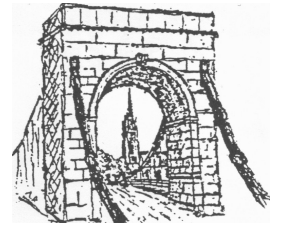




MARLOW U3A MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

33rd Newsletter: July/August 2011



Our New Venue for Group Meetings

Following the blaze that engulfed Marlow Rowing Club during the early hours of 3rd August, we have switched our venue to the United Reformed Church (Christ Church URC) in Oxford Road. The sessions will be held in the Worship Hall, which has the benefit of comfy seats, a projector, screen, amplifier, speakers and tuned piano.

When available, we will also book the Cornerstone

Room, which will be a convenient place for us to make our teas and coffees. Other benefits include fewer steps, and a lift!



We can also dispense with our waiting list, as the URC has plenty of room for all those who have expressed interest. So please spread the news to any fellow U3A members who might be interested.

For those who are not sure where Christ Church URC is located, please refer to the aerial view. Parking is available behind the former Waitrose site in Riley Road or at the West Street car park next to Portland Alley.



When you enter the building, turn to your right up a few steps and you should then find someone whom you recognise!

Gustav Holst: Not Only “The Planets”!



Jim called his talk “Gustav Holst: Not Only *The Planets*” because the vast majority of people associate Holst with *The Planets* and with very little else. However he was a prolific composer of a wide variety of wonderful music. He composed almost 200 works including operas, ballets, hymns (e.g. *In the Bleak Midwinter*, based on a poem by Christina Rossetti), songs, orchestral suites, overtures and theatre music. Jim’s aim was to give us a taste of some of these works before ending with music from *The Planets*.

He was born Gustav Von Holst in September 1874 in Cheltenham, but the “Von” was dropped during the First World War. The house in Cheltenham where he was born is now the Holst Museum. Holst’s great grandfather Matthias was a court composer in Russia until he fell out of favour and fled to England.

In 1885 Gustav was sent to Cheltenham Grammar School. His father was determined to make him a good pianist, but even in his youth Gustav was troubled by neuritis in his hands. Holst was a most remarkable man with many outstanding achievements despite very serious health

problems. In addition to his neuritis he was frail, suffered from asthma and had very poor eyesight.

Holst was a very good pianist but because of his neuritis prolonged piano practice was impossible, so he took up the trombone. He played with the Carl Rosa Opera Company and supplemented his meagre income by playing with an end of pier band “The White Viennese Band”, performing at Brighton, Eastbourne and other seaside resorts.

Holst attended the Royal College of Music on a scholarship and studied composition under Charles Stanford. He later taught at the RCM. It was there that he met Ralph Vaughan Williams and this was the start of a lifelong friendship. They played their compositions to each other and criticised each others’ works.

Jim’s choice of excerpts certainly fulfilled his aim to demonstrate Holst’s versatility, including music for string orchestra, brass bands, women’s voices with harp, and music for full orchestra. He also illustrated Holst’s interest in folk music, whether English, Algerian (*Beni Mora Suite*) or Indian (*Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*). We also heard an extract from his *Japanese Suite* at last December’s meeting.

Holst Playlist

The Street Of Ouled Nails from *Beni Mora Suite* (1910)

St Paul’s Suite (1913) – Finale (*The Dargason*)

Hymn of the Travellers (1910) (Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda)

Scherzo from *A Moorside Suite* (1928)

Hammersmith (1930) – excerpt

The Planets (1918):

- *Mars, Bringer of War*
- *Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity*
- *Uranus, The Magician*

In 1923 Holst was badly injured when he fell off a podium and struck his head whilst conducting. Although he continued to teach, compose and conduct until his death in 1934 he never fully recovered from that fall. 1934 was a bad year: Holst, Elgar and Delius all died that year.

Despite his very poor health Holst led a most remarkable life, composing some of the most innovative and brilliant music of the early 20th century.

- The videos that Jim used to accompany the three extracts from *The Planets* created considerable interest. There is a complete set of seven of these films on YouTube (just type “Holst Planets Hickox ensimon” into your YouTube search box).

