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NEWSLETTER WINTER 2023



It's almost the end of the year, which means, among other things, that it's time for another Stuart Singers Newsletter. It's been a busy autumn for the Choir as you'll read in this issue. We had another very successful joint concert with **Dursley Male Voice Choir** at Beaudesert School in September, raising money for Stroud Foodbank. You can read about this on Page 3. I was even more sorry that I had to miss this year's **Annual Dinner** when I read Sue Wise's article about it on Page 4. The main focus since then has been on **Christmas** and the rest of the issue is devoted to that.....our **preparations, our charitable efforts and even our cooking!** There will be changes for the Choir next year with a change of Chair as Bruce explains on Page 2. Before that though, we have our eagerly anticipated singing at Gloucester Cathedral and our visit to Gloucester Royal Hospital to come. If you have any time left when the parcels are opened and all the carols have been sung, have a go at my **Christmas Chain Puzzle** on Page 9. I don't want to spoil your Christmas so answers are available on request!

Wishing you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Janet Brown: Editor

Membership

Our choir numbers have remained steady over the past few months. We have welcomed back Jane Widdowson, alto, who decided to rejoin the Choir after a break. We also have a new soprano, Suzy Temblett and a new alto, Liz Collins. They've all settled in well and we're glad to have them on board.

Unfortunately, we also have some people who are leaving the Choir at the end of the season. Ian Hartley from the basses and Gill Brain from the tenors have decided to call it a day and we wish them both well. Our current Committee Chair and tenor singer, Bruce Salisbury, has also decided to leave for a variety of reasons. I would like to thank him for his hard work on the Committee and I'm sure the Choir, especially the tenors, will miss his voice. We wish you all the best for the future Bruce.

January will bring about the start of a new season and we will get our new music. If you've ever thought about joining the Stuart Singers, it is an ideal time to do so. Just send me an email and we can arrange for you to come along – we are a friendly bunch and you will receive a warm welcome.

Louise Cook: Membership Secretary

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[A Message from Bruce](#)

This is the end! In the words of Bond Girl Adele from one of our Christmas Concert songs. Not to be too melodramatic, it is the end of my Choir life as I have made the difficult decision, for various personal reasons, to leave the Choir at the end of the year.

I appreciate this is somewhat unprecedented for someone in my position 'mid-term', so I can only apologise for any disruption this may cause. I don't think it will be too much as, after discussions with and within the Committee, Lou Cook has valiantly volunteered to take on the role, at least until the AGM in autumn 2024. She has the full and unanimous support of the Committee, the MD and the Choir membership and I'm sure she will do a great job with their backing.

I have to say what an excellent Committee I am leaving. Maddie as Treasurer and Janet as Concert Secretary, as well as Newsletter Editor, have been doing outstanding work for some time and Liz has now taken on the marketing role with great relish as can be seen from the ticket sales for the Christmas Concert. (At the time of writing, Friday is sold out!) The latest addition is the multi-talented Vic so it's a great team. Having said that, the Committee is now one member short of a full set so if anyone would like to volunteer there are always jobs to do!

I'd like to thank everyone who contributes to the running of the Choir and every member of the Choir for all the work that goes into producing the high level of performance that the Stuart Singers are known for. This is only possible, of course, due to the excellence of the music team, Helen and Matt, with added support from Steve. There are also lots of other helpers who I can't name for lack of space. I think—at least I hope—you know who you are! It has to be said that it can be hard work in all of these roles but there are also rewards.

Perhaps I could just mention a few good memories I will always have of my time with the Stuart Singers.

One of my earliest concerts as a real novice was in Malmesbury Abbey in 2016. I particularly remember singing *Les Misérables* – a work I hadn't really appreciated before. This also featured in the programme on the tour to Bournemouth and Ringwood when I had the privilege of singing some of 'Mark's parts' in *Les Mis* – quite a few times as it turned out!

