

Issue 3

October 2021

Cantemus News

L e t u s s i n g !



Text

Marina Vera - City of Music

Unitarian Music Society



www.unitarianmusic.org.uk

Letter from the Chair

I wonder if anyone knows this song by Marvin Hamlisch from the 1975 musical, *A Chorus Line*. The opening verse reads

*I'm watchin' sis go pitterpat
Said "I can do that
I can do that."
Knew ev'ry step right off the bat
Said "I can do that
I can do that."*



This is a tendency of mine: whenever I listen to a pianist play a Rachmaninov prelude or admire a Turner watercolour or watch somebody skateboarding, I think, "Hmm, I can do that!" What arrogance! And what a cropper I have come on many occasions!

At one of my earliest UMS Conferences, I decided I could outdo the previous year's speaker by giving a talk on a contemporary composer, the Swedish-born Nils Lindberg about whom I was particularly enthusiastic. I bought several of his CDs, researched his life and even made contact with him.

But as the time for my talk drew near, I started to get cold feet: "Who's going to be interested in this composer? What right have I to stand up there, demand their attention and expect them to listen?" So I decided on a fall-back approach. I would hand out crossword puzzles and word searches so at least I would not be able to see their bored faces, and they would have something to divert themselves while I nattered on.

When the day arrived I humbly handed out my puzzles as people arrived, and explained to everyone rather sheepishly, "I hope you enjoy the music I am going to play you, but if not, well, here is something for you to do."

I then proceeded to explain about my current craze for Lindberg, spoke of his many awards and said proudly how I had even had an email from him. All of a sudden David Dawson blurted out, with that mischievous twinkle in his eye:

"And here's the man himself!"

Everyone roared with laughter, and I was speechless with embarrassment. Served me right, I can hear you say, but I quickly recovered and carried on anyway. And of course I have never learnt my lesson, for I have been giving talks, and stumbling along, ever since.

So when, earlier this year, I was asked to take over as Chair of UMS, my first thought was, I CAN DO THAT!

It remains to be seen whether I can or not, but I will give it a good shot. I am stepping into some revered footsteps, none more so than those of my predecessor, Valerie Walker, who has steadily kept the ship afloat for several years and, more recently, through these becalmed times. Now we are sailing again under a favourable wind, with a crew of enthusiastic young Committee members as well as some experienced old hands (if I may put it like that). "Onward and upwards," as C S Lewis wrote, "To Narnia and the North!"

Well, we don't need to go as far as Narnia, but I am all for being adventurous. Let's see what new ideas we can come up with to inspire a young generation of talented musicians. We have a good foundation to build on but, at the same time, I feel that change is in the air. Maybe "Oliver's Journey Home" (written about in a later article) will foster some new directions for us to go in.

So don't hold back - just think, **"WE CAN DO THAT!"**

Nick Morrice - UMS Chair



UMS Secretary musings

We have 93 members who have renewed their membership for 2021-2022, with four former members not renewing.

Since the last Cantemus News I have sold a further four hymn CDs and have a number of enquiries about how to get them.

I sent a thank you card to John Wilkinson thanking him for his work on keeping the UMS website up to date. Josh Johnston has taken over this task.

I sent a card to congratulate Nick Morrice and Adrienne Wilson on the occasion of their Civil Partnership Ceremony.

I sent a Get Well card to Lyanne Mitchell, when she wasn't feeling too well.

We had two successful Zoom events: taking part in the Societies Days and the UMS Virtual Day in August 2021, including our AGM, at which I was reappointed Secretary and Membership Secretary. Gary Brookfield was reappointed Treasurer and Nick Morrice became our new Chairperson. Elizabeth Rosenberg chairs the Conference organising group.

Margaret Robinson

UMS virtual day

A great time was had by all who attended - it was so nice to see everyone again. The organisers lined up a wonderful mix of events for us, much as we do at our live conferences. I want to say a big thank you to all who worked to put the 'virtual day' together.



ZOOM is a great way to keep in contact, and I strongly urge those who haven't tried it yet: please do!