The Beginnings and Development of Italian Opera

We were delighted that Chris Elam and Nina Holding joined forces to prepare our first real Opera session. Chris explained that opera began in Italy, but it appears that nobody knows for sure who invented it. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is often perhaps incorrectly credited with having written the first opera *La Favola d’Orfeo* performed in 1607 at Mantua. If not the first opera *Orfeo* is regarded as the first work to show the potential of this new art form which combined singing, dance, theatrical effects and drama.



In 1637 the first public opera house in Venice was opened and this is probably when the term opera was first used. The last opera Monteverdi wrote was the *Coronation of Poppeae* in 1642 and it is the first opera to use actual historical figures. The subject is Nero and his desire to set aside his wife Octavia and to marry his manipulative mistress Poppeae. The opera was performed in Venice at carnival time and was a huge success.

There were now two forms of opera; *opera seria* for the nobility and *opera buffa* for the middle classes. *Opera seria* was based on classical texts whereas *opera buffa* owed more to the Commedia dell'Arte.

Naples now became the centre of Italian opera as the King of Naples built an opera house in his palace. Scarlatti (1660-1725) wrote over 40 operas which were first produced at the Viceregal Palazzo Reale and then the public theatre of San Bartolomeo. Venetian opera was based on mythological characters and stage machinery whereas Scarlatti's subject was the characterization of kings, lovers, servants and confidants. Scarlatti also developed the overture for opera into the three part form allegro-adagio-allegro which can be seen to be the predecessor of the classical symphony.

Handel (1685–1759) spent time in Naples and was greatly influenced by the Italian opera he saw performed there. Under George I's patronage Handel was able to bring to London audiences his version of *opera seria*.

Another non Italian Mozart (1756 – 1791) now enters the operatic stage. Mozart as a child prodigy had written two Italian operas by the time he was 14. Mozart as an adult wrote operas which still form an important part of the operatic repertoire, for example *Idomeneo*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*. Italian opera was in Mozart's time already popular in Vienna, but Emperor Josef II had set up a company to perform in German rather than Italian. It was said that the Italians were the masters of vocal music whereas the Germans were known for their instrumental excellence. Mozart can be said to have combined both and in his skill at combining the words, the instrumentation and writing beautiful music to have taken opera to new dramatic heights.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) was born a year after Mozart's death. He was influenced by Mozart and Haydn and was known as *il tedesco* (the little German) in Bologna as a teenager because of his devotion to Mozart. Rossini wrote 40 operas in 20 years, and is said to have remarked, 'Give me a shopping list and I will set it to music'!

The tenor voice was now 'the voice'. Castrati were no longer fashionable. The style of singing for the tenor and soprano was called 'bel canto' (beautiful singing).

Singers were stars and needed great virtuosity to meet the demands of the arias that were now written. Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini are bel canto composers. Bellini (1801-1835) in particular is renowned for his flowing melodic lines. Bel canto singing started in Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries. Rossini is also known for the 'Rossini crescendo', and probably his best known opera is *The Barber of Seville*.

Donizetti (1797-1848) wrote over 70 operas, both comic and tragic. *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) was a resounding success. He moved to Paris from Naples in 1840 and composed *La fille du Regiment* which was also an immediate success. He was subsequently appointed Court Composer in Vienna. *Don Pasquale*, written in 1843, was his last opera. Donizetti dominated the Italian opera scene after Bellini's death up to the success of Verdi's *Nabucco* in 1842.

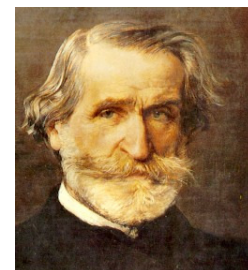
Nina then described the career of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), one of the most influential composers of the 19th century. He transformed the whole nature of operatic writing during the course of his long career. His works dominate the standard repertoire 1½ centuries after their composition and some of these themes have long since taken root in popular culture, e.g:

Opera Playlist: Excerpts from:

Monteverdi: *La Favola d'Orfeo* (1607)
Monteverdi: *The Coronation of Poppeae* (1642)
Handel: *Julius Caesar* (1724)
Mozart: *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786)
Rossini: *The Barber of Seville* (1816)
Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835)
Verdi: Lady Macbeth's Sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth* (1847)
Verdi: Love Duet from *Otello* (1887)

- ♪ *La Donna e Mobile* from *Rigoletto*
- ♪ *Va Pensiero* (chorus of the Hebrew slaves) from *Nabucco*
- ♪ The Drinking Song from *La Traviata*
- ♪ The Grand March from *Aida*.

