



Ashtead Choral Society
Conducted by Andrew Storey

HANDEL

Theodora

SATURDAY 6 JUNE 2026

St Martin's Church, Epsom

Con brio

Supported by

HRTCT

The Humphrey Richardson Taylor
Charitable Trust

www.ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk



www.epsomandewelltimes.com

"for the community, by the community"

A not-for-profit quality news service

Vincent Desmond, Chair of Ashtead Choral Society



Welcome to our last concert in this season of oratorios by three different composers. Today's performance of Handel's *Theodora* follows on from Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in November and JS Bach's *St John Passion* in March (see our website for video highlights). All three composers shared the organ loft as the launch pad for their careers. All three left an important legacy in the lineage of dramatic

choral works. However, perhaps only Handel, with his instinct for the theatrical, would have tackled *Theodora*. The result sits equivocally between the opera house and the church which means that you are in for a rather tempestuous, tragic and occasionally tawdry evening exploring love, sacrifice and persecution.

To bring Handel's work to life we are pleased to welcome back our orchestral partners, Kent Sinfonia, and our fine new and returning soloists to tell the tale of *Theodora* under Dr Andrew Storey's direction. As ever, there are so many other folks to thank, from our brilliant music team to our many volunteers. Indeed, I would like to emphasise our thanks to the small army of folks who do huge amounts of work to keep ACS going and developing.

So, this is it for another season during which we have given three super concerts, welcomed lots of lovely new singers, raised over £1,500 for local charities (Refugee Network and Focus Surrey) and collectively drunk something like 3,000 cups of tea and coffee on Monday evenings. Next season will involve Verdi and Rutter, brass ensembles and jazz. To keep up to date with concerts and events, why not use the time queuing for interval refreshments to subscribe to our newsletter (hit our homepage to do that) and subscribe to our Facebook and Instagram pages.

Now, brace yourselves for *Theodora*...

ASHTEAD CHORAL SOCIETY

Founder: George Pizzey

Chair: Vincent Desmond

Music Director: Andrew Storey PhD, MSc, BA (Hons), PGCE

Conductor Emeritus: Arthur Diamond GGSM, FISM

Conductor Emeritus: Paul Dodds BA, PGCE

Accompanist: Stephen Ridge MA, LTCL

VICE PRESIDENTS

Mr S Bridges, Mrs A Digby, Mrs M Macdonald, Ms H Pritchard,

Mrs B Quinlan, Mrs A Ridge, Mrs R Stark

JUDY WILLIAMS MEMORIAL FUND PATRONS

Miss D Dearn, Mrs M McInnes, Mrs M Newall

FRIENDS

Mr and Mrs A Diamond, Mrs J Luscombe, Mrs A Talbot

ACS TRUSTEES

Chair: Vincent Desmond, Membership Secretary: Anne Bailey

Treasurer: Tony Williams, Concert Secretary: Linda Crook

Soprano Representative: Lucy Morrell, Alto Representative: Jennie Beck

Tenor and Bass Representative: Andrew Moss

Marketing Manager: Alice Curran, Box Office Manager: Kathy Lewis,

Subscriptions Treasurer: Ishbel Kenward

Librarians: Richard and Claire Price

Ashtead Choral Society is a member of Making Music, The Mole Valley Arts Forum and a Friend of Surrey Performing Arts Library.

We thank all those who have assisted in the organisation of this concert.

Membership Sec: secretary@ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk

It is an offence punishable by fine and/or imprisonment against the provisions of the Dramatic and Musical Protection Act 1958 to make any recordings of a musical performance without obtaining the prior written permission of the performers.

