



Compiled and edited by Tony Sanderson FRMS Chairman.

From the Chairman's Desk – Part 1

I thought I had better start by apologising for the lateness of this issue of the FRMS Newsletter. Whilst my recovery from CIDP continues, using leg and arm muscles that I was unable to use for some time leaves me feeling tired and I just found it too much to complete the Newsletter until now.

I hope you feel that the wait has been worthwhile. We have a fascinating interview with the composer Kim Porter who also sings with the Sixteen among other ensembles.

We feature another composer, the FRMS Treasurer, Paul Corfield Godfrey. He is the only composer whom the Tolkien Estate has allowed to set *The Lord of the Rings* to music. His *Musical Chapters From The Lord of the Rings* is available on CD and his settings of scenes from *The Hobbit* will be released at the Tolkien Oxonmoot this autumn.

Talking about composers, it is the 150th anniversary of Havergal Brian's birth this year. I describe a couple of events I attended, a recording session with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and a presentation of a handwritten score to the British Library.

We are delighted to feature three articles from member societies: York, Street and Glastonbury, and Putney. Feel free to tell us what is going on in your society.

One of our Vice Presidents, Allan Child, wasn't too enamoured with last year's BBC Proms and airs his views.

Another event that some of the Committee attend is the Torbay Musical Weekend. We give brief details of this year's event in November 2026.

Interview with Kim Porter

Q) It has been fascinating to read of the vocal groups you have sung or are singing with, such as The Sixteen, the BBC Singers, the Gabrieli Consort and ORA Singers.

What first made you aware that you had a special singing voice and how did you set about being trained to maximise your voice's potential?

I've been very lucky to get to work with so many really good vocal ensembles. Singing alongside other people is what I love and what I have always done. Consort singing happened at home as mum had a madrigal group which met from time to time, (yes, a rock and roll childhood!) After masses of choral and ensemble singing at Uni in Manchester I joined a few very good amateur choirs in London—the Thomas Tallis Society, the Holst Singers and the Corydon Singers—and gradually started getting work professionally. After a while I got a place as an alto with the BBC Singers.



Kim Porter Singing with The Sixteen

Q) It must have been very exciting to be invited to sing with a group as prestigious as The Sixteen. Do you have any performance with The Sixteen that stands out in your memory?

I absolutely love being a member of The Sixteen and am very proud to be part of the group. I think some of our Choral Pilgrimage concerts in York Minster have been the most memorable; it is an extraordinarily beautiful building and so much of the music The Sixteen perform works like a dream in that space. But amongst many others I also adore our Blackburn Cathedral concerts; the acoustics and the audience are gorgeous. Truro Cathedral is a very special place too; we love, love, *love* singing there. I guess MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* at The Sistine Chapel is up there too!

In fact, as I write, I'm on my way to Rome with the Sixteen so perform again at the Sistine Chapel. I'm excited to be singing another James MacMillan Commission called *Angels Unawares*. It was commissioned by the Genesis Foundation.

Q) You are listed as an alto soloist in recordings of composers as diverse as Monteverdi, Allegri, Poulenc, Rubbra, MacMillan and Rizza. Are you eclectic in your musical tastes or are you drawn to music from a particular period?

As a singer I love to work on pretty much everything, from rehearsing Gibbons and Dowland with a viol consort; Brahms and Bridge songs for mezzo, viola and piano; and singing some Elvis Costello, James Taylor and Billy Joel with my band in County Durham. In 2025, I attended the BBC SSO prom of Harrison Birtwistle's *Earth Dances*, which knocked me for six when I was a student!

Q) What are the highs and lows of the recording process from your point of view?

Recording is a really intense thing. It works so well when the conductor and producer know and trust each other. It can be very tough vocally depending on repertoire and sometimes pretty mentally exhausting. At the end of four days of super-focused concentration you certainly get close to your colleagues as you have to support each other so much, which is a lovely thing.

Q) It must have been a wonderful experience singing in the premiere of Sir James MacMillan's Fifth Symphony, *Le Grand Inconnu*, which has now been recorded?

James's music has been a massive part of my singing life. Being in the team for The Sixteen's first performance of his 5th Symphony, both in the choir and as a soloist at the Edinburgh Festival, was one of the most amazing and scary things I've ever been asked to do. The CD recording was from an 'as live' second gig at the Barbican Hall. So a few re-takes were possible, but the disc is basically a concert performance.



Kim Porter

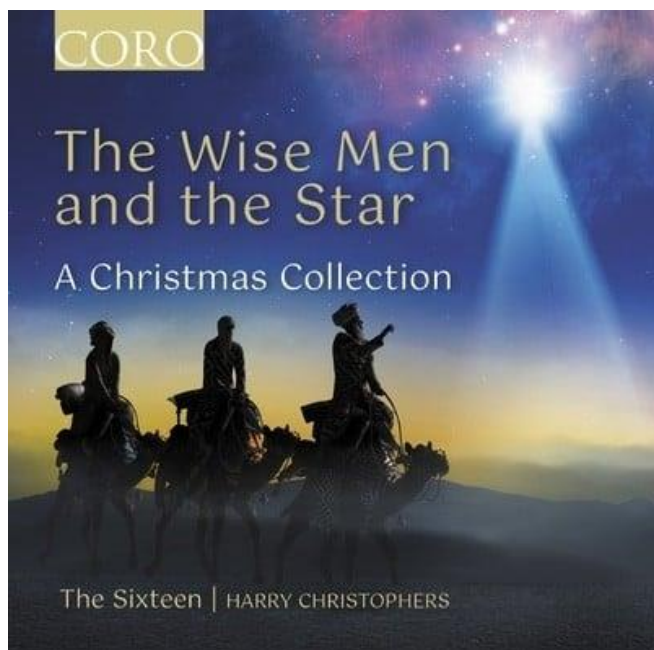
Q) When did you feel drawn to composing? Was there a creative urge that made you feel, "I must do this"?