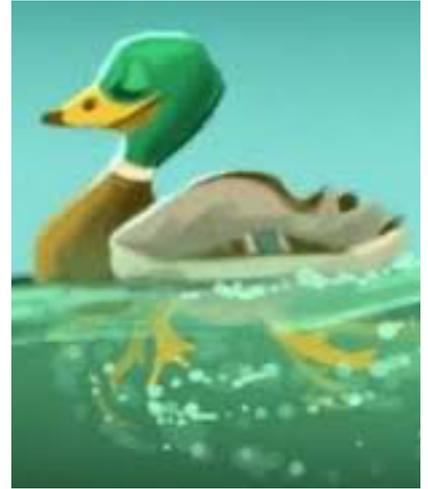
I look forward to any future ZOOM events we will have (mini-conferences, mid-year?) and I especially look forward to our next live conference and our premiere of "Oliver's Journey Home".

Marcie

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From the Organising Sub-group...

“Be more duck”, my mother used to say. Be more duck? *“Everything looks so easy-going on the surface; ducks glide around the pond but underneath, their legs are going 100 miles an hour to keep themselves afloat.”*



‘Be more duck’ was most definitely, and certainly, me on the run-up to the Virtual Conference. It may have seemed smooth-sailing on the day but underneath, my little legs, fingertips, and heartbeat, were racing at 100 miles a minute.

Of course, it started out that we had to do a complete 180 from our original plan and pivot to a Virtual Conference. This came with a whole lot of unknowns that myself, and the Organising Sub-group, had never entered into. Hosting a Zoom event for numerous people (who would know if my internet held up?), finding volunteers who felt comfortable to lead a session, and making time for technical run-throughs so that everyone was happy with what they were doing on the day. I think maybe, the week before, I didn’t look like the calm duck gliding along the pond’s surface, but a rather frazzled duckling that was taking its first dip into the murky depths.



But, let’s be honest, it paid off. The Virtual Conference was a huge success and I couldn’t be more proud of the Organising Sub-group and everyone who led a session. I’ve had so many lovely emails and messages from people saying just how much they enjoyed it, and how wonderful it was to have UMS ‘together’ once more.

This year, of course, we are giving ourselves even more to do! Our Summer Conference will centre around Nick Morrice’s *Oliver’s Journey Home*. We will perform the musical in Ilkley, on the Sunday, where David Dawson wrote the majority of the music. Although this is not quite one of the infamous ‘abroad’ trips that UMS used to go on, I’m quite excited to experience something like it! We will of course still have our regular sessions, AGM and chapel service during this conference - all of which you will hear more about in a later Cantemus News.

What you will need to look out for though is **ANOTHER** Virtual Conference! We're looking for a Saturday in February or March where we can host another one day event. Here we will listen (and maybe run-through) some of *Oliver's Journey Home*, as well as participating in another varied range of sessions. A little soupçon for the Summer Conference, I hope.

