

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

After a quiet start to the year, the autumn will see a flurry of activity as we embark on an intensive tour of Vigils and return concert in Hereford cathedral.

VIGIL '99 TOUR

Cambridge (Great St. Mary's Church) – Saturday, 9th October

Bradford Cathedral – Saturday, 16th October

Bristol Anglican Cathedral – Saturday, 6th November

Manchester Cathedral – Saturday, 13th November

Linton Parish Church, near Grassington, Yorkshire – Saturday, 27th November

Hull Methodist Central Hall – Saturday, 4th December

N.B. remember that attendance at the Vigils is free with an offering being taken to cover costs

HEREFORD CATHEDRAL CONCERT

Once again the NEO has been invited to return to Hereford for what promises to be another wonderful evening on Friday, 3rd December. Further details of all of these events will be published in the next newsletter in the autumn.

n.b. The NEO PROM – An Italian Summer. We would like to apologise for any disappointment that there may be over the cancellation of our anticipated Italian summer concerts which we had hoped to perform in Manchester and Bristol this July.

NEO T SHIRTS AVAILABLE IN NAVY BLUE

We have now extended our range of T shirts to include navy blue as well as cream. Both are in the same style, made from 100% cotton with the NEO logo emblazoned across the front. Prices are £10.70 (inc. p&cp) for medium, large, and extra large, and £8.70 (inc.p&cp) for small.



Mugs, again in cream with the new logo on, are available for £6 (inc. £1.05 p&cp).

Car stickers are available for £1 (inc. p&cp).

Please write to the NEO *Friends*, at the address below, with your cheque made payable to the New English Orchestra stating whether you want small, medium, large or extra large size if ordering T shirts.

NEO FRIENDS

The NEO *Friends* was formed in 1994 with primary purpose of supporting the NEO and to enable members to keep in touch and to help those who would like to become more closely involved in the life and work of the NEO. If you are interested in joining the NEO *Friends* or would like to know more contact:

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE ON OUR FREE MAILING LIST?

If so, please send your details to the address below.

Newsletter

No.4

Spring 1999

THE NEW EUROPEAN ORCHESTRA

Nigel Swinford writes regarding recent developments: “The New European Orchestra is also planning a series of Vigils later in the year. I’m sure you’ll be interested to know that their Christmas concerts went extremely well. I cannot ever remember conducting a more enthusiastic choir and orchestra – 101 Dalmatians came to mind but they sang even better, of course! The concerts were very well attended and many people stood up to applaud at the end, such was their appreciation. The tour was a very big step forward for the whole operation. They now have to build a firm administrative base so that future events can be staged without too much strain.



Those of you who went to Salzburg in 1997 may remember Corinna Ebeling who came from St. Gallen, Switzerland to sing with us. For the New Year tour it was Corinna’s job to find 88 beds wherever the orchestra went. No mean feat! She achieved it superbly. This gives an idea of the administrative task of organising an NEuO event though.”

CAROLS AND CLASSICS

Christmas 1998 saw one of the most successful tours to date with some 7000 people attending the concerts. For those who are in the NEO Friends you will find reading the inside story of our various events from the perspective of different members of the NEO. So we thought it would be an interesting idea to let our newsletter readers who are not NEO Friends see something of what they are missing.

The following article appears in Opus 10, published in Spring 1999, and is written by Myrtle Lawrence, one of our Sopranos who gives us her very personal perspective on the tour.

It was that time of year again. After months of fortnightly rehearsals in Birmingham, and with words memorised (by female choir members at least!), the hustle and bustle of the Christmas period had arrived; the NEO Christmas Tour was about to start. As a relatively new member of the choir (I joined in 1997) I had only done one Christmas Tour and I was looking forward to the experience of the second.

Friday, 11th December – Manchester

After a good clear journey from Bristol to Manchester (once more onto the M5/M6, dear friends) my two choir member travelling companions and I arrived in time to watch the end of the orchestral rehearsal.

Nigel had to fit so much into our first rehearsal together before the concert, I admired his patience and grace as he had to decide which orchestral and choir pieces needed priority.

After an excellent meal provided by the staff at the Bridgewater Hall we felt refreshed and ready for the concert. This was the first time we choir members had heard the orchestra's contributions to the programme and I was immediately taken by the wonderful percussion section as it performed in 'Still Life at the Penguin Café' (by Simon Jeffes) and also in Jacques Ibert's 'Divertissement.'