When I was young, I often used to set poems of my grandfather for me to sing with him at the piano for family birthdays and anniversaries and inflict them upon everyone at parties... They used to say they loved them, but they would, wouldn't they!

I love responding to texts that people bring to me for commissions. I spent a year writing music for Manchester Uni's drama department. Creating a score for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was such a wonderful thing to be asked to do.

Q) On the ORA Singers' album *Sanctissima*, your anthem *Pulchra Es Et Decora* follows on from the recording of the plainsong *Pulchra Es Et Decora Filia Jerusalem*. Do you find particular resonance in plainchant?

Part of ORA Singers' mission is to commission works that are reflections of existing renaissance masterpieces. In my case, I was asked to write a piece using the *Pulchra Es* plainchant as my inspiration. It was a more interesting exercise than it seemed at first! I loved using the shapes and melodic colour of the chant. It was great too, to write for the singers in ORA whose voices I know so well.



The Wise Men and the Star – The Sixteen

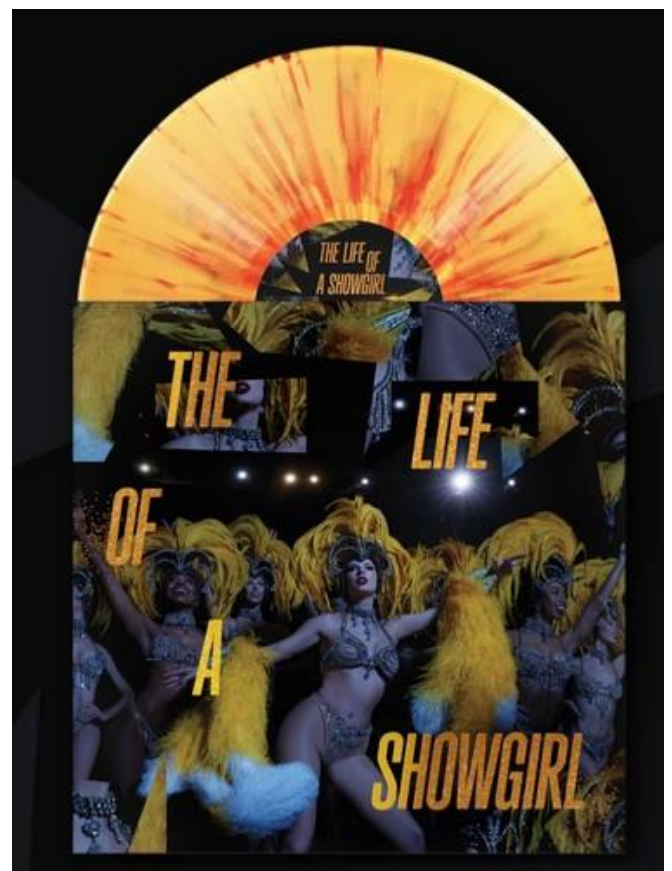
Q) Do you have any new compositions in the works?

I have been working on a commission from the BBC Singers. It's a setting of a poem by Georgia Douglas Johnson, the African-American poet and playwright involved in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s. It's called *I Want to Die While You Love Me* and is to be the second of three settings of Douglas Johnson's works, after *Your World* and before *Benediction*. *Benediction* was written for The Sixteen and was released last year on our disc *The Wise Men and the Star*. (Apologies for the shameless plug!)

From the Chairman's Desk – Part 2

The recorded music industry has gone through various cycles of development and change from old 78s through to the LP and then the audiocassettes and CDs through to downloads and online streaming. However, the desire to own a physical product remains.

This seemed to have reached its apogee with the release of Taylor Swift's new album *The Diary of a Showgirl*. On her store there are CD editions, with and without signed posters, a sweatshirt edition, a cassette edition, and a pink shimmer vinyl edition. HMV Online have their own exclusive edition with a poster:



The Life of a Showgirl – Golden Vinyl Edition

And last October *The Crowd is Your King* edition has also come out. My local cinema has shown multiple screenings of the film version. In 2014 Taylor went to war against the streaming companies, demanding that artists be paid, and she was successful:

[\(https://soundiiz.com/blog/taylor-swifts-war-against-music-streaming-and-its-consequences/\)](https://soundiiz.com/blog/taylor-swifts-war-against-music-streaming-and-its-consequences/).

So I thought it would be interesting to know what format members of FRMS societies use to play music. Perhaps we use more than one, maybe streaming plus

CDs. Do members still purchase physical products, or has too much space been taken up? Feel free to let us know if you would like to.

