 19th, St Mary's Nantwich

FAMILY CAROL CONCERT

with Nantwich Young Voices
Andrew Mildinhall – organ, Conductor – John Naylor

For full details visit www.nantwichchoral.org.uk

Unfortunately Sasha Manning Johnson is unwell. We are extremely grateful to Philippa Hyde who has taken her place at extremely short notice.

PHILIPPA HYDE – soprano

Philippa commenced her singing studies with Ann Lampard and continued under the tuition of David Johnston and Yvonne Minton CBE at the Royal Academy of Music. She graduated with the coveted Dip.Ram in 1993. In 2001 she was awarded the ARAM, an honour granted to past students of the Academy who have achieved distinction in their profession.

Philippa is an experienced recording artist and since 1995 she has been a regular soloist for Hyperion, for whom she created the role of Semira in the first performance for nearly two hundred years of Arnes Artaxerxes, which was also broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. Her busy and varied concert, operatic and oratorio career has taken her all over Europe and to many of its major concert venues and festivals. She has performed with many of the leading Early Music orchestras and ensembles and regularly appears at the South Bank and Wigmore Hall in London, as well as in cathedrals throughout the United Kingdom.

Recent engagements have included a tour of Europe (including broadcasts on foreign radio networks as well as on BBC Radio 3 from the Royal Festival Hall) singing solos in J.S. Bach's St Matthew Passion, conducted by Sir Roger Norrington; Concerts with the CBSO under the batons of James Macmillan and Nicholas McGegan in Birmingham's Symphony Hall and a performance of Haydn's Harmoniemesse in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall with Sir Simon Rattle.

Philippa has given many performances with her husband Richard Tanner whom she met whilst they were both students at the Royal Academy of Music. Their concerts incorporate popular classics for soprano, accompanied by piano, organ or harpsichord. Their large repertoire includes music by Handel, Bach, Monteverdi, Purcell, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Schumann & R Strauss as well as a music by 19th and 20th Century British composers. They have appeared throughout the United Kingdom in Cathedrals, Churches, Oxbridge Chapels and in concert halls. They have also toured to India, USA and Italy and have broadcast together on BBC Radios 3 & 4 and on BBC 1 Television's Songs of Praise and have also given many concerts with Richard as orchestral conductor.

Richard and Philippa live with their young family in Blackburn, Lancashire, where Richard is the Cathedral Organist. Philippa maintains a busy schedule of concerts around Britain and abroad. She also teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.