

Newsletter 14, January 2024

# HALIFAX

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## Choral Society

The world's oldest choral society  
Making music continuously since 1817



Our Spring concert at Halifax Minster celebrates the world around us with music for everyone! The Choral Society will present extracts from Haydn's spectacular oratorio *The Creation* alongside more contemporary music by Benjamin Britten and living composers Grayston Ives and Sir James MacMillan. Accompanied by the fabulous Graham Thorpe on the wonderful Minster organ, we will also be joined by the Choir of Halifax Minster for a number of pieces, including some solo items from them. Our soloists will largely be drawn from within the ranks of our team of Choral Scholars. It promises to be a wonderful evening of creation-themed music.



**Tickets for the Spring concert are only £15 - click on the star!**

Under 18s accompanied by a ticket holder will be admitted free on the door only.

### *A New Song*

Sir James MacMillan's music is deeply rooted in both his Scottish heritage and his



Catholic faith. Initially best known for his instrumental works, most famously for the tour-de-force percussion concerto, *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* written for Evelyn Glennie in 1992, he has increasingly turned to choral works. He has stated 'I love writing for voices. I love the British choral sound. I go down the well-worn paths, but I do like to revisit these traditions and perhaps add my own character.'

*A New Song* brings together Scottish idioms with choral depth in a setting of Psalm 96, 'O sing unto the Lord a new song'.

## ***The Canticle of Brother Sun***

Grayston Ives (who prefers to be known as 'Bill') was a member of the *King's Singers* from 1978-1985, and has since built a reputation as a composer and choral director. His *Canticle of Brother Sun* uses words by St. Francis of Assisi which praise God and thank Him for his creation of nature - sun, moon, water, fire and earth - and ask blessing for those who 'walk in the way of peace'.



## **Ipswich and Halifax Choral Societies performing Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at Snape Maltings in 2017**

Halifax Choral Society's very first concert, in 1818, was Haydn's *The Creation*, so naturally we chose that work for our concert in 2018. Altogether, we have performed the work 18 times (so far!), as well as making a virtual choir recording of the well-known chorus '[The Heavens are Telling](#)' during lockdown. When [Ipswich Choral Society](#) - the second oldest choral society - joined us for our bi-centenary celebrations in 2017, they mooted the idea of a 'return match' for their own 200th birthday in 2024. Accordingly, we will be joining them at [Snape Maltings](#) on 20 April for a performance of *The Creation*. This is sure to be a great evening, and what could be a better excuse for a weekend in beautiful Suffolk? We would love to see you there.

Did you know ...?



## Rejoice in the Lamb

Benjamin Britten's Festival Cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, was written in 1944 using excerpts from a long poem by Christopher Smart. *Jubilate Agno* was probably written between 1757 and 1763 when Smart was confined to a mental asylum, St. Luke's in Bethnel Green, London, apparently at the instigation of his father-in-law John Newbery. While Smart certainly seems to have been a little unbalanced at times, there may have been more to the 'Commission of Lunacy' taken out by Newbery which put Smart into St. Luke's as, initially, a 'curable' inmate.

Smart was already quite well known as a poet when Newbery became his publisher in 1750. Newbery was looking for someone to contribute to two of his magazines, *The Student*, and *The Midwife* (the latter having nothing to do with the medical profession!)

Smart's contributions added an element of satire and comedy to both publications, which also included pieces by Smart's friends and associates, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Samuel Johnson. Smart doesn't seem to have made much money from this, and had to 'toil' at 'hack work' to keep his head above water. Sadly, his expenditure continued to exceed his income, as Mr. Micawber might have warned, and like Micawber, Smart ended up in the King's Bench Prison as a debtor, where he died in 1771.

18th century London was a hotbed of literary battles, and Smart's involvement set him against his erstwhile publisher, Newbery. The tension between them may have contributed to Newbery's declaring Smart insane, although there is some evidence that he suffered from some kind of religious mania. Newbery included attacks on Smart's mental and moral state in several of his publications, which contributed to Smart's reputation as unbalanced and disreputable.



Certainly, *Jubilate Agno* is strange and, at times, deeply mystical, and this may explain why it didn't see publication until 1939. Britten's choice of extracts include short poems to Smart's cat, Jeffrey, and to a mouse 'of great personal valour'. The overarching theme is the worship of God by all created beings and things, each in its own way.

Wow! We were delighted to raise a whopping £1497.64 for local charity [Healthy Minds](#) at our Annual Carols and Brass concert at the Victoria Theatre. Our incredible audience filled the Healthy Minds teams' donation buckets to the brim as they left the theatre. Thank you to everyone who donated, for your smiles, kindness and support. Healthy Minds says: 'Thank you to Halifax Choral Society for the opportunity to raise so much money. It will be spent wisely to help our wonderful Calderdale communities.'

## Dates for your diary:

9 March 2024 'Music for Springtime' concert at Halifax Minster

20 April 2024 *The Creation* by Haydn, with Ipswich Choral Society at Snape Maltings  
6 July 2024 Summer concert at Halifax Minster  
1 December 2024 Carols and Brass with Black Dyke Band at the Victoria Theatre  
13 December 2024 *Messiah* by Candlelight at Halifax Minster  
12 April 2025 Spring concert

If you have any suggestions for what you would like your Newsletter to include, or any queries about HCS, please email

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