I find the way Apple Music presents its offerings allows the user to explore music they are unfamiliar with. However, I have enjoyed listening to box set collections recently, some new and some I have had for a while. A few years ago, Brilliant Classics put out a collection of French Piano Concertos. What I liked about the set was its combination of familiar works, the Ravel and Saint-Saëns, as well as composers I had not heard of before such as Cecile Chaminade and Jean Françaix. One concerto stood out to me and that was by Jules Massenet, famous for his operas. I found the concerto very enjoyable and the finale witty and great fun.



Brilliant Classics Edition of French Piano Concertos

The French concertos conveyed a lightness of spirit which contrasted with Brilliant's set of Russian Piano Concertos. The latter includes familiar ones by Rachmaninoff, Peter Tchaikovsky, Anton Rubinstein, Khachaturian, Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev as well as less well known ones by Tikhon Krennikov, Boris Tchaikovsky and Sergei Bortkiewicz. Tikhon Krennikov is best known as a persecutor of Shostakovich and his music has generally been disparaged. Personally, I found the first movement of his third piano concerto pretty dire, but it improved to becoming quite acceptable in the third movement. The Soviet audience gave it polite applause.

The composer Sergei Bortkiewicz had an incredible life that would make a good movie. He fled Russia following the Russian Revolution. He ended up in

Germany, but had to leave there when the Nazis came to power. He survived, however, in neighbouring Austria, but much of his work was destroyed in Allied bombing raids. He suffered financial hardship but was overjoyed when a concert of his orchestral work, including his first symphony, was played to mark his 75th birthday. Like Ravel, Prokofiev and Hindemith, he composed a piano concerto for the one-handed pianist Paul Wittgenstein. But unlike Prokofiev's and Hindemith's concertos, Wittgenstein actually played and enjoyed Bortkiewicz's stirring four movement Second Piano Concerto, which was written in a romantic style in 1923. The five movement *Third Piano Concerto* is equally dramatic.

To mark Arvo Pärt's 90th birthday ECM has reissued the *Tabula Rasa Special Edition*, which includes scores of his works *Fratres* for violin and piano, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, *Fratres* for 12 cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and *Tabula Rasa*. ECM has also released a new album of choral works by Arvo Pärt, entitled *And I heard a voice*, which includes his *Nunc dimittis*. Brilliant Classics have a 9 CD box set if you want to get an inexpensive overview of Arvo Pärt's music.



Yuja Wang's Album of Shostakovich Piano Concertos

Returning to the subject of Russian Piano Concertos, this year Yuja Wang has turned in excellent performances of the two Shostakovich concertos with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons coupled with some of Shostakovich's *Preludes and Fugues*. DG removed the *Preludes and Fugues* from the disc when the concertos were included in its box

set of Shostakovich symphonies, concertos, incidental music and the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The performances of the core symphonies are of excellent quality.

I attended a London Symphony Orchestra concert in March where Yuja Wang was the electrifying soloist in Rautavaara's *First Piano Concerto*. Many reviews praised the stunning quality of her pianism. As one of the encores she played brilliantly her own dazzling arrangement for piano of the second movement of Shostakovich's *Eighth String Quartet*.



Back to Nature

As a sign of the move away from CD, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla's new album of the music of the Lithuanian composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis is available on vinyl or streaming but not CD. The *Storm* movement in *Back to Nature* is pretty scary.

In October a couple of the committee went to the Tolkien Oxonmoot in October to hear excerpts from our colleague Paul Corfield Godfrey's settings from the *Lord of the Rings*. We really enjoyed listening to them. They were sung by members of Volante Opera, who are drawn from Welsh National Opera. Paul is the only composer whom the Tolkien Estate has allowed to do this. The recordings are available online:

<https://www.volanteopera.wales/category/all-products>

Whatever medium you choose for listening to music and whatever your taste – Happy Listening!

York RMS Reaches 70 Not Out!

Gavin Mist of the York RMS writes about their 70th anniversary.

In July York RMS celebrated its 70th anniversary. At a time when many societies have had to close down it's a pleasure to be able to report this milestone in the society's history - and that we're still going, just about!

The society's origins go back to the 26th July 1955 when a dozen people met in the city to discuss the formation of a society which was then known as York Gramophone Record Society. It was decided that the new society would affiliate with the Federation (then the NFGS).

Subscriptions were set at £1 1s (£1.05). According to the Bank of England inflation calculator, this equates to around £25 in today's money; our current subscription is £15!

Equipment was to be provided by some members: a Miss Snowden had a 'Dansette' and a Miss Kay and a Mr Hutchinson each had a Pye 'Black Box'.

The new society's first music meeting, or 'recital', as it was called, was on Thursday September 15th 1955 in St William's College, adjacent to York Minster. Membership grew to 33 in that first year.

I joined the society as a youth in 1984 when I moved to North Yorkshire from London, and the meetings were still held fortnightly on Thursday evenings in St William's College. Equipment at that time was a Garrard 301 turntable, Quad valve amplifiers and a pair of enormous and enormously heavy Wharfedale loudspeakers.

35 years ago, in 1990, it was decided to change the name of the society to York RMS as it was thought the word 'gramophone' was rather archaic. For the 35th anniversary we pushed the boat out and held a celebratory dinner (at which the chairman of the Federation was guest of honour). We invested in new equipment (Systemdek turntable, Quad amplifier system and Epos loudspeakers) and we had a special guest speaker for one of our meetings in the form of BBC Radio 3's Malcolm Ruthven.