Programme

Theodora George Frideric Handel

Cheryl Enever (Theodora) Soprano soloist

Richard Decker (Didymus) Countertenor soloist

Cathy Bell (Irene) Mezzo Soprano soloist

Ed Saklatvala (Septimius) Tenor soloist

Timothy Dickinson (Valens) Bass soloist

Adam Storey (Messenger) Tenor soloist

Kent Sinfonia - Leader **Christian Halstead**

Ashtead Choral Society

Andrew Storey Conductor

Contents

Part I

| | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | Overture | |
| 2. | 'Tis Diocletian's natal day | Valens |
| 2(b). | Go, my faithful soldier | Valens |
| 3. | And draw a blessing down | Heathens (Chorus) |
| 4. | Vouchsafe, dread Sir | Didymus & Valens |
| 5. | Racks, gibbets, sword, and fire | Valens |
| 6. | For ever thus stands fix'd the doom | Heathens (Chorus) |
| 7. | Most cruel edict! | Didymus |
| 7(b). | The raptur'd soul | Didymus |
| 8. | I know thy virtues | Septimius |
| 8(b). | Descend, kind Pity | Septimius |
| 9. | Though hard, my friends | Theodora |
| 9(b). | Fond, flatt'ring world, adieu! | Theodora |
| 10. | O bright example | Irene |
| 10(b). | Bane of virtue | Irene |
| 11. | Come, mighty Father | Christians (Chorus) |
| 12. | Fly, fly, my brethren | Messenger & Irene |
| 13. | As with rosy steps the morn | Irene |
| 14. | All pow'r in Heav'n above | Christians (Chorus) |
| 15. | Mistaken wretches! | Septimius |
| 15(b). | Dread the fruits of Christian folly | Septimius |
| 16. | Deluded mortal! | Theodora & Septimius |
| 17. | O worse than death indeed! | Theodora |
| 17(b). | Angels, ever bright and fair | Theodora |
| 18. | Unhappy, happy crew! | Didymus & Irene |
| 18(b). | Kind Heav'n, if virtue be thy care | Didymus |
| 19. | O Love, how great thy pow'r! | Irene |
| 20. | Go, generous, pious youth | Christians (Chorus) |

Interval

Part II

| | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 21. | Ye men of Antioch | Valens |
| 22. | Queen of Summer, Queen of love | Heathens (Chorus) |
| 23. | Wide spread his name | Valens |
| 24. | Return, Septimius | Valens |
| 25. | Venus laughing from the skies | Heathens (Chorus) |
| 26. | Symphony | |

| | | |
|--------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 30. | Long have I known | Didymus & Septimius |
| 32. | O save her then | Didymus & Septimius |
| 32(b). | Deeds of kindness to display | Didymus |
| 33. | The clouds begin to veil | Irene |
| 33(b). | Defend he, Heav'n | Irene |
| 34. | Or lull'd with grief | Didymus |
| 34(b). | Sweet rose and lily | Didymus |
| 35. | O save me Heav'n | Theodora & Didymus |
| 36. | The pilgrim's home | Theodora |
| 37. | Forbid it, Heav'n! | Didymus & Theodora |
| 38. | To thee, thou glorious son of worth | Theodora & Didymus |
| 39. | 'Tis night | Irene |
| 40. | He saw the lovely youth | Christians (Chorus) |

Part III

| | | |
|--------|---|--|
| 41. | Lord, to Thee each night and day | Irene |
| 42. | But see! The good, the virtuous Didymus! | Irene & Theodora |
| 44. | Blest be the hand | Christians (Chorus) |
| 45. | Undaunted in the court | Messenger, Irene & Theodora |
| 46. | Whither, Princess, do you fly? | Irene & Theodora |
| 47. | She's gone | Irene |
| 47(b). | New scenes of joy | Irene |
| 48. | Is it a Christian virtue, then? | Valens, Didymus, Theodora & Septimius |
| 49. | From virtue springs each gen'rous deed | Septimius |
| 50. | Cease, ye slaves, your fruitless prayer | Valens |
| 51. | 'Tis kind, my friends | Didymus & Theodora |
| 52. | How strange their ends | Heathens (Chorus) |
| 53. | On me your frowns | Didymus, Theodora & Valens |
| 54. | Ye ministers of justice | Valens |
| 55. | And must such beauty suffer? | Didymus, Theodora & Septimius |
| 56. | Streams of pleasure ever flowing | Didymus & Theodora |
| 57. | Ere this their doom is past | Irene |
| 58. | O Love Divine | Irene & Christians (Chorus) |

