

## **SINE NOMINE SINGERS**

### **- how it all began**

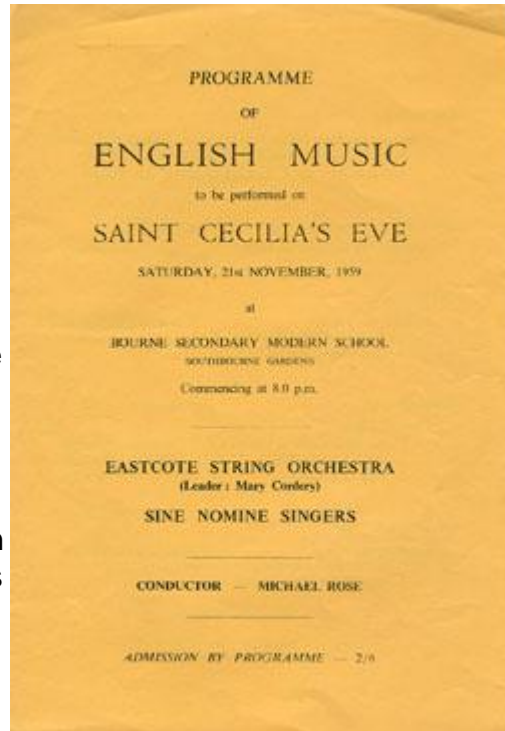
*By David Collier*

Fresh from his studies at the Royal Academy of Music and having completed his obligatory "National Service" in the band of the Royal Scots Guards, Michael Rose began with enthusiasm to gather together a group of musicians with a panache which was, for those lucky enough to be caught up in it, both breath-taking and inspiring. We were attempting to fill the musical needs of the New Elizabethan Age which were beginning to be felt following the dark days of the second world war. Life was going to be better; great achievements were ahead and this needed to be expressed artistically. For many years we had become used to large forces, orchestras and choirs, giving massive performances of large-scale works which is fine and is still valid today. But the small intimate chamber group had been neglected and there was a definite move to redress the balance. There are many groups like ours today but in 1958, when we began, this was certainly not the case.

We were fortunate to find in the Eastcote Community Association a body willing to add a musical element to their activities. In return, they would be our guarantee against financial worries which were never very far away in the early stages. Thus we became the choral section of the E.C.A. and the inaugural meeting was held in February 1958.

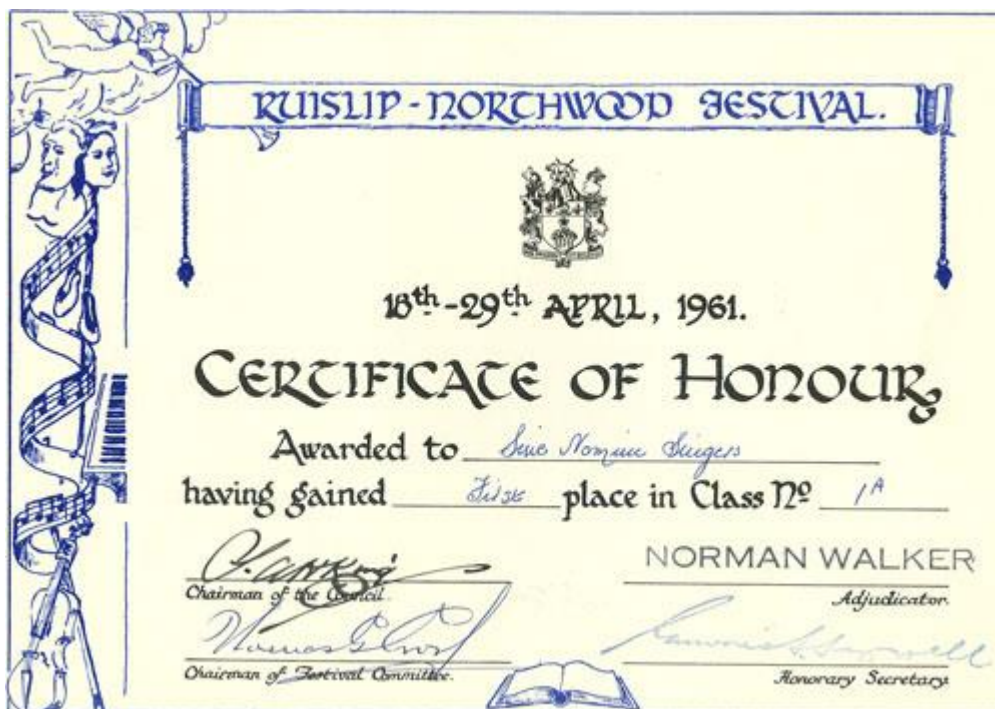
To begin with, we met on alternate Mondays at Newnham School in Eastcote to sing madrigals. The initial subscription was ten shillings (50p) but this soon had to be increased because of the rising cost of music and putting on concerts, in spite of a great deal of help from such bodies as Ruislip-Northwood Arts Council as well as the E.C.A. But the essential enthusiasm never failed and we managed to overcome all these difficulties.

For some while we could not decide on a name (one famous group had already called themselves the Elizabethan Singers!) but after much discussion we settled on Sine Nomine Singers as being the most appropriate. Therefore our first concert, given at Eastcote Community Centre, Southbourne Gardens, Eastcote on 23rd November 1958, was programmed as being given by “String Orchestra and Singers” (the orchestra also being part of the E.C.A.). Our part in the programme consisted of ten madrigals, eight of them being English, one Italian and one Flemish. The same programme was presented at All Saints Church, Hillingdon, one week later. By the time we gave a concert in Ickenham on 15th March 1959, we were billed as “The Sine Nomine Singers (choral group of the Eastcote Community Association)”. Again, we shared the programme “with strings” and our contribution was madrigals – only more this time!



