

# East Surrey Choral Society Newsletter

## September 2006

### From our chairman

It seems only a few months since the last newsletter but here we are again. We were disappointed that Della was too ill to sing at the Summer Concert but it was still a great success in spite of the heat. It was only a brief illness and she is a lot better and promises to sing with us another time. We do appreciate this as it must take a lot of organising on her behalf to make sure she is free.

Another busy year for the Committee, although some jobs have been split we still have some vacancies. Ruth Thorpe offered to become Secretary when no one else wanted the job. Unfortunately she found that juggling work and home did not give her enough time so she had to give up. We thank her for her help and organisation.

Gill English has agreed to take on the job, now that she is semi-retired she thinks she has the time.

It was a shock for us all when Jackie Richmond, our Treasurer, was whipped into hospital just before the Easter concert. She is now home and looking heaps better, but feels she is unable to continue as Treasurer as she is still having treatment. Is there anyone able to take on the job? Jackie will willingly show a volunteer what it entails. In her quiet way Jackie kept control of the finances and got the books to balance. No mean feat as I found in trying to do the job myself. At one point I thought we several thousands in hand - the bank did not agree. I am not a figure person, the bank was right! Jackie has it all on computer.

We also have a vacancy for a Catering Manager/s The rehearsal coffee arrangements just need a tweak now and then, but the parties need someone in charge even if it is only to delegate the work.

Besides the £900 we got back from Inland Revenue we received money from the Barn Dance and the Parties. We also received great contributions from Joan's marmalade, Keith's eggs, Ann's catalogue, Tree's plants and coffee morning, Sue's bring and buy and coffee morning, and Mollie's alterations. These are all very much appreciated.

In spite of this we still had to transfer a lot of money from the High Interest Account and some concerts, especially those with an orchestra, run at a loss. de Stafford is putting up the rent next year as well so we have decided to charge £2.00 a term for music. Many choirs expect their singers to provide their own music by buying, borrowing or begging. We are lucky that Ceinwen manages to track down enough music for us all, having to phone all round the country at times.

For those who missed the summer party we had a very enjoyable and warm evening thanks to Marilyn and John Aitken for their hospitality and organisation.

We start again on 12th Sept., but I shall be on a train in Europe somewhere. So see you all in good voice when I get back.

**WANTED**      Someone to take over the Treasurer's job.  
Jackie will train and Cathy will be very grateful!

*Cathy Pierce*

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## **From our Conductor**

As always seems to be the case when I come to pen my contribution to the newsletter, I am made aware that in only a month's time, ESCS will reconvene to tackle music for another season – which in turn means that summer is flying past. At least this year we have had plenty of hot weather to enjoy – or complain about! – so the ball has been travelling far further – but still not necessarily in the right direction! For me, 2006 is quite a watershed and the prospect from mid-October of not making the daily trek to BBC Maida Vale is one with which I am battling to come to terms; after three decades as a BBC Singer, I now once again have to compete for work in the freelance world of music – a somewhat daunting, yet exciting and challenging prospect. So, which of my many pipe dreams shall I select? No doubt time – and the bank manager – will very largely decide things for me, but there are several interesting possibilities, so I am certain I shall not become entirely idle.

For the choir too, I think 2005/6 proved an interesting year. The Bach concert at Christmas was very well received, even if the musical challenges in the *Magnificat* stretched us to the limit. Brahms' *Requiem*, which had for some time been near the top of members' "request list" for performance, worked well with the piano duet accompaniment, though I am sure most singers realized that here was a great work which will always closely examine and test the physical and vocal stamina of any choral group. The Victorian programme a few weeks ago proved a true audience-puller and hopefully will have helped the choir's finances. It was such a shame that Della was not well enough to be with us – she really would have provided the icing on the cake, I am sure. How fortunate we are to have a president who takes such an active and genuine interest in "her" choir. Thank you, Della, for your tremendous enthusiasm and support.

