

8. AN INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

The Twinning with Konstanz

In 1982 the Choir entered a new relationship, still going strong today, with a German choir: the Konstanzer Oratorienchor. There were certain similarities, such as the propensity to change names: the German choir was to rename itself the Sinfonischer Chor Konstanz in 2004.

The route to this was somewhat tortuous. Richmond upon Thames had been twinned with Fontainebleau since 1977, and the latter was already twinned with Konstanz, resulting in a partnering between the “Prélude” choir of Fontainebleau and the Konstanzer Oratorienchor. Largely through the encouragement of Mark Moore, the proprietor of Richmond Records and an active member of both Richmond Arts Council and the Richmond in Europe Association, exchange visits had taken place between the Konstanz and Fontainebleau choirs with Cantanti Camerati, the chamber choir that John Bate had founded but had been conducted since 1974 by Geoffrey Bowyer. The Richmond in Europe Association was working to complete the triangle by bringing about a twinning of Richmond with Konstanz. Mark Moore was also a keen supporter (later an Honorary Patron) of the John Bate Choir and thought it appropriate to involve us in the process. Not wishing to upset the existing though somewhat unbalanced link between the Konstanz choir and Cantanti Camerati, he used his contacts to arrange that the John Bate Choir would perform in the annual Konstanz festival in July 1981.

So on Friday 10th July 1981, around forty Choir members took to the air, flying to Zurich and travelling onward by coach to Konstanz where all were accommodated at the Hotel Barbarossa (which has been thoroughly renovated since!). As yet there was no link with the Oratorienchor, so there were no hosts. The concert on the Saturday in the Basilica, with Gareth Green playing the organ, was recorded by South West German radio and broadcast some time later. It included the Byrd five part mass, the Britten Flower Songs, two Bruckner motets and *Zadok the Priest*, the latter being accompanied appropriately by loud cracks of thunder overhead. A few members including John had to leave on the Sunday, but those who had managed to take the Monday off stayed over, spending Sunday visiting Meersburg and Überlingen across Lake Constance and Monday morning on Insel Reichenau before heading homewards.

The legacy of this trip has been an enduring disagreement between the two choirs about when exactly the relationship started, with some at our end claiming 1981 and the Germans insisting (correctly) that it was 1982. We had of course no contact with the Oratorienchor when we visited in 1981.

Richmond Council was won over by the lobbying of Mark and his colleagues, and arrangements for the formal twinning of Richmond and Konstanz were put in place. The weekend of 30/31 October 1982 was chosen, as it also marked the fifth anniversary of the twinning of Richmond with Fontainebleau, whose dignitaries (and choir) were invited to share in the event. Members of the John Bate Choir and Cantanti Camerati accommodated the two visiting choirs in their homes over the weekend. On Saturday 30th October a "Four Choirs Concert" was given in St John the Divine, Richmond. The first half was provided by the Chorale Prélude of Fontainebleau and Cantanti Camerati, separately singing a variety of madrigals, part songs and carols, then after the interval all choirs joined in Beethoven's 9th Symphony conducted by John Bate. Squeezing the choirs and orchestra into the church was something of a challenge: the solution was to turn the church around, with the large choirs and orchestra facing the altar, Cantanti and the French choir in the gallery and such audience as could be fitted in mainly occupying the chancel! Perhaps some of the Richmond Councillors present noticed the lack of performing facilities in their borough for the first time.

The Richmond in Europe Association



TO CELEBRATE

the TWINNING of RICHMOND UPON THAMES with
CONSTANCE, GERMANY
and the fifth anniversary of the twinning with
FONTAINEBLEAU, FRANCE

8 p.m. SATURDAY 30th OCTOBER 1982

A FOUR CHOIRS GONGERT

Part 1 French and English choral song

Cantanti Camerati of Richmond **Chorale Prélude de Fontainebleau**
Conductors Geoffrey Bowyer & Gilbert Menil

Part 2 Symphony No.9 in D minor, "The Choral" Beethoven

The John Bate Choir **Konstanzer Oratorienchor**
Chorusmasters John Bate & Erwin Mohr
Kathryn Hannies, soprano Carole Rosen, alto
Geoffrey Pogson, tenor Jonathan Roberts, bass

THE JOHN BATE ORCHESTRA Conducted by JOHN BATE

Church of St John the Divine Kew Road Richmond
Tickets £4.50, from

Richmond Adult College, Parkshot, Richmond
Richmond Records, Paradise Road, Richmond
Alberts Music Shop, Heath Road, Twickenham

The 1982 Twinning Concert

The next day, Sunday, the formal civic twinning ceremony was held at York House, Twickenham. Prior to that a buffet lunch had been organised for the visiting choirs and their hosts at Waldegrave School in Twickenham, and after the ceremony (and civic glass of wine) the Konstanz choir gave a short concert in St Mary's Church, Twickenham.

Apparently, proper consummation of the civic twinning required a return event, which duly took place in Konstanz two years later, in May 1984. Perhaps this is the reason why the Richmond Council website states that Richmond has been twinned with Konstanz since 1983! On that occasion the Choir travelled to Konstanz for the second time, but this time most if not all of the participating members were accommodated by German hosts. The last movement only of Beethoven's 9th was performed in the Konzil by the two choirs, under the Oratorienchor's conductor Erwin Mohr, more for the significance of the event than any musical purpose, the low-ceilinged hall being wholly unsuitable for such a concert. Afterwards, all repaired to the banqueting hall below for eating, drinking, speeches and more drinking. Our choir gave their own concert the following evening in the Basilica.

Over the succeeding period of thirty years each choir has made five visits to the other's base, on each occasion performing a single concert jointly under the home choir's conductor. The original Konstanz conductor, Erwin Mohr, died prematurely in 1990 and was replaced by Wolfgang Mettler. Works performed together have been *Elijah* (twice), *Saul*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, *Jephtha*, *Creation*, Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* and Rutter's *Magnificat*, the Verdi *Requiem*, Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem* and Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens*, and most recently in 2013 Karl Jenkins's *The Armed Man* and Kevin Jones's *Cantus de Stellis*. St Gebhardskirche has been the location of performances in Konstanz, while at the London end after two not entirely happy experiences in Richmond's Queen Charlotte Hall, the most recent three concerts have used the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

On most occasions around half of each visiting group have opted to stay with hosts and the rest in hotels. A number of long-standing friendships have resulted, although fewer than might be expected owing to the rather high turnover of the Konstanz choir compared to Thames Philharmonic. Their older members tend to leave because of the policy of standing throughout concerts, being replaced by a steady supply of young recruits from the school where Wolfgang Mettler teaches. Cantanti Camerati have also kept up their relationship and as a result have usually been involved when the Germans come over, socially if not always musically. The weekends are quite hard work for all concerned, and the timetables are tight, with the visiting choir normally arriving late Friday afternoon in time for an evening rehearsal, but there is usually time for a reasonable amount of sightseeing and always time for a social event - *Prosit!*



Joint performance of "Jephtha" in St Gebhardskirche, Konstanz, 1992