

ACS Musical Notes

Autumn 2025 Newsletter



AYLESBURY
Choral Society



Our Summer evening of Opera and a 'goodbye' to Jeff Stewart in June 2025

On Saturday June 21st, Aylesbury Choral Society said its 'goodbye' and 'thanks for everything' to our Musical Director, Jeff Stewart, for ten fantastic years, including the tricky months of the Pandemic when he led us superbly in 'Zoom' rehearsals and kept the choir alive. The June concert, aptly enough for a professional opera singer, was an evening of choruses and arias from opera. As part of the evening, we were joined by three amazing soloists, joined by Jeff, himself, as the fourth. The choir, themselves, were dressed as for going to the opera and the whole evening, to packed audience, was a joyous, bubbling festival of music.

Now, as I write, after four rehearsals already, our new Music Director, composer, Philip Stopford has settled in very well, indeed. The choir are enjoying his lively approach. Not only are we preparing some of Philip's own works for the concert on December 6th but we are also enjoying his amazingly flexible, wide-ranging (in terms of pitch) voice. We are performing, as a more substantial work, a piece not frequently done by amateur choirs, the sublime *Mass in E minor* by Anton Bruckner. This will be accompanied by a fifteen-piece wind ensemble and organ. Then, in the second half of the concert we will be performing a range of shorter works, specifically selected as pieces appropriate to the festive season. These include works by Tamsin Jones, Sally Beamish, Palestrina, and Philip, himself, together with some carol arrangements for the audience to join in with. Make sure that you secure your tickets as soon as possible because there is a good chance that they will go fast.

The 2025 - 2026 concert season continues....

(all at St Mary's Church, Aylesbury, 7:30pm):

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| Saturday 6th December, 2025 | Bruckner's <i>Mass in E minor</i> and music for the season with the Wind Ensemble of The Aylesbury Sinfonia |
| Saturday 28th March, 2026 | Durufié's <i>Requiem</i> and other choral classics with Colin Spinks at the organ |
| Saturday 20th June, 2026 | Songs and Choruses from Musical Theatre with Colin Spinks at the Piano |
- All directed by Philip Stopford

See our website for further information. aylesburychoral.org.uk

Tickets: £18 (£7 under 18) from our website: aylesburychoral.org.uk (concert & tickets menu) and from members.

Season Tickets also available including a free programme for each concert: £50 (£20).

Our New MD: Philip Stopford



My musical path began as a Chorister at Westminster Abbey, through various posts at Truro, Canterbury, Chester and Belfast Cathedrals, to a stint in the USA at Christ Church, Bronxville, just outside New York City. My time now is spent composing and publishing my own music, performing concerts, making recordings and trying to complete commissions on time! I have no teaching job or church job, so ACS will be my only regular weekly commitment as things stand. I live in Leighton Buzzard in a 1950s bungalow with my rescue dog Dillon, who I adopted in America and bought back to England when I returned. He is a terrier/schnauzer mix most probably and totally adorable, of course!

It is clear that Jeff has led a tight ship in a fun and friendly environment, and I look forward to continuing those two important facets of a great choral society

Featured composer: Anton Bruckner

ACS is performing two works by Anton Bruckner in their concert on 6th December: his Motet *Locus Iste* and the *Mass in e minor*.

Bruckner was born in 1824 in Austria, where he lived for most of his life, until his death in 1896. He was a deeply religious man, educated in an Augustinian monastery, learning violin and organ as well as singing in the choir, and then became a teacher, himself. Later, he went to Vienna to learn music under Simon Sechter. However, he taught himself mostly as a composer, starting as such at about the late age of 37. He met and made the acquaintance of Mahler and Liszt. He, later still, took a teaching post at the Vienna Conservatoire. His compositions are mostly symphonies and sacred choral music, though there are also a few chamber works. He was quite conservative compared to the 'modern' music of Wagner and Mahler, and his symphonies, in particular, hark back to the later works of Beethoven, though they have the 'Romantic' and more modern personal stamp on them, making them unique and immediately recognisable as 'Bruckner'. His choral works also look backwards, this time to the contrapuntal music of Palestrina, though, once again, they are no mere pastiches but are highly original and clearly works of the Romantic period.

Bruckner was a notoriously fastidious composer, never being completely happy with the end-product so, as such, he re-worked some works several times. His *Mass in e minor* is in at least three editions and it is the 1896 version that ACS will be performing in December, this being his last version and, therefore, the one most commonly recognised as his final thoughts on the matter today.

Bruckner, today, stands as one of a select band of the greatest of symphonists, in a line from Haydn to Beethoven to Mahler and Shostakovich. However, his choral music is also of great beauty, displaying music of faith and a stunning craft.

Would you like to join us?

If you are interested in becoming a member of ACS, do come along to a couple of rehearsals - free of charge - to try out what it is like to sing with us. After this trial period, you will be asked to do a short voice assessment so that we can tell which is the best voice section for you. Being able to read music is an advantage but by no means essential and we give help with learning the music, e.g. by providing audio rehearsal files and Internet links to note-learning websites or within the rehearsals themselves. Please contact our membership secretary at moira.membership@gmail.com or our chairman, Chris Dalladay, at acschairman@gmail.com. We meet at The Church on Fairford Leys, Hampden Square, Aylesbury HP19 7HT on Tuesdays during school term times at 7:30pm. Music will be provided.

We hold 'Open' rehearsals on the 2nd Tuesday of each term - all are welcome. You could, in fact though, try us out on any rehearsal evening.

If you would like to join our mailing list, please jot a brief email to our chairman, Chris Dalladay, at acschairman@gmail.com letting him know your name and email address.