My personal thanks go to all at ESCS, but in particular to the immensely hard-working members of the committee, notably Ruth Thorpe and Gill English for their secretarial contributions, Ceinwen for her 'authoritarian'(!) efficiency as librarian and John Kensett, who with valued assistance from John Dale, has regularly undertaken so much of the heavy work and organization on concert days, as well as overseeing social events. (I am still not convinced that even this amount of work will ever win people round to your joke book, John!) Socially, I think that the barn dance in March – a brainchild of Gill English – proved the highlight of the social calendar. Great fun and a great success, I shall remember it with particular fondness, as the choir presented me with a bound volume of Bach chorales to mark the passing of yet another decade in the life of yours truly. My sincere thanks go to all at ESCS who contributed not only to the birthday celebrations but also to making my eleven years such fun – and for giving me enough lines on my forehead to write music on! Jackie Richmond's presence as treasurer has been sadly missed since she was so cruelly hit by illness. How good it was to see her at the rehearsal on the day of our de Stafford concert. Our thoughts and best wishes are with her – and we look forward to seeing her again very soon.

Regrettably, Jan Winstone has decided that demands on her time and pressure of other work will no longer enable her to continue as the official accompanist, so we are sadly saying goodbye to her. Jan has been an immense support and a highly valued member of the ESCS engine-room. I am sure that I speak for all connected with the choir when I thank her for her marvellous contribution to the development of ESCS and wish her all the very best for her future career. I sincerely hope that she and Derek will keep in

regular touch with us. A number of accompanists have expressed interest in working with us and I hope very soon to have news on a suitable replacement for Jan.

The coming season contains a mix of the familiar and the not-so-well-known, the latter particularly in our Christmas programme. We shall of course include carols, some for choir alone and some for audience, but I intend to largely avoid "Carols for Choirs" wherever possible this year. I feel Messrs Rutter and Willcocks have been well served by ESCS for some years, so I have other settings in mind which I am sure will please both singers and audience. The main work, however, will be the rarely-performed cantata, *Christmas*, by Arthur Somervell. Best-known for his songs, and in particular for the cycle *A Shropshire Lad*, Somervell spent much of his adult life as a schools inspector, working tirelessly to improve music education; had he not done so, then perhaps we should have benefited from a greater output of similarly well-written vocal repertoire. I admit to never having heard Somervell's *Christmas*, but the score appears highly accessible and the music pleasingly lyrical...so, another "first" for ESCS! In contrast, at Easter, we shall perform Haydn's *Creation*, one of the most popular of all oratorios, when I hope that we shall once again be joined by soloists and orchestra from the Guildhall. Our summer concert will provide yet more variety, as we offer choral music from different parts of the world. In planning the 2006/7 season, I have as always tried to create programmes that will appeal to both performers and listeners, at the same time remaining mindful of the fact that, as finances are not limitless, some potential repertoire would prove impracticable.

(*Ed: Only another five chapters to go!.....*) In committee meetings we have talked at length about many aspects of singing as members of ESCS. By and large, I feel that choral discipline has continued to improve, but I do implore each and every member to recognize that we are all individual cogs in a wheel, all players in a single team. All are equally dependent on and should be supportive of each other; choral groups do not benefit from individual leadership within a section any more than they do from a reticent "church mouse" approach. Comments within the choir passed on as intended asides can – and often do – offend, as well as causing unrest and disharmony. I urge all members of the choir to act and sing with individual discipline and self-control as members of what is, by and large, a very happy crew.

ESCS is capable of presenting a good, solid, blended sound, but it has to be admitted that this does not always happen, for a number of differing and often seemingly unconnected reasons. Part of my job as musical director is to discover and encourage the best and most confident singing that I can. I am only too well aware that the membership contains a wide range of musical abilities, experience, confidence etc., but ESCS' quality has improved considerably over the past decade and I shall strive to maintain and advance our standard. We have welcomed a number of new members during the 2005/6 season, but I should still like us to strengthen, so please encourage any potential members to come along and sing, particularly sopranos. Our September rehearsals will be open to anyone interested in joining to come along and find out about us, so please make any "guests" welcome.