He wrote 28 operas between his first *Oberto* in 1839 and his last *Falstaff* in 1893. His third opera, *Nabucco* (1842), was his first great successful opera and it made him famous. It caught the public fancy because of the driving vigour of its music and its great choruses. This was interpreted as giving meaning to the struggle for Italian independence and the unification of Italy. After *Nabucco* Verdi based his operas on patriotic themes and many of the standard romantic sources such as Victor Hugo (*Ernani* 1844), Byron (*Il Due Foscari* 1844) and Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Falstaff*). Further huge successes included *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata* and *Aida*. Verdi's last opera was the brilliant comic opera *Falstaff* (1893).



Opera had become the fusion of the five arts: drama with the presentation of real people; good writing with a strong narrative; painting with colour in costume and set; movement and dance; and finally, wonderful music. From its conception during the Baroque period to the maturity of the romantic period, it was the medium through which tales and myths were revisited, history was retold and imagination stimulated.

Experience Opera Locally!

Did Chris and Nina's session stimulate or rekindle your interest in opera? You don't need to go to London to experience opera performances as the following selection of local events demonstrates.

The Regal Picturehouse at Henley presents screenings of operas during July and August. Among these are *Madame Butterfly* (8th August), *Nabucco* (9th August) and *La Fille du Regiment* (10th August).

On 22nd September **Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*** will be performed at Norden Farm by The Complete Singer with a talented young cast auditioned from the London Music Colleges. Fully costumed and sung in Italian with English surtitles. The cast and chorus will be accompanied by Glyndebourne pianist Lesley-Anne Sammons, together with a small instrumental ensemble. This event is currently on sale to Maidenhead Music Society Members and Associate Members only. Contact the Box Office for more information on how to become an Associate Member.

Aylesbury's Waterside Theatre hosts productions of two of the most famous operas in October. **Verdi's *La Traviata***, his interpretation of one of the most popular love stories of the 19th century, *La dame aux Camélias*, will be performed on 7th October.

Highlights include the Brindisi, the best known drinking song in opera, the duet *Un Di Felice* and Violetta's haunting aria *Addio Del Passato*. The following evening 8th October sees a performance of **Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*** with exquisite sets and fabulous costumes including antique wedding kimonos from Japan. Highlights include the Humming Chorus, the moving aria *One Fine Day* and the unforgettable Love Duet. Both productions will be sung in Italian with English surtitles.



English Touring Opera (ETO) will perform two operas at Wycombe Swan. On 7th November they will present **Handel's *Flavio***. Mixing comedy and tragedy, and set in the corrupt, sensuous court of Lombardy, it follows the fortunes of two pairs of star-crossed lovers, trapped in the bitter

rivalry between families. Described as a revival of a rarely-performed jewel of the 18th century, it will be performed in lavish period costume and sung in English. See

<http://englishtouringopera.org.uk/productions/flavio>

On the following evening the ETO will perform an updated version of **Purcell's *The Fairy Queen***. Purcell's original version (1692) is a strange, delicate masque or semi-opera recreating the enchanted world of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The version to be performed at Wycombe Swan is influenced by the English surreal painter Richard Dadd, and imagines the story set in a military convalescent hospital. The score contains dance music, such as hornpipes, so this production includes dancers and acrobats alongside singers. Not surprisingly, it will be sung in English.

Four Opera Masterpieces, Tuesday 15th November, Rewley House, Oxford. This U3A Study Day will explore opera, its artistic rationale and background and development through the ages up to the present time looking at four key works – Gluck's 'Orfeo et Euridyce', Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro', Verdi's 'Othello' and Puccini's 'La Boheme'. Talks will be illustrated with recorded excerpts of the operas to illustrate the different styles and musical constructions. This is being organised by Anthony Burdall Tel: 01367 240 713, email@anthony.burdall@burdall.net.