We took part in a programme of English Music to be performed on Saint Cecilia's Eve on 21st November 1959 at Bourne Secondary Modern School in Eastcote. The same strings were now called “Eastcote String Orchestra” and they joined us for one of the items: the verse anthem by Purcell “O sing Unto the Lord”. This time we included music by Britten and (for light relief) “Three Nonsense Songs” (words by Edward Lear) set to music by Matyas Seiber. We were now actively enlarging our repertoire.

We were fortunate in having a strong tenor section when we began but after a while we found ourselves in the same position we are familiar with today and had to advertise for more tenors as well as other voices from time to time, but it was strongly felt that we did not want to grow into too large a choir and that numbers should ideally stay between 20 and 30.



From the beginning, we felt that joining with other groups, instrumental and choral, was advantageous in that it provided variety in the programmes and helped to defray the costs. We found we were giving concerts over a wide area. For example, in 1963 we began an association with another similar group based almost as far to the south-east of London as we are to the north-west, so it was convenient to meet in Central London to give concerts jointly. This group was the Gloriana Choir and their conductor was Alfred Safhill. We gave two concerts at the bombed-out and recently restored city church of St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, one with the Celestino Quartet and the other with the Pepys Wind Ensemble. Later, the two choirs gave two concerts at the church of All Hallows-by-the-Tower – a carol concert including Britten's "Ceremony of Carols" with Hilary Wilson (harp) and, at Passiontide, a grand performance of Bach's "St Matthew Passion". For this we were joined by the Gayton Singers, directed by Clarice Brooksbank and a ripieno choir provided by Swakeleys School directed by Olive Lane, the wife of one of our members, Norman Lane, who was to become our conductor when Michael Rose had to leave us to take up the post of conductor of the BBC Training Orchestra in Bristol in 1967.

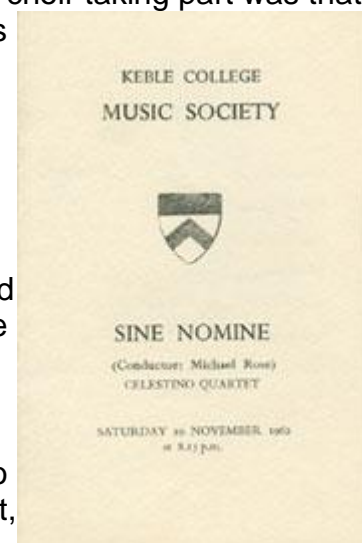


These large-scale works were the exception but were something we enjoyed performing from time to time. Two other such occasions should be mentioned as big, memorable events in our first few years. The first was being invited to provide the gallery choir at the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster for a performance of Vaughan Williams' "Sea Symphony". Then we joined with several other London choirs to form the chorus for the Berlioz Requiem at a promenade concert in the Royal Albert Hall. We performed this work on two occasions in different seasons: firstly with John Pritchard and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and secondly with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. Both were memorable occasions. This was before the Royal Albert Hall was changed from the rather grey and drab hall of the war years into the colourful, plush and vibrant place it is now. The great improvement in the acoustics, when the inverted mushrooms were installed in the dome, was yet to be made and there were

problems, especially for the four wind bands which Berlioz calls for in the "Tuba Mirum" section. These were positioned as far from each other as possible and the time lag for the two positioned furthest away from the orchestra was a conductor's headache. Amazingly, it all came together very well in the event. In those days, when the score called for one part to sing on its own softly (as in this work), great courage was needed as there was no "audible" feed-back and it was impossible to hear anything from those close by. One just sang, hoping that others were singing too! The conductor smiled and all was well.

Michael Rose, teaching at the John Lyon School in Harrow, arranged for us to be involved in events for the school's Music Society. In November 1962 we took part in a choral and orchestral concert in Harrow School Speech Room in which our contribution was Britten's "Hymn to Saint Cecilia". Another choir taking part was that of Harrow Grammar School for Girls, whose music mistress was Ann Phillips. In October 1963 Michael and Ann were married at a church in Harrow where Ann's father was the minister. Sine Nomine had the honour of singing the anthem by William Walton "Set me as a seal upon thine heart" during the wedding service.

One of our members was president of Keble College Oxford Music Society and we were invited to give a recital, with the Celestino Quartet, to the Society in the college hall. In order to make our appearance decorously on the platform we were led through kitchens and subterranean passages and finally up a dark, narrow staircase before emerging into the splendour of the hall. It was necessary to take care lest,



by dislodging any of the large, gleaming cooking pans hanging on the walls, we announce our imminent arrival inappropriately!



In November 1963 we sang at Holy Trinity, Brompton Road, in a programme of recently composed works but with, for contrast, Monteverdi's Mass for four voices. To complete a busy year, we joined with other choirs in a concert at the Royal Festival Hall in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Workers Education Association, London District. The programme included five works being given their first performances. Sine Nomine's particular responsibility was to perform a humorous work set to music by Thea Musgrave (who was present to take a bow). It called forth the non-committal remark from one newspaper reviewer that "John Cook's Grey Mare (was) quite sharply etched". We were now attempting quite avant-garde material and finding it a real challenge.

A rather different experience for the choir was being invited to make a recording for a subsequent broadcast at the BBC studios in Maida Vale. We recorded enough to make up a 15-minute programme and then crowded into the control room with the producer to hear it played back. We felt that Sine Nomine was on its way.

At about this time (mid-1960s) Michael Rose and a few friends started up the "October Festival". This was planned as a series of subscription concerts held each October over a four or five week period. We approached interested people to become sponsors by making a donation for which they received free entry to all concerts. This seemed to work well and we soon had a long list of sponsors whose names were printed in the attractive leaflets advertising the Festival each year. The concerts all took place in All Saints Church, Hillingdon and Michael was able to obtain many excellent young musicians, some of whom subsequently became famous. Sine Nomine Singers became the "resident" choir and took part in many of the concerts. We had a good following and the concerts were well attended.



