

Dear Friends,

We started the second term of our 2020/21 season somewhat frustrated that any return to normal activity seemed further away than ever. Not only were we looking at many more weeks of restriction in the face of a new and aggressive form of Covid19 but we had finally received confirmation that all concert dates provisionally agreed with the Colosseum for later in the year would no longer be held over, following the termination of the Borough Council's contract with the management company, thus giving rise to some uncertainty about the future of the building itself. Happily, we have since been reassured that the Council is committed to the Colosseum as an iconic performance venue and expects to carry out the necessary renovation works as soon as possible prior to making it available once again for hire. You can see a copy of a recent press release below.

Recognising that it's often the case that we overlook the quality of assets on our own doorstep, this seems the perfect time to celebrate the Colosseum and our good fortune in having it as our preferred concert venue since it first opened its doors to the public in 1939, with the Watford & District Philharmonic Society topping the bill at the inaugural concert in 1940. You can read more about the building and its history on page 2.

More good news has followed with the roll-out of the vaccination programme. Many of us should find ourselves towards the top of the list fairly soon – old age for once being something of an advantage! For now though, we should expect to continue with our Monday evening rehearsals on Zoom. Whether or not we might be able to return to live rehearsals later in the year remains somewhat uncertain but we do have a date reserved for a summer concert in the Grand Hall at The Grange Academy (formerly Bushey Academy) if conditions are right.

With the turn of the year bringing the possibility of renewal and recovery, this issue of Corona Chronicle may be the last. So I'm especially delighted to include pieces by three of our newer (and younger!) members whose early enthusiasm is very encouraging for the choir's future. They are **Sarah Lockwood** (alto), **Lynne Medini** (soprano) and **Maria Horton** (tenor). All three have interesting back stories – and Sarah has very recently become a first time Mum with the birth of Oscar Peregrine on 29th December. Many congratulations to all concerned!

It's always nice to discover long family ties with the Society – we have several husband and wife pairings, of course, but sometimes parents along with their adult children. We know that alto, **Janet Fanshawe's** mother was a member many years ago, as was the mother of bass, **Michael Hussey**. But can anyone beat the **Wellings family**? Mum **Margaret** (soprano) and son **David** (bass) are both currently in membership and David writes about his family's association with the Phil in this issue (page 7).

Rounding off issue 10 are contributions from yet another bass, **Malcolm Two** and from our Chairman, **David Pollak**, who picks up the theme of renewal and regeneration with an interesting piece about Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish festival celebrating the New Year for Trees, this year taking place on 28th January.

Here's looking forward to a new Spring!

Judy



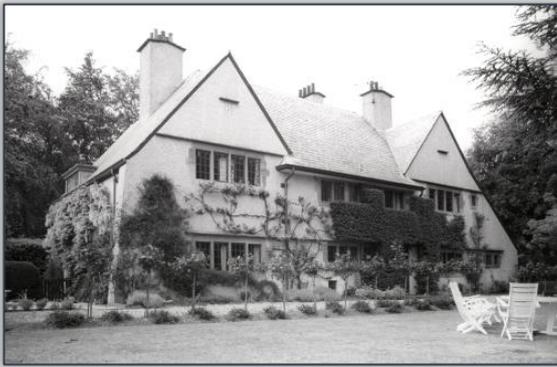
The Colosseum

An 18th century Watford mansion – The Elms – once stood on the site now occupied by the Town Hall and the Colosseum. The Borough Council purchased the site in 1919, eventually commissioning the building of the Town Hall in the late 1930s more or less as we know it today, with its integral Assembly Rooms later to become known as the Colosseum. The change of name came about in 1994, following a joint venture between the Borough Council as owners of the building and the management company contracted to run it as a multi-purpose entertainment venue. Whether or not it was intentionally named after the Roman amphitheatre or the result of a mis-spelt reference to the London Coliseum in St Martin's Lane, the choice of name remains a bit of a mystery! Either way, it is now a Grade 2 listed building with its own Blue Plaque awarded in 2017 for its contribution to musical heritage.



