



WELCOME

This term sees a number of new things for the CCS—the innovative Albert Hall Festival, a new conductor for our first three rehearsals (welcome, Sarah), and a new newsletter—CCS Chatterbox!

*This edition includes the fascinating introduction which Francis Merson, editor of Limelight magazine, gave at our performance of Rodion Shchedrin's *The Sealed Angel*. Don Aitkin, Roland Peelman, Virginia Taylor and of course, Tobias Cole, also share their thoughts on the performance. I hope these help to bring back memories of this wonderful experience.*

Looking ahead, Rachael Thoms and Tobias give us some thoughts about the Albert Hall Festival, which should inspire us for the coming rehearsal period.

Finally, some current and future developments for you to keep an ear out for...

Yours in music

*Kelly Corner & Rachael Eddowes
CCS Publicity Team*

CANBERRA INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

Reflections from your intrepid reporters, Kelly & Rachael

After an intense (and slightly scary) rehearsal period, many CCS members performed in three CIMF concerts at the Albert Hall. Singing the Hallelujah Chorus on opening night was a very different experience – the orchestra up on stage, choristers lined up around the walls surrounding the audience, and Roland conducting “in 3D”, arms waving in all directions. Very different from my (Kelly's) first Hallelujah in the Llewellyn Hall, but the audience loved it and gave us a standing ovation. What an exhilarating four minutes!

With the previous night's rehearsal still fresh in our minds, many of us approached the concert of *The Sealed Angel* with some trepidation. Would we hit and hold our pitch? Would everyone watch the conductor at the key moments? Would we do justice to the music, to our soloists, and to Roland? The comments below tell what others thought; for myself (Kelly), I was on a complete high at the end of the performance, with only

two regrets – that I hadn't brought my daughter to listen, and that we weren't going to be singing it again! And who could forget the real star of the night, Gabriel Cole?



If it was all mellifluous lines from Virginia's flute and Clive's eloquent narration on Wednesday night, by Friday the choir had gathered forces again for some serious intensity in the Pärt Credo. The free-form improvisations by instrumentalists and choir alike brought back (for Rachael) memories of a high school music camp with Matthew Hindson. No doubt Andrew Mogrelia was a little terrified to work with us for the first time in the dress rehearsal, but after some incognito warm-ups with Roland in the gallery, the choir was another hit with the CIMF crowd.

So now, it's over to the views of others, starting with the introduction to *The Sealed Angel* given on the night by Frances Merson.

I'm very excited to present a concert of a truly extraordinary modern cantata by composer Rodion Shchedrin, *The Sealed Angel*.

This cantata is a hugely important work not only in Russian music, but also in the Russian history full stop. Its premiere in 1988 in Moscow was one of the key events marking the incredible rebirth of the Russian orthodox church. Let's remember that back in 1988 Russia was still, officially, an atheistic country. Today, 70% of its people follow the orthodox faith. Now I'm no religious person by any means, but what I welcome in this renaissance of religion in Russia is a return of a tradition of church music – that includes such masterpieces as the Rachmaninov Vespers. This

tradition had died out under Communism, and it wasn't until *The Sealed Angel* which we're hearing tonight, that it was resurrected.

So how did the composer Rodion Shchedrin

manage to have a profoundly religious work performed in a profoundly anti-religious country? Well, he created a subterfuge.

Instead of calling his work a Mass, which is what it really is – the text is just bits of the Russian liturgy – he labelled it as a response to the Nikolai Leskov short story *ZapechAtlenny Angel* - The Sealed Angel. This seemed reasonable enough given that Shchedrin had already written operas based on literary themes – an opera of Gogol's *Dead Souls* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, for instance.

Since Nikolai Leskov, the author of the short story *The Sealed Angel* (and also of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, which became an opera by Shostakovich) was a writer endorsed by the Soviet censors, a piece of music ostensibly based on that work was authorised almost by proxy. To succeed as a composer in the Soviet Union, you had to be able to play the bureaucracy, and so it was in this very savvy way that Shchedrin managed to have a work that is totally religious in nature performed in a country where religion was still, effectively, banned.

But the Leskov title *The Sealed Angel* was more than just a façade to please the censors. It also added another level of meaning to the choral work.

The climax of the original Leskov short story, a group of master masons are building a bridge across a river. The masons are old-believers, who follow a version of orthodoxy that is now banned. Anyway, the masons possess a very valuable icon of an angel, which some bureaucrats of the new orthodoxy order be sealed and taken away to a proper, new-believer monastery. In order to prevent this, a fake copy of the icon is made by a master icon painter, but in order to make the switch, this icon must be carried by one of the masons in a perilous crossing of the half-built bridge as the river is raging during an ice thaw.