Also, as noted by Nina (and previously in this Newsletter), **South Bucks U3A** run dedicated opera sessions at the Beacon Centre, Holtspur, where they screen Opera DVD to members of various local U3A branches, all of which are invited to regard these meetings as an extension of their own activities.

Edward Gardner: "The Man who Rescued Opera"

This year's Last Night of The Proms will have a new conductor: Edward Gardner.



Gardner served as an assistant conductor to Mark Elder at The Hallé Orchestra for 3 years. In 2003, he was named music director of Glyndebourne on Tour, which he relinquished in 2007. In March 2006, he was appointed music director of English National Opera, and he formally took up the post in May 2007, with an initial contract of three years. He was named Conductor of the Year by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2008. Some see him as "the symbol of the most brilliant operatic turnaround in recent history".

In September 2010, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra announced the appointment of Gardner as its next principal guest conductor, effective September 2011, with an initial contract of three years. Although there have not been any formal press announcements of Gardner extending his ENO contract, he has stated that he is continuing to plan work with ENO until at least 2015.

Marlow Music Festival 2011

The Syllabus for the 2011 Festival is now available at www.marlowmusicfestival.co.uk. The aim of the Festival is to provide a training ground for aspiring musicians of all ages and abilities. They will have the opportunity to perform in front of an audience in a supportive environment and receive feedback from highly respected adjudicators. The Festival is divided into classes, and medals are awarded within each class. Outstanding and promising performers may receive a trophy and/or be invited to perform at the annual concert.

If you know of an aspiring musician who would like a printed Syllabus, please contact Keith.

Future Programme

Date	Provisional Programme
(no meeting planned in August)	
15 Sept	<p>Sir Malcolm Sargent (presented by Mike). Sargent (1895–1967) was an English conductor, organist and composer widely regarded as Britain's leading conductor of choral works. His private life was quite colourful. Mike will provide a selection of music associated with Sargent, including one of his own compositions, as well as some thoughts from the man himself from his last appearance at a Prom Concert.</p>  <p>Nikolay Andrevevitch Rimsky–Korsakov A man of many parts. He composed music covering chamber, orchestral and operatic works. He was also a man of the world, aware of the politics and privations in 19th Century Russia. He fell foul of the authorities and his progress in Music Academia was put on hold for a time. He not only composed a wide range of music in his own right, but famously worked with Borodin on <i>Prince Igor</i> and re-orchestrated some of Glinka's works.</p>  <p>Nadia Ellis (from High Wycombe U3A) will illustrate the wide range of this fascinating composer's compositions.</p>
28 Sept	<p>Visit to Hatchlands at East Clandon, Surrey. The house was built in the 1750s for Admiral Boscawen, hero of the Battle of Louisburg. Robert Adam ceilings decorate the house, featuring appropriately nautical motifs. Today the mansion is a family home, containing tenant Alec Cobbe's superb collection of paintings. Six rooms also display Europe's largest collection of keyboard instruments associated with famous composers such as JC Bach, Chopin and Elgar. As well as touring the house and collections, we will attend a chamber concert of music by Dibdin, Dussek, Balfe, Sullivan, Clay, Elgar and German in the purpose-built concert hall.</p> <p>At the time of writing, all of the concert tickets that we bought have been snapped up. There may, however, be a few spare seats on the coach if you would like to visit Hatchlands with us.</p>
20 Oct	<p>George Gershwin (presented by Chris Snare) Organ Development and Organ Music (presented by Bill Parkinson)</p>
17 Nov	<p>2011 Anniversaries: William Boyce and The Last Flowering of the English Baroque (presented by Keith) and Gustav Mahler: the Bridge Builder (presented by Jenny)</p>

Please note the above dates in your diary. We look forward to seeing you at (or soon after) 9.45am on 15th September at the new venue.