And, in the immortal words of the cartoon: "That's all, folks!" I look forward to seeing you again on September 12th for the start of another year of enjoyable music-making. Let's make it the best yet!

*Ian Kennedy*

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## Honorary Secretary

I do hope you are all having a lovely relaxing time during the summer break, and am looking forward very much to seeing you all again on September 12th. As you all know, I have taken over from Ruth Thorpe as secretary, and am very grateful to her for helping me during the handover, and for all the work she did when she was in the position. One of the things I particularly enjoyed that was organised by Ruth, was singing with the Really BIG Chorus at the Royal Albert Hall. Fourteen of us attended, and we sang Verdi's Requiem with a choir of well over 1,000 and The English Festival Orchestra, under the baton of Brian Kay (ex Kings Singer). It was an exciting and moving experience, and it was wonderful to sing it again. I highly recommend the experience - do look on the notice board for information of further events

Looking back over the year, we have been very fortunate in performing some wonderful music. I felt that we all enjoyed singing the Bach and the choice of carols at Christmas.

Personally, I gained much help from using the Chorus Rehearsal CD's for this, and we were fortunate that the choir purchased these to help members to 'note bash' for Brahms 'A German Requiem' for our spring concert. (There is an amnesty for the bass C.D. to be returned) This piece is much loved by the choir, and was very well received by the audience.

We had great fun in the summer concert with our 'Evening of Victoriana', even though the ladies could have done with some oxygen while climbing over rocky mountains! I think the audience numbers were the highest we have seen for a long time. We were sad that Della was unwell and unable to sing, and look forward to having her with us at a concert in the near future.

We are all grateful to Ian for giving us a continual supply of first rate soloists, and I'm sure they lift our performance on the night. We are all glad to welcome the new members who have joined us throughout the year, and the choir has benefited from having them with us. We have asked Michael Pilkington and Karle Simpson if they would become Vice Presidents alongside Victoria Speller, due to their loyalty and many and varied contributions to the choir over a long period. We are grateful that they have both accepted, and look forward to seeing them in the next season. I would also like to thank Jackie Richmond for her devoted work as Treasurer, even while she has been so unwell. It is only now that we truly realise how much input she has been giving in a quiet and efficient manner. Get better soon Jackie, we need you in the altos! I would like to thank Cathy for stepping in and looking after the books during her absence.

Now to future social events. I believe the skittles evening on September 20th will be quite hilarious! Unfortunately we have to limit the numbers to 28, as with a larger group we would be playing until the early hours! We will, however start a waiting list, as there may be cancellations. The Barn Dance is booked for March 3rd '07, so no excuses for not putting it in your diary! It is back by popular demand, and as we have two 90th birthdays in the choir next year, surely it is a time to celebrate! I must say I was impressed with people's stamina, but I've never been quite the same since being John Manning's 'wheelbarrow' in one of the dances!!

I feel that these social events are a wonderful time for us to get to know each other and our families. The summer party at Marilyn and John's home which was so successful was a good example. These occasions also engender a closer group feeling and awareness, and can only assist in our performance as a choir.

Lastly, I would like to thank Jan and Ian for all their hard work, patience(!) and devotion to the choir. We are all so sorry to see Jan go, but it is a career progression for her, and we wish her all the very best for the future. She has been a loyal and supportive

accompanist to us, and has also been very helpful in taking rehearsals in Ian's absence, and in assisting people to develop their singing abilities. Ian has really developed the choir over the last 11 years, and has brought humour and conveyed his love of music to us. He has stretched us and encouraged us to sing a wide variety of music, and has developed an exciting programme for the 2006/07 season.

So thank you to you all for electing me, and I'll try my best to live up to my predecessors'

Here follows an amusing anecdote taken from 'Stick to the Music', collected by John Boyden.

