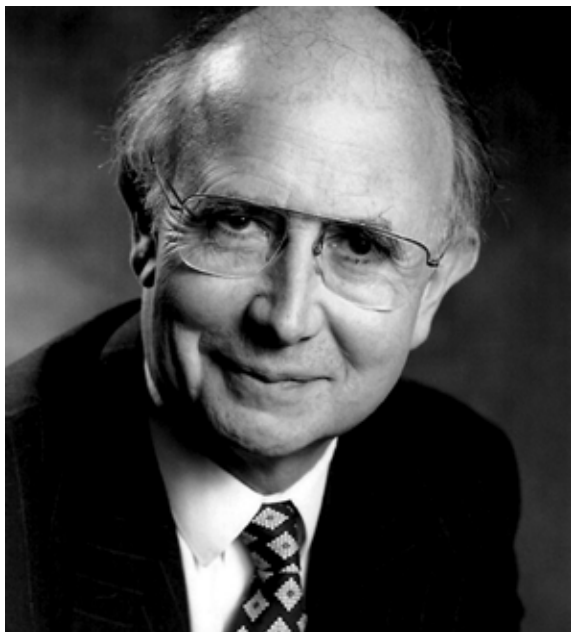

Martin Neary: former TCS conductor



My first thought, when asked to contribute an article about my period as conductor of the TMS, was one of gratitude to the Society for giving a rather inexperienced candidate the chance to 'cut his teeth'. I wish I could remember more about my audition in September 1966, other than that we worked on some choruses from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which I had never previously conducted. And it was a delightful surprise to receive a telephone call from the indefatigable choir secretary, Barbara Muir, inviting me to become your conductor.

The first challenge was to choose a programme for my opening concert in December. Rather than play safe, I opted for a varied menu,

ranging from a Bach Cantata to Benjamin Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, which for most of the choir was a new experience. Everyone responded very positively, despite some initial rhythmic problems, the irregular bar lengths causing quite a lot of consternation to both choir and conductor. One of the tenors still relied on tonic sol fa, which rather flummoxed me! But our performance at All Hallows Church was well received, thanks not least to our organ accompanist, (now Sir) Richard Armstrong, who went on to have an illustrious career as an opera conductor, and some excellent soloists, one of whom was a twelve-year-old chorister of mine from St Margaret's Westminster, Gunther Wassertheurer.

Most of our concerts were given at All Hallows Church, though we did hold one at St Mary's Twickenham including the Kodály *Missa Brevis*, which with its stratospherically high soprano part was somewhat stressful! Perhaps the most adventurous choice during my time, however, was Handel's rarely heard oratorio, *Joshua*, for which we had a first-class team of soloists. Thomas Morell's libretto had some curious lines, such as 'And grateful marbles raise to thee', when it was hard to keep a straight face, but it was good to break new ground.

My final concert with TMS was in March 1972, when we performed the *St Matthew Passion* with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. This was also the first time I had conducted Bach's masterpiece. By then Penny (who sang regularly with TMS and let me know when I needed to be more patient or beat more clearly!) and I had moved to Winchester, and sadly therefore I had to step down as your conductor. But what a way to finish!

Since then, it has been inspiring to see the way the Society has continued to thrive, and I would like to end this short appreciation by congratulating Christopher Herrick, not just on his staying power, but also for all he has done to develop the choir; the outstanding performance of Herbert Howells's *Hymnus Paradisi* in 2018 was in a different league from what we were achieving fifty years ago!

Laus Deo!