



AGS News 10 Festival

Edition

Winter 2008/9



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

The first Gibbs Music Festival, held in Danbury Parish Church on the weekend of 12th -14th September was a resounding success. May we extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to what was a very special occasion.

Angela Aries,

Secretary

THE GIBBS FESTIVAL...

“Shouldn’t it be called The Gibbs *Music* Festival?” considered one trustee at the planning stage. “Not many people will know anything about him or even that he was a local musician”. After the variety of events over the weekend of the 12th-14th September, however, there would be no doubt of his identity in the locals’ minds.

For several weeks beforehand, Gibbs’ eyes followed one around from the life sized busts on the posters around the village. During the weekend 87 people shared a tea and a supper in his name; 21 people walked a trail of his homes and haunts to the sound of a peal of church bells on the sunny Saturday morning and a total of over 300 people attended five musical events, all described in an eighteen-page programme painstakingly put together by the festival chairman, Christopher Kingsley, and faithfully reproduced ready for printing by Liz Blyth. In the church there was a display of Gibbs’ life and work, which was studied during concert intervals, and people were able to visit the slate memorial plaque in the chancel and his grave.

The Armstrong Gibbs Society was lucky to have as its artistic director a local resident and professional musician, Robert Atchison, violinist of the London Piano Trio, who have for several years enthusiastically championed and recorded Gibbs’ music. His contacts, along with those of our Chairman and local Councillor, Christopher Kingsley, ensured the Lottery and M and G funding which was needed to underpin the events financially.

The weekend started with a lunchtime piano and flute recital in the Parish Church of St John Baptist. It included a sensitive and able rendering of the Lakeland Pictures and Suite in A for flute and piano, by local musicians Lara Griffin and Kay Gibson. This, along with the well-supported festival lunch which followed, was a heartening launch to the weekend.

The programme on Friday evening was A Celebration of English Song. First, Michael Pilkington, a Society trustee and musicologist, lent us his great experience of English song and its interpretation, by conducting a master class with three music students from the Colchester Institute on three of Gibbs’ songs: “Silver,” Philomel” and “Five Eyes”, contrasted with songs by Purcell, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Michael Head. It was a gritty activity, but much appreciated by both the audience and the participants. Then, after an interval, a group of three English National Opera singers by the name of “Bella Donna” gave us an entertaining, humorous and polished recital of composers ranging from the C16th to the C20th.

Saturday’s Festival concert in the church was performed by the London Piano Trio and friends, Paul Hagger the organist of St John Baptist Church, and the Lingwood Consort. It included a Concerto for Strings by Vivaldi, with continuo and strings sensitively integrated, and his ever popular “Gloria”; a Handel Organ Concerto and Gibbs’ Cantata “The Turning Year”. The singers all agreed that this their third performance of “The Turning Year” was by far the most exciting, as they were accompanied for the first time by strings as well as the piano part, and it must be said that Olga Dudnik’s pianistic skill added immeasurably to the excitement.

The London Piano Trio came into their own on the Sunday afternoon with a spirited and sparkling rendering of the Mendelssohn Trio in D minor Op 49, and Gibbs’ pastoral “Country Magic” Op 47, and Trio in D Major Op 99, two of the four trios recently recorded by the LPT, to much acclaim.

The weekend was rounded off by a Choral Evensong with Gibbs organ compositions for ingoing and outgoing voluntaries, his hymn tune ‘Lingwood’ and his evening canticles, sung by an augmented Parish Choir. The Rector in his sermon reflected that, like many of his contemporaries who were adjusting to a new social order after the horrors of two world wars, Gibbs’ compositions

reflected both the realism of the dark forces of nature, (his son David was killed in action in Italy in 1943), and the restorative sanctuary of the English countryside. He spent the war years in Windermere after Crossings, his Danbury home, had been requisitioned as a military hospital. On his return to Danbury he was able to seek the refreshment of an out of doors spirituality and become once again "the creative artist who wants to celebrate and reflect upon the steadfast qualities which characterize English life, ...alive to the nuances of mood and season in both his human and natural environment." In addition, however, Gibbs was unusual amongst his contemporaries such as RVW, Arnold Bax, Peter Warlock or Gerald Finzi, in being known to have a living Christian faith.