Watford Town Hall complex in 1960

The Orchard, Shire Lane, Chorleywood

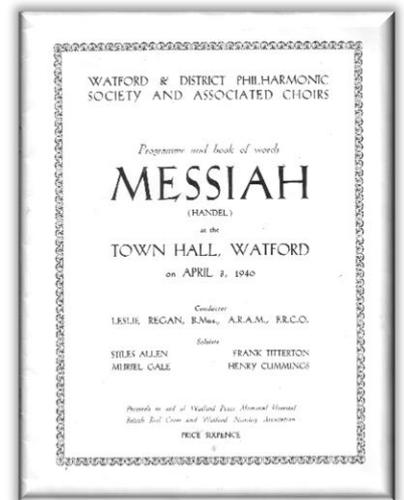


The architect chiefly responsible for the Town Hall complex was **Charles Cowels-Voysey** (1889-1981) son of the eminent Arts & Crafts architect **C.F.A. Voysey** (1857 – 1941) who lived for a time in Chorleywood in a house of his own design – The Orchard, in Shire Lane. However, in his work Charles Cowels-Voysey consciously eschewed his father's distinctive style, generally relying upon classical proportion whilst insisting on the use of good materials and fine craftsmanship and avoiding elaborate decoration. Working in close partnership with Cowels-Voysey was acoustician **Philip Hope Bagenal** whose innovative design resulted in a building widely recognised throughout Europe as a fine concert and recording venue, commended by world-class musicians such as conductor

Thomas Beecham and cellist Julian Lloyd-Weber, who described it as 'the finest recording venue in the world'! Hope Bagenal would also be responsible for the acoustic design of Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall and the Royal Festival Hall in London's South Bank.

Intended as a multi-purpose performance venue, the Colosseum has attracted world famous artists whether in concert or in the making of recordings. Film buffs will be aware of its role in recording the soundtracks for such blockbusters as the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Sound of Music* whilst many of the greatest stars in the world of popular music have topped the bill throughout its history. In recent times, these have included Elton John, Genesis, The Kinks, The Who, Slade, Marc Bolan, Oasis, One Direction, Robbie Williams and Jools Holland. In the field of classical music, the Colosseum has played host to international superstars such as Maria Callas, Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti. It remains the home of the BBC Concert Orchestra, regularly broadcasting *Friday Night is Music Night* on Radio 2.

The Colosseum's pipe organ was designed and built by **John Compton**, initially for the Gaumont Palace in Chelsea. It was re-commissioned in 2007 and fully restored in 2011 following an extensive fund-raising appeal and is described by the Cinema Organ Society as 'one of the very best Compton organs anywhere in the country' and 'one of the most versatile civic instruments in use today.'



Inaugural concert, 3 April 1940



We were delighted to hear that 1st alto **Sarah (Lockwood)** has recently had her first baby. No doubt she will be given every encouragement to take up musical opportunities as they present themselves.



Anyone reading this in the hope of finding great reminiscences of huge choral performances, tours and recordings is going to be sadly disappointed. Until joining Watford Phil last year I had done very little formal choral performance since I was 19. When I left school, I had been fortunate enough to have had an enormous number of choral and orchestral performing opportunities and therefore when I went to Cambridge I instead threw myself into something a little different: Musical Theatre and Jazz. However, with this in mind, I will try to dredge up some of my various experiences I hope you may enjoy anyway.

So, let's rewind. I started music lessons when I was four, joyfully abusing my parents ear drums with my enthusiastic recorder playing and adding flute lessons to the cacophony when I was 7. At this stage I was incredibly consistent: I could play pretty well in lessons or on my own but put me in a performance or (worse yet) an exam and I would fall to pieces. I vividly remember my teachers' frustration at my performance nerves, and the kind words of my recorder teacher before one exam when she said of my aural tests "let's assume you won't get any marks, and then anything you do get will be a bonus".

In spite of my lack of success on paper, I still loved playing, so I carried on. My senior school took music very seriously, and provided a huge range of opportunities, for which I am profoundly grateful. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that I spent all of my free time in some kind of musical group – instrumental and choral. Choral choices were fairly predictable: *Messiah* and plenty of Vivaldi (being a girls' school), but with the odd exploit into works such as Karl Jenkins' *Adiemus*. Our school music teachers were a colourful bunch, complete with a full set of artistic temperaments. I think everyone present still remembers the recording session when the Head of Music lost his temper on the podium and accidentally knocked an 8-foot microphone stand onto the 1st cello... One of the few theatrical musical performances was an all-female *Magic Flute* in which I enjoyed participating in the chorus (as a 2nd Bass), as well as providing Papageno's pan pipes (on sopranino) and the magic flute from the wings.

My personal highlight came when the school decided that they ought to justify owning a harpsichord by using it in a concert for once, and therefore I was asked to perform (as a recorder soloist) in *Brandenburg Concerto IV in G major*. While this experience would be pretty thrilling for any 16-year-old, the fact that I actually held my nerve for once definitely added to the charm.