Perhaps the most lasting memory will be of the tour to Venray, Holland in October 2019 to take part in the 75th anniversary commemoration of liberation. Singing in a rain-soaked war graves cemetery dressed in a blue plastic poncho might not be everyone's idea of a good memory! We did do other things as well and were looked after with great hospitality by our hosts.



Who could forget the 'smurfs' concert!

Our first concerts after the 2 year hiatus caused by the COVID pandemic are also good memories. The first one was at Christmas 2021 when it felt good to be able to perform again. This was followed in April 2022 by the resumption of our traditional concerts with our old friends The Wyndham Singers, proof that our link had survived.



Singing with the Wyndham Singers and also for Ukraine

There are more, of course, but I will now just wish you all well and I'm confident there are many more great performances and memories to come from the Stuart Singers.

All the best, Bruce

Charity Concert

in aid of

Stroud District Foodbank



Unusually, Jennifer and Tony Pritchard were in the audience for this concert and acted as roving reporters!

The stage was set for another Stuart Singers concert in Beaudesert School's Performing Arts Centre on 29th September but this one was different from others in two respects: firstly, it was a joint concert with Dursley Male Voice Choir and secondly, I wasn't singing! This felt rather strange but I was glad of the experience of being on the receiving end, as it were, because of the opportunity of hearing what the choir sounded and looked like from the audience's perspective. Usually, I hear predominantly the part I'm singing, with the other parts playing a secondary role. I enjoy making harmonies with them, but I can't tell necessarily what the overall effect is. You'll be pleased to hear, it's good!

The Stuart Singers started the concert, calling for the audience's attention with Martin Shaw's joyous 'Fanfare': what a great opening number! A moving rendition of the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', made more effective by good dynamics was followed by 'The Prayer'. Any panic thoughts the Choir may have had of "Can I remember the Italian?" were well hidden in this sensitive performance and the first set finished with 'Sloop John B', a number arranged by Matt and obviously enjoyed by the Choir and the audience alike.

Then Barrie and Matt performed the well-known piano duet by Schubert, 'Marche Militaire No1' which did indeed (to quote Barrie), add "a touch of class" to the proceedings.

DMVC then took to the stage and opened quietly by singing three verses of the popular hymn 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind' which Barrie had arranged to good effect. This was followed by the sober and poignant song from Billy Elliot, 'Deep into the Ground'. The men then lifted our spirits with Rutter's beautiful anthem 'For the Beauty of the Earth' and the second set closed with 'Sixteen Tons', a fun entertaining number whose folk origins lie in the mines of Kentucky, USA.

After the interval, DMVC's version of 'The Sounds of Silence' was an interesting arrangement of a well-known 1960's number. This was followed by Matt's imaginative arrangement of a song sung by Johnny Cash called 'Wayfaring Stranger'. Barrie's arrangement of 'Scarborough Fair' showed the Choir's varied talents off to good effect. The final song of this set was Matt's fun, crowd-pleasing arrangement of 'Drunken Sailor' which stole the show for me (sorry it wasn't a Stuart Singers number, folks!)

Matt and Barrie then had great fun and showed considerable technical prowess playing John Williams' 'Cantina Band' piano duet which went down a storm.

We returned to the stage with the entertaining and educational 'The Making of a Choir' arranged by Barrie for us, finishing this set with the 'Oliver' medley, a comprehensive visit to various great numbers from the musical.

There followed two joint songs to close the evening, both requiring two conductors. 'Anthem' is always a good rousing number, movingly performed by both choirs and neither choir was to be defeated by the tongue twister that is 'Rhythm of Life'. The concert definitely ended on a high! Thank you for providing us with a thoroughly entertaining evening.

Jennifer Pritchard



Two conductors, one choir! Not sure how that works but it's always a pleasure to sing with Dursley Male Voice Choir!

For me to hear my own choir (DMVC) as a member of the audience, for the first time, was quite a treat, hearing harmonies that I don't really hear while in my section. I think the distinctive difference between the two choirs, in a joint concert, makes a very enjoyable and interesting night's entertainment and adding in the lovely piano playing of Matt and Barrie gave the whole evening variety—something to be repeated.