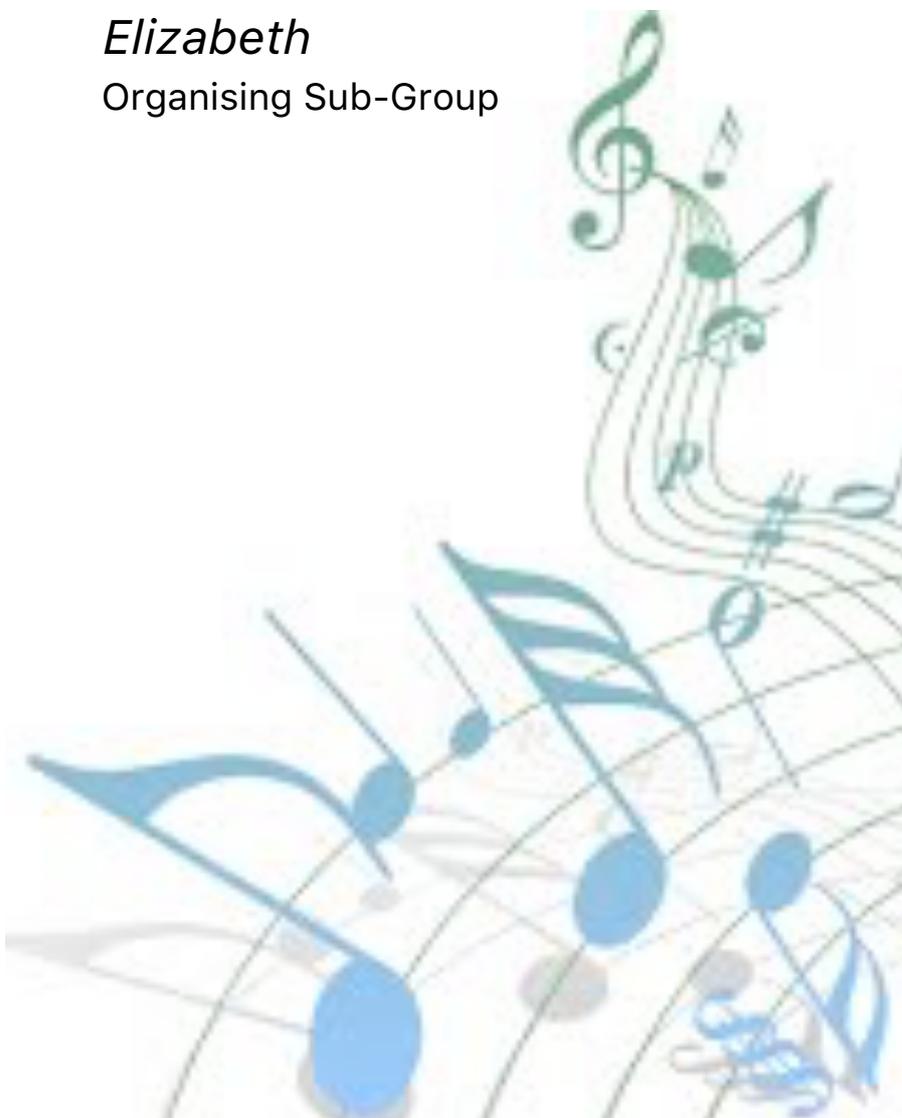
As I write this, I am currently putting the UMS 2022 Calendar together and planning what needs to be done for these two conferences. It is busy, it takes time and effort, but it is (as always) a joy.

I hope to see as many as you as possible at the Conferences in the coming year.

Until then, keep making music!

Elizabeth

Organising Sub-Group



Join us for
a Super Saturday
in Feb
or March '22
for a Virtual
one-day
event





Oliver's Journey Home

Friday 12th August

We will all arrive at the Nightingale Centre during the afternoon of Friday 12th August and greet each other like long-lost friends, only more warmly than ever because this day has been a long time coming.

There will be pockets of music-making and a lot of chatting over cups of tea, then something a bit stronger round about 6ish, before...



We will dine noisily at 6:30 until someone announces sternly that it is time to assemble for our evening practice: singers this way, orchestra that way. We will look at the musical, as well as the hymns and probably an anthem for the service in Old Chapel.



This will go on until we are fit to drop; there will be a calming Epilogue and we will retire to bed, happy but exhausted.

Saturday 13th

will emerge bright and fine, we will eat more breakfast than we are used to, then there will be a variety of workshops throughout the day; free time to see the well-dressing in the village, more tea, more drinks... you get the picture... followed by.....

An evening of party pieces, where we lay bare our souls, sing our songs, tell our jokes, or simply sit back and have a good laugh. Epilogue, hugs, good night, **ZZZZZZZZZZZZ...**



Sunday 14th August.....

and a surprising change: "**Your carriage awaits you!**" Yes, all aboard for a mystery bus ride - except we know where we are going. Nervously clutching our scores and our packed lunches, we are heading off to **Ilkley.....**