Theodora - George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

George Frideric Handel was born in Halle, Germany, spent his early life in Hamburg and Italy before settling in London in 1712, where he spent the majority of his career and became a naturalised British subject in 1727. He was strongly influenced both by the middle-German polyphonic choral tradition and by composers of the Italian Baroque. Handel's music forms one of the peaks of the 'high baroque' style, bringing Italian opera to its highest development, creating the genres of English oratorio and organ concerto, and introducing a new style into English church music. He wrote the most famous of all oratorios, *Messiah* in 1741, and is also known for such occasional pieces as *Water Music* (1717) and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (1749). He is consistently recognised as one of the greatest composers of his age admired by Classical-era composers, especially Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

Handel wrote *Theodora* in the summer of 1749, when he was 64. It is his penultimate dramatic oratorio and was first performed on 16 March 1750 at The Covent Garden Theatre and although admired by Handel's musical acquaintances, it had only limited success with the public. The librettist was the Reverend Thomas Morell, who had provided the texts for *Judas Maccabaeus* (1747) and *Alexander Balus* (1748), and who was also to provide the text for *Jephtha* (1752).

The Making of Theodora

Theodora is unique in Handel's output. Unlike his other religious dramas it is not drawn from the Bible or Apocrypha, and it is his only oratorio set in Christian times. The martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus was first recounted by St Ambrose in his three-volume work, *De Virginibus* (AD377). In 1675 the legend of Theodora first appeared in the *Acta Sanctorum*, a 68-volume collection of saints' lives compiled from records of the early church fathers. In England it was included in what was for many a companion volume to the Bible, John Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs', the *Acts and Monuments of ... the Church* (9th edition 1684), which also tells of Diocletian's persecutions. Morell's primary source was *The Martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus* (1687), a novel by Robert Boyle, a scientist and man of letters who stated that his aim in writing a novel, was to improve upper-class youth with an inspirational story about attractive and virtuous young people; and to

show that women can be heroines, as brave, constant, generous, rational, understanding and capable as men. Morell followed Boyle's plot and characterisation, but made some crucial changes. As well as creating choruses of the Roman and Christian communities, he strengthened the personality of Irene and advanced the role of Septimius from a walk-on part to a central character, a Roman soldier on active duty, creating a further strand of dramatic tension.

Theodora as sentimental drama

Sentimental drama was a type of theatre much esteemed and much practised in 18th-century Britain. Many of its features recur in operas and oratorios by Handel, but nowhere so consistently and pervasively as in *Theodora*. Extensive, detailed expositions of motives, moral dilemmas and situations; focus on tender emotions and domestic, intimate relationships; empathy with the feelings of others; heroic displays of self-denying generosity to a dearly-loved individual, a cause, or both; the leading characters vying with each other to be the more generous; a heroine who sets the higher standard of heroism and generosity, to the admiration of her male counterpart; a plot articulated by a series of dilemmas pressurising characters into making choices, often fatal, arising from clashes of loyalty: all these are defining features of sentimental drama, and central aspects of *Theodora*.

All the main characters are repeatedly confronted with choices which will crucially affect both their own lives and the lives of those close to them. It is not Theodora's inevitable fate to be martyred, and while Theodora, Didymus and Irene are not transformed by events, they could choose to behave differently. However, Theodora's and Didymus' commitment to their religion is so strong that their decision about each choice is almost predictable making the action all the more poignant and tragic. Septimius, the 'ordinary' person, does hesitate, and his reactions illuminate the extraordinary certainty which the strength of their faith gives to Theodora, Didymus and Irene. They have already made their central choice to adhere to their Christian beliefs, whereas during the course of the action Septimius actually changes. He becomes increasingly sympathetic to the Christians. The scenes in which Septimius appears, especially those with Didymus, explore the pain of moral dilemma: between commitment to belief and family ties; between belief and national identity; between loyalty to a friend and pledged

allegiance to one's country. The Christians' religious commitment demands the choice between life and death. Septimius, torn by duty and sympathy, faces choices nearer to ordinary experience.