I thought that all the songs from the Stuart Singers were performed very well with clear diction and good timing. I particularly enjoyed the 'Sloop John B' arrangement and performance.

On the occasions that I have listened to DMVC during rehearsals, I am impressed by the good sound I hear and this concert was no exception. The performance of 'Drunken Sailor' was particularly well done and I enjoyed the audience's reaction. This rounded off the DMVC's selection of songs nicely.

The conclusion with the joint numbers of 'Anthem' and 'Rhythm of Life' made an excellent finale, the latter really showing the different styles of the choirs but how well they worked together.

All in all, I'm very glad I came.

Tony Pritchard

The 2023 Annual Dinner

A Sparkling Evening

We arrived at the new venue wondering how it would be after gathering for so many years at the Golf Club. We needn't have worried as the dining room at the Old Lodge was warm and welcoming and decorated in celebratory mood.

Lots of the ladies dressed in glitzy outfits which really added to the festive ambience and the room was full of lively chatter as more than sixty choir members and friends arrived for a convivial evening. We were summoned together by MC Charlie and after grace from Simon, we sat down to a delicious meal which was served very efficiently by the staff.



Three glittering ladies!



A good time was had by all!



Ukulele entertainment

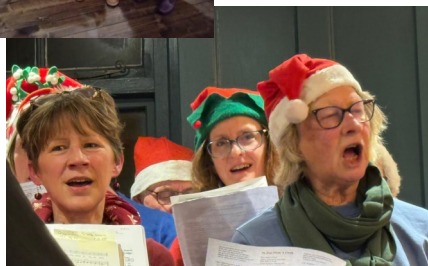
A highlight of the evening was the entertainment from Jennifer and Tony. How fitting for us to have a 'singalong' to such diverse numbers as Culture Club's 'Karma Chameleon', John Denver's 'Country Roads' and 'Yes Sir She's my Baby'. Everyone joined in with gusto and it was clear that a great time was had by all! John Fynn was especially enjoying himself playing 'air banjo'!

With further thanks from Bruce and Charlie, the evening came to a close with everyone still buzzing. This sort of event really emphasises how much the members of the choir enjoy not only singing together, but socializing together. How lovely to be part of such a wonderful group of friends and supporters. It was so good too to see that some of our newer members and their partners joined in the fun.

From the many positive WhatsApp messages the next morning, the Annual Dinner 2023 was a great success and I'm sure we would all like to give our heartfelt thanks to Nigel and Lyn for their hard work in getting over the initial hurdles to make it possible.

Christmas is Coming.....

A group of us went **Carol Singing** and to introduce some of our Christmas programme to those gathered in **The Crown** in **Minch** on December 4th. It wasn't a huge audience but the singers enjoyed a good warm-up and others enjoyed some Christmas spirit—maybe even literally!



We even managed to record a couple of little jingles for publicity purposes on Radio Gloucestershire! Or is it GloucesterSHEER? Read on.....

Tickets selling fast.....



Liz Odell has taken on the role of Marketing Secretary on the Committee and here she is enjoying selling tickets at our rehearsals. And there's more, as she writes here....

On December 8th the Stuart Singers were featured as **Star of the Day** on **BBC Radio Gloucestershire**.

It meant being awake and ready to be on the air at 7:15 am, trying to say the word "Minchinhampton" multiple times without tripping over my own tongue. This was not easy after being in the Cotswold Club until 11.00pm the night before!

They played the jingle which we recorded in the Crown – "Good Morning Gloucestershire" and "Merry Christmas GloucesterSHEER" followed by a good couple of minutes promoting our concerts tonight and tomorrow.

Hopefully we sold a few more Saturday tickets as a result of the show and gave some publicity to our chosen charities, Nelson Trust and Mindsong.

Marg Hillier has been collecting at Christmas for **Teckels Animal Sanctuary** for a number of years. This year was no exception. She reports.....