Concerts/Events

Local events in the next few weeks include:

- ♪ Syrinx Trio play music by Vivaldi, Saint-Saens, Chopin, Haydn, Poulenc, Bozza and Bizet. 7.30pm on 27th August at Hambleden church.
- ♪ St.John's Ensemble with Nathan Vale (tenor). Elgar Violin Sonata, Vaughan Williams *On Wenlock Edge*, and Schumann Piano Quintet. 7.30pm on 1st September at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Gordon Fergus Thompson (piano). Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Rachmaninov, Scriabin. 7.30pm on 15th September at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Serenata Soloist perform music by R.Strauss, Berwald, Rossini and Spohr. 7.30pm on 17th September at Hambleden church.

- ♪ West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival* Concert 1: Music by Krasa, Brahms and Dvorak. 7.30pm on 16th September at Church of St. Lawrence, West Wycombe Hill.
- ♪ West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival* Concert 2: Music by Shostakovich, Schumann and Schubert. 7.30pm on 17th September at Church of St. Lawrence, West Wycombe Hill.
 *Lawrence Power, the famous viola player, is the Artistic Director of this new Festival, and has arranged an impressive gathering of well-known musicians for these concerts
- ♪ Marlow Recital Society: Mark Viner (piano). Works by Chopin, Liszt, Alkan and Godowsky. Vine House, Marlow, on Saturday 17th September.
- ♪ Maidenhead Music Society in conjunction with Windsor Festival present Mozart's Opera 'Cosi fan Tutte'. 7.30 on 22nd September at Norden Farm, Maidenhead.
- ♪ Grimethorpe Colliery Band. 7.30pm on 24th September at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury.
- ♪ Kharkiv Opera present Verdi's *La Traviata*. 7.30pm on 7th October at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury. See page 4 for details.
- ♪ Kharkiv Opera present Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. 7.30pm on 8th October at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury. See page 4 for details.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Conductor: Barry Wordsworth, Cello: Guy Johnston). Rossini *The Barber of Seville* Overture; Elgar Cello Concerto; Dvorak Symphony No. 9. 7.30pm 16th October at Wycombe Swan.
- ♪ The Colours of Spain - a song recital (a quartet of singers with piano accompaniment). Works by Turina, Walton, Brahms, Wolf, Poulenc, Ravel and Saint-Saens. 7.45 on 29th October at Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield.
- ♪ City of London Sinfonia with Michael Collins (conductor and clarinet) and Noriko Ogawa (piano). Rossini: String Sonata No.1; Shostakovich Piano Concerto No.1; Weber Clarinet Quintet (arranged for clarinet and strings); Mozart Symphony No.40. 7.30pm on 23rd October at Wycombe Swan.
- ♪ Northern Ballet present *The Nutcracker*. 25th – 29th October at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury
- ♪ English Touring Opera perform Handel's *Flavio*. 7.30pm on 7th November at Wycombe Swan. See page 4 for details.
- ♪ English Touring Opera perform Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*. 7.30pm on 8th November at Wycombe Swan. See page 5 for details.
- ♪ Four Opera Masterpieces (U3A Study Day). 15th November, Rewley House, Oxford. See page 5 for details.
- ♪ Mozart Festival Orchestra present *The Four Seasons by Candlelight* (also includes music by Purcell, Bach, Mozart, Charpentier and Handel). 7.30pm on 23rd November at Wycombe Swan.
- ♪ Pascal and Ami Roge. A Wedding Cake Recital. Saint-Saens, Faure, Ravel, Dukas, Debussy. 7.45pm on 26th November at Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield.
- ♪ Marlow Choral Society and Princes Risborough Music Society present *The Big Messiah*. 7.30pm on 27th November at Wycombe Swan.
- ♪ Royal Philharmonic Orchestra present a "Tchaikovsky Spectacular". 7.30pm on 30th November at Waterside Theatre, Aylesbury.

★ If you would like to feature any events of interest herein, please email the details to Keith ★

Happy listening!

Brian (484099, brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com) and Keith (891507, keithrachel@hotmail.com)

P.S. Don't forget that you can view what we have done at previous sessions at our web site:
<http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>