

## Forty Years On

Remember Friday evenings in the pub? With the week's work over, the whole weekend ahead, relaxing with a few draught beers? Well, one night in 1982, a young musician and teacher at the Royal Academy of Music, was doing just that, in the French Horn in Gerrards Cross, along with his girlfriend Mary, and with Richard Steele (an old friend who was now Head of Music at Queenswood School, Potters Bar) and Richard's friend Martin Berry, the new Head of Maths at RGS. Anyway, a couple of pints in, Iain Ledingham - for indeed it was he! - was enthusing about his recently formed South Bucks Choral Society. Eighty or so singers already, and with some very successful concerts behind them.

So why stop there? Why not start a music festival? St Mary's Amersham was a beautiful venue, the choir could sing in the choral works, and perhaps the Chamber Orchestra, an excellent London-based orchestra, would be pleased to play. No point in waiting! So they left the pub that night (Iain really not having far to go, as he lived in St James's curate's house, which was practically next door) with a festival name, a plan, an artistic director, a chairman, a treasurer and an administrator!

Sponsorship was the first essential. Classical music always needs this support. Undaunted, our music director and chairman donned their suits (their best suits - or their only suits?) and set off to woo Amersham businesses. It wasn't to the taste of Bowyers Pork Sausages, but for Halstan, the music publisher, the idea hit just the right note. Halstan became the first major sponsor, along with Brian and Christine Wilmot. From the start, the festival was a substantial undertaking. The first one, in 1983, included the choir in Handel's Saul, a baroque orchestral concert with the Thames Chamber Orchestra and a harpsichord recital at Chenies by the distinguished harpsichordist Virginia Black. And in the second year, there were eight concerts in eight days! The ticket prices tell their own story: a concert from £1, a season ticket with two supper concerts, £19.50!



South Bucks Choral Society was the springboard which made it possible, providing committee members, leafleters, ticket sellers, furniture movers, ushers, caterers, bar staff, transport, accommodation for musicians, and a general willingness to turn a hand to whatever was needed. Things were not always as serene as they appeared from the front. During one St Mary's concert, an usher remembers that a water pipe burst at the other end of the church, so helpers were frantically trying to control a flood, while the band played on. It sounds like Titanic! Chenies brought its special challenges. If it seems a tricky event for the helpers now, how about driving round to collect crockery and so on for 100 guests, heaving it in and out of the car, cooking all the food, working in a tiny kitchenette where the whitewash came off the walls, moving all the furniture between dinner and concert, and then washing everything up in cold water? The helpers certainly used to enjoy the after-parties in the Long Room, with Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs MacLeod Matthews hosting a blazing fire and conversation long into the night.

The Festival went from strength to strength, the quality of the music attracting very generous sponsorship, donations and legacies from both businesses and individuals. For Iain, the opera

performances and the formation of his own Festival Orchestra are particularly dear to his heart, and we will perhaps learn more about these in future newsletters. His other highlights were too numerous to list here, but two in particular were the 1991 concert performance of *The Magic Flute*, with Wendy Hiller as narrator, and the 2000 Millennium orchestral concert in Eton School Hall, with Elgar's serenade for strings, Iain himself playing Finzi's *Eclogue*, Vaughan Williams' *Serenade for strings* with sixteen Royal Academy soloists, and Elgar's violin concerto with Leland Chen, a Menuhin pupil who also recorded the work with Menuhin conducting. Menuhin himself had famously recorded the concerto as a very young man with Elgar conducting.

There have been some choice non-musical moments too. A concert of lighter works has been a part of the Festival since its early days, and indeed is a common feature of the many festivals which have sprung up more recently. But how many can say that their Instant Sunshine singers, a musical comedy group, had, on their appearance with us, double-booked themselves, for an Amersham concert and a cabaret appearance in Leicester on the same night – and solved this clash by ... hiring a helicopter, which took off from a nearby field.

Iain also remembers joining in a little too enthusiastically with a wine tasting in Coleshill village hall. Loading the harpsichord back into their car at the end, he and the then Chairman dropped it. A true musician to his core, when recounting this Iain supplied full details of which harpsichord it was and why this particular one survived the accident without damage!

