

## Vivace Chorus On Song As It Celebrates Its 75th Anniversary

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Guildford's Vivace Chorus is 75 years old. To mark the milestone the choir has published a booklet charting its history. Here, **Hilary Twigg** gives a synopsis of it.



The Guildford Municiple Philharmonic Orchestra.

After the Second World War, Guildford Corporation's newly appointed musical organiser Jack Crossley Clitheroe had the vision to put on regular orchestral concerts and hold a summer music festival – including forming a choir.

The Municipal Choir gave its first performance on January 26, 1946 as part of a victory concert.

By December 1946 the now Festival Choir had 190 members. That year marked the emergence of a choir which would eventually evolve from the Guildford Festival Choir, via the Philharmonic Choir, into the new millennium's Vivace Chorus.

The choir has seen a range of music directors and conductors over its 75 years. Following the sudden death of Crossley Clitheroe in June 1962, Vernon 'Tod' Handley was appointed to succeed Clitheroe as the next music director.

Soon after his arrival, the name of the orchestra changed to Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra (GPO) and from the beginning of the 1965-66 season, the Festival Choir and the Philharmonic Choir merged to become Guildford Philharmonic Choir (GPC).

Following Handley's departure in the early 1980s, the borough brought in a series of guest conductors for both the orchestra and choir. They included Brian Wright, Norman del Mar, Sir David Willcocks, Richard Armstrong, Wilfried Boettcher and En Shao.

In September 1984 Simon Halsey became the new chorus master. He left in 1987 and Neville Creed, who had been his deputy, took over.

Neville stayed with GPC for seven years, preparing the choir for several eminent guest conductors, and conducting a few concerts himself.

In 1990, the choir celebrated the tenth anniversary of Guildford's twinning with Freiburg im Breisgau.

Around 80 members of the Freiburg Bachchor travelled to join GPC in a performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in Guildford Cathedral, and GPC was invited to sing Handel's *Messiah* later in the year in Freiburg.

In January 1995, the choir appointed Jeremy Backhouse as music director. At that point, the choir was financially supported by Guildford Borough Council but this support was removed in 1998.

The choir had the choice of giving up or going it alone – it decided to keep going. The borough funded one of GPC's concerts each year until 2002 but then all ties and funding from the borough ceased.



Jack Crossley Clitheroe.



Vernon Handley.



The concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 2014.

The choir has been performing as Vivace Chorus since the start of the 2005-06 season. It has sung three times at the Royal Albert Hall: In October 2001 as the backing choir for Russell Watson *The Voice*; in May 2011 performing Mahler's *Symphony No 8*, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and four guest choirs and in 2014, singing Verdi's *Requiem*, again with the RPO.

In 2017, the choir celebrated its 70th birthday with a concert in the Royal Festival Hall where it gave the world premiere of a specially-commissioned piece by composer Francis Pott, *Cantus Maris* – Francis having also been the choir's illustrious accompanist for many years.

The choir has performed a wide range of music. Just before the first Covid lockdown, G Live saw the incredible *African Sanctus* by David Fanshawe, complete with Mighty Zulu Nation Theatre Company dancers.

It has collaborated with the Guildford Shakespeare Company, world-leading soloists such as Julian Lloyd Webber and Tasmin Little, and has raised a significant amount of money for local charities.



Vivace Chorus' carol service at Holy Trinity Church, Guildford, in 2014.

As the choir that has performed the Mayor of Guildford's Carol Concert for 70 years, it produced an online carol concert in 2020 to support local Covid support funds, and sings at Guildford's central Service of Remembrance every year.

Vivace Chorus is hosting a concert at G Live in Guildford on Saturday, November 19, to celebrate its 75th anniversary.

The concert is titled *Feast*, and what feast of music it will be! The choir will be joined by the National Symphony Orchestra for a programme that includes one of the best-loved pieces of all time – Ralph Vaughan Williams *The Lark Ascending*. And, in Vaughan Williams' 150th anniversary year, there will be more Vaughan Williams, plus Holst's *The Perfect Fool*, and the exciting banquet of a piece that is *Belshazzar's Feast* by William Walton.

[Click here for G Live's website to book tickets.](#)

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