In December 1966 the London Borough of Hillingdon arranged a Civic Concert to be held in the Church of the Immaculate Heart in Hayes. The choir was composed of members from the Sine Nomine Singers, the Ickenham Cantata Group, the Gloriana Choir and the Gayton Singers. The orchestra was the Hillingdon Sinfonia and four top-rate soloists were engaged. We gave a performance of Handel's "Messiah" to the Mayor and dignitaries of the borough and a full house.

Apart from these special occasions with generally large audiences, our own concerts continued to be given but we found it difficult to attract audiences large enough to cover our expenses. A publicity campaign might have helped but was deemed too

costly. We felt we must keep giving concerts to keep up our standards, so we tried for more local venues – churches, schools etc.

We now possessed an extensive music library and needed to find somewhere to store it. Some music had been lost and was costly to replace. This led to a problem in 1967. The cost of hiring cupboard space at the school meant that of our receipts for the year, about three-quarters was being spent on music. Clearly, we would need to be more careful.



presents

**"ST. NICHOLAS"**  
by Benjamin Britten

Sine Nomine Singers  
St. John's Presbyterian Choir  
Oaklands Choir  
St. Nicholas & St. Mary's Schools Choir  
with

**WILFRED BROWN** (tenor)

Conductor: **MICHAEL ROSE**

Emmanuel Church, Northwood  
Saturday, 4th November  
at 8.00 p.m.

Tickets: 5/-  
Obtainable from RNAC Box Offices

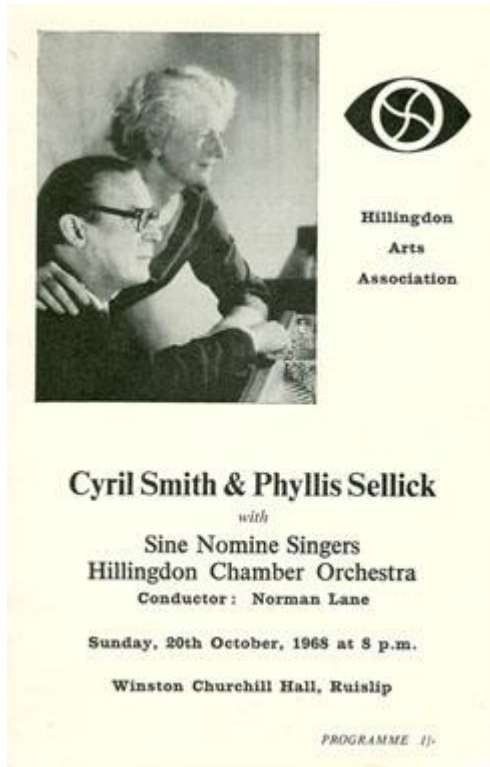
As already mentioned, Michael Rose had to leave us in 1967 and moved to Bristol. His last concert with us was in November at Emmanuel Church, Northwood and was under the auspices of the Ruislip-Northwood Arts Council. We joined with other local choirs and the Hillingdon Sinfonia, Michael Rose conducting. The second half consisted of Britten's "Saint Nicolas" which received praise from the tenor soloist, Wilfred Brown. At a party arranged by the choir, a small presentation was made to Michael and Ann to show our appreciation for all that Michael had been able to give to the choir and to wish him well in his new post.

In the remaining years of the decade and with Norman Lane now our conductor, we gave an average of just over 8 concerts per year, ranging from short recitals to full-scale concerts, with other groups also taking part. The following gives some idea of the different venues and diverse circumstances in which we found ourselves singing at this

time: two concerts in Ruislip Methodist church with strings; a recital with organ and a concert with organ and the Hillingdon chamber orchestra at St Paul's church, Ruislip Manor; a recital with the novelty of harmonica solos by Martin Barber at the "STM Club" given in the parish hall of St Thomas More church, Eastcote, where some of our members attended; a long recital of early and more recent anthems, mostly unaccompanied but some with organ accompaniment by E.G. Runnicles, at St Mary's church, Hayes; two relaxed recitals at St Mary's church in the delightful village of Denham in Buckinghamshire. We were entertained socially by villagers in their houses afterwards. For the West Middlesex Group of Gramophone Societies, we gave a recital with harmonic and violin solos, at Greenford Hall, Greenford, Middx. Alan Pike was the violin soloist and also the leader of the Misbourne Orchestra who joined with us to give "An Evening of English Music" for the Drayton Recorded Music Society at Yiewsley Central Hall (since demolished). The Glaxo Sports & Social Club Music Group invited us to give a concert with instrumentalists at their clubhouse in Greenford and the Uxbridge & District Musical & Dramatic Society presented a concert with us and members of the Society in St John's Hall, Hillingdon. This was to be "The Spirit of Christmas" and included some audience participation at the end of the programme.



Chalfont St Peter Community Centre provided the venue for a short but sweet recital and the Board of Trade offices in Eastcote for two longer ones with instrumentalists. These were given for the Music Appreciation Society and were well received. We gave one of the concerts of the 1969 Pinner Music Festival in which we were joined by Cyril Heels, violin. The programme included the Five Negro Spirituals from Tippett's "Child of our Time".



And finally in this list of varied concerts up to 1970, perhaps the most unexpected of all. We sang the Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes opus 52 to the piano accompaniment of Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick. To lose the use of a hand was a tragic thing for Cyril Smith. But thanks to people like Norman Lane, who arranged music for three hands, the duettists were able to continue giving performances. The Hillingdon Arts Association concert at Winston Churchill Hall, Ruislip, was billed as "Cyril Smith & Phyllis Sellick with Sine Nomine Singers & Hillingdon Chamber Orchestra. Conductor: Norman Lane". There was just room on stage for the two pianos and the Singers but we enjoyed the experience of singing with two such talented pianists – and to a full house too. The local paper reported that "Applause was so enthusiastic that they [the pianists] gave a performance of the Arrival of the Queen of Sheba, arranged for them by Norman Lane".

