

HALIFAX

Choral Society

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

Welcome to our second newsletter.

Lockdown has been a frustrating time for everyone, not least singers, but we have got an exciting programme planned for the rest of the year. Details can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Covid restrictions have prevented us from rehearsing and performing but we have continued to meet on Zoom, not just for online rehearsals and keeping on singing, but also for listening to music together, for quizzes and for general chat. As well as bringing much needed light relief this has given us new opportunities to get to know each other.



Darius Battiwalla

On Monday 29th March we enjoyed a pleasurable evening sharing the Desert Island Disc choices of Darius Battiwalla, the Musical Director of Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus and Leeds City Organist.

This gave us a new opportunity to get to know Darius, who has been closely associated with the choir for many years.

During his interview with Philip Collin, we learnt a lot about Darius' development as a musician and listened to some great music.

Darius was born in Islington, London. His mother is from Lancashire and his father is from a Parsee family in India. As a young child he began playing the piano by ear, later taking up the cello and finally the organ. He told us how fortunate he was to have opportunities to learn music and to play in an orchestra at school.

Darius is in great demand as an organist, pianist, conductor, arranger and improviser. He told us about his keen interest in improvising piano and organ accompaniment to silent films - here is a link to a [short recording](#) where he talks about his approach to this challenge.

Darius' eight choices were:

Moderato, *Symphony No. 5 in D Minor*, Shostakovich
Gloria: Cum Sancto Spiritu, *Mass in B minor*, Bach
Allegro vivace e nobilmente, *Symphony No. 2 in E-Flat Major*, Elgar
Molto moderato, *Piano Sonata No.21 in B-Flat Major*, Schubert
Overture, *Girl Crazy*, Gershwin
Allegro molto appassionato, *Violin Concerto in E Minor*,
Mendelssohn
Allegro moderato, *Cello Sonata in G Minor*, Chopin
Part 2:6 Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfundener. *Symphony No. 3 in D Minor*, Mahler

If you would like to hear Darius' choices in full, [they are available here](#):

For his book Darius chose *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov and for his luxury item, not surprisingly, he would like a grand piano, but more surprising was his stipulation that this comes with a built-in coffee maker!



Helen enjoying a walk in Malta

Helen Roberts

HCS members were very sad to hear of the sudden passing of Helen Roberts in 2019, and we have just been notified that under the terms of her will, we have received the amazing sum of £40,000 'to be used for the general benefit of the society'.

Helen's mother was from Halifax, and her father was Welsh. For many years the family enjoyed holidays in Borth-y-Guest, and

Helen's goddaughter, Isobel Hainsworth-Breare, describes those long hot summers on the beach with three generations of extended family as idyllic - like something out of Enid Blyton - picnics on the beach, messing about in the sea, sailing, walking across the estuary to Harlech, and playing on the danger rocks! Helen survived all her immediate family and this pained her dreadfully, but she was an avid letter-writer and stayed in touch with her extended family, never forgetting birthdays. In both her working life, as a teacher, and in her personal relationships, she was always keen to encourage the young and interested in their achievements.

In 1959, at age 16, Helen's school choir was invited to sing Bach's *St Matthew Passion* alongside HCS and she said that the experience made a great impression. She joined HCS in 1965 and became a valued member of the alto section, being presented with her 50-year long service award in March 2015. Over the course of 54 years with HCS, she sang in 50 performances of *Messiah*, and nine of Verdi's *Requiem*, which remained one of her favourites. Her fellow alto, Lizzie Heywood, says that Helen always knew when we had last performed works. She had listed them and as soon as John asked about this, she would tell Lizzie quietly, but rarely said it out loud. At times she found the back row in Carlton, where the altos sat for rehearsals, a little too warm, and would produce a pair of pliers, insisting that Lizzie get down on her knees to turn off the heating. At the end of rehearsal, she would hand Lizzie the pliers again, so that the heating could be switched back on!

The initial intention is to use some of this most generous legacy to invest in outreach and recruitment activities to increase membership numbers in order to ensure the future of HCS.

Meet our accompanist! Q & A with Jenny Martins



Q: Where did you grow up, and where do you live now?