My thanks to all you animal lovers in the Stuart Singers who gave to the Teckels Animal Sanctuary tin!

We collected £165 which was brilliant. I will continue to collect from family and friends in the weeks before Christmas and hope to make £200. I'll let you know.

It is such a worthwhile charity and needs every penny it can get so THANK YOU for your generosity. Teckels will be over the moon!

Stop Press: December 11th Marg sent a cheque for **£300** to Teckels!



Sing Joy! Our Christmas Concerts 2023

Christmas starts early for the choir—in June in fact when the music for the December Concerts is first given out. It's always fun to see what's ahead and the first rehearsals are quite relaxed. "It's only July," is a comment often heard. We took a 3 week summer break this year too and we were preparing for our joint concert with DMVC for most of September, so Christmas seemed to be on the back burner. Added to that I was away for three weeks in November—most of the time in Bhutan—a country where 99% of the population are devoutly Buddhist and there are fewer than 10,000 Christians in the whole country. No carol singing in November there then! I must admit to a concerted effort to learn some words on the flight home so as not to be too far behind. That was just as well as, after its gentle start, the somewhat frantic run-up to Christmas was in full swing on my return.

One change that Helen had decided on when compiling the programme was that there wouldn't be so many songs about snow! She felt that we had somehow wished the heavy snowfall which followed our Saturday concert last year upon us by singing 'Let It Snow' with such gusto! This year we have rather more songs about joy and bells and have titled our concert "Sing Joy" inviting people to come and rejoice with us.

Another idea of Helen's was to make the second half of the concert more informal, trying to create the feeling of a 1920s-1940s Christmas get-together round the fireplace and the Christmas tree at home. She suggested a slightly less formal seating arrangement and the use of the screen to display Christmassy graphics suggested by the songs. We were also asked to wear themed accessories instead of jackets and pashminas. Some of us felt rather challenged by this at first but at the dress rehearsal it was obvious that everyone had enjoyed getting out waistcoats, braces, caps, boas and all manner of stoles and shawls. We thought we looked a picture! Buoyed up by the news that Friday evening's concert was a sell-out and Saturday was not far behind, we went home full of anticipation.

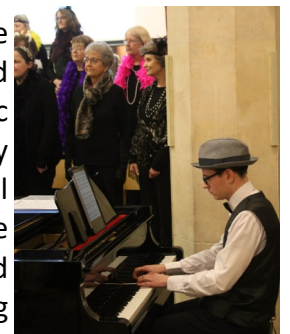


As this issue goes to press, we are reflecting on another success after Friday's concert. Choir members who were in the audience, sent messages of congratulation.



Sebastian Taylor, our solo violinist, was superb. His talent was obviously appreciated by all and his playing made our medley from Fiddler come to life.

Skyfall and Spaceman are powerful numbers too and contributed to a dramatic first half. The party atmosphere after the interval went down really well. The audience mood lightened and we all relaxed singing Ding Dong, the Santa Medley and



Christmas Alphabet with gusto. Many of us allowed our Christmas dreams to take over with Steve's solo of Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas and Vicky, Erika and Lou's beautiful singing of The Little Boy that Santa Claus Forgot brought tears to a few eyes. I is for the Icing on the Cake.....a message from Maddie that the raffle raised £400 and £150 was donated!

Same again on Saturday then?



Stop Press: And it was! Well done everyone!

Janet Brown

Christmas Shoe Boxes for Ukraine

Following a text from her family in Hertfordshire, Lynn Bevis asked the choir for **HELP** to donate gifts for Christmas. These were to be in the form of shoe boxes covered in Christmas paper and filled with sweets, games, clothes, school supplies or anything which would bring joy to a young boy or girl in Ukraine. Within days the request was answered.