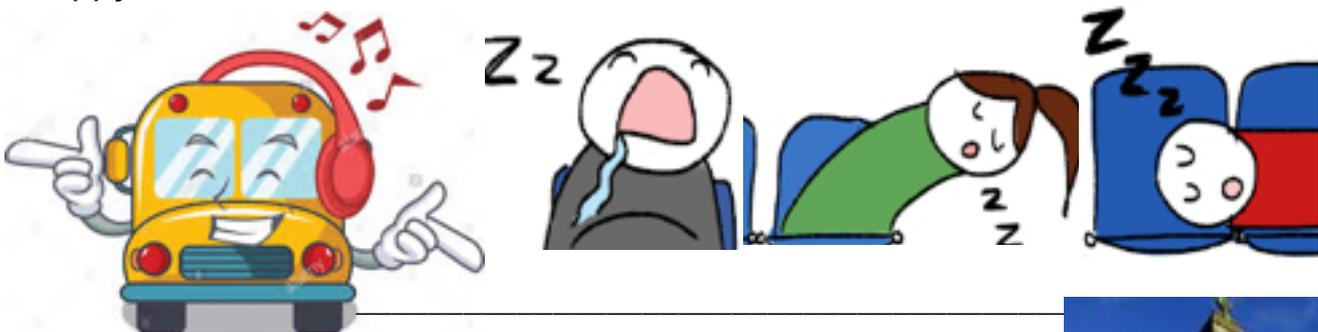
.....to rehearse and perform "**Oliver's Journey Home**" at the Clarke Foley Community Centre.

We will sort of throw it together in a few hours, then perform it once at about five o'clock, under the guiding hand of Alan Williams and a select number of instrumentalists from the **New Horizon Orchestra**, which David Dawson himself conducted for many years.

Once the loud applause (we hope) has died down.....

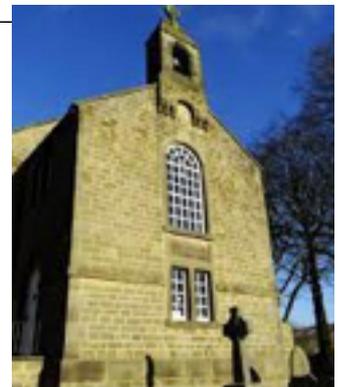


...we will all join together in a feast laid on by the staff of the hall, meet and greet dear Unitarian friends from near and far and other friends and relations before leaping aboard our coach and heading back to Great Hucklow. There may be a little singing on the way, but my bet is we will mostly be sleeping it off - again, happy but exhausted.



Monday 15th August

Monday will dawn, even brighter than yesterday. Maybe we will have a little lie in...then the remainder of the Conference will consist of our traditional service in the Chapel, followed by the AGM. Then lunch before we have our hugs, say our farewells and "**See you next year!**"



This is how I see things roughly panning out, and if it sounds at all inviting, then make sure you sign up in plenty of time for what promises to be a different kind of UMS Conference: one tinged with sadness, to be sure, but a joyful occasion in many ways - and, above all, a belated tribute to our late beloved President, David Dawson, without whom probably none of this would have been possible.

Nick Morrice

Hymns, Concerts and Music-Making at York Unitarians

In recent weeks, York Unitarians dared to step back into the chapel for blended services. Some of us actually sing the hymns - accompanied by recordings or by our invited pianists, whereas last autumn, music was only on Zoom, and the pianists were offered furlough. They have become friends of the congregation and often feature in the lunchtime concerts too.

My own journey back to hymns re-started in June last year when I responded to Louise Rogers' Facebook announcement about Uni-Sing! It was like a red rag to a bull when I read that she 'would need a pianist'.... A year of weekly sessions created great camaraderie; from July re-shaping itself into fortnightly sessions, each led by a different team, reader and musician choosing their own theme.



Chapel lunchtime concerts: Adrienne Wilson (Adie) took on the organisation of lunchtime concerts after I left for New Zealand at the end of 2013. It is no small feat that, after a series of postponements since Spring 2020, we have caught up from the backlog! Audience numbers reach 60 and 70. So many people are glad to show up, masked or not, to hear fine musicians in the lovely setting and fine acoustic of St. Saviourgate Chapel. I have had the pleasant job of taking the money at the door – and handing it over of course – and takings are split between chapel and performers.

The York congregation's approach to music and musicians, after such a period of self-questioning, is slowly being redefined. I just learnt that a music group may form - and why not? What could be more healthy than to work as a team - to breathe, move, hear and feel our own voice in action?

I am now one of the Sunday musicians – and what a great piano we have to play on, financed anonymously in 2012. Acquiring such a piano has been part of the draw for musicians booking the chapel for their own events. Before that, a bequest from the will of John Robinson provided a quality electric organ with other sound options. Sometimes a hymn/song is better with piano, and sometimes we appreciate the organ option, and (whisper) if it's cold on the piano side of the chapel, I migrate to the other instrument by the radiator...