In the cantata *The Sealed Angel*, this transportation of a religious treasure over the bridge becomes a metaphor for the carrying of faith through the turbulent years of Communism. Shchedrin himself came from a family of clerics, was secretly baptized while he was a



child, which was a very risky business. In these perilous circumstances, orthodox faith in Russia was conserved.

The solo flute which links the nine movements, played tonight by Virginia Taylor, can be seen either as the voice

of the Angel itself, or, I think as the treasure of Russian orthodox faith, and Russian orthodox music, being carefully preserved through some very troubled times. And you'll hear from the bass voices in the very first movement a sound that is immediately recognisable as Russian, a sound which, back in 1988, hadn't been heard in the concert hall since before the Revolution. In short, tonight you'll be hearing not just a stunning piece of choral music, but a work that marks a turning point in the history of Russia.

And history is also being made here tonight, as you will be the first people ever to hear this work performed in Australia.

Francis Merson
Editor, *Limelight Magazine*

For me, the Shchedrin concert with the CCS and Virginia Taylor was one of the highlights of the Festival. In order to write the program notes I viewed several versions of the piece on YouTube, and realized then that our audience would love it. And they did! My thanks to Canberra Choral Society for a magnificent performance.'

Professor Don Aitkin
CIMF Festival Ambassador

A few words of thanks and congratulations to all members of the CIMF Festival Chorus for the dedication and seriousness you brought to the task of learning an entire Russian epic from scratch! *The Sealed Angel* has its roots in ancient singing traditions of the Orthodox Church and it was heartening to how prepared the Canberra choristers were to embrace these traditions and do them justice. Your contribution to this grand Russian work and, of course, Handel's Hallelujah constituted two of the great moments in this past festival. It is wonderful to see the choral scene in Canberra so diversified, interesting and interested – and when and where it counts, united!

Roland Peelman
Conductor
Artistic Director, *The Song Company*

When Chris Latham asked if I would play *The Sealed Angel* by Rodion Shchedrin, which was scored for SATB choir and flute solo, I was immediately intrigued.

My only real knowledge of Shchedrin was an arrangement for strings and percussion of the Carmen Suite by Georges Bizet, which I had heard many times and always enjoyed.

Chris lent me a recording from a live concert of the work, and I was hooked. The writing for choir, soloist and flute was both powerful and mellifluous at the same time.

Knowing that our performance was to be conducted by Roland Peelman from "The Song Company" meant that this would definitely be lots of fun and very rewarding.

Our performance at the Canberra International Music Festival was an Australian premiere and very special for all. The scoring for the choir of this work is complicated and difficult in many places with obscure intervals which challenge the most experienced of choirs. Joined with some wonderful soloists, the choir sang with commitment and quality to do justice to this beautiful and obscure work.

From a personal viewpoint, it was a joy to be able to perform this work with a choir from my own city of Canberra and in partnership with Roland Peelman and members of The Song Company.

Thank you to all involved for ensuring this was such a success and special evening, and, as always, a special thank you to Chris Latham for his artistic vision, in finding pearls such as this for us to perform together.'

Virginia Taylor



Congratulations to everyone who sang in CIMF, there was much positive feedback from everyone involved as well as the audiences. The Shchedrin and Pärt certainly extended us, taking us into completely different musical styles from what we are used to. I'm really looking forward to seeing how this experience has bearing on our future programs.'

Tobias Cole, CCS Director of Music

And what was the reaction? Standing ovations on the night, and the following review:

The second concert featured a choral masterwork by "Russia's living treasure", Rodion Shchedrin, born in December 1932.

His work, *The Sealed Angel*, is as intriguing for its secrets – even deception – as it is for the music. It's really a Mass that celebrates the 1,000th anniversary of Russia's conversion to Christianity, but is narrated as the story of "an icon whose beauty and power are so formidable that the authorities determined that it should be sealed up".

Large forces were on stage for the performance, including flautist, Virginia Taylor and soloists tenor, Andrew Goodwin, heard in the previous performance, counter-tenor, Tobias Cole, treble, Gabriel Cole and mezzo, Lanneke Wallace-Wells.

The Canberra Festival Chorus was drawn from SCUNA, Llewellyn Choir, Canberra Choral Society and Oriana Chorale.

It was all conducted by director of The Song Company, Roland Peelman. A member of the choir did a very fine job as narrator. Sadly, he was not acknowledged at the end of the performance.

Virginia Taylor provided the only instrumental contribution. It included some beautiful, almost mysterious, solo passages and, occasionally, some lovely accompaniment subtly integrated with the singing.

The choral work, though, largely was unaccompanied, after the style of Rachmaninoff's "Vespers". The choir kept pitch quite well throughout with only some minor drift a couple of times.

At times the sopranos did not quite pitch to the higher notes initially, but Peelman pulled them up there discreetly.

The basses provided excellent foundation, finding and holding some wonderful, if impossibly low notes with confidence. They certainly aroused thoughts of a Russian male choir.