By the beginning of the Seventies, the idea of the smaller chamber choir had taken hold and we found ourselves joined by many other choirs both nationally and locally. At the same time a wave of new music was being composed which was ideally suited to such groups. This was refreshingly lyrical music with a direct and immediate appeal to people of all ages.

In spite of the turbulent times we were now experiencing, we were determined to carry on with our music making. But we had to face many problems such as increasing expenditure and falling income and it was well into the next decade before the situation improved.

If the first years were of excitement, innovation and moving into pastures new, then the next period as we approached our 25th anniversary was one of consolidation in difficult circumstances. Life was becoming harder. The decade 1970-1979 was described as "The winters of discontent". There was much industrial unrest and unemployment soared. During this time everybody had to live with the energy crisis which resulted in a three-day working week, threatened petrol rationing and TV broadcasting closing down at 10.30 each evening. The choir minutes record that in one year we were glad we had postponed a winter concert to the following year "because of the power strikes"!

William Byrd must have felt the desolation of his times when his church was persecuted but he continued to write such marvellous music which still inspires us today. To mark the 350th anniversary of his death, the choir sang evensong at St Mary's church, Hayes, using mainly music which he wrote for the Anglican church. The anthem chosen for this service, "Sing joyfully unto God our strength", admirably sums up his optimistic view of life through adversity.

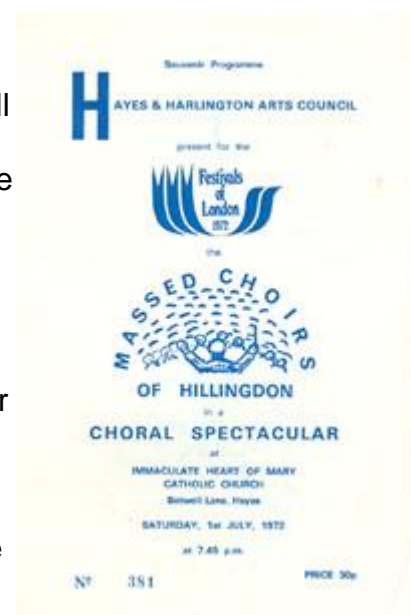


We needed such faith in the seventies and it was not until the early eighties that we began to feel a marked improvement. Until these times were behind us, we needed to conserve our means and make the best of our resources, if possible by pooling them with other bodies. In short, we acted together with other organisations to cheer each other up – as tends to happen in times of crisis.

A good example of this was by joining with Glaxo sports & Social Club at Greenford on three annual occasions to provide some comfort for a workforce under threat. Two of these performances were of Handel's "Messiah" with small orchestra and harpsichord and the other was of Christmas music and carols.

On another occasion we had the pleasure of being one of ten choirs taking part in a "Choral Spectacular" organised by Hayes & Harlington Arts Council at Botwell Lane R.C. church in Hayes. The ten choirs covered a range of different choral singing and were representative of a wide age range and we all benefited from singing both together and separately with such a disparate group, all dedicated to music-making. A similar concert was held two years later in 1974 under the auspices of the Hillingdon Arts Association. By now the economic situation was biting ever harder and we were grateful for the solace and inspiration our musical activities provided.

Because of his many other commitments, Norman Lane was not always available to conduct the choir and we were fortunate to have, from amongst our membership and elsewhere, able musicians who could take practices and deputise for Norman at concerts. Notable among these were Michael Williams, Arthur Head, David Lock





and Anthony Smith, who all had much to offer the choir.

We should not forget the dedicated work of others, which often goes unnoticed, who carry out the necessary mundane duties without which no choir could function properly. We were particularly grateful to Mr John Williams who, though not a member or ever wanting to sing (happily leaving this to his wife Dorothy and son Michael, both staunch members of the choir), nevertheless agreed to become our chairman for many years and gave an enormous amount of support behind the scenes with "Front of house" arrangements etc. He helped to carry us through a difficult period. One other name must be noted – that of Mrs Gina Moore, secretary for our first eleven years, who gave great support for almost a decade and a half. The announcement of her death was a great sadness for the choir.

In 1976 a Constitution was drawn up and approved and we became affiliated to the National Federation of Music Societies.

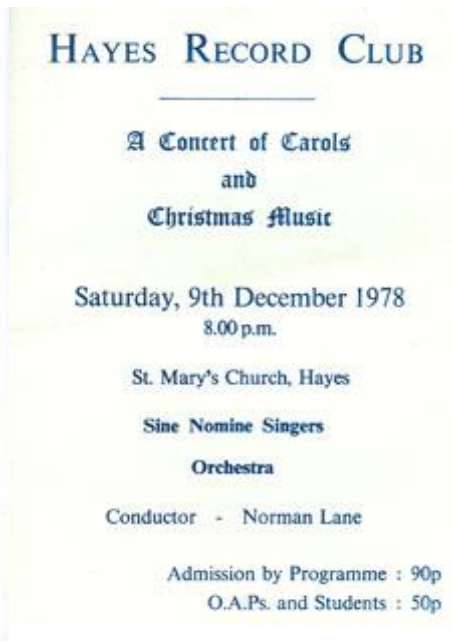
Our music library was by now quite large and was being well looked after by Michael Burns, our librarian of many years. A decision was taken to purchase 26 copies of "The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems", although some anthems in the collection were already in our library. Michael Burns was keen for us to use his house for a summer social event. Others also offered their homes in this way in succeeding years and the summer party with refreshments and singing became an annual event.

We were still experiencing financial problems as late as 1980 but in 1982 we were able to report much improvement. Membership increased to 28 and it was recorded in the minutes that we only had a vacancy for one tenor! We had weathered the storm and felt able to face the future with confidence.