I soon headed off to Cambridge, ready to try some whole new musical experiences. As it turned out, studying music is not for the faint-hearted. Fortunately I took to the musicology like a duck to water, because classes such as keyboard studies were utterly nerve-wracking. (Keyboard studies exams required you to be able to sight read: a figured bass accompaniment, a whole string quartet score and a Bach chorale.) Lectures could be incredible artistic experiences in themselves, as any choral score (from plainchant to Britten) would be demonstrated by handing out scores for everyone to sing: the counter-tenors sounding surprisingly good at 9am... Many of my classmates are now professional singers, performing all over the world, including the ENO Chorus, Opera Holland Park, Lieder Festivals, and major theatres in Europe.

Meanwhile I decided to combine music with my other love – dancing. I performed in and choreographed several shows each year, including musicals, pantomimes and Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. For reasons I have never entirely grasped, my performance nerves (which I have never conquered) have always been best-controlled in stage performances, so this felt like an ideal outlet for me. Highlights include performing as both a Fairy and a Lord, in a single performance of *Iolanthe* (G&S) at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, which I had also choreographed; and of somehow managing to teach any choreography at all to the Cambridge Footlights for their panto, which was simultaneously one of the most entertaining and frustrating experiences of my life.

At this point comes a gap of several years, when apart from squeezing in some singing lessons, work took over until I joined Watford Phil. I have really enjoyed being able to sing with a group again and I'm looking forward to being able to rehearse in person with you all again!

Tenor **Maria (Horton)** joined us 2 years ago. Here she is, with husband and children – are we looking at core members of a future junior choir? Great to know that you have found us a friendly and welcoming bunch, Maria!



Hi everyone!

I joined WPS for the first time in 2018 for *The Armed Man* concert. I had been thinking of joining since moving to Watford, but had 2 young children (now 5 and 3 years old) so it was always a bit of a struggle to get out of the house with bedtimes, feeding etc.

Anyway, *The Armed Man* gave me an extra reason to join since it is a very special piece for me, and one I had always wanted to sing in a choir. This is because I was actually at the first ever performance of this piece in the Royal Albert Hall in London. At the time, we had been drawn to the concert by Julian Lloyd Webber playing Elgar's Cello Concerto, but then in the second half came across this wonderful piece with the amazing percussion, brass and such a wonderful variety of movements. My Dad recorded the concert when it was replayed on the radio and we listened (and sang along) to it often! So getting to sing this properly with

choir and orchestra was really wonderful!

I have been involved in music since a very early age, partially because my Mum literally goes around singing all the time, and used to play me and my 2 sisters nursery rhymes constantly when we were little, and also because the first thing my Dad does when he goes into a new room is turn some music on (!)

I started learning the piano at the age of 5, recorder at 7 and cello at 8, and loved playing and singing in various ensembles - first at school and in a folk group (that I still cameo in now and then!) and later in the Hillingdon music service. The cello was 'my' instrument (I never really enjoyed the piano as much), but I also used to play various recorders and percussion in the folk group. I got to go on tour with Hillingdon music service to the Netherlands - singing in the choir and playing in the orchestra - amazing fun!

I then went off to study Physics at Warwick University and got heavily involved in various music activities including the Chorus there. This was my first real experience of big choir singing.

I started off as a soprano 1 (I used to love my top Bs!) the voice register assigned to me in the Hillingdon choir, but I realised after a few years that actually I preferred singing in the lowest part of my register, and eventually joined the tenors where there were a few other lady tenors (otherwise I wouldn't have dared!!)

After Warwick, I got a job working in IT for P&G in Newcastle and have been working for them in various locations ever since. One of these locations was Amiens in France, where I found and joined a small choir of 8 people that was based in the factory where I was IT manager. This was a very different experience to singing with a 300 strong Chorus, but also wonderful - lots of fairly jazzy French songs! I discovered that in French choir concerts, it was perfectly normal for the audience to join in all the songs – and not just when told to!!

When I returned to the UK for my next assignment, I arranged for my French choir to come on a mini 'tour' to London (well, Ruislip/ Eastcote) and did a joint concert with the folk group in their church. It was a really fun and memorable weekend, not least because it snowed, stopping several members of our audience getting home, and meaning that the French choir almost missed their ferry as one of their cars needed to be dug out!!