The balance across the choir generally was superb, Peelman controlling tempi, volume, phrasing and flow expertly, only occasionally having to do some fine adjustments across the choir sections along the way.

The Sealed Angel was quintessentially Russian. The melodies, moods and rhythms took us fairly and squarely into Russia's very heart and soul, attracting a sustained standing ovation at the end.

I would have loved to hear the piece in a livelier acoustic, with Virginia Taylor's flute soaring like an angel above the sustained voices.

Clinton White, City News, 17 May 2012

[All CIMF photos by Peter Hislop]

ALBERT HALL FESTIVAL

Our next endeavour is the Albert Hall Festival, beginning with the 1930s Soirée—described by Brenda Gill as “a vision of reaching Canberrans who would not normally attend our concerts and involving them in both singing AND dancing.”

Toby took inspiration from Robyn Archer’s grand plan of a dance for every decade during the Centenary Celebrations, and added his signature community singing involvement to come up with the blueprint for our Soirée. The 1930s was chosen to connect with the Sunday Tribute Concert to Dame Nellie Melba (who died in 1931).

The music consists largely of show tunes and popular songs. Song books will be printed and EVERYONE will be encouraged to sing along, especially when not dancing. CCS members who choose to attend will be a valuable boost to the community singing, and can of course participate in the dancing too. Tickets for Choristers are only \$20 (less for under 27s) in recognition of our role as co-hosts and supporting singers.

A formal supper will be served at around 9pm, and we are hoping that choristers will make food of the era to bring along (suggestions and even recipes will be made available) – perhaps make extra so that we will have something to share at our post-concert party on Sunday.

As you can see, this is a very different event for CCS, but it should be a bit of a party for us.

Brenda Gill, AH Festival Coordinator

The Albert Hall Festival is about recapturing the spirit of Canberra when The Albert Hall was built. But the Melba concert/show is more than that. It goes further back to when Melbourne was being built and how an ambitious tenacious young lady made Europe and North America aware of Australia, before Australia became aware of Australia through Federation! The Albert Hall is the perfect setting to tell this story because its design is reminding us of a past era, from the ticket booth in the foyer to the proscenium stage. And with the energy of the night before still reverberating our show will start and finish when Melba died, in the 1930's.’

Tobias Cole, CCS Director of Music

I'm really excited and so honoured to be engaged by CCS and to share the stage with one of Canberra's best loved choirs. I am a massive Tobias Cole fan so the chance to collaborate and learn from such a talented and generous individual is a real gift. I am also really looking forward to the challenge of portraying one Australia's most legendary figures; Dame Nellie Melba. She was the first Australian to appear on the cover of Time magazine, she has a marble bust on the grand staircase of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, she appears on our 100 dollar note, has a music



institution and a music hall named in her honour. She was a dedicated teacher and charity worker. But the thing that elevates her to total legend status in my mind is food! We have Peach Melba, Melba sauce, Melba Toast, and Melba Garniture. If I can get just one dish named in my honour I

know I will have made it!!!

Looking forward to meeting you all and working with you soon.'

Rachael Thoms, Lyric Soprano

We've had great publicity already, including a front page article in the City Chronicle, and an article in the Canberra Times Panorama magazine – not to mention the colourful flyers and posters designed by Brenda Gill, Brenton Lovett's painstaking work with Canberra Ticketing, and all the emails that choristers sent out to your networks, we have already sold over 100 tickets to the Soirée. Over 70 people signed up for the classes at Danzón dance studio over the next six weeks so that we can trip the light fantastic on the night!

Look out for our colourful banners outside Albert Hall from mid June, and more as we get closer to July.

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE – MELBA CONCERT

Date	Time	Venue*	Notes
Mon 28 May	7.30-10pm	SJ	Sarah Cutler
Mon 4 June	7.30-10pm	SJ	Sarah Cutler
Mon 11 June	7.30-10pm	SJ	Sarah Cutler
Mon 18 June	7.30-10pm	SJ	Toby
Mon 25 June	7.30-10pm	SJ	Toby
Mon 2 July	7.30-10pm	SJ	Toby
Fri 6 July	7.30-10pm	AH	Toby
Sat 7 July	1pm – 4pm	AH	Toby
Sat 7 July	7.30 – late	AH	Soirée**
Sun 8 July	2pm warmup 3pm start	AH	Concert

*SJ: St Johns AH: Albert Hall

**Soirée – ticketholders & CCS helpers only

OTHER NEWS

The CCS Chatterbox team have been busy adding new website content, so if you haven't had a look for a while, do check it out. We are also setting up a password-protected members area to keep all the “stuff” that choristers need access to, but others don't – constitution, “who does what”, and so on. There will be only one password for everyone to use – just think of your favourite end-of-year concert and you'll have it! We'll notify you by email when the members section is set up.