Last year Humanitarian Aid Fund and Ukraine Relief sent out over 1000 shoe boxes filled with presents to the children in Ukraine. It is hoped to follow up this year with even greater support. One of the main stated aims of the appeal is to Spread Joy! The name of our Christmas Concerts might have helped but, in any case, the idea certainly seemed to speak to the Stuart Singers. The interest and effort was fantastic. The beautifully covered, labelled and filled boxes were collected at our Sunday afternoon rehearsal at the end of November and will soon be on their way to Ukraine via Lynn's niece, Deborah.

A very big **THANK YOU** to choir members for spreading joy to so many—**SING JOY!**

Lynn and Chris Bevis



A job well done!

Joyful shoe box fillers with their colourful collection!



It was fun selecting presents for the boxes with a boy or girl and their age in mind. Many found that covering the box was the hardest part!



Stop Press: December 5th

The shoe boxes have been delivered to Castle Point. They'll be in Kyiv on Monday December 11th!

Many thanks to Lynn for initiating and organising such a worthwhile project.....and to Chris for his stalwart support!

Tea for Two and Two for Tea!

For more years than we can remember Wendy Lea and I have been serving coffee and tea once a month during the break at our rehearsals. This acts as a welcome opportunity for the choir to socialise without disturbing the flow of the rehearsal. It also plays a useful role as a revenue earner for the choir raising £235.00 so far this calendar year. All of this money, together with the raffle and book sales, goes into a separate music fund, so it makes an important contribution to keeping our repertoire fresh.

During the run up to our biannual home concerts, the choir meets on a Sunday afternoon for an extra rehearsal and this is when our talents as bakers comes to the fore. There is always lots of enthusiasm amongst the ladies to produce their signature bakes – and we have lots of **Star Bakers**. In contrast, the men are a bit reticent about showing off their baking prowess but more than make up for it by eating the cakes with such relish!



Last month's offerings were particularly splendid and so prolific we ran out of space on the table!

Biddy Hadfield

Wendy and Biddy displaying the work of our Star Bakers



Many thanks to Wendy and Biddy, our resident tea ladies, for all the work that they do.

Spicy Fruit Cake

Left it till the last minute to bake a Christmas Cake? Try this quick and easy version, sent in by Jan Dawson. She says it's moist and delicious and can be eaten as soon as it's baked! Thank you, Jan!

Ingredients

- 4oz margarine
- 12oz mixed dried fruit
- 8oz sugar
- 1/4 pint water
- 1/2 teaspoon mixed spice
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla essence
- 12oz self-raising flour
- 1teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- 2 beaten eggs

Method

Place the margarine, dried fruit, sugar, mixed spice, vanilla essence and water in a saucepan. Heat until the margarine is melted and bring to the boil. Boil for 1 minute. Remove from the heat, add the bicarbonate of soda and stir. Leave to cool—it's important that the mixture is really cool before the next stage. Mix the flour and beaten egg into the cool mixture.

Put the mixture into an 8"/20cm round cake tin. Bake in an oven at 175 degrees/gas mark 3-4 for 45 minutes or until a skewer inserted into the cake comes out clean. Leave to cool in the tin.