I've been in the London area now since 2011 and was part of 2 choirs between then and moving to Watford - both really fun and different experiences. I'm loving how welcoming WPS has been – it's a really lovely choir! And weirdly, I've found that the Zoom rehearsals have actually helped my 'small children bedtime' situation - much easier to just pop downstairs to join in once the kids are in bed! However, it's obviously strange not being able to hear anyone else and I am very much looking forward to getting back to some form of normality with you all. Thanks for a lovely welcome to the choir!

High-kicking soprano, **Lynne (Medini)** joined us in 2019. Her dancing and circus experience could well be put to good use in future concerts – programme planners take note!

I have a background in performing arts and have loved music and dance since I started ballet and tap classes at the age of 5. Learning modern dance gave me an introduction to counting time and clapping rhythms so I'm in my comfort zone when Michael gives us rhythm exercises. My sight reading is more than rusty though and many of the pieces are new to me but I am enjoying the challenge.

I started to read music at school while learning the recorder and went on to study classical guitar at senior school because we had one at home. I took up singing when I went to full time ballet school at 16 and worked through the grades with sight-reading being the most challenging for me. While I was there I was coached in teaching ballet and learnt how to instruct the pianist for the accompaniment to fit the exercises. I also learnt how to teach a class with no pianist and no back up recordings and it's funny how you end up singing well known classical pieces.

My aim on graduating was to get into the West End and in those days you needed an Equity card even to audition. A lot of dancers ended up working overseas on Equity sponsored contracts and I was no different. I got a job doing an 'American Review in Italy' which turned out to be a travelling circus. My next job was a traditional summer season end of the pier show in Cromer, Norfolk. That was true variety and we had to sing and dance our way through the numbers – the worst was having to sing while doing a can-can!

My priorities changed after that as my husband (who I met in the circus) and I wanted to settle down. I got a 'normal' job at Mothercare where I've been since 1991 but I also kept my hand in dancing for a while, running my own part-time dance school for around five years.

I joined Rock Choir five years ago and have had many opportunities to perform with them – the Edinburgh Fringe Festival last year was a great experience and we recorded a Christmas charity single that reached number 1 in the download charts. But I wanted to get back to classical music and am so glad I found WPS - actually it must have been a sub-conscious thing because I saw WPS at Watford Colosseum several years ago at a sing-along *Carmen* which I loved. **That would have been the concert version we did with Terry in 2008 (Ed.)**

My tastes in music include favourite Tchaikovsky ballets, a bit of opera – I've been lucky enough to see *Rigoletto* at l'Arena di Verona and *Turandot* at the Sydney Opera House - songs from the musicals, and I love a bit of Josh Groban!

I'm looking forward to seeing you all again, hopefully later this year.





Who could resist buying a concert programme from **Malcolm (Two)**? He **not only co-ordinates programme sales at rehearsals and in the Colosseum but also acts as courier for us, collecting** the programmes from our printer in St Albans – where Malcolm also lives – and bringing them across to Watford, batched up and ready to sell. **Thanks to all of our regular programme sellers – you know who you are!** Here, Malcolm writes of his early involvement in music and his enthusiasm for our choir.

Those basses who sit near me in rehearsals will expect this musical memoir to be neither musical nor memorable. Nevertheless Covid Chronicle's insatiable appetite must be fed.

As a child I had no formal musical training. Apart from the radio, there was little music at home but I sang a great deal from the age of 8 as a treble in church choirs and in my school choir, until my voice broke at around 14yrs old. I staggered on for a while singing alto but my voice did not settle down into a baritone register for ages and singing went by the wayside apart from in the bath, after rugby matches, and in the pub.

I was very lucky that the Head of Music at my school (approx. 1000 boys from 9 to 18yrs) was ambitious in terms of the music we would publicly perform. From quite a young age I was exposed in some depth to great music- Messiah, Britten, Mozart, Bach *B minor Mass*, etc. The first concert for me was *Messiah* and I clearly remember hearing a live professional orchestra for the first time in my life, playing the overture and then the tenor soloist singing *Comfort Ye* – I was amazed by the sound.

The same Head of Music also ran the Choir of St Pauls, Bedford, so again on a regular basis I was exposed to a constant stream of choral music performed in a number of settings, including madrigals from the top of a church tower in the centre of Oxford and a Sunday service in St Albans Cathedral – and all the time getting paid for it. I think it was 1s 3d per week but you had to earn it by attending practices. As well as regular services, weddings and funerals, as Bedford is a county town, we sang at civic events such as Mayoral services, the opening of the Assizes when the Judges arrived, and for occasions such as Laying up of the Colours for the Beds & Herts Regiment. Because of the school connection with our Choirmaster, I would sometimes be able to pop out from school and get paid for the privilege (2s 6d per event).