As we travelled home (different car, different companions) memories of a good concert in a lovely hall with a warm audience helped ease the long journey. As I crept into my house I felt quite proud that it was not just my teenage sons who can arrive home at 2.00 in the morning!

Sunday, 13th December – London

We had been warned by London-based members of the choir that the journey to the West End Theatre where we were performing tonight would be very slow so near to Christmas. We dutifully left Bristol in plenty of time, only to sail right through to the Haymarket with hours to spare! On our arrival we were struck by the contrast between the backstage facilities of 'Her Majesty's Theatre' and those at the venue the night before. Don't tell 'Her Majesty's', but after Manchester's clean, spacious changing areas, these seemed dark, cramped, stuffy and rather decaying – but fascinating for all that! The theatre is the London base for 'The Phantom of the Opera' and to be in the same dressing rooms as used by long-standing members of the cast, and to see the photos of them and their families, was really interesting. The large, dark stage was also fascinating although we were alarmed to see that Nigel had apparently taken his revenge on members of the choir who still had not memorised their words properly by stringing them up in the wings of the stage (however, closer inspection revealed the hanging off-stage bodies to be full size puppets – props from 'The Phantom'). The concert again was very enjoyable and we had a good-sized appreciative audience in the theatre.

Monday, 14th December – Birmingham

We were all relaxed and used to the programme by now and for me Monday was the most enjoyable concert of the tour. There were surprises in the programme tonight, including a masked bandit creeping about firing pistol shots in Strauss' 'Bandit's Polka', a flurry of hats exchanging heads in the 'Rustic Polka' (by the same composer) and John Trow-Poole arriving on stage with his stein of Bavarian beer after the same piece! In each performance different aspects of the programme seemed to shine especially brightly

and tonight my personal highlights were the beautiful string introduction to 'Jesus How Lovely You Are' and the choir singing 'Ding Dong Merrily on High' at a cracking pace, introduced at a Presto Manic-oso tempo by Stephen 'Flying-Fingers' Robbins on the piano.

Tuesday, 15th December – Bristol

The home run, literally, as we only had to travel about 12 miles to tonight's venue at our very own, rather scruffy, Colston Hall. It was good to be near home. Relationships have deepened as we have travelled, rehearsed, and performed together over the last few weeks and there was therefore a sense of joy tinged with sadness as this was to be our last concert together.

My favourite musical memories from this Christmas Tour, and from this last concert in particular, must include again, the lovely lilting melodies of the 'Penguin Café' music, the marimba solo, 'In the Bleak Midwinter,' played by Andrew Whettam (also the favourite of friends and family in the Bristol audience) and singing the simple but beautiful worship song 'Jesus, How Lovely You Are'. (Subsequent debate over whether you have to have grotesquely misshapen hands to wield four marimba sticks at once proved fruitless, and we were forced to the conclusion that Andrew Whettam is simply a very talented man). The tour was over and we were left with friendships formed and renewed and for me a sense of thankfulness to God for His strength and gifts, and also relief that I'd done it!

ROGER KNOTT – an appreciation

February 1999 brought a great shock to the NEO as one of our most stalwart enablers, Roger Knott, died suddenly. Nigel Swinford writes the following appreciation of a great man:- "Roger Knott was above all a true friend. He was quiet, self effacing and blessed with the grace of genuine humility yet it is the thought of his friendship which will live with me for ever. He was not sentimental, yet he really cared for the people in the NEO, was always there when we needed him and was generous in the gift of his time as with all his other resources.

He first joined the orchestra in the mid 80's, driving the instruments van out to Salzburg. He loved to travel, and in addition to his meticulous care of the NEO's finances for over 10 years, looked after us on our foreign tours with tremendous attention to detail. His duties also included negotiating the arrangements with major concert halls, front of house management, and general trouble shooting which he did par excellence.

All artistic operations such as the NEO sail close to the wind financially. It is an unavoidable fact of life. Yet the skill with which Roger handled our resources drew the highest praise from all quarters. He was God's gift to us, a true enabler, and it was our privilege and good fortune to enjoy his friendship for so many happy years. We give thanks."



ANDREW WHETTAM

Those of you who came to Christmas concerts last December may remember that percussionist Andrew Whettam played the beautiful Christmas carol 'In the Bleak Midwinter' as a marimba solo. He has also played marimba solos in NEO concerts on a number of previous occasions. After working for 12 years primarily as an orchestral musician Andrew has decided to concentrate on working as a soloist.

If you enjoyed his performance and would like to know about other performances Andrew is giving in your area please contact him at:-