A: I grew up in Keighley. I went to Newcastle University in 2004, to study music. I chose Newcastle because of the variety of music on offer, because it felt like a very friendly place and because I also loved the City. I stayed there for a while after University working with Sage Gateshead and started to develop my career as an accompanist, then moved to Leeds to work with Leeds School of Music (now called Leeds Conservatoire) - I still do three days a week there. A friend in Leeds told me about an opportunity with Opera North; this was a lucky break and very much a turning point for me. Although Opera North started out so recently, they have been a phenomenal success. They are strong on outreach work which I've really enjoyed being part of. I have been able to do innovative work with young people and community groups who may not be familiar

with opera as well as regular accompanying.

Q: Why do you like being an accompanist? Is piano your favourite instrument to play?

A: I really enjoy the collaborative aspects of music making; I don't want to necessarily be in control. I love to feel part of something where all the various contributions from different musicians come together, all adding up to something special and unique. I do play other instruments as well as piano; I play clarinet, and I play organ in church (though not recently!) but never feel I can quite get where I want to be in the same way as I can on a piano. So yes, it is piano for me.

Q: How have you found lockdown?

A: Lockdown has made me appreciate so many things we have all previously taken for granted and when we can get back to making music together, I will never take them for granted again. As I'm a freelance musician I've had to find new ways of doing things, and strangely there here have been some positive aspects as it has been an opportunity to develop some new skills, particularly around technology; sound and video recording, editing, and production are all new areas for me. Collaborating in different ways with friends such as Chris Pulleyn has produced some amazing results and new ways to put music out there. Who knew you could play a duet when you are not even in the same room! [Click here to watch.](#)

Q: How did you hear about us and what attracted you to Halifax Choral Society?

A: John [Pryce-Jones] told me about the opportunity with the choir, and of course I was interested - it is the world's oldest choral society after all! But although it has a long tradition, it is not staying in the same place as some choirs do, it is up for things that are fresh and different - the *Holy Face* was a very exciting venture. I did not know Philip [Collin] before but the opportunity to work with him has also been amazing; he is so full of ideas and creativity and really gets the best out of the singers. The singers themselves are brilliant, they put a lot of effort in, and that makes it rewarding for an accompanist.

Q: What sort of music do you like?

A: Everything! - but if I had to choose one composer it would be J S Bach. Oh, and Brahms. And I love opera. But I also like pop music - the Beatles would be a favourite but I also have other pleasures - I enjoy Jazz, and I listen to Whitney Houston when I am in that sort of mood!

[Watch more from Jenny on her YouTube Channel here.](#)

Did you know ...?

Rossini (1792-1868) is best known for his comic operas, a genre in which his hugely influential innovations sometimes disgusted an older, more conservative generation of composers who nicknamed him 'Monsieur Crescendo'. He wrote 39 operas, but *William Tell*, written in 1829, was to be his last. His early retirement from opera was dubbed by the critic Francis Toye in 1934 as 'The Great Renunciation', describing it as a 'phenomenon unique in the history of music', but Rossini did not give up composing altogether. He produced songs, piano pieces, chamber music and religious works, including his *Petite Messe Solennelle*, written five years before his death, which he referred to as 'the last mortal sin of my old age'. With typical ironic wit, he questioned at the end of the manuscript 'Is it sacred music (*musique sacrée*)? I have written or damned music (*sacré musique*)?' His caustic humour was well known, for example his comments that 'Wagner has lovely moments but awful quarters of an hour' and 'One can't judge Wagner's opera Lohengrin after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend to hear it a second time', but he was sometimes on the receiving end: Beethoven said that

Rossini would have been a great composer if his teacher had spanked his bottom enough'. The *Petite Messe Solennelle* inspired the comment usually attributed to Napoleon III that it is neither 'little', nor 'solemn', which is, perhaps, true, but the result is an exciting and inspiring work.

Dates for your diary 2021

- **Saturday 26 June:** Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* at Halifax Minster
- **Saturday 24 July:** RETURN TO LIVE MUSIC CELEBRATION! a summer prom at The Piece Hall, Halifax
- **Saturday 18 September:** COME AND SING! Handel's *Messiah*
- **Saturday 6 November:** Duruflé *Requiem*
- **Sunday 28 November:** *Carols and Brass* with Black Dyke Band

Entry to the Piece Hall event will be free. Details on obtaining tickets for our other concerts will be posted on our website.

If you would like to take part in the "Come and Sing *Messiah*", or know of anyone who would be interested, please [contact us](#).

We would like to thank our patrons who have helped us through this difficult period

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Halifax Choral Society (1817) Ltd.
Company's Registered Office:
3 Heathfield Rise,
Rishworth,
Sowerby Bridge
HX6 4RS
coordinator@halifaxchoralsociety.co.uk



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