Just after the war Beecham allowed himself to be cajoled by the BBC. into directing a studio-bound performance of Berlioz's colossal, and rarely heard opera 'The Trojans'. He had no love of the Beeb, but allowed his resentment to be overcome by some substantial fees for his newly formed Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

The leader of the orchestra was David McCallum. He was, or thought he was, fully accustomed to Sir Thomas's little jests. But, when the end of the first act was reached and Beecham continued to flail the air long after the music had stopped, he must have begun to wonder. McCallum was in a quandary what to do. Eventually, he looked up at Sir Thomas, still busily beating time. 'The piece is over, Sir Thomas,' he called gently. Beecham put down his stick. 'And about time too!' he said, and walked off.

*Gill English*

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### **A message from our President, Della Jones**

Mortified to have missed singing with you on July 1<sup>st</sup>. But even a presidential Mezzo is occasionally ill!

A Mezzo from Warlingham town,  
On an evening in August sat down.  
Her task, "Write a ditty,  
Erudite or witty."  
Make the E.S.C.S. smile not frown.

A "medium time" ago,  
When I was just but four –  
A hymn at church I sung,  
My career had thus begun.

Neath Girls' Grammar was my haunt,  
Science and Maths I did not flaunt.  
The Hills of Wales - I knew quite well,  
With whom and when - I'll never tell!

Music was my driving force,  
To the R.C.M. for the graduate course.  
Then to Geneva did I roam –  
This became my second home.

The Grand Theatre was my mentor,  
Europe soon became my centre.

But Britain was the place I wanted,  
This is where my seeds were planted.

Operas, concerts, Albert Hall,  
What a lifetime, what a ball.  
Oh the work and bloody learning,  
Constant nerves and constant churning.

Would we change it? - would we hell,  
Keep life ringing - like a bell.  
Keep on singing - Lovely choir,  
Your achievements ever higher.

You have greatness in your stride,  
With the "Kennedy" by your side.  
Watch and learn and smile and look,  
Try to "NOT LOOK AT THE BOOK!"

Wishing you all a great summer.

P.S. But I tell - Best of all,  
Was the Barn Dance friends, at Woldingham Hall!!

*Della Jones*

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### ***From our publicity manager***

One or two of you may have noticed that having gone to the trouble of writing your name and address on an A4 size envelope for me, this missive has arrived in an A5. The reason for this is that the postage rules have just changed – it is now more expensive to send the larger size. Also enclosed is an advert for new members – please could you put this up somewhere.

*David Frank*

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### **My Guitar and I**

My guitar and I were demonstrating its range of notes plus some rather unconventional sounds. Then we played some short pieces in different pulses and rhythms. The eight year olds listened politely, some even raptly. Myra was sitting by my feet. When she had tired of tying and untying my shoelaces she tied my two shoes together. Suddenly, she looked up in curious surprise. «Grannies don't wear trainers". Her voice was puzzled, disbelieving, challenging. Well, Myra, I have to tell you that this 'grannie' does not care what others think about her shoes as long as her feet are comfortable. Many other things which I do might also surprise you. Since retiring, I have time to be me - not a wife, mother, housewife, earner, chauffeur, valet, ..... I can be me, a new me, the true me. I can try new things that I'd never had time, freedom, courage to do before. I don't care

what others think or say. That doesn't matter. It's a question of mind over matter - if you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

The greatest thing I'm doing is learning. O.K. perhaps it takes me longer than younger people. That doesn't matter - it is the doing that is important, exciting, absorbing, rewarding. They say it is better to travel than to arrive, and, oh joy, what interesting people I meet on the journey.

- Once a week, I'm wearing tough working boots and clothing, and working with loppers and bow saw in woodland management and conservation. I'm learning about ancient coppicing techniques, about controlling alien plants, about enriching the native wildlife that is there if only we'd stop to look and see it.

- My new computer is linked to the Internet and is gradually teaching me how to access the world.

- The world of music which I entered only when I retired, continues to enthrall and challenge me - two choirs and two instruments. By August I will have passed Grade 3 Piano - there's confidence for you! [Or bravado?] How amazing it seems to me that I can share with my grandchildren news of music-making endeavours - mine as well as theirs, and I can invite friends and neighbours to enjoy our concerts.

'Grannie' aka Nana aka Marion Davis Proud to be an OAP which stands for Outdoor Active Person, engaged in Ongoing Absorbing Pursuits.