The following are highlights from our concert programme: We teamed up with Musica Antiqua and the Tudor Dancers in the Great Barn in Ruislip for an interesting evening of early music and dance from the 16th and early 17th centuries. The Hillingdon branch of the United Nations Association invited our participation in a "Words and Music" celebration of United Nations Day at local churches.

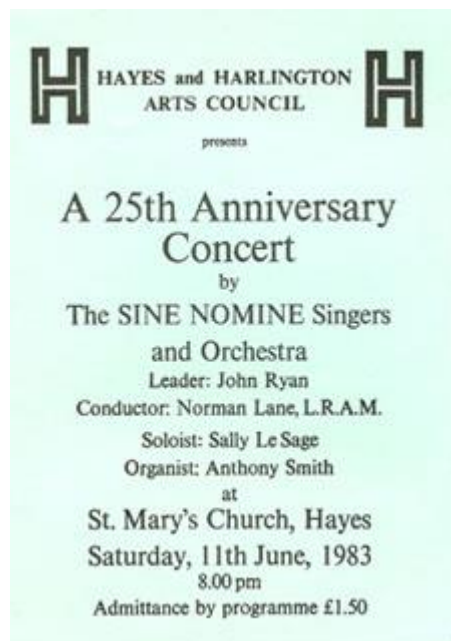
An interestingly different venture for us was to take part in "An Evening of Gilbert & Sullivan" with John Lawrenson and the Sullivan Singers and Orchestra at Vyners School, Ickenham. This was arranged by the Friends of Vyners.

A more serious event was a performance of Bach's "St Matthew Passion" in conjunction with the Uxbridge Choral Society, Haberdashers' Aske's girls' middle school choir, five leading soloists and orchestra in Bishopshalt School hall.



The Hayes Record Club and West Middlesex group of gramophone societies continued to include live music in their programmes and we were always ready to provide choral and instrumental recitals.

At a special "Combined Choirs of Hillingdon" event at the Alfred Beck Centre, the Queen's Silver Jubilee was marked with appropriate choral and orchestral music with fanfares by the state trumpeters of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall.



With the Ickenham string orchestra we gave a concert at S.S. Peter & Paul parish hall, Harlington, to mark the 200th anniversary of the death of William Boyce.

In 1983 we reached our own Silver Jubilee. With the assistance of the Hayes & Harlington Arts Council we presented a 25th anniversary concert by "the Sine Nomine Singers and orchestra with organist Anthony Smith" at St Mary's Church, Hayes. Sally LeSage was the soprano soloist in the main work – Haydn's Nelson Mass. Later in the year we gave a further anniversary concert at All Saints Church, Hillingdon, with the title "Silver and Gold". This was in recognition that the church was celebrating its 50th anniversary, having been consecrated in 1933, and we were pleased to have had such a long and happy association with the church.

**SINE NOMINE SINGERS**  
- the story continues

*By Jane Craxton, Marian Garnett, Carol Moss, Barbara Plummer, Nicola Wilson Smith*

In December 1984 Norman Lane retired as our permanent conductor. (Sadly he died in March 1986.) Roger Moon, an ex-pupil of Norman's, and a singer in the choir, took over temporarily until Andrew Green - a familiar voice to listeners of Radio 3 - was appointed in May 1985. The parlous financial state of the choir resulted in moving rehearsals from Newnham School, Eastcote to All Saints Church, Hillingdon, where we have been ever since.



December 1986 saw the choir travelling to Welwyn Garden City for a Christmas concert at St John's Church, Digswell, Andrew's home ground. This included choruses from Handel's "Messiah" and a mass by Charpentier, with carols and lullabies. Andrew's wife, Elizabeth Lane was the soloist for this and other concerts.



In April 1987 we sang Faure's "Requiem", the "Five Mystical Songs" by Vaughan Williams and Victoria's "Tenebrae Responses" in All Saints Church; this was our final concert with Andrew, as he resigned in May. Once again Roger Moon stepped in, and conducted the summer concert. This was held at St. Mary's Church, Perivale, the first and only time this

venue has been used. Several prospective conductors were auditioned in July, but Roger was invited to take up the post permanently. He proposed a special concert for the 30th Anniversary of the choir, which took place in April 1988, covering a wide range of styles and receiving favourable comment. The programme included Palestrina's mass "Aeterna Christi Munera", madrigals by Weelkes and Morley, songs by Elgar and Bach, a song by Michael Rose, the choir's first conductor, and one by Roger himself, in which the baritone solo was sung by Andrew Green. The Elthorne Chamber Orchestra, an ensemble formed specially for the occasion which included staff and former pupils of the Hillingdon Music Service, accompanied the choir.



Unaccompanied madrigals, glees and partsongs with the theme of spring and summer, including Britten's "Five Flower Songs", and ending with "The Long Day Closes" and "Sweet and Low", were performed at a concert at St. Martin's, West Drayton, in July 1990. In between were poetry readings. This was due to be held outside, but threatening rain drove everyone indoors.

The Christmas concert in 1990 took the theme of a Victorian Christmas, with music written during the life of Queen Victoria, from Schubert to Schönberg. It finished with

some songs from “The Gondoliers”, first produced in 1889. The choir dressed in Victorian costumes, and the large and enthusiastic audience was double the usual size.



At this time the ladies' usual concert dress was all black. Subsequently it was changed to single-coloured shirts with black skirts, which continued for a number of years until it reverted to all black, with a touch of red. The red was changed to gold for the 50th Anniversary year.