After evensong, musicians and audience were able to join in a sit-down supper catered for by Alan's Kitchen, when the events of the weekend were mulled over. The general consensus was that it was all well worth the sustained effort by so many contributors, and gratifyingly well-supported. We were especially pleased to welcome our President Ann Rust, and her husband Lyndon and two of their daughters, who came up from Berkshire for the weekend. It could be viewed as a useful rehearsal for the next Festival we plan in 2010, to mark the 50th anniversary of Gibbs' death.

If it works out as well as the 2008 occasion has, the trustees will feel that their efforts to promote Gibbs and keep him in not only the local but in future the national consciousness is being achieved by the current generation. We would welcome members of the next generation to keep up the good work and join us as trustees!

Laurette Guest



Performers' Perspective

Friday lunchtime recital

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to play for the Armstrong Gibbs Festival and even more so when I discovered that I would be starting the whole Festival off with the Friday Lunchtime Concert. After a number of months spent practising, the day finally came. I had heard that ticket sales had been good so I was feeling optimistic. The piano, hired from Comprehensive Piano Services, was beautiful in every way; visually, tonally and in touch. At first, my fingers felt very stiff and unwilling to move, but this improved as I relaxed and learnt that my audience was sympathetic. Alongside music by J.S. Bach, Debussy and John Ireland, I performed Gibbs' *Lakeland Pictures*. Previously unfamiliar with Armstrong Gibbs' piano music, I was glad of the opportunity to learn newer repertoire and thus enjoyed working on this set of pieces, in the months leading up to the Festival. The concert finished with Gibbs' *Flute Suite in A* with Kay Higgs as the flautist. Kay was an absolute pleasure to work with; both in practices and in concert and her skill greatly enhanced the recital. The concert was very well received and Kay and I made a decision to provide an encore in the form of Gossec's *Tambourin*. Both feeling quite worn-out but

pleased nonetheless, Kay and I were glad of the Festival Lunch afterwards which seemed to round the concert off very well indeed.

I would like to thank the Armstrong Gibbs Society for giving me this excellent performance opportunity and for introducing me to Gibbs' piano repertoire which I look forward to exploring further.

Lara Griffin

Friday evening Masterclass

I was made to feel very welcome, and really enjoyed both the class and the recital that followed. ...please extend my thanks to Michael Pilkington, whose warmth and generosity put me at ease.

Sergei Marriott

From the Treasurer:

Subscriptions

I wrote a year ago asking members to consider paying their £10 subscriptions by standing order in favour of the AGS. This makes life much easier for the Treasurer - and also for you, it seems to me. Some of you have since decided to take that course, and now the majority of members do pay by standing order, or its close cousin the direct credit. Thank you very much. I quite understand that some people prefer not to do this, and this year they will receive with this Newsletter a subscription reminder.

In the same note, I also mentioned Gift Aid, and as a result some of you made Gift Aid Declarations too. Thank you. There may have been a little too much choice in the official version of the form which we sent out, and not all of you may have guessed the "right" answer! So this year those of you who perhaps did not will receive a fresh form with the "right" answer made more obvious from the type-face used. And those of you who did not make a Declaration will be given a second chance to consider doing so by using the copy of the form which will also be enclosed for you. Again, I quite appreciate that some may be reluctant to follow this course.

During the first weeks of January I shall be applying to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to recover tax paid on subscriptions paid, and which are the subject of a Gift Aid Declaration, since the formal constitution of the AGS on 24th May 2003. This should produce something in the order of £250 if more people make Gift Aid Declarations in the near future. Thereafter the annual recovery is unlikely to be more than about £50.

I am keen to make the administration of the Treasurer's job as simple as possible, in part for my own benefit; but also, and more importantly, so that I can find a willing successor in the not too distant future. So with this in mind, I should be grateful for your positive response to these requests.

Please reply to Douglas Potter, 1 Hay Green, Danbury, Essex, CM3 4NU. If you have any queries, you can contact me on 01245-225585 or douglas.potter@bopenworld.com.

See **News and Views** next issue, for details of a first performance of a work by Gibbs. Please send other contributions to the editor: Angela Aries, 16, Runsell Close, Danbury, CM3 4PQ, angela.aries@btinternet.com