

ACS Musical Notes

Autumn 2026 Newsletter



AYLESBURY
Choral Society



At rehearsal for our summer concert, 2026: *Music for Stage and Screen*

Here we are in September at the commencement of our 94th Season of concerts following a most successful first year with our new Musical Director, Philip Stopford. The other concerts of the 2025-2026 season have been highlighted in previous newsletters so I will just mention our summer concert of *Music for Stage and Screen*. Often in the summer we put on a lighter, smaller-scale concert and this was one of our more ambitious of lighter evenings. The choral music included selections from *James Bond*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, and from the music to *Titanic*, *My heart will go on*. Then we also had several solo items from West End star, Clare McCaldin, who was brilliant – not only in her singing but also in her introductions to the audience. The concert was enjoyed by all: choir and audience. It was accompanied by Colin Spinks on his last ‘outing’ with ACS, along with his wife, Felicity. It was a great opportunity to say a massive ‘thank you’ to Colin following twenty-two years of amazing playing – on organ, piano and harpsichord – and occasional directing. He was presented with a large number of gardening vouchers as he is a keen gardener, which should keep him going in the garden for some time to come.

Our new season has already commenced and our next concert is on Saturday 28th November at which ACS will perform the every-popular *Messiah* by George Frederic Handel, with four amazing soloists, The Aylesbury Sinfonia and our MD, Philip Stopford. This will, undoubtedly be an extremely well-attended concert so those wishing to come along should get their tickets early (we are also charging a little more on the door whilst advanced ticket sales are at the same price as previously). Handel was so inspired in writing *Messiah* (notice that it should never have the article, ‘the’) that he composed it in just twenty-four days in 1741. For the writer of this newsletter, he has sung the oratorio more times than he cares to remember yet it always impresses for its skill, imagination and vitality (and remember: Handel was a German writing in English – his writing for the English language is truly brilliant). The work can be, perhaps, a little over-popularised and hackneyed but it is never short of being an absolute masterpiece of the Baroque period.

To give advanced notice, ACS will be joining forces with Leighton Buzzard Festival Singers on May 1st in All Saints Church, Leighton Buzzard to perform the world premiere of Philip Stopford’s *Psalms of Christ*, again with orchestra and soloists, as part of his fiftieth birthday celebrations. Put this magnificent event in your diaries now. Tickets will be on sale from January.

The 2026 – 2027 concert season....:

Saturday 28th November, 2026: Handel’s *Messiah*, with soloists and orchestra at St Mary’s Church, Aylesbury, 7:30pm

Saturday 1st May, 2027: Philip Stopford’s *Psalms of Christ* (world premiere), with Leighton Buzzard Festival Singers, soloists and orchestra at All Saints Church, Leighton Buzzard, **7:00pm** (please note time)

Saturday 19th June, 2027: A selection of music highlighting the ‘World’s’ Greatest Melodies’ with Tom Dewey at the piano at St Mary’s Church, Aylesbury, 7:30pm

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 (£20 & £8 on the door).



Featured composer: George Frederic Handel (1685 – 1759)

Handel was born in Halle in Germany where he attended at the University as well; and then, later in his younger years, he travelled to Italy at the invitation of Ferdinando de' Medici who was very interested in opera. Handel was a natural opera composer and simply loved writing for the theatre. So, when he later became Kapellmeister (musical director) to George, the Elector of Hanover in 1710, he stayed only briefly. It was London that, outside Italy, was a major centre of operatic productions at that time and by the end of the same year, he travelled to England where he decided to settle permanently, taking on British citizenship. After composing the *Utrecht Te Deum and Jubilate* for Queen Anne, Handel received a pension from her which helped enable him to stay in London, also supported by other patrons. Strangely, he composed no operas at all for the first few years he was in England but did write quite a lot of music for the Royal Household, in particular King George I (formerly the Elector of Hanover who Handel had previously been employed by in Germany) who had come to England to take the throne following Queen Anne's death. This music included the *Water Music* for a Royal party on the River Thames.

Handel did return to the composition of opera, however, but, after initial success, his works, considered a little old-fashioned, decreased in popularity. He turned to Oratorio, composing works such as *Esther*, *Deborah*, and *Athaliah*. His fame in London took a dip later in his career and, following an invitation to go to Dublin in 1741, he wrote *Messiah* which was to establish him ultimately as one of the greatest of English composers. The work was first performed in Dublin to great acclaim. However, it was a revival performance in London (the work had not at first been popular in London) for the benefit of the *Foundling Hospital* that the work's fame – and Handel's – really resurged. Nowadays, it is Handel's most famous work of a highly regarded catalogue. Handel never married and was a rather private person; he died in London at age 74 in 1759. Over 3000 mourners were at his funeral.

Repetiteur / Accompanist

As stated earlier, ACS said 'goodbye' and 'thank you' to Colin Spinks, our accompanist for the last twenty-two years at our Summer Concert in June. We have been pleased to appoint Mr Tom Dewey to this role from the beginning of September and he has already proved himself to be a worthy successor over his first three weeks.



Get Ready....

Advanced notice: In the autumn of 2027 we will welcome composer of the *Mass in Blue*, Will Todd, who will lead a 'Come and Sing' workshop on his new advent oratorio, *The Promise*, on Saturday 18th September, 2027; and then this work will also be performed with Will in attendance on Saturday 4th December, 2027. Exciting, Hey! Come and join in the workshop and/or join us at the concert.

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 memsec@aylesburychoral.org.uk or our chairperson, Judith Trainor, 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 Deputy Chair, Chris Dalladay, at cdalladay@aol.com letting him know your name and email address.