Those were heady days!

Eventually, in the early 2000s, the cost of the room rental at St William's was just too much and we moved to meeting in the Central Methodist Church hall.

At the 35th anniversary dinner the previous chairman of the society, Tony Pook, commented that over the years membership had fluctuated. There was a time when it exceeded 50 members but there had also been, as he put it, "darker occasions when the committee of the day wondered if there was sufficient membership to be able to continue for more than another year."

This latter situation sadly came to the fore again in May 2013 when falling membership numbers led to a proposal to close the society. Fortunately we didn't close and this was when I took over the running of the group, albeit with a very small membership of around half a dozen. We shifted to meeting monthly and on Saturday afternoons.

Initially we held meetings at my home and membership numbers gradually increased again. Then, in 2014, a chance conversation led to us being able to hold meetings in Dower Court, a residential home run by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, which is where we still meet today. We have the use of a large room with comfortable chairs, an adjacent kitchen and a very nice acoustic for music listening. It's also rent-free (hence our low subscription rate). The arrangement is that residents of Dower Court can attend our meetings free of charge, and a few do.

Our 70th anniversary meeting was held on the actual anniversary, 26th July. It was a much less lavish celebration than our 35th but was, nonetheless, a very enjoyable occasion. There were around a dozen of us and we had a birthday cake and some wine. Our treasurer, David Archer, presented a very interesting programme of music featuring artists and musical events from the past 70 years.

It was nice to be able to reflect on past glories, the good times and the bad, and the many friends we've made over the years. As is so often the case with groups such as ours, the membership is of the 'senior age range'; after 41 years in the society I'm still almost the youngest member! We desperately would like to recruit some younger members and worry about our future. But we're looking forward to continued

enjoyment of music together for as long as circumstances will allow.

Paul Godfrey writes about his setting of Musical Chapters from the Lord of the Rings

The problems of recording a large-scale musical composition such as an opera, choral work or massive symphony, have of course been immediately apparent and a matter of concern for more than a century since the dawn of recorded music. Often nowadays those problems are addressed by the commercial issue of a live stage performance of the piece in question, sometimes but not invariably supplemented by patches from an additional session under studio conditions following the concert or concerts at which the principal material has been recorded.

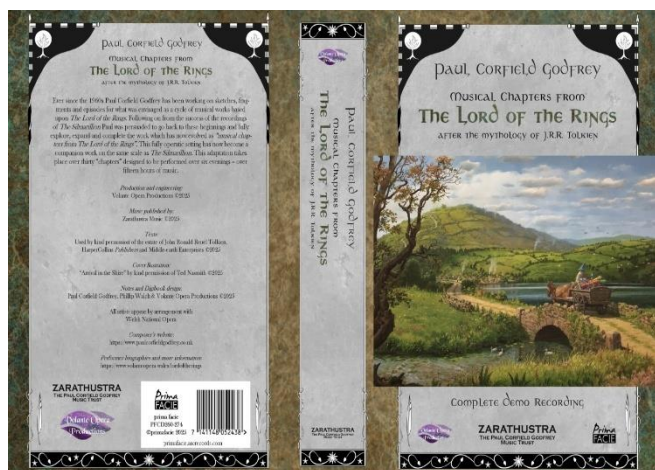


Paul Godfrey (3rd from left) with members of Volante Opera

This in itself creates problems, which are not unique to recordings; singers and performers who may be both suitable and willing to undertake roles may well not all be available at the same time, and promoters are faced with a choice between substituting other (and perhaps less satisfactory) soloists or allowing for sessions to be recorded piecemeal (sometimes in widely different locations) and assembled at a later date during the engineering process. This latter was certainly the option adopted by many record companies during the 'golden age' of opera recordings (say from 1950 to 1990) when, for example, Decca's famous Vienna recordings of the

individual operas of Wagner's *Ring* (now on 14 CDs) were often split over two series of sessions as much as a year apart. This of course requires in its own turn very precise organisation to ensure that roles are assigned to the same singers in both sessions, even when – as in the *Ring* recording – they might have to be allocated to different singers at different stages in the cycle.

In the case of my 'musical chapters from *The Lord of the Rings* after the mythology of J. R. R. Tolkien' which together with its appendices extends over 15 CDs, there was never any question but that the recording would have to be undertaken over a period of years. In fact the first track on the set, which is now due for release as a single volume in 5 September 2025, was the hymn to Elbereth sung by Louise Ratcliffe in a session from 2019; Louise was at that time working with Welsh National Opera (and had sang Aredhel in my 'epic scenes from *The Silmarillion*' the year before) but has now moved elsewhere. Similarly, other singers have been recorded as and when they were available in South Wales, and we have drawn upon artists from other quarters where necessary to fill the total of some eighty solo roles required by Tolkien's narrative. It would have been quite impossible to do this with artists of the same quality if we had needed them all to be in the studio at the same time.



Cover Art for Paul Godfrey's Setting of *Musical Chapters from the Lord of the Rings*

Assembling the individual tracks laid down by the singers into a unified dramatic whole then devolves heavily upon the producer, and Simon Crosby Buttler has performed miracles in obtaining a lively and vibrant interchange in dialogues between characters who may well have been singing in isolation in a

studio physically months, or even years, removed from each other. Singing the part of Frodo himself, he has undertaken multiple retakes to emphasise the relationship between characters as well as ensuring that the soloists are allowed to create their own interpretations of the motivations and emotions that the music calls upon them to express. This sort of interaction would of course be nonsensical in the realm of the theatre or the spoken word, but it is the sort of business that operatic artists (and all of the singers in the recording have extensive stage experience) relish and indeed in which they can excel.