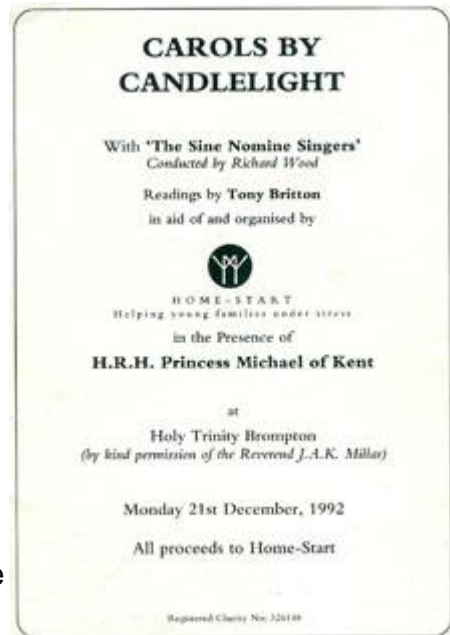


We joined with Hillingdon Choral Society as the semi-chorus for a performance of Elgar's “Dream of Gerontius” in March 1992 at the Beck Theatre. Also in March we gave a programme entitled “Transatlantic Evening”, with music by Britten, Barber, Copland, Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein and Gershwin, which featured Roger Moon's highly accomplished jazz piano playing.

In May 1992, a very successful Lute Song Master Class was given by Emma Kirkby (soprano) and Anthony Rooley (lute), who were friends of two choir members. It was hugely enjoyed by everybody, and they kindly agreed to become patrons of the choir.

It was decided to apply for charitable status for the choir, to help conserve limited funds. An Extraordinary General Meeting was held in early December 1992 in order to change the constitution so that it would be acceptable to the Charity Commissioners; the application was subsequently granted. Over many years the choir has been supported by and affiliated to the Hillingdon Arts Association, and the National Federation of Music Societies, now called Making Music.

At the request of one of our basses, Richard Wood, the choir was invited to take part in a Christmas Concert in Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, to support the charity 'Homestart'. This was conducted by Richard himself and Roger Moon, and afterwards the choir was invited to the reception where they were presented to Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.



In the spring of 1993 the Hayes and Harlington Arts Council promoted a series of concerts. In May the choir performed Howells' "Requiem", a group of Byrd madrigals, and lute songs by Dowland and Morley, at the William Byrd School in Harlington, with Jessica Gordon as the lutenist. This formed part of the four hundredth centenary celebrations of the birth of William Byrd who lived in Harlington for a number of years.

The July concert saw us back in All Saints Church performing an animal themed concert with music by Copland, Britten and Seiber. That summer the choir made its first visit to the Craxton Studios in Hampstead, thanks to Jane Craxton, one of our

sopranos. Since then, many such visits have been made, sometimes in the summer and also around Christmas, all of which have been very successful with excellent food, music and entertainment! The choir is very grateful to Jane for arranging these events at what is a delightful and interesting venue.



In November that year at our concert in All Saints Church, the power failed, and we were left in darkness. As a result, the programme had to be re-arranged, and the unaccompanied items originally scheduled for the second half had to be performed in the small parish hall with the audience seated there as well! Luckily the power was restored and the remainder of the programme - Dvorak's "Mass in D" – was able to take place in the church.

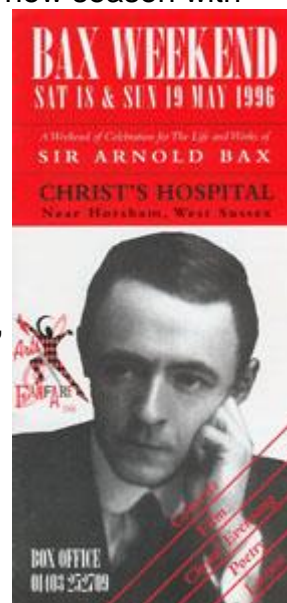
In July 1994 we were joined for the first time by the Hillingdon Girl Singers - a choir run by the Hillingdon Music Service - with their conductor, Jo McNally. The programme included Vaughan Williams' "Three Shakespeare Songs" and excerpts from Purcell's "The Fairy Queen", with soloists from Sine Nomine.

Recruitment is always a problem in a small choir, trying to keep the right balance of voices with a regular turnover of singers. In autumn 1994 the dwindling number of tenors and basses reached crisis point, when the last tenor left. Roger was not willing to carry on with only three parts, but agreed to conduct a Gala Concert in November with an orchestra, soloists and women's voices only. This was his last concert.



The post of conductor was advertised in Classical Music, and after auditioning eight applicants over three evenings in January 1995, it was offered to John Thwaites, Head of Piano at Christ's Hospital School, Horsham. Fortunately some new singers had been recruited, notably tenors, so the choir was able to look forward to the new season with more confidence. Our first concert with John was a celebration of English Choral Music from Purcell to Tippett, in recognition of the Purcell Tercentenary and Sir Michael Tippett's 90th birthday. In December we were again joined by the Hillingdon Girl Singers and a harpist, who performed a selection from Britten's "Ceremony of Carols".

In May 1996 John Thwaites arranged for us to take part in a weekend event to celebrate the life and works of Sir Arnold Bax, held at Christ's Hospital School. We provided the choir for a candlelit evensong in the chapel.



By the summer, we knew that John would be moving on, and he conducted his final concert with us in December. The Hillingdon Young Singers joined us, with the Hillingdon Brass - both from the Music Service. The programme included Part 1 of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" and Vaughan Williams' "Fantasia on Christmas Carols".

John Thackray, another of the conductors who had auditioned the previous year, and who had been a close-run second for the post, was asked if he would be willing to guest-conduct the choir for a term, concluding with a concert. After only a few weeks, we all decided that we would like him to be our permanent conductor, and were very happy when he accepted. At John's suggestion, the November concert in All Saints Church was an Italian Evening, a very popular event with pieces by a number of Italian composers. The first half was church music, and the second half, music of romance and recreation, including excerpts from Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Gondoliers". During the interval there were Italian refreshments for all provided by the choir.



In December, a Carol Concert was also held in All Saints, with The Hillingdon Young Singers, to raise money for our local hospice, Michael Sobell House.