Even after I'd stopped singing, I continued to soak up music of all genres – jazz, pop, Indian, flamenco, country, blues; I have never stopped enjoying almost everything but as I grew older, classical music began to dominate. Highlights include the many hours spent at evening and late night concerts during the biennial St Albans International Organ Festival. This involves two weeks of organ competition attracting brilliant young musicians from all over the world, and also a wide range of top quality concerts and recitals. On some occasions my wife and I have hosted competitors for the fortnight, which adds an extra competitive dimension in support of "your" temporary lodger.

In 2010 I was contemplating my retirement, set for my 67th birthday in 2011 and I stated my wish to join a choir but my doubts about the quality of my voice and my limited ability to read music made me reluctant to follow this through. Patricia, my wife, mentioned this in conversation with Eleanor Anderson (sop), a friend and former work colleague of hers from way back. Eleanor encouraged me to come to the 2010 open rehearsal for which I am ever grateful. **Nice work Eleanor! (Ed.)** Trying to pitch my voice to notes on the bass clef was a new and scary experience for me but I did not feel under great pressure and people around me were friendly and supportive, so I came back for more, and I'm still here.

My first concert included the Mozart *Requiem* and at the afternoon rehearsal in the opening movement as the soprano soloist began to sing *Te decet hymnus*, I was so overwhelmed with joy at being a part of the glorious sounds all around me that I had great difficulty singing at all for the rest of the movement. Fortunately I held it together for the evening performance. When singing with the Phil I still get some moments like that and I am so grateful for the opportunity to indulge myself, to have my musical knowledge expanded a little, and to experience pieces that I might not have considered before. All this in the company of a great group of people!

I am acutely aware that these experiences are only available to me because of the dedication and hard work of our conductor, our accompanist, our committee and all their helpers, so this is my opportunity to say a fortissimo "thank you".

What a great job you have all done in keeping the choir together in these weird times. **Thank you, Malcolm! (Ed.)** We Still Sing! But I am sure it's a relief to those normally in earshot of me that for a short while, we sing largely unheard.

David (Wellings) tells of his family's long history of music making in Watford – going back for over a century. Sister **Claire** and her husband **Andy Hartropp** are currently Friends of the Society, too.



David (left) & David Griffin (right) enjoying a rehearsal with fellow basses.



Margaret (front row, centre) with colourful sopranos in concert.

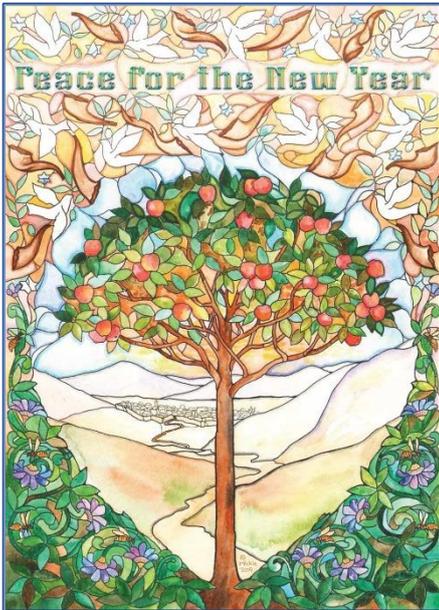
I have always been known as one of the family of four that have been singing with Watford Phil for several years. The four consisted of my Dad, John, who sadly died in 1999, my Mum, Margaret, my sister Claire, and me. My Mum and I are still members of the choir and my sister has recently moved into her new home in Leicestershire. My brother, Vince, gave up singing after primary school.

Members of the Wellings family have been singing in Watford for over a century. There are very old photos of my Grandad as a choir boy at St Michael and All Angels in West Watford and of my Dad in the choir at St Paul's Church in Bushey. When writing a history of the Peace Hospice I came across a report of a Gilbert and Sullivan Pageant in Cassiobury Park in 1919. It was the first major fundraiser for the Peace Memorial Hospital and on the list of singers were my Grandad and his three sisters. Two of the sisters went on to be founding members of Watford Operatic Society in 1922 and my Dad would later perform with them in the 1950s and 1960s. Dad would also play minor parts in some of the semi-professional shows at The Watford Palace Theatre when it was run by Jimmy and Gilda Perry. My Dad would tell the story that his only solo performance at what is now the Colosseum came during a fundraising concert for Chinese Nationalists in 1946 or 1947. I have never seen evidence of this of this strange event!