Theodora and the idea of the heroine

Morell's characterisation of the heroine is both of its time and strikingly forward-looking. Theodora is one of several vulnerable, beleaguered oratorio heroines whose predicament brings out their strength of character. Theodora is threatened with rape, and could say 'Fearless of death, as innocent, I triumph in my fall'. Attempted rape specifically, and more generally female 'virtue in distress', are dominant motifs in English fictions of the mid-18th-century. For Theodora, as for the audiences of their time, virginity is the essence of female integrity. There is nothing coy or insipid in her resistance to violation. On the contrary, for all her vulnerability to male oppression, Theodora is a woman of astonishing dignity and strength, showing an independence of mind and will that would now be called feminist.

Synopsis

Main Characters

| | |
|------------|---|
| Valens | President of Antioch (Bass) |
| Didymus | A Roman Soldier, in love with Theodora (Countertenor) |
| Septimius | A Roman Office (Tenor) |
| Theodora | A Christian of high birth (Soprano) |
| Irene | A Christian, friend to Theodora (Mezzo Soprano) |
| Messenger | (Tenor) |
| Christians | (Chorus) |
| Heathens | (Chorus) |

Part I

The scene is set in Roman-occupied Antioch in the early 4th century, and opens with Valens, the President and Governor, proclaiming a festival of Jove in honour of the Emperor Diocletian requiring all citizens to offer sacrifice to Jove, or be severely punished or put to death. Valens gives his officer Septimius responsibility for ensuring general compliance. The chorus of Romans cheerfully endorses the decree, but Didymus, a Roman soldier in love with Theodora, a Christian maiden of high birth, asks that loyal citizens

whose consciences prevent them from obeying may be spared punishment. Valens responds with yet fiercer threats of reprisal, and the chorus relishes the prospect of the recusants' suffering. Alone with Septimius, his superior officer, Didymus condemns persecution and speaks out for freedom of belief. Septimius, clearly suspecting Didymus' Christianity, affirms his own loyalty to Roman rule but appeals to the spirit of pity to instil universal tolerance.

The scene changes to a meeting of the persecuted Christian community. Theodora, and her friend Irene lead their fellow believers in renouncing worldly ambition and greed and in sharing their gratitude for the strength of their belief. A messenger interrupts them with news of Valens' decree. The Christians are about to disperse in panic, but Irene rallies them with a magnificent statement of hope, and they re-affirm their faith. Septimius comes to arrest them, but tries first to warn them of the seriousness of their predicament. Theodora speaks out in defence of Christianity, knowing she is risking her life, but Septimius has to tell her that her punishment is not death but enforced prostitution until she recants. Praying to die rather than suffer this blow to her integrity, Theodora is led away 'clad in robes of virgin white'. Irene is left to break the news to Didymus, who vows to rescue Theodora or die in the attempt. The Christians pray for the success of his mission.

Part II

The festival of Jove takes place, presided over by Valens. He sends Septimius to tell Theodora that she will be subjected to violation by his soldiers unless she joins in the pagan worship before the end of the day. The chorus of Roman men looks forward to the delights of the brothel.

The scene changes to Theodora's place of confinement in the brothel, where she laments her condition. Initially frightened and near to despair, she regains strength in contemplation of the hope of a heavenly afterlife. Didymus approaches Septimius, who is in charge of her guard, and appeals to their friendship as fellow soldiers. He reveals both his Christianity and his love for Theodora, and persuades Septimius to let him into Theodora's cell. Meanwhile Irene leads the Christians in prayer for Theodora's protection.

Didymus enters the cell - his identity concealed by his closed helmet - thinking how happy Theodora will be at the prospect of freedom. Theodora is initially terrified, assuming him to be her first ravisher, but Didymus reveals

his identity and offers to exchange clothes with her to effect her escape. Steadfast in the principles of her faith, Theodora refuses to countenance such an idea and asks instead that Didymus kill her, to release her from the seemingly inevitable threats to her integrity. Horrified in his turn, Didymus eventually persuades her to trust that God will save them both, and to accept his plan. The action returns to the Christians, who recount the story of Christ's raising of the son of the widow of Nain, affirming God's power to save even the dead.

Part III

The Christians' prayers appear to have been answered by Theodora's safe return. