

President's Message April 2024

The death of Peter Smith at Christmas was a huge shock and a great loss to the many friends, colleagues, choristers and students who valued his wisdom, erudition, generosity and support over so many years. Peter's membership of the EDOA stretched back over 55 years, with periods of devoted committee service, and his musical contributions to the Newsletter were always much appreciated. His final pair of offerings, last September, included a lovely chant to Psalm 84, one of the several memorable items sung at his funeral, with the large choir under the skilful direction of Jonathan Dods and the inspired organ playing of Robert Evans.

A special word of thanks is due to Roger Carter for all the trouble he took with the arrangements for the AGM. St Mary's, Welwyn was a new venue and it proved ideal with all the required facilities adjoining the church and the historic Wellington Inn just over the way. Roger was a delight to work with and I was grateful for his inviting me to join him for the duet recital, for which the audience turn-out was most heartening. Roger continues to serve on the committee, as does Peter St John Stokes, both with our thanks. I endorse the gratitude expressed at the AGM for the hard work, often unsung behind the scenes, to Matt Tattersall as Treasurer, Rosemary Knight as Editor and website keeper and Michael Hennin as Secretary. Ruth Lewis has had to step down for the required year's break and we thank her warmly for her hard work.

Ruth is also thanked for so generously hosting the 'At Home' once again, postponed from the autumn. As the date was February 29th, the subject "Leap into Spring" was chosen and brought forth several topics we enjoyed sharing. As ever, Ruth hosted us with a veritable feast of good things. What a lovely evening it was and thank you again, Ruth!

Congratulations to Jonathan Gregory for the truly memorable and moving performance of the Bach *St John Passion*, following weeks of dedicated rehearsal by several choirs, under his inspirational direction. Barnet and Hadley church choirs joined the UK-Japan choir and other singers, supported by a superb small orchestra and a line-up of brilliant young soloists on the evening of Palm Sunday. It was the biggest crowd seen in Barnet Parish Church since Carlo Curley's memorable recital back in 1987!

Ashley Wagner is well-known to many of us and you may even have made a donation when he ran in the Brighton Marathon, fundraising for the Alzheimer's Society. We are in absolute awe of Ashley for competing and completing and surviving to tell the tale! To hear Ashley next locally in recital, book Wednesday 3rd July at 12.30 pm in St Albans Abbey.

I imagine that few of us will have been unaware of the centenary of the death of Charles Villiers Stanford, and let us hope the various commemorations will lead to a deeper understanding and wider knowledge of Ireland's greatest composer of English church music. Do search out Professor Jeremy Dibble's enlightening YouTube documentary about Stanford's time at Trinity College, Cambridge <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf-I3on0C0> You will not be disappointed. Paul Spicer's short article in the latest *Organists' Review* gives a splendid overview of Stanford as a teacher at the RCM (what a list of names!) and as a composer. The anthems, motets and canticles so familiar and beloved of us are but a small part of a vast output, with symphonies (seven), concertos (eleven), operas, chamber music, songs and part-songs all worth exploring. Of the latter, who could not fail to be moved by *The Blue Bird*? Beyond the accessible organ music, Stanford's rarely heard five Organ Sonatas have lately featured in the

Monday Cornhill recitals (after all, Darke was a pupil), with just two now remaining: no. 3 (May 20) and no. 5 (July 1); see you there?

Terence Atkins