



Plans for 2022 – 2023

Maybe you have been thinking of joining a choir? Now is a good time to plan ahead for September, to act instead of just thinking about it! Here in Portishead, there is a friendly, medium-sized, choral society with close links to the local community on your doorstep. Like many other choirs, our membership was affected by the pandemic; our numbers were quite high (nearly 80). We are now aiming to get back to where we were; there are vacancies in all sections (especially tenors and basses). Our members are

drawn mainly, but not exclusively, from Portishead, there are no auditions and we rehearse on Thursday evenings. We are dedicated to singing and providing performances of mostly classical music in four voice parts (soprano, alto, tenor and bass). Find out more by visiting our website: <https://portisheadchoral.co.uk/> . Here are our plans for next year:

December 17th St Nicolas - Benjamin Britten

Britten's cantata, *Saint Nicolas*, was commissioned to celebrate the centenary of Lancing College, Sussex. It is scored for chorus, treble soloists, tenor solo, piano duet, organ, percussion and strings, with a libretto by Eric Crozier. The cantata tells the story of the life and achievements – some real but mostly legendary - of Nicolas, the 4th-century bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor.

Britten was always a very practical composer who was equally at home whether writing for modest amateur performances or for international occasions with virtuoso professional soloists. He once said 'It is the composer's duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings.....I want my music to be of use to people, to please them, to enhance their lives' (extracts from his response to receiving the first Aspen Award in 1964). All his music testifies to this philosophy and *Saint Nicolas* is no exception.

Saint Nicolas was Britten's first large-scale work written with mainly amateur performers in mind and is a wonderful example of his outstanding ability to capture the essence of his subject-matter with a series of dramatic yet essentially simple ideas to which performers and audiences can immediately relate. A highly suitable choice for a December concert; after all, *St Nicolas* was the man behind the story of Father Christmas/Santa Claus.... A lot of audience participation will be involved, not just in this cantata, but also in the Christmas carols in the second part of the programme.

March 25th 2023 Haydn The Creation

It is said that Haydn wrote his oratorio 'Creation' after being inspired by Handel's 'Messiah'. These two oratorios are, arguably, great pillars of the choral society tradition. While Handel's work focuses on Christ and draws heavily on Old Testament prophecies, Haydn's work tells the story of the creation of the world. Rediscover the magic of live choral music with this joyous

oratorio, conducted by our Musical Director, Jonathan Palmer, with soloists, and orchestral accompaniment by Portishead Sinfonia.

'The Creation' celebrates heaven, earth and all life with a truly fulfilling sense of happiness, and seems a fitting way to return to post-pandemic music-making. It is such a satisfying work to perform, as an Alto from the RNS Chorus said: "*Haydn gives the Chorus some fabulous moments in The Creation, such as the very dramatic opening when the Chorus sings the words 'and there was light' with an explosion of orchestral sound on the word 'light'. He also provides the Chorus with the chance of singing some wonderfully joyful tunes to get our teeth into and which we can go home from rehearsals whistling.*"

All of you are warmly invited to share the experience with us.

June 10th 2023 Gershwin Porgy and Bess (Concert version)

The opera *Porgy and Bess* is the story of a crippled beggar and his doomed love, Bess. Set in 1930s Charleston, it portrays life and death, hope and despair in a black community called Catfish Row. The jazz and blues-influenced score includes such classics as *Summertime*, *Bess*, *You is My Woman* and *It Ain't Necessarily So*, and has been credited with blurring the lines between opera and musical theatre. The text is in a dialect: Gullah, which is a Creole blend of English and African languages.

Since its debut in Boston in 1935, *Porgy and Bess* has been one of the most consistently running shows in American music and theatre history. In the 1950s, the opera toured the Americas and Europe, becoming one of the first by a native-born American to be staged at Italy's La Scala. Although George Gershwin was convinced that he had helped produce a work of art, he died of a brain tumour in 1937 before he could experience the show's huge success.

It is worth noting that while many "ethnic" operas such as *Aida*, *Madame Butterfly* and *Carmen* are commonly performed by white singers, *Porgy and Bess* is seldom staged with other than African-American casts, except in concert version, like the one we will be doing. Although that means that the drama is compressed and the moods change frequently as the songs appear in the manner of a medley, it does not really matter. In the end it's great music, a mix of classical, blues and jazz. It's a story we can all relate to, it's the common man, and how many operas do we actually know the tunes to? And: it's in English, like both the other concerts this year!

Why not come and join us?!