### **From the Sublime to the Ridiculous**

**Sublime** - The lights dimmed. Onto the stage walked a small, elderly man. He sat down and played his guitar. That's all. He just played. The audience was motionless, seeming not to breathe.

I believe in magic.

### **Ridiculous** Happenings to me and my guitar

I arrived early for an audition. Man unlocked the hall, and ushered me in. Nowhere to tune up and practice. Never mind, just get on with it. Waited. Second man arrived, then another. They waited for a fourth person. Waited. No other players. At last I was invited to play. During my second piece, fourth person entered, hung up a coat on a metal hanger on a metal rail, came forward, sat down heavily, dropped a bag on the floor. Somehow, during all this I did not miss a note! Then I was asked to play the first piece again so the latecomer could hear it. By now I was having difficulty keeping a straight face as the situation was farcical. I was thanked, told they enjoyed my playing. Still no sign of any other players. I left hurriedly before startling a passer by with my laughter. The letter I received told me I was unsuccessful as they had had other entrants at Grade 6 and above. Really? Ghosts, perhaps, playing on cobweb strings.

Arriving at a Music Festival, I heard a steward say to another, «Here comes our guitarist." Now, while that sounded rather grand and flattering, I realised something was wrong. Seven guitar classes had been advertised. I was the only entrant so my class was merged with other string players. So here was 'grannie' against several tiny tots. [They were all more proficient than me!]

The next Festival would surely be supported by more players. After warming up in a practice room, I tried to return to the hall by the same outer door I had entered. It was locked! Somewhere there had to be a way onto the back of the stage, but which of the countless identical doors to open? How would I know if a player in an earlier class was about to put fingers to strings? They would not want me suddenly appearing behind them! After some minutes pondering this dilemma, a steward came looking for me. I was rescued.

And next year? Plain sailing, or ???

*Marion Davis*

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## **Choral in a castle**

A couple of years ago I went on a weekend of singing with “Songlines” a choir which a friend of mine belongs to. This choir sings exclusively a capella, from a wide repertoire, mainly drawn from traditional songs from around the world. I had been to one of their concerts and liked what I had heard.

There were about 40 of us there. The venue was Kinnersley Castle, Herefordshire, a beautiful building with a long history, now sadly decaying. The family who own and live in it put the proceeds of events such as this towards it’s upkeep, more I think from a sense of devotion to it than anything else, but I fear for them – castle maintenance isn’t cheap. It was January and the heating wasn’t working. Brr!

There were no scores and I didn’t know any of the songs – something which I found at first a little daunting. However, fortunately (apart from our leader) neither did anybody else, so we were all in the same situation. We had songsheets for the words, but the melodies and rhythms we learned by listening and repeating. Some were quite complicated, I recall one Ukranian folk song being described as having 4 beats in the first bar and 4 ½ in the second!! Trying to work that one seemed impossible for me at first, but once I had heard it a few times it became more familiar, and easier. By the second day it was coming naturally.

Other songs included; a Brazilian playground chant, African and Turkish traditional songs and a Gospel number. This last one, I am glad to say is still ringing in my ears and hopefully will continue to do so!

I am used to singing with music in front of me. Even if I have learned a piece I still have a connection in my mind with the printed score. But we had no scores, so what to do? Well, we had memory and direction from the conductor to guide us, but, most importantly, we had to listen to the music and to others around us. I found this very liberating. It enabled us to connect with the music and each in a way which I haven’t before or since. As we had literally all day to work on a handful of songs, and we were not singing tired after a days work, we were able to take the time to develop the sound and our voices, so that by the end of the second day we were able to give a very good concert performance to an audience of three!

Now I’m not going to suggest that we at ESCS throw away our scores, even though it would certainly save us some money. I very much enjoy our repertoire. But I do make one personal appeal to Ian. Just once in a while give us something to sing but give Ceinwen a break - no a score. Make us learn it by using our ears and eyes. In return I promise you our undivided attention and no heads in copies!!

*David Frank*

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