My function as a composer is to ensure that the whole experience then coalesces into a whole, with vocal parts carefully balanced with the massive sounds of the sampled orchestra in a manner which neither gives an unrealistic prominence to the voices nor masks the clarity of Tolkien's dialogue (and throughout I have endeavoured wherever possible to adhere to the author's own exact words). We have included the complete sung text in the booklet with the set (and taken considerable pains to avoid any accidental errors, no easy matter in a work of this size!) but I would hope that at least ninety per cent of the dialogue should be immediately comprehensible, and again operatic singers have experience in ensuring that this happens. Some of these singers – from Philip Lloyd-Evans as Gandalf, to Rosie Hay as Gwaihir the Lord of the Eagles – have distinguished recording histories stretching back over several decades; others – Rhodri Prys Jones as Legolas, or James Schouten as Elrond and Faramir – are at the outset of what promise to be long and stellar careers. Many of the others are singers already familiar from their sterling work in the set of the 'epic scenes from *The Silmarillion*' completed back in 2023, and I am delighted to say that their earlier contributions have attracted universal approbation from the critics. Many of the singers in these recordings will also feature in the recording of *The Hobbit*, a four CD set which is scheduled for the summer of 2026.

The Street and Glastonbury Recorded Music Group

Adele Wills, Secretary of the FRMS, writes about her own RMS

It is always interesting to hear about Recorded Music Societies across the country – both their history and how they go about their business – so I was very pleased when our Chairman asked me to write about my own society.

The group was formed in 1953 with the aim of meeting with other music lovers to listen to recordings in a friendly and informal atmosphere. Initially meetings were held in Glastonbury in the founder's home, but soon other members offered to accommodate the group. Presentations were also shared between the membership, a model that, now more than seventy years on, has largely endured. Meetings were held once a month throughout the year and, being a rural district, the catchment area was initially quite wide stretching from Wells to



Bridgwater. As with most societies, the membership was drawn mainly from the senior stratum of the population and, until recently, numbers remained steady at the mid-twenties. Meeting in people's homes meant that expansion was never comfortably an option and everyone was happy with the informality of the evenings which kept costs low.

As with all our societies, an important aspect of the group is that it enables members to widen their musical horizons and to hear works that they otherwise might not make the effort to listen to. The choice of music covers a wide range and the aim is to cater for all tastes. As well as the well-known classical works that we all love, the range has widened significantly in recent years and programmes now include more modern, avant-garde composers, jazz, folk and even popular music!

In 1960, Brendan Sadler became secretary and gradually assumed all the planning and organisation of the group – which lasted almost continuously until his death in 2021. Brendan was an energetic advocate of the work of the FRMS and his passion for classical music was unbounded. This commitment led him to

serve on the FRMS national committee from 1998 to 2000. Brendan's enthusiasms were not limited to recorded music, and he also contributed significantly to the live music offering of his local community. He founded Strobe Opera in Street in 1969 and for twenty-five years conducted two staged productions a year, in May and November. The ambition and scope of these productions was enormous for a small rural theatre, ranging from Gilbert and Sullivan, and Johann Strauss to the grand operas like 'Carmen'.

In 1996, Brendan inaugurated a revival of the original Rutland Boughton Glastonbury Festival, producing, at the theatre in Street, the first live performances since 1953 of Boughton's cult opera, *The Immortal Hour*. The production attracted Boughton family members and distinguished aficionados from all over the world together with the broadsheet press. A similarly prestigious production took place in St John's Church in Glastonbury a few years later when Brendan conducted Boughton's opera *Bethlehem*. Hywel Jenkins, one of the group's current organisers, was also Leader of the Orchestra for both of these productions (and Hywel also gave his first presentation to the RMG in 1983).

In 2019 Somerset was honoured to be the county chosen for what turned out to be the FRMS's final live AGM before the Covid pandemic hit. The event itself was hosted by the Weston-Super-Mare Music Appreciation Society but the responsibility for arranging music after the evening dinner (at The Winter Gardens in Weston) lay with us – and we chose The Abbey Quartet, a string group based in Glastonbury and led by Hywel (the name inspired by Glastonbury Abbey). By coincidence, the guest speakers in the afternoon had spoken about Benjamin Britten and Hywel had chosen the beautiful slow movement from Britten's *Simple Symphony* as part of the evening's programme. The picture shows the players in action; Hywel is the lead violinist on the left.

Brendan's passing coincided with the height of Covid when the group couldn't meet, and the future looked uncertain for a time. Brendan's daughter, Kate Sadler, a professional singer, musician and teacher based in Melbourne, was a driving force in keeping the group going and two members took over the organisation with another member offering her home outside of



Glastonbury as a base. Kate even still gives two presentations a year for us – often using Zoom when she is not in the UK and involving a very early start for her! We have only had one presentation where Kate overslept in middle-of-the-night Melbourne, and we had to start without her!

So, what does the future hold? We have fourteen members and have recently moved our meeting time to afternoons.



