



AGS News

9 Spring 2008



Welcome to the latest edition of AGS News, the forum of The Armstrong Gibbs Society, which covers events, people and music.

The Turning Year

2008 marks the 50th anniversary of Gibbs' delightful composition *The Turning Year*. This cantata for mixed chorus and piano, or piano with strings is: 'Dedicated to the Secondary Schools of the City of Carlisle on the occasion of their Octocentenary Celebrations 1958'. The words are by Benedict Ellis who first met Gibbs in the early 1950s. They became good friends, working together on several sacred and secular works. Taking the four seasons as a basis for an extended work is a tried and tested formula and the precedent set by composers such as Vivaldi and Haydn is taken forward in *The Turning Year*.

In *High Summer* we hear a review of the sights, sounds and scents that tempt our senses during the summer season. The music is tuneful, straightforward and relaxed, reflecting 'a season needing neither time nor space.'

The second movement, *In Autumn* is in four sections. The first and last, discussing the more sedate pleasures of autumn, frame two vigorous sections in compound time describing what may happen 'when the wind is wild'.

The title of the third movement, *Fell Winter*, probably draws on Gibbs' experiences while living in Windermere during the Second World War. This movement is the shortest and lightest in the texture of the whole work. Moving at a slow pace as befits winter, each of the four voice parts enter individually to describe aspects of winter that might be experienced on the Lakeland fells. The movement concludes with a reference to Christmas in 'God rest you merry, Gentlemen'.

Spring Song is an exuberant paean to the spring. Once again we reflect on the many pleasures of that season that 'we would not change for gold'. In this movement there are four sections in the form of a rondo. The first episode is set in the major key a minor third below the tonic. Here the sopranos and altos make contributions individually and then in duet. This is balanced by the second episode when the tenors and basses enter with a similar form but in the major key a third above the tonic. The music of the first middle and last sections is the same, the latter bringing the work to a triumphal conclusion with 'Who sees our English Spring revealed shall give his thanks for gold'.

Throughout the work the highly descriptive nature of the poetry is well matched by the texture and harmony of the music, resulting in a splendid cantata which is a joy to sing and a pleasure to listen to.

It is likely that the first performance in Essex was given by the Danbury Choral Society on 27th October 1958 with the composer conducting and Phyllis Wright accompanying.

Performances in 2008 are to be given on 19th April by the Maldon Choral Society and on 13th September in Danbury Parish Church by the Lingwood Consort. The latter performance will use the strings and piano accompaniment.

Christopher Kingsley



Memory Lane

The composer Arthur Butterworth writes:

Yes! I most certainly met AG in 1941. I was a very callow youth of 17, who worked as an office boy in a Manchester legal and estate office. I was besotted with the brass band and played the cornet, although already by this time I had aspirations to be an orchestral player. On being asked by AG what instrument I played, I timidly replied:...."the cornet, sir"..

.." The *what !..?..* the CORNET !!....ugh!...you should play the trumpet !.... The implied distaste for such a plebeian, cloth-cap, northern working-class brass band instrument filled him with horror. Although I had submitted some compositions for him to peruse, he did NOT give me a scholarship and I went home much deflated. Luckily, some time later I was called up into the army (1942-1947) and after almost five years returned to get a government scholarship to the RCM (now the RNCM). However things turned out all right in the end. My time in Germany just after the war was of immense influence: I learned all about "real" music: Bach, Telemann, Buxtehude, Brahms, Schumann, Hindemith and other seminal influences - especially church music and the

organ, and made a wide circle of friends among German musicians. My own First Symphony had its premiere under Barbirolli in 1957, and the Second under Adrian Boult in 1965. Next month - May - I am to return to the RSN to conduct the Fourth Symphony and Viola Concerto for Dutton Records. This will be the first time I have conducted the SNO since April 1954 - fifty-four years ago!. In two weeks' time 15th April, I am to lecture to the BMS at the New Cavendish Club. I have heard quite a lot of AG's music, more especially the "Westmoreland Symphony" by the Westmoreland Orchestra at Kendal some few years ago. I think it is fine, characteristic ENGLISH music, which has always been - along with Sibelius - the most influential on my own. I had some study with Vaughan Williams, and I am especially drawn to Bax, and know all about the cricketing days with AG, W.H.Squire, Clifford Bax, *et al* I always rather regretted not having met AG again after the war, because I do like his music, even though he had, in a sense "rejected" me in 1941.

Arthur Butterworth



From the Records

In a letter to his daughter and son-in-law in May 1958, Gibbs describes the first performance in Carlisle of the cantata The Turning Year:

Hence to the Covered Market a vast cold hall with 1000 children and 2000 in the audience. 120 teenagers sang my turning Year v well indeed. & it was received with enormous enthusiasm - last movement repeated & I had to make a speech. The performance had one serious fault - due to the inexperience or/and nervousness of the young Director of Music who conducted. Everything was rushed in tempo. He actually cut over 5 minutes off the correct time for the work! I was a bit peeved in No 3 Winter It is marked to go very slow & to ensure this I put the unusual time signature 8/8 instead of 4 to ensure it should be beaten in quavers But he took it at a cheerful 4! Still there's no doubt it is a good work & comes off brilliantly.



From the Treasurer:

With this edition of the Newsletter you will have received two forms: a bank Standing Order Mandate, and a Gift Aid Declaration. Let me explain why.

1 *The collection of membership subscriptions is made very simple (for me, and I think for you too) by making a standing order in favour of the AGS. Many of you have already done this, for which I am very*

grateful. But for those of you who have not, perhaps you would spare the idea a thought.

2 *As many of you will be well aware, a donation to a charity can attract tax relief, whether the donation is made by a company or by an individual. "Donation" includes "membership subscription" when, as with the AGS, the only benefit received in exchange for the subscription is the provision of information, such as by this Newsletter, about the charity's activities. There are two means by which this tax relief is obtained: for a company, the donation is deducted from the company's profits before it pays corporation tax; for an individual, the charity has to re-claim the income tax paid by the donor/member.*

In the case of an individual, a claim for repayment can be made only if the individual has signed a Gift Aid Declaration, which is why I very much hope that you will be willing to do so. Please read the form carefully before signing it.

For every £10 subscription paid, the AGS will recover - at present rates - £2.80; and it should be possible to recover this retrospectively, back to 2004. And all without any effort from you - apart from signing the Declaration.

So please sign one or both forms, as appropriate, and bring to the AGM, or send by post to: Douglas Potter, 1 Hay Green, Danbury, Essex, CM3 4NU. If you have any queries try 01245 225585 or douglas.potter@btopenworld.com.

Many thanks. Douglas Potter. Treasurer.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Gibbs Festival

Exciting news! The first ever Armstrong Gibbs Music Festival will take place in Danbury over the weekend of the 12th -14th September 2008. Events will include a concert by the London Piano Trio, a Master class by Michael Pilkington, a solo piano recital by Lara Griffin and a performance of The Turning Year by the Lingwood Consort. The weekend will conclude with Choral Evensong in Danbury Parish Church, followed by a Festival supper.

Odysseus

Gibbs' choral symphony, with the BBC Concert Orchestra and the London Oriana Choir, conducted by David Drummond, is now available on the Dutton Epoch label CDOX7201, from usual outlets or Dutton online.

The London Piano Trio CD of the Gibbs piano trios

Altamira CD - AS 1230105

If you have not yet got a copy, you can order one on the website: www.londonpianotrio.com

Or contact Robert Atchison directly on: 01245 324100

See Next Issue for CAG Soundbites, From the Records, Memory Lane, and News and Views. Please send contributions to the editor:

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