1998 was our 40th Anniversary year. The spring concert in March – “A Treasury of English Church Music”, held in St. Martin’s Church, Ruislip – saw the first performance by the Sine Nomine Recorder Consort, composed of three members of the choir and two friends. They played four short pieces during this programme, and made occasional appearances for a few years after that, when the programme could include an instrumental interlude.

We held the first of our summer supper concerts in St. Martin’s Church Hall: “The Butterfly’s Ball and the Grasshopper’s Feast”, with the theme of animals. Choir members provided a buffet supper for the audience during the interval. This proved to be very popular, and has continued ever since, although now we find it preferable to sing first and eat when all the music is finished.



That summer we had a memorable day out for choir members and their families - the first of regular social occasions hosted by one of our tenors, Peter Calvert-Smith, at his family’s Sussex home, where we were able to swim, play tennis and croquet, picnic and barbeque, and even sing a little!



The 40th Anniversary Concert was a performance in November of a shortened version (the original version lasts over three hours!) of "King Arthur" by Purcell, held in St. Lawrence Church, Eastcote. Although we wore concert dress, appropriate hats and scarves were donned at suitable moments, and we employed some props. Sadly, it was at this time that John Thackray became ill. Helen Vickery and Jo McNally stepped in to help with rehearsals, and Michael Emery conducted us for the concert. Helen then also stood in for John at our carol concert with Coteford School in December.



We had hoped that John would be able to return to conduct us for the spring term, but this was not possible, so Jo McNally agreed to take us on for a concert in which we joined forces with her adult beginners' choir, Voices Anon, who were based in Maidenhead. We performed items as individual choirs, and joined together for Schubert's "Mass in G". This concert, given at All Saints, Hillingdon in March, was performed again in Maidenhead in April.

John managed to return to conduct us at the beginning of the summer term but sadly died only a few weeks later. Helen Vickery took up the baton for our summer supper concert "Seasons of the Year", which was given in his memory. On September 26th 1999 there was a moving memorial concert for John, arranged by his widow Sue and given in the Natural History Museum, where he had been the Archivist. The performers were taken from the various choirs and orchestras with whom John had been associated, including members of Sine Nomine. We performed Brahms' "Requiem" with the singers ranged on the grand staircase and the orchestra at the foot, in the main hall of the museum, with the audience sitting underneath the dinosaur skeleton! Our soloists were Michael George and Julie Kennard, who were personal friends of John & Sue Thackray.



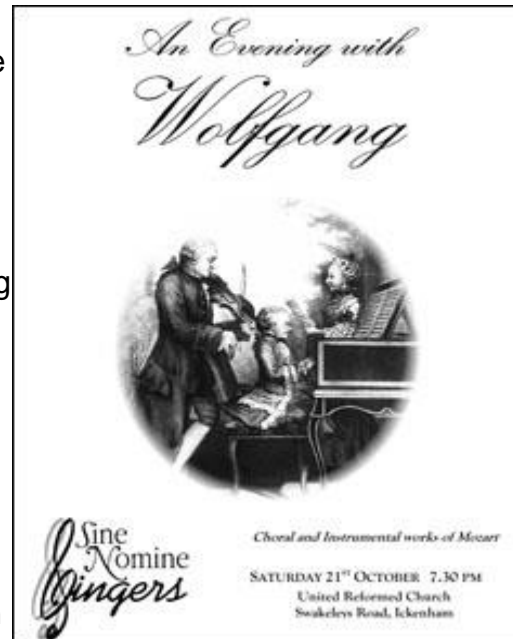
Once again, we had to hold auditions for a new conductor, and were fortunate to find the right person to succeed John in Rebecca Miller, who joined us in autumn 1999. Born in California, she had studied conducting and piano in Chicago and Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, and was teaching at the Royal Academy of Music Junior Department.

In Rebecca's first season, our spring concert took place on April 1st, and was aptly named "Familiar Favourites, Funny Fugues and Foolish Frolics". We were attempting to widen our range of venues, and had booked Holy Trinity Church, Northwood. With 'silliness' as the theme for this concert, it rapidly descended into farce as we attempted, and later narrowly succeeded, in transferring the concert from the church to the church hall owing to the church's acoustics, which Rebecca considered unsatisfactory for our choir. Problems arose when we discovered that we were not licensed to perform in the hall, and it being a Saturday we had great

difficulty contacting someone who could grant the licence. Eventually things were sorted out and the concert took place in the church hall.

That summer of 2000, the choir gave a concert entitled “Around the World in 80 Minutes” which was notable for the fact that we sang in eight different languages, including Hebrew. At this time, the “Friends of Sine Nomine Singers” scheme was set up, as a way of encouraging audience members to support the choir, and rewarding their support with a small discount on ticket prices and advance information about concerts and other social events.

In October 2000 we performed “An Evening with Wolfgang” – a concert of works by Mozart, at the United Reformed Church in Ickenham. There was an excellent turnout, although it was suggested that this might have been due to the fact that the new vicar was being welcomed in the hall behind and was his name perhaps Wolfgang? It was a really good evening including excellent instrumental offerings that thrilled audience and choir alike, in particular a violin sonata played by Kahae Han - a winner of the BBC Radio 2 Young Musician of the Year Award, and a piano sonata played by Danny Driver - Rebecca’s husband. At the time Danny was a Junior Fellow at the Royal College of Music and would go on to take first prize in the Radio 2 Young Musician of the Year competition in 2001. He also generously performed, accompanied the choir and sang with us when needed throughout Rebecca’s time as conductor.