Our recent membership. Kate Sadler is at the back on the right, standing. Yours truly front left, just sneaking into the shot! A few of these members, sadly, are no longer with us.

Almost all of our presentations are prepared and delivered by members with the occasional guest speaker. We have expanded into new territory recently by having our first joint presentation and a now annual Members' Choice session. We are also increasingly using Spotify rather than CDs and arguably this has made us more adventurous and inventive in our programming. Recent themes have included: *Rebels and Revolutionaries*, *Rollicking Royals*, *Rachmaninov at 150* and *The Richter Scale*. Starting with 'R' is not a requirement for our programmers! Our costs are very low; as long as we have somewhere to meet, we can keep going for a while yet! It is a lovely, friendly and informal group – long may the music continue!

Adele Wills, joint Organiser of Street and Glastonbury Recorded Music Group (with additional ideas from Hywel Jenkins)

The Proms – A Vice-President's View

The BBC Proms are a musical highlight for many but one of our Vice-Presidents, Allan Child, wasn't enamoured with aspects of the 2025 Season.

The Proms are over for another year – thank goodness! I never thought I would ever need to write those words, but by the time you read this you may perhaps agree with me. As I write the Proms have only been running for a couple of weeks but already I am fed up with the continual hype for them on Radio 3. It started, of course, way back in the spring when the programme was first announced; at every opportunity, appropriate or not, listeners have been bombarded with a continual stream of excess publicity. As almost every piece of music is played, the presenter has to tell us that that work, or its composer, or the performers will be featured in a Prom on such and such a date; and then there are what can only be called advertisements, the ones that begin 'BBC Radio 3, the home of ...' – ugh!

This is not to deny that the season's programme includes some extremely valuable and important music, featuring contemporary composers alongside those of earlier generations and rarely-heard works alongside the standard classics. It also provides opportunities to hear live performances from performers which we might otherwise only be able to hear on record.

Why, though, do Radio 3, and in particular its controller, think we need this torrent of unnecessary publicity? Do they not credit their target audience with any intelligence, or think listeners have an almost non-existent attention span? If they were to cut out all this superfluous nonsense there would be more time available either to include more music or to provide more substantial information about the music currently played. We can but hope.

Allan Child

75 Years of Putney Music - From Gramophones to Great Conversations

In 2025, Putney Music celebrates a remarkable 75 years of listening, learning, and lively discussion. The society's story mirrors that of the recorded music movement itself ... from the crackle of shellac discs to

the digital age ... and reminds us that, while technology transforms, the joy of sharing music endures.

Beginnings: The Age of the Gramophone



Recorded music societies began in the early 20th century, not as gatherings for musicians but for machine enthusiasts. Members debated the relative merits of gramophones, cylinders, and early electrical recordings ... the focus was more on the how than the what.

By 1936, enough of these groups existed to form the National Federation of Gramophone Societies, launched at Columbia Studios in Abbey Road with just 14 member societies. Later renamed the Federation of Recorded Music Societies (FRMS), it gradually shifted its focus from equipment to artistry ... from sound to substance.

Ralph Hill and the Birth of a Society

After the Second World War, recorded music societies thrived. Live concerts were scarce, LPs were precious, and the communal experience of listening together was invaluable.

In 1949 the critic and broadcaster Ralph Hill founded the Putney Gramophone Society. Its first meeting, on 23 January 1950, featured Hill himself speaking on *The Great Violinists*. Attendance quickly soared from 50 at the debut to nearly 200 by March, with an annual subscription of 15 shillings.

PROGRAMME 1950	
Monday Evenings at 7.30 p.m.	
January 23rd.	"Inaugural Meeting followed by 'The Great Violinists.' An illustrated talk on Ysaye, Kreisler, Heifetz, Menuhin, Sereva, etc. by our President, Ralph Hill.
February 6th.	"Bachmann and his Third Symphony." An illustrated talk by Scott Goddard (Music Critic of <i>News Chronicle</i>).
February 20th.	"The Meaning of Music." An illustrated talk on some of the four points in good listening by Julian Herbage (Conductor, composer, and member of the B.B.C.'s Sunday morning programme, <i>Music Magazine</i>).
March 6th.	"Record Review." Our President, Ralph Hill, plays and discusses some recent new recordings.
March 20th.	"Famous Conductors I have Met." An illustrated talk by C. B. Rice (Music Press Officer of the B.B.C.), describing the personalities and styles of various conductors, including Toscanini, Boultman, Beech, Barbirolli, Mahler, Bergovoy, etc.
April 3rd.	"Cycles in the Opera." A programme of operatic music presented by Stephen Williams (Dramatist and Opera critic of <i>Evening News</i> and <i>Daily Times</i> and author of <i>Cycles in the Opera</i>).
April 17th.	"Members' Night." A programme of music selected and presented by members of the Society.
May 1st.	"The Story of the Waltham." An illustrated talk on the development of the Waltham from its beginnings up to the present day by Dr. Moses Cameron (Conductor, critic of <i>Times</i> and <i>Tide</i> and author of <i>The Waltham</i>).
May 15th.	"Record Review." Mr. Vaughan Hudson plays and discusses some recent new recordings.
June 5th.	"Members' Night." A programme of music selected and presented by members of the Society.
September 11th.	"Introduction to Music." An illustrated talk by Kathleen Cooper (President of the Putney Music Club and well-known pianist and teacher).
October 9th.	"Introduction to the Orchestra." An illustrated talk by Alan Richardson (one of England's leading composers) on the development of the orchestra in the hands of the great masters.
October 23rd.	"Modern Music Through the Ages." All music was modern once. Our President, Ralph Hill, gives an illustrated talk on the changes of musical vocabulary over the last 500 years.
November 6th.	"Record Review." Mr. Vaughan Hudson plays and discusses some recent new recordings.
November 20th.	"Music of Denmark." An illustrated talk by Alex Robertson (well-known broadcaster, critic of <i>The Gramophone</i> , and author of <i>Denmark</i>).
December 4th.	"Members' Night." A programme of music selected and presented by members of the Society.