The Friends of the Festival – yes, you good folks to whom this is addressed - developed naturally in due course. At the first AGM, downstairs in St Mary's Church Rooms, only three Friends turned up – and, of course, a merry meeting ensued – in the King's Arms across the road. The Friends are the backbone of the Festival. They buy the most concert tickets, they are loyal advocates, generous donors, and their ongoing financial support is a cushion which allows us to engage the best musicians, and employ an outstanding professional orchestra. In this last year in particular, donations have also enabled us to offer financial support to those of our musicians suffering severe financial hardship. Freelance work has been very rare during this period and they have been most grateful. From its inception to this day, the Festival has been a big part of Iain's life. He says it has allowed him to give early performance opportunities to Royal Academy students, some of whom have gone on to illustrious careers. Lesley Garrett for instance – you heard her here first! And, with typical modesty, he says it has helped him greatly to become a better conductor - that you can try to learn conducting by studying it, but really, you can only learn by doing it.

And that is really the heart of the Festival – the standard of music. The early members we were able to contact talked about lifelong friendships, new directions, and other benefits from their involvement over the last forty years. But what came across loud and clear was the music. "London standard concerts performed here in South Bucks," a founder member said, "It brought so much pleasure to so many," and, "We felt touched and privileged to have events like these." And this is still the case. At a recent concert, an audience member said, "One of the lovely things about living in Old Amersham is this sublime music, right on our doorsteps." From Xeroxed leaflets to full-colour edge-to-edge printing, from post and cheques to online booking, much has changed. Indeed, at the moment we can't even hold live events. But the original purpose is still the purpose. As the Home Page of the website says, "Our aim in starting the Festival was to promote music-making of the

highest professional quality in the local area, using some of the very attractive venues available to us." It still is.

With thanks to those who contributed to this article: Iain Ledingham, of course, and also Liz Basden, Sheila Basnett, Mary Finey, Judy Gill and Tertia Goodricke.

Do you have any memories of the early days of the Festival? If you send them to [chairman@amershamfestival.org](mailto:chairman@amershamfestival.org) we will try to print a selection in the future. We won't use your names unless you give us permission. You can find a list of past concert items on the Festival website, in the History tab of About Us

Friday 13th April 8 p.m.  
The Hall, Dr Challoner's Grammar School  
**SONG RECITAL**  
Mark Wildman (bass) Iain Ledingham (piano)  
Songs by Mozart, Mussorgsky, Steptoe, Vaughan Williams and a selection of Songs of the Sea.  
Tickets £3, £2.50 (children and O.A.P.'s)  
Sponsored by Rayner and Keeler Ltd

Saturday 14th April 8 p.m.  
St Mary's Parish Church, Amersham  
**MOZART - Requiem and Vespers (K339)**  
**SOUTH BUCKS CHORAL SOCIETY**  
**THAMES CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**  
Alison Hargan (soprano)  
Timothy Evans-Jones (tenor)  
Mark Wildman (bass)  
conducted by Iain Ledingham  
Tickets £5, £4 nave, £3 (transpss) (all tickets reserved)

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The Amersham Festival of Music acknowledges financial assistance from Buckinghamshire Arts Association.

**AMERSHAM FESTIVAL SOCIETY**  
has been formed to support this and future festivals. For a membership fee of £10 members are invited to attend rehearsals and social events and are offered priority booking for all concerts. For further details please contact Miss Janet Steele, 20 Smith Street, Chelsea, London SW3 4EE.

Directions to Chenies Manor House will be supplied with tickets for April 10th.

**BOX OFFICE**

Postal booking opens on February 21st (form below)  
Telephone booking opens on March 7th on High Wycombe 41913

Tickets from the following shops from March 7th  
Old Amersham Travel, 8 Whielden St, Amersham;  
Gateway Travel, 108 Sycamore Rd, Amersham (on the Hill)

Rosehill Instruments, 64 London End, Beaconsfield  
Pavitt's Bookshop, 12a Packhorse Rd, Gerrards Cross  
Anglia Building Society, 35 High Street, Chesham  
Tickets at the door for all events except April 10th  
**SEASON TICKET** - one top price seat for all events (except April 10th) for £16.50 (£19 including lunch on April 7th) - a saving of £6.

Please detach this form and send it with your cheque and a stamped addressed envelope to The Treasurer, Amersham Festival Society, 72 Walton Drive, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 6TT

**TICKET ORDER FORM**

Please fill in number of tickets needed and total value.