Since coming home from New Zealand two years ago, with so much change around us, I trust that a new musical era will open up, for me, for York Unitarians, and for UMS. Let's look forward then, to ***Oliver's Journey Home!***

Myrna Michell

Collaborations



'Think of successful creative collaborations as - dreams with deadlines.'

W G Bennis

'Oliver's Journey Home' is the result of a collaboration between two UMS friends - a composer and a writer. David Dawson wrote the music and Nick Morrice, wrote the libretto. It is a considerable achievement.

We were all devastated by David's death last year and we feared that this 'dream' was shattered by the pandemic and would never be performed. However, we now have a plan to perform it next August at our 2022 Conference, thanks mainly to Nick's efforts and contacts.

This will be a public performance and will be our tribute to our beloved late President, David Dawson. It marks the end of an era for UMS - but we are determined to continue meeting, singing, playing and to keeping our special musical fellowship alive and kicking!

This process needs another kind of collaboration. I have greatly enjoyed working with the UMS Sub Organising group - Elizabeth, Isabelle, Elly, Esther and Jo. Our meetings were always up-beat and enjoyable. It felt good to be part of such a positive group, dedicated to the survival of UMS despite all the setbacks.

Societies Day and the UMS virtual conference were challenging events to create on Zoom. We are so grateful to all those who contributed so effectively, especially Helen, Richard and Myrna. But my personal prize goes to Elizabeth who did the lion's share of the work along with her full-time job commitments.

I have also greatly enjoyed collaborating with David Kent in creating 'Songs of Inspiration' which can be freely used for Unitarian worship. When we first met, years ago, at a UMS Conference, I told him I wrote poems...but I really felt they were song lyrics looking for a tune. He has supplied lovely tunes and performs them beautifully on his Youtube channel.

Every UMS Conference of course, demands *lots* of collaboration with the busy programme of workshops, epilogues, rehearsals, entertainment, AGM reports... the list goes on. Our performance next August will also be demanding on many levels. I like what Stephen Sondheim said about musicals being 'plays', but that the last collaborator is **the audience**, so we've got to wait 'til the last collaborator comes in before we can complete the collaboration. Roll on August '22!

Lyanne



Musical Happenings Near Oxford

I still play Tenor Horn with the Yarnton Band near Oxford and (apart from me and a couple of others) the average age is pretty young so our conductor chooses music that keeps them enjoying their playing.

Currently we are playing items like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Crazy Thing Called Love*, *Strictly Come Dancing* theme and *Beauty and the Beast*. For part of the year we have rehearsed in players' gardens in groups of six and recently gone back into the village hall observing social distancing.

During lockdown we made a recording of Freddie Mercury's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Mr Blue Sky* by creating our individual parts then sending them for mixing. A photo is attached and I'm the oldie in the bottom line wearing a check shirt.

Yarnton Band playing Bohemian Rhapsody during lockdown

Keep a look out on the Band's website for a link to the video:

<http://yarnton-band.org.uk/>



In August we had our first engagement since lockdown at the Windrush Valley Fete near Burford. Then we played for our village church's St Bartholomew Day. I was hesitant as a descendent of Huguenots and as a Dissenter because of the atrocities on that day in 1572 and then in 1662.

However, I did play because Bartholomew is the patron saint of bees and bee keepers!



Peter Hewis

Looking backand forward

Digging through old diaries to check, I find that my first UMS conference was in August 2007. Since then, every year - until this beastly pandemic intruded - I have met-up with other music-loving Unitarians and made many new friends. I have been introduced to music I had never encountered before, even if I had heard of the composer, and had so much fun.

I'm not much of a singer (a hesitant Alto - OK if I sit next to someone good at hitting the right first note) and an indifferent pianist – even worse now that arthritis has attacked my joints - so never likely to inflict my efforts on those enjoying the Saturday evening's entertainment. But I love music and have enjoyed every one of those long week-end breaks, whether at Gt. Hucklow or Ammerdown.