ALL GRAMOPHONE EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN GENEROUSLY SUPPLIED BY FRANK W. PHILLIPS LTD. 102 PUTNEY HIGH STREET, S.W.15.

Unfortunately, both Hill and the society's first secretary, W.J. Darbon, died within a year. But the spark had been lit.

A Period of Change and Perseverance

Following Hill's death, Sir John Barbirolli accepted the presidency (1951–54), and later Ralph's widow, Ida Hill, led the society for nearly half a century as President and Patron.

Meetings moved between several Putney venues ... Zeeta House, the Miramar Hotel, the Star and Garter, and the Coach and Eight ... before finding a permanent home in Dryburgh Hall (part of Putney Leisure Centre) in 1973, where meetings continue to this day.

The turning point came in 1958 when the charismatic Felix Aprahamian became President. A distinguished critic, concert organiser, and lifelong champion of French music, Aprahamian infused the society with new energy. Alongside Armen and Irma Tertsakian, who between them served on the committee for nearly 50 years, he helped transform the society's reputation.

The Sound of Progress

Technological change always kept members talking. In the early years, equipment was borrowed from local shops. By the late 1950s Putney owned its own mono system and by 1960 the great debate was stereo.

At the society's tenth anniversary a lively panel, including conductor Norman Del Mar, discussed stereo reproduction. Some found it revolutionary, others thought it 'unnatural'. By the mid-1960s stereo had triumphed.

In 1968, recognising that the word gramophone sounded quaintly old-fashioned, the society adopted its modern name, Putney Music. The same year's guest list glittered with stars ... Janet Baker, Neville Marriner, John Gardner, and Roger Norrington among them.

Golden Years: 1970s-1990s

Membership surged through the 1970s, peaking at around 250. The 21st anniversary was marked with a dinner and recital at the Hurlingham Club, and the society became known for its convivial Christmas parties and social gatherings.

The speaker list of this era reads like a Who's Who of 20th-century music: André Previn, Pierre Boulez, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Murray Perahia, and Sir Charles Groves all appeared at Dryburgh Hall.



Dame Janet Baker

A highlight came in January 1986, when Dame Janet Baker returned for her second visit, drawing an astonishing 270 attendees ... an all-time record. Her most recent appearance, in 2019, was equally warmly received.

A Broader Musical Conversation

Under Aprahamian's long presidency (1958–2001), Putney Music evolved into a platform for all aspects of musical life; not just performers, but conductors, producers, administrators, critics, and composers.

His successor David Cairns, the eminent Berlioz biographer, became President in 2002. The early 2000s saw new Vice-Presidents: Piers Lane, Piers

Burton-Page, and Ian Partridge, and an invigorated committee under Cathy Connolly and later Win Carnall.

Andrew Keener and Peter Avis brought imaginative programming and a new generation of speakers, while Vice-Presidents Martin Neary and Steven Isserlis lent distinction and support.

Adapting to Modern Times

The 2010s brought fresh challenges. As home streaming and online content grew, fewer people attended live talks. Membership declined from 160 in 2010 to around 60 today, reflecting a broader national trend. FRMS membership has fallen from 300 societies at its peak to about 63.

Yet Putney Music endures, thanks to devoted members and generous legacies from supporters' wills. These have helped maintain the society's independence, keeping subscriptions affordable and programmes varied.

Still Listening, Still Learning

In an age when anyone can summon Mahler, Mozart, or Messiaen at the click of a mouse, Putney Music's magic lies elsewhere. It is in the shared experience - the insight of a visiting musician, the laughter of a live audience, the question asked from the back row that sparks a moment of revelation.



75th Birthday Cake

For 75 years, Putney Music has embodied the FRMS spirit; music not just heard, but discussed, celebrated, and lived. As long as there are listeners who value that, Putney Music, like the music it cherishes, will continue to play on.

'While formats may change, the love of music...and the joy of sharing it never does.'

Havergal Brian's 150th Birthday

2026 marks the 15th anniversary of Havergal Brian's birth. He is best remembered for his mighty *Gothic* Symphony, which is the symphony with the largest forces that has ever been performed. Martyn Brabbins conducted the work at the BBC Proms in 2011. A new release of a BBC Recording from 1980 of the Gothic with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ole Schmidt has been released this year. It received very positive reviews.

