

ACS Musical Notes

Spring 2026 Newsletter



AYLESBURY
Choral Society



Our Christmas concert 2025 and the debut with ACS of Philip Stopford, our Musical Director

Our 'new' concert season (2025-2026) commenced in the Autumn under the baton of our 'new' MD, Philip Stopford, the composer and choral director. Our first concert with Philip was on December 6th and consisted of a first-half of music by Anton Bruckner: his much-loved motet, *Locus Iste*, and the less known but no less wondrous, *Mass in E minor*. The mass was a piece ACS had not performed before and posed quite a challenge, musically. However, the performance in December, accompanied, as required by Bruckner, by a 15-piece Wind Ensemble, was a terrific success with so many really positive comments from both performers and audience. The second half consisted of more seasonal music, including Palestrina's inspiring *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, carols for all to join in with, and more modern but most enjoyable works by Tamsin Jones, Sally Beamish and Philip Stopford, himself. One audience member was heard to say of the evening: "Wow! What a performance! Dramatic, exhilarating, exciting all the way.... I really felt that everyone was working together and gaining strength from their joint efforts. A superb 'first concert' by your new musical director - who also showed his talents in composition. ACS seems to be going from strength to strength. I could have listened to it all again, so very well done to everyone involved."

Our next concert, on Saturday 28th March follows a similar format with one larger work in one half and a series of shorter anthems and motets in the second. The principal item is the evocative and beautiful *Requiem* by Maurice Duruflé accompanied on the organ by our very own Colin Spinks. Many compare this work with that other French 'great' *Requiem* by Fauré but, whilst they both shy away from the 'hell and damnation' magnificence of the likes of Verdi, and are much more reflective and contemplative, they are quite different in style, harmonies, and conception. They are both supremely beautiful and heartfelt but, the Duruflé being less widely remembered than the Fauré, lends the subject a fresher, interesting and perhaps more powerful, approach. Other works in the evening will include Allegri's most famous *Miserere* (that piece with the soaringly high top Cs), Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*, Bob Chilcott's *God so loved the world*, Tallis's *Salvator Mundi*, Dan Forrest's *And Can It Be* (set to the great Charles Wesley's famous and moving words) and Philip Stopford's *O Sacrum Convivium*. Do come along!

The 2025 - 2026 concert season continues....

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

Saturday 28th March, 2026 Duruflé's *Requiem* and other choral classics

with Colin Spinks at the organ

Saturday 20th June, 2026 Songs and Choruses from Stage and Screen

with Colin Spinks at the Piano

Then, for Christmas, 2026: Saturday 28th November: Handel's *Messiah* with orchestra

All directed by Philip Stopford

See our website for further information and ticket sales: aylesburychoral.org.uk

Tickets: £18 (£7 under 18) from our website and from members.

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 Dilon, 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!

Featured composer: Maurice Duruflé

ACS is performing Duruflé's *Requiem* this coming Spring, on March 28th.

Maurice Duruflé was born in 1902 in Louviers, France, and died in 1986 in Paris. He studied music, first at the Cathedral school in Rouen, famous for its specialism in Gregorian Chant. Later, he went to the Paris Conservatoire. He also studied composition under Paul Dukas (of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* fame) and, on the organ, under Eugène Gigout. In his lifetime, he was perhaps most widely known as an organist, taking up the position at St Etienne-du-Mont in Paris from 1930 and for the rest of his life, though he also acted as assistant organist at Notre-Dame, especially under Louis Vierne, a lifelong friend. He was, in fact, assisting Vierne when the latter died at the console at Notre-Dame. He also taught at the Paris Conservatoire for many years. He premiered Francis Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* in 1939, also advising the composer on the organ registrations to employ.

Despite living into his eighties, it was Duruflé's work as an organist and teacher for which he became most well-known at the time. He composed only a few works, and only a select group were published (fourteen), though each has become a 'classic' of the twentieth century musical canon. The main problem was that he was super-critical and he found composing to be a laborious process. The result of this self-criticism and his 'release' of only a small number of works, is that those that there are are very finely polished, well-crafted pieces. Of these, perhaps, the most famous and certainly one of the most substantial of his works, is the *Requiem*. Unlike Messian, a contemporary of Duruflé's, he did not experiment with new musical language but, instead, it looked backwards to a large extent, much of the music being based on the original Gregorian Chant for the 'Mass of the Dead', though the influence of impressionism is clearly present. It was published in an organ version in 1948. The work was orchestrated at a slightly later stage (ACS is using only organ accompaniment for its performance in March). It was commissioned by the 'Vichy Regime', for a monetary reward, though this regime had collapsed by the time the work was completed in 1947.

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.