	Total cost		Total cost
6th April		11th April	
Thames - at £5.00		Chamber - at £1.50	
Chamber - at £4.00		Choir - at £1.00	
Orchestra - at £3.00		12th April	
7th April		Opera - at £2.50	
Organ - at £1.50		Players - at £1.00	
Recital - at £4.00		13th April	
(with meal)		Song - at £3.00	
7th April		Recital - at £2.50	
Instant - at £4.00		14th April	
Sunshine - at £3.00		Choral - at £5.00	
10th April		Concert - at £4.00	
Chenies - at £12.50		Recital - at £3.00	
Season Ticket required	- at £16.50		
(including meal on April 7th)	- at £19.00		

Total Enclosed £

(Cheques payable to Amersham Festival Society)

NAME (Mr/Mrs/Miss) . . . . . Date . . . . .

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BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

# Amersham Festival of Music

## 6th-14th April 1984

Honorary Patron  
THE RT. HON. SIR IAN GILMOUR, BT, M.P.



This year the Amersham Festival presents a wide variety of events including choral and orchestral concerts, two one-act operas and an evening of words and music. A special feature has been made of the music of Mozart and a number of his major works will be performed.

The picturesque old town of Amersham with its beautiful parish church provides a fine setting for artistic events. During the Festival concerts of the highest standard can be heard in several excellent local venues. We hope you will find much that appeals to you in the programmes and that we shall have the pleasure of entertaining you at more than one of the Festival concerts.

Richard Steele Chairman  
Iain Ledingham Artistic Director

**FESTIVAL DIARY**

Friday 6th April 8 p.m.  
St Mary's Parish Church, Amersham  
**THAMES CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**  
Peter Hanson (violin) Peter Lale (viola)  
Iain Ledingham (conductor)

Overture, Idomeneo Mozart  
Sinfonia Concertante Mozart  
Simplicia Symphonia Britten  
Symphony No. 35 (Haffner) Mozart  
Tickets £5, £4 (nave), £3 (transpss), (all tickets reserved).  
This distinguished London orchestra has recently celebrated its 21st birthday and we are very pleased to welcome them back to the Festival.

Saturday 7th April 12 noon  
St Mary's Parish Church, Amersham  
**LUNCHTIME ORGAN RECITAL**  
by James Lancolt (Winchester Cathedral)  
Music by Bach, Mozart, Reger, Mendelssohn.  
Tickets £1.50, (£4 to include a light lunch after the Recital in the historic Banqueting Room at the King's Arms.  
Sponsored by Y.J. Lovell (Holdings) plc.

8 p.m.  
**EVENING CONCERT**  
The Hall, Amersham Community Centre, Chiltern Avenue  
An evening with **INSTANT SUNSHINE**  
Tickets £4, £3  
This versatile group continues to delight audiences through their radio broadcasts in which a light-hearted and witty approach has won them many devoted listeners.  
Sponsored by Thomas Wethered and Sons

also **OUTDOOR MUSIC** played by **AMERSHAM BAND** from 2.30-4.00 p.m. in the Memorial Gardens (if wet, in St Mary's Church) and by groups of young musicians around Amersham throughout the day.

Sunday 8th April 6 p.m.  
St Mary's Parish Church, Amersham  
**FESTIVAL EVENSONG**  
Preacher - The Archdeacon of Buckingham  
Introit - Ave Verum Mozart  
Canticles Gibbons Short Service  
Anthem - Insanae et vanae curae Haydn

Tuesday 10th April 8 p.m.  
Chenies Manor House  
by kind permission of Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs Macleod Matthews  
**'A PORTRAIT OF MOZART' in letters and music**  
Taniel Evans (reader) Paul Manley (violin)  
Iain Ledingham (piano)  
Tickets £12.50 (to include buffet supper with wine)  
Few composers have left a more detailed and entertaining picture of their life and times than Mozart. Excerpts from his many letters to his family and friends will be interspersed with music from Mozart's violin sonatas.

Wednesday 11th April 8 p.m.  
St Mary's Church, Amersham  
**CHAMBER CHOIR OF DR CHALLONER'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL**  
Ian Hooker - Director  
A programme of English Secular Choral Music  
Tickets £1.50, £1 (children and O.A.P.'s)  
This well known local choir has made a number of television appearances and has sung in several cathedrals.  
Sponsored by Equity and Law Life Assurance Society plc

Thursday 12th April 8 p.m.  
The Hall, Dr Challoner's Grammar School  
**THE OPERA PLAYERS present**  
'Bastien and Bastienne' Mozart  
'Three's Company' A. Hopkins  
Tickets £2.50, £1 (school children)  
The festival is delighted to welcome this gifted touring company presenting a youthful masterpiece by Mozart and an hilarious comedy by Anthony Hopkins - a unique opportunity to hear opera in Amersham.  
Sponsored by Amersham International plc

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