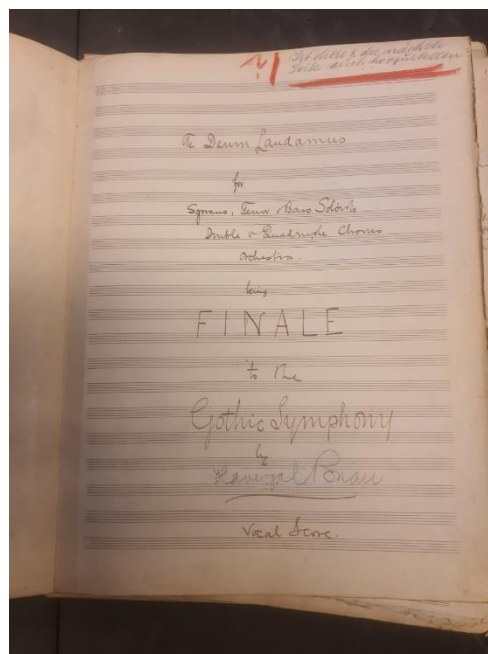


Cover of the Ole Schmidt release of the *Gothic* Symphony

The vocal score of part 2 of the symphony lived in California. It was transferred to Bristol University. In December 2025, it was united with Part 1 of the score and donated to the British Library by Brian's granddaughter, Alex Ware. It was a lovely occasion.



Alex Ware with Chris Scobie (Lead Curator of the British Library)



Havergal Brian's Handwritten Vocal Score of Part 2 of the *Gothic* Symphony

The notoriety of the *Gothic* Symphony can obscure the fact that Havergal Brian composed 31 other symphonies. Coming to the fore this year is some of his vocal music such as his *Choral Songs*:



Volume 1 Toccata Classics Complete Choral Songs of Havergal Brian.

The BBC and the Havergal Brian Society jointly commissioned a recording of two settings of Havergal Brian psalm settings, those of Psalm 23 entitled *The Lord is my Shepherd* and Psalm 137, *By the Waters of Babylon*.

Fires at Chappell & Co during the Blitz and in 1964 caused extensive damage. Many English composers' scores were lost including the full score of the setting of Psalm 137 by Havergal Brian. The work had been

composed in 1905 and reorchestrated by the composer in 1909 for a larger orchestra.

The work has now been reorchestrated by Rodney Newton. Martyn Brabbins has recorded the work with the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales.

The setting of Psalm 137's famous lines 'By the waters of Babylon' were sung both at the beginning and the end of the setting. The composer Rodney Newton orchestrated the vocal score in a very idiomatic style of early Brian. Havergal Brian conveyed the pain of the Israelites exiled from their homeland most eloquently.

The most striking moment for me was towards the end of the setting where menacing staccato orchestral chords gave a doom-laden sense of finality, the mirror image of the positive and uplifting orchestral chords that close out Sibelius's fifth symphony. After these chords are played the choir return to sing the heart-rending 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept'.

Henry Waddington was the bass soloist in this work.



Martyn Brabbins with the leader of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Lesley Hatfield

An ideal contrast is Brian's setting of Psalm 23 as it is about a sense of home and security. There is no sense of want in this Psalm. So, it was a great surprise to

hear militaristic themes in the introduction which was at odds with the famous hymn set to the tune *Crimond*. Verse 4 of the psalm talks about walking through the shadow of the valley of death. The verse in the hymn about a table being prepared in the midst of the psalmists' enemies is often omitted when the hymn is sung. Verse 4 is in Brian's orchestration, which was written in 1944-45. Brian's score accentuates that the peace and sense of security the Psalmist speaks of was hard-won—particularly apt at the time of the reorchestration. Whether Brian was motivated to reorchestrate the score in 1944-45 by the impending end of the war or just felt like doing it is not known. The original orchestral score was lost by Brian in 1920.

As in the setting of Psalm 137, the setting of 23 ends with a repeat of its opening line. Concluding Psalm 23 by singing 'the Lord is my shepherd' emphasises that peace has been found and the security of home reestablished. John Finedon was the tenor soloist in this recording.



Martyn Brabbins in Action

Another release this year will be Volume 2 of Toccata Classics series of Havergal Brian's Choral Songs. The series has included delightful settings of songs for children's choirs.

2026 has seen the inclusion of Brian's overture 'The Tinker's Wedding Comedy Overture on Chandos' Volume 3 of their series 'Overtures from the British Isles'. The BBC Philharmonic is conducted by Rumon Gamba in this album. Brian's overture is very lively and stands up well with the other overtures on the album.

HB's symphonies have a reputation for being difficult, but his third and eleventh have delightfully jaunty scherzos, the eleventh has a beautiful adagio and both are worth a listen, also his fifth symphony *Wine of Summer* for baritone and orchestra. Many of the others have fun moments such as the opening of the seventh.

The Torbay Musical Weekend 2026

The details of this weekend, which runs from 13th to 15th November 2026, can be found on their website <https://www.torbaymusicalweekend.co.uk/>

Events will include Richard Hughes and Susanne Stanzeleit of Meridian Records describing the process of recording, editing and producing a CD; Stephen Stirling talking about and playing the French Horn; also joining the Primrose Trio to play Brahms' Piano Trio; and John Mills and Cobie Smit playing the guitar.

Committee members of the FRMS attend these weekends and find them very enjoyable.

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Articles for Newsletters

The next newsletter should be published in September 2026. Please send any society news or articles by 1st August to the Chairman at the email address shown above. Any contributions would be welcome, such as an article about your society.

Current and past newsletters can be downloaded at:

<http://www.thefrms.co.uk>
