



Great Start to 2017 Summer Season

A terrific concert in Keswick launched Colne Valley's 2017 season of summer events. The beautifully located 'Theatre by the Lake' provided the venue for the first run of our summer repertoire. It was a performance the Choir can be proud of and the audience loved it. This was our fifth appearance since 2005 and **David Hirst** reports that, while some items were old favourites, 11 items were new ones – as always performed without music.

The auditorium was in darkness and the glare of theatre lighting meant that the Choir couldn't see who we were singing to. But it was clear right from our first set; '**Funiculi, Funicula**', Elvis's '**When I Fall in Love**' and Welsh anthem '**Llanfair**' that the audience was engaged and enthusiastic.



Matt Houston sang '**The song of the Clyde**' and told a nice story about his mum exploring personal banking and being helped at the bank by a nice young lady, called, she thought, 'Direct Debbie'. When the family pointed out the mistake she added that she must be getting 'Senile Dimensions'. Then he sang, '**I'll walk beside you**' to the audience, that now knew for certain that they were in both for a very good evening of musical entertainment and also for an emotional and moving experience.

Then came '**Benedictus**' and the ever-popular, '**You Raise Me Up**' - Thom at his best and the Choir backing him up with fervour.





Raymond Ellis does the next solo spot. He sings beautifully and tells a good story about painting budgies. It's a very silly story but Raymond has the talent to make you hang on his every word and laugh afresh even though you've heard the tale a couple of times before.

He adds a song about a straight-laced librarian discovering the joys and perils of passion which is both poignant and very funny. Do you know there's an American sit-com called '**Everybody loves Raymond**'?

We finish the first half with Paul Simon's '**Bridge Over Troubled Water**'. (Readers will note this song is on top of the charts again.) Then came a hauntingly beautiful arrangement of '**Shenendoah**' and that favourite of male voice Choirs, '**The Lost Chord**'.

There's a big martial start to the second half with '**The Soldiers' Chorus**'. Then comes the gypsy melody, '**Nina**' which builds to a frantic pace. And finally, '**Love Divine**', Thom's arrangement of the John Rutter version of a classic hymn.



In all of this we are most skilfully accompanied by **Chris Pullein**.

Chris also did a solo spot, telling his audience (and Colne Valley men) how much he was enjoying his Colne Valley debut in a proper concert. He explained how Keith Swallow, our accompanist for 60 years, was still recovering from breaking two fingers in a recent accident. "His are very big shoes." he said "And I can't hope to fill them. But I'll do my best" he then went on to play **Prelude No.6 Opus 23** by **Rachmaninov** and **Prelude No.1** by **Gershwin**.

'I really enjoyed it all.' said Chris.

'**Yellow Bird**' with **Edward Asquith**'s inimitable bird calls came next and the punchy '**Rhythm of Life**'.

Then it's Thom's solo spot. He is so good. He sings, '**Sweet Lovers Love the Spring**' and then gets all vaudeville over '**Mr Cellophane**' from **Chicago**.

The Choir's final set includes '**Softly as I Leave You**' and '**Don't Rain on My Parade**'. And for a big finish - the rousing new piece '**We Rise Again**'.

Its two main verses are sung for the first time, not by the Choir as ensemble, but excellently, by second tenor, **James Cooke**.

We stay behind, to chat with our audience in the Theatre bar. They have had a good time and so have we. Then it's the long coach trip home, arriving in the small hours.

We sang 16 items - these will be the core of our summer season. It'll be a good year!



It'll be a good year? - 'Carding Shed' in Hepworth - proves it.

It'll be a good year! Our next gig – a second concert at the 'Carding Shed' in Hepworth - proved it. This was an informal, friendly concert, with a relaxed reprise of the lighter items in our summer repertoire on the menu - along with a Pie & Pea Supper at the **Oil-can Café** and nightspot.



A star is born?

New tenor **Jonny Kilner** took his first solo spot for the Choir with some panache and increasingly confident musicality. VotV reckons he'll become a regular soloist in future concerts.

Once again **James Cooke** and **Steve Uttley** provide a half hour interval show at supper time – These lads are good!

This concert was also noteworthy for the return to performance of maestro, **Keith Swallow**, after his recent injuries. VotV know he hates 'electric keyboards' but every Choir member was delighted to see him back, confident that his wonky little finger will continue to regain function as his recovery proceeds.



The Choir was received with warm applause by an engaged audience

Just a few days later, we were on stage at the Town Hall. We were 'testing the waters'. Could a summer concert with our colleagues in Brighouse and Rastrick Band work? - **You bet it could!** VotV can do no better than that quote, verbatim, the **Huddersfield Examiner** Review.

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The Huddersfield Daily **Examiner**

Landslide Victory for Choir and Band

*Show: Brass and Voice Spectacular: with Colne Valley Male Voice Choir
and Brighouse & Rastrick Brass Band
Venue: Huddersfield Town Hall - June 10th 2017
Review: Suzanne Smelt*

No swings to the left or right here! Instead we sat swinging in time to music performed by the reputable forces of award-winning Colne Valley Male Voice Choir and the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band, proud winners of six 'first' prizes at this year's Whit Friday Band contests.