Our main concert of the season was an epic performance of Bach’s “B Minor Mass” in St Martin’s Church, Ruislip, in April 2001 – a huge undertaking for the choir, in which our numbers were supplemented by hunting down willing recruits from other local choirs. The Amici Singers in Harrow provided the largest contingent, and we couldn’t have done it without them. The work was performed with members of Rebecca’s orchestra: The New Professionals, and some excellent young soloists. We obtained sponsorship from several local businesses that helped to offset the considerable costs of an event of that size and complexity, and thanks to massive efforts by members of the choir to publicise the concert, and the popularity of the work, we had an enormous audience.

We needed to move with the times, and early in 2001 the partner of one of our members offered to set up and host a web site for the

choir, which was gratefully accepted. In November that year, to commemorate the victims of 9/11, we performed Duruflé's "Requiem" at the United Reformed Church in Ickenham, where the mezzo-soprano solo was sung by our conductor, Rebecca, also an accomplished singer.

The most memorable concert of 2002 was a performance of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" in December, at St. Lawrence Church, Eastcote, sung in German, with soloists from the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music, and The New Professionals. The tenor originally booked let us down, but his last-minute replacement, Norbert Meyn, sang the 'narrator' rôle superbly in his native language. This brought in a good audience, and the atmosphere in the concert was further enhanced by a wonderful selection of Christmas cakes and biscuits, not to mention the heady fumes of about 10 gallons of mulled wine!

As ever, we were trying to think of new ways to boost the choir's funds, so in early January 2003 we were booked for a day at Legoland in Windsor to sing carols in the bandstand, while our younger family members enjoyed the attractions and the snow.



The season ended in June with the summer supper concert: "A Mouthful of Madrigals", again with Danny Driver on the piano and a talented young violinist, Clara Biss. This was our last concert with Rebecca, who had resigned, due happily to an increasing number of professional conducting engagements. She subsequently became the American Conducting Fellow of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, and Resident Conductor of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

After auditioning several candidates, we were very pleased to welcome Helen Vickery as our new conductor, having worked with her on a number of occasions in the past. Although continuing to rehearse at All Saints Church in the small parish hall, we had not given a concert in the church for some time, despite it having the best acoustics in the district, because we found it difficult to attract a local audience. The newly inducted vicar was keen for us to perform there, so we decided to sing Handel's ever popular "Messiah". The performance four weeks before Christmas 2003 was very exciting, lit partly by candlelight, and supported with excellent soloists and an orchestra brought together by Helen. The church was full, and the audience enjoyed it very much, helped along by mince pies and mulled wine. That year we also joined with the All Saints Church choir for their service of Nine Lessons and Carols, and have done so on several occasions since.



The dates for the season's concerts had been planned well in advance when Helen took over as conductor. We did, however, feel obliged to move the date of our spring 2004 concert so as not to clash with her wedding! Concerts the following season included Bach's "Magnificat" and Rutter's "Requiem". In the latter we were fortunate to have our soprano Elaine Bennington's talented family performing with us: Sarah (flute), Katie (oboe) and Jack (percussion).

For the summer supper concert in June 2005 we gave a rousing and semi-costumed finale of a medley from "Oklahoma", accompanied by the brilliant young pianist Jessica Chan, who had earlier performed two solo pieces. This went down so well with audience and choir, that the format has been repeated ever since, and Jessica has returned every year to great acclaim. The Oklahoma medley was then repeated as part of a "Voices for Hospices" concert given at the Beck Theatre in Hayes in October.

Early in December we gave a concert with The Hillingdon Girl Singers again, who provided the gallery choir and the 'boy' soloists for "St. Nicolas", a cantata by Benjamin Britten. This was very well received by the audience, a large part of which was made up of families of the girls, which as usual boosted the numbers.

In April 2006 we performed Elgar's "The Music Makers" with mezzo soprano Deborah Davison, a member of the English National Opera chorus and occasional soloist with ENO.

In a quest to try performing in new venues, or ones that we hadn't sung in for many years, the concert in November was held in Pinner Parish Church. 2006 was the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth, and our contribution to the worldwide celebrations was a

Mozart evening with the "Requiem" as the main work. We had an excellent small

orchestra and soloists. This proved to be a good place to perform: it was a sympathetic acoustic to sing and play in, and we attracted some local support as well as our loyal regular audience.

One of Helen's many contacts is the young composer Bernard Hughes, and the following March we performed a programme including his recent work "Missa Sancti Michaelis", with an organ reduction of the orchestral score. Bernard Hughes was in the audience, and was very complimentary about our rendition.



Our longest-singing member, bass David Collier, who was one of the founding members of the choir in 1958, was nominated by the choir for his outstanding contribution to local music-making, and was presented with an award by Hillingdon Arts Association at the Civic Centre in June 2007.

At the end of the summer, the choir was invited by the villagers of Sigy-en-Bray in France to stay for a weekend, to take part in the village festival. This was arranged by one of our altos, Sue Thackray, who has a cottage there. We sang a large selection of French, English and Latin items to a packed and very appreciative audience in the village church, who responded with magnificent hospitality.



In December 2007, our new (and current) website went online, reflecting the improvements in software for web design since the site was set up.

*Sine Nomine Singers 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

## THE CREATION

Joseph Haydn



**All Saints Church**

Long Lane Hillingdon UB10 9BT

**Sat 15 November 2008 7:00pm**

*Sine  
Nomine  
Singers*

Tickets £10 (accompanied children free)  
from choir members or at the door  
enquiries: 020 8933 7908

[www.sinenomine.org.uk](http://www.sinenomine.org.uk)



2008 was the Golden Jubilee year of Sine Nomine Singers, and we marked the occasion with a 50th Anniversary Concert in October, once again in All Saints Church as the first concert had been held there and it coincided with the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the church. Many people with a past association with the choir were invited, and some former members joined us for a memorable performance of Haydn's "Creation", with excellent soloists and orchestra. The occasion was marked by an exhibition in the parish hall recalling 50 years of the choir with many interesting programmes and photographs from the archives plus the customary refreshments and a wonderful cake. We look forward to our next 25 years.