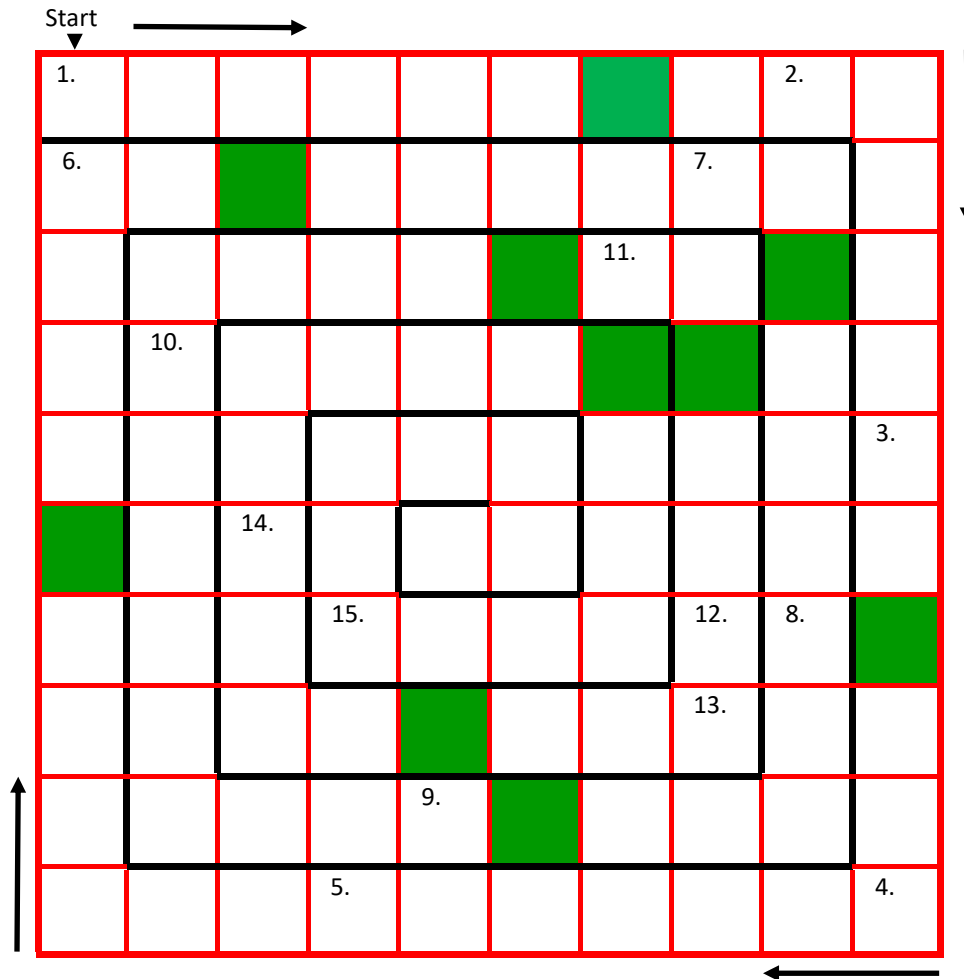




Christmas Chain Puzzle



The last letter of each answer, all on the theme of Christmas, is the first letter of the next. Write your answers following the grid until you have finished the puzzle. Then rearrange the letters in the shaded squares to reveal the name of a popular Christmas pantomime character (10). There's a **prize** for those who email the answer to jandj.brown@btinternet.com. Good luck!



Clues

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Christmas Island belongs to this country. | 9. The English Boxing Day lunch of Bubble and Squeak is made with these. |
| 2. Marzipan has the flavour of this nut. | 10. 26 December is the Feast of St? |
| 3. You know Dasher, Dancer, Prancer & Vixen, Comet, Cupid,and Blitzen. Which one of Santa's reindeer is missing? | 11. The Christmas Tree in Trafalgar Square London is a gift from this country. |
| 4. A German dessert made of fruit preserved in liquor. | 12. Complete the title of the carol: O Come All Faithful. |
| 5. One of the gifts brought by the Magi. | 13. Complete the title of the Advent hymn: O Come, O Come..... |
| 6. Another name for 6 January. | 14. In the song The Twelve Days of Christmas, there were nine of these. |
| 7. The English name for Bûche de Noël. | 15. A decorative wreath or cord sometimes hung on a Christmas Tree |
| 8. He announced to Mary that she would have a baby. | |

Upcoming Events

Dates for Your Diary in 2024

April 20th/21st

Tour to Somerset and Devon

Concerts in Taunton and Cullompton

May 18th

Concert with Bournemouth Male Voice Choir

Cirencester Church of St John Baptist 7:30pm

June 7th/8th

Summer Concerts

Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton 7:30pm

June 15th

Afternoon Garden Party

24 Bownham Park

June 28th

Music in the Garden

Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton 6pm-9pm

Dec 6th/7th

Christmas Concerts

Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton 7:30pm

**Wishing a Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year**

to our

Business Sponsors.



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