Local maestro Thom Meredith led all through a cheerfully cheeky rendition of Funiculi Funicular (Denza), which exposed excellent choral discipline as the choir easily grappled with fast conversational passages. The powerful band enhanced this song with their delicate playing.

This impressed me. Too often a brass band does not know how to turn the volume down. We repeatedly heard the choir's trademark choral blend of excellence, spot-on diction and assured ensemble singing.

In a programme of mainly expressive songs, that didn't rely on pacey rhythmic momentum, the singers kept a sure eye on their conductor to shape the phrases and follow any slight tempo changes.

(And we kept an eye on Thom as he brought the house down with his wonderfully expressive solos in You Raise Me Up by Lovland).

Examples of well-controlled and sensitive singing were heard in the bass melodies of When I Fall in Love (Young and Heyman) and in the choir's contemplative interpretation of Shenandoah (traditional) with its alluring and unexpected harmonies.

This choir's affinity with church music was demonstrated in stirring performances of Benedictus (Arvryn), with some robust unison singing, and in Morte Christe (When I survey The Wondrous Cross) enlightened by Matthew Houston's beautiful tenor solo.

This choir was born to sing these pieces. The band produced their own uplifting performances as in Ballade (Gollande), conducted by Dr David Thornton. Here, solo tenor-horn player Sheona White made her instrument truly sing. Breath-taking.

Soloists Mike Eccles (flugelhorn), Kathleen Gaspoz (cornet) and Jason Poulston (drum kit) also wowed us. Showpiece The Entry of The King (Wagner) was explosive, as five cornet soloists provided flourishing fanfares.

This was matched in its electrifying energy and raw power by Baker's A Short Ride in a Brass Machine and Strike up the Band (Gershwin) in which the percussion section sprang to life.

This is England's top brass band and proved its standing in pieces such as the march - Knight Templar. Water-tight ensemble, crisp articulation, and outstanding musicianship resulted in a tremendous sound that simply blew us away.

The inspirational finale, We Rise Again (Dubinski), with super soloist James Cooke, left me in no doubt of my allegiance to this musical coalition. They all have my vote.

And with a standing ovation, following an impromptu Floral Dance, they got the vote of the overall majority. This concert was a landslide victory for all performers.

Bravo!



Enthusiastic audience members vote 'Yes' as choir and band present their manifestos.

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And then on Monday 19th June we were back to sing for the **Lions** at **Slaitwaite St James's** in our annual old folks charity concert - what a summer it's turning out to be!

AGM - Appropriately dull - except for the interesting bits

The Annual General Meeting of the Colne Valley Male Voice Choir was dull - and quite rightly so.

The Treasurer reported our finances were sound, that our ludicrously low subscription fees will stay ludicrously low (as long as we support the 200 Club, of course.) Our estimable Secretary outlined the many successes of another good year; our membership stable or slightly increased. (**Jack Smith** won a prize for having attended every



single rehearsal and concert in the past year). The Music Secretary reported on many a well-received concert, noting how we continue to perform many new songs as well as the old favourites and all the time without the music on show. The Committee was re-appointed without demur as were Thom Meredith and Keith Swallow.



The end of an era

So, yes it was dull – apart from one feature. Our wonderful Chairman, **Peter Denby** rose to tell us these were his last 'Chairman's Remarks' He began by telling about how pleased he was with our concert the other night with Brighthouse & Rastrick Band in the Town Hall. He had been instrumental in getting this new collaboration off the ground and he hoped it would go on to become a regular calendar fixture, though perhaps in another town.

This led him on to reminisce about Choir concerts he'd been involved with going back to the 1970's. He concluded, "From a very proud retiring Chairman... I can only say 'Thanks for having me.'"

Well, Peter, the thanks are due from us.

The Choir is very proud of the ways he represented us and are grateful for his wisdom, diplomacy and jovial good humour in acting as our 'front-man' all these years. Peter stood down as a singing member some time ago and now he's standing down as Chairman. Let's hope he remains around for many years to come as one of our most active advisors and supporters. Truly it's the end of an era.

And another thing....

Famous composer and conductor, **Owain Arwel Hughes** was in Slaithwaite on June 12th. He had come up specially to lead the Colne Valley men's rehearsal in preparation for our forthcoming Llangollen concert.

The Choir has been associated with the Llangollen Eisteddfod music festival ever since it began: indeed CVMVC was the first choir onstage at the first festival some 70 years ago – and Colne Valley has won more first prizes there than any other choir.

So we were thrilled to be asked to join with 3 other great choirs and Wales' leading brass ensemble - the **Cory Brass Band** - to join in a spectacular opening concert to this year's 70th Anniversary Festival under the baton of Maestro Owain. This will be on Monday July 3rd

It was a fine rehearsal. He took us through our pieces with great enthusiasm and brio. Two songs will be done in Welsh and we were particularly grateful to Owain for taking us line by line through the tricky pronunciation of '**Tydi a Roddaist**' ... etc.

Thom will be joining the baritones and the Choir will be out in force for what promises to be a great evening.



For more information click on their website: <http://international-eisteddfod.co.uk/>

.. and to buy tickets, Click on: <http://international-eisteddfod.co.uk/events/monday-evening/#SpektrixIFrame>

And see our website to get the full story

colnevalleymvc.org.uk



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to join our Readers' List or for other queries