The UMS Conference is always a frenetic three days, filled with activity, the variety of which is amazing. I have been conference organiser several times and this involved an enormous amount of work but also gave great rewards. Music is everywhere, being played, sung, and talked about. I have listened to fascinating - and very expert - presentations, and learned so much about composers, musicians and poets; I have joined in drumming workshops, Elizabethan Dance classes, mask-making, even 'beginners recorders' (I now know for certain that I am incapable of blowing and fingering at the same time). There is so much choice between which session to join – often with two or even three options - that it is often difficult to choose, and although some 'downtime' is recommended, one needs to be determined to take a break and go for a stroll.

Is there a part of any life when music is not involved in some way? - even if just background sound on a TV programme, in shops and restaurants, or when we are driving? Certainly for me, and most Unitarians, I would think, music must always be part of our worship. The aims of our society underpin that, as well as the commitment to provide music education in the widest sense. We know there are many musical Unitarians who are not part of our number. We need to spread the word that UMS is not here just to provide back-up CDs of hymns for small worship groups, or to hold a three-day summer get-together every year.

This last difficult year has, of necessity, encouraged other ways of communicating and joining together for worship. It has also enabled new ideas and involvement between those who may have never met in person to enjoy other activities, and it has been delightful to see how musicians have adapted. May these new ideas, these new groups, flourish and expand.

I, and all of you I know, will be looking forward with excitement to the performance of 'Oliver's Journey Home'. We are fortunate to have such a talented Chair, and it will also be a wonderful memory of a much-loved and respected former President, sadly no longer with us.

And finally, I would like to say as a memory to that dear old friend, David Dawson - 'Thank you for the Music' (courtesy of ABBA). Perhaps not his beloved Haydn, Handel, Vivaldi, Elgar, Bach...but! Being a member of UMS is an ongoing pleasure...

Thank you all.

Valerie Walker (former Chair)

This is the poster which we hope will help us to find our 'Oliver'. Gavin Howell has kindly shared it on social media – UK Unitarians, UK Unitarian Youth and BUYAN Facebook pages and with both GA and congregational youth leaders.

Let us know if you have a potential 'Oliver' in your circle of family or friends....we would love our Oliver to have Unitarian connections!

Oliver's Journey Home

The Unitarian Music Society is putting on a musical next summer, called "Oliver's Journey Home", as a memorial to David Dawson who wrote the music.

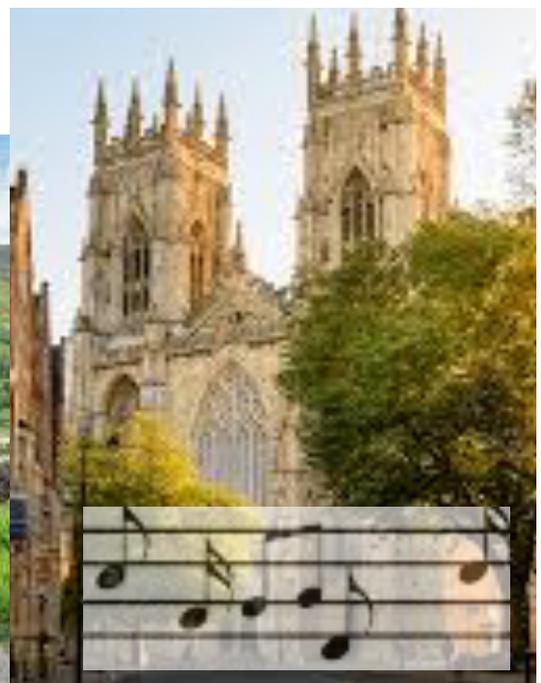
We are looking for a young singer/actor to take the lead part, ideally in his late teens.

We need an 'Oliver'!



**Can you sing?
Can you ride a stationary bike?
Would you like to be the star of our show?**

If so please contact - nickmorrice@gmail.com



... And Finally ...

A huge *thank you* to everyone who has contributed to this issue. Your participation is much appreciated.

The next Issue of *Cantemus News* will come out around the third week of January 2022.

It will contain our Summer Conference Booking Forms and a reminder for our one-day Virtual Conference in February or March. (see Elizabeth's piece page 5)

Please send contributions for issue 4
of *Cantemus News* to -
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(Please note change of email)

or post to 49 Mount Stuart Road, Rothesay,
Isle of Bute, PA20 9EB)

Best wishes, Lyanne
Cantemus News Editor



*Until then,
wishing you all good health
and harmony!*