The link between our family and the Watford Phil choir came through singing with the choir at Christ Church in St Albans Road. Just after Dick Lewis arrived at the Church in the late 1970s, he encouraged my sister and then my Mum to join the choir. Dad and I joined in occasionally, and an existing member of the choir, Bill Endell, suggested that Dad joined the Watford Philharmonic. He joined first, then Claire, followed by me and Mum later. *Many of you will remember Dick Lewis (Vicar of Christ Church) and his wife, Janet. Both were members of the choir, Dick memorably standing in for Terry on one occasion to conduct – riotously! – a Monday evening rehearsal! (Ed.)*

Our memories of our time with the choir include the trip to Bermuda and the spectacular SAFA and Sir Malcolm Sargent concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. I was volunteering for the Peace Hospice when the first request for a fundraising concert came in from Cassiobury fundraising group. I am still proud of the fact that I gave the green light to the first Watford Phil concert for the Hospice more than 30 years ago. We also have great memories of the choir's visit to Carlow. To make a holiday of it, six of us did a week's tour of Southern Ireland in the pouring rain. Great memories of Mum and me, Dick and Janet Lewis, Claire and her husband Andy crammed into a small seven-seater people carrier.

Watford Philharmonic has given us the opportunity to perform the most spectacular music with such a wonderful group of people. Singing allows you to be physically and emotionally engaged with the greatest works ever produced and gives you the chance to engage with a wide variety of audiences. It is great fun too!!



Chairman **David** concludes this issue with an entirely appropriate reference to a date in the Hebrew calendar – Tu B'Shvat, the season of new trees.

Chag Sameach! This is the traditional greeting before a Jewish Festival and on 28 January this year, we shall be celebrating the Festival of Tu B'Shvat. The name is taken from the date in the Hebrew calendar and the festival traditionally celebrates the season of New Trees or, as might be equally appropriate for 2021, New Beginnings.

With the arrival of the long-awaited vaccine, which we all hope will bring to an end this period of restrictions and isolation, we can see a light at the end of a long tunnel stretching back to last March. For new trees we can read a rebirth of life and just as new trees remind us that the seasons all have a purpose, this is the time of year to plant and prepare for the year ahead. We, in turn, can plan a new repertoire, sing new pieces and metaphorically plant new musical life, or, in the words of our former conductor and now our present conductor, “renew our enthusiasm.”

As with all Jewish festivals, while the message might sometimes be forgotten, the food is all important. Just as we hold what's called a seder meal for Passover (Pesach) when it is clearly stated that certain foods will be eaten to commemorate events from the Exodus, we also have a seder at Tu B'Shvat when we traditionally eat seven species of food which are barley, wheat, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. Nowadays, we add all sorts of other fruit, all of which have deep hidden meanings but to those of us at the table, simply taste good.

In modern terms, Tu B'Shvat is our ecological festival since it celebrates new life which comes from our protection of the environment and reminds us how everything revolves around nature and the seasons. **David Attenborough** would have plenty to say on the subject and I suspect that harvest festivals might be regarded in a similar vein. Whether you are a Friend of the Earth, a follower of religious festivals or simply a lover of music and member of the Watford Philharmonic Society, Tu B'Shvat is a festival that can be celebrated by anyone. We should all accept that the protection of our planet is our personal responsibility and so, let me conclude by wishing everyone *Chag Sameach!*



News

- Most of you will have heard by now that **Susie Vanner**, for many years a member of our soprano section, very sadly died just after Christmas. David has written to her family to express condolences on behalf of the Society.
- Malcolm's piece in this issue makes reference to **St Albans International Organ Festival**. This is a really prestigious biennial competition with a range of associated concerts and related activities, scheduled to take place this year between 5th and 17th July, Covid permitting. Take a look at their website to see what's on offer in the 31st season!
<https://organfestival.com/>
- Your committee last met via Zoom on 17th December 2020. Most of the discussion focused on exploring opportunities for future concerts, given the uncertain situation at the Colosseum as well as our ability to re-form later this year. We have an option on the **Great Hall at the Grange Academy (formerly Bushey Academy) on 19th June** and very much hope that some sort of performance might be possible by then.
- We're also aware of the need to re-schedule an **AGM** at some stage, but for the time being the committee will remain unchanged. Thanks to all concerned for being willing to continue in post. We will be putting out a call for two new members to join us in due course – **please do get in touch if you think you might be able to contribute, especially helping with some aspects of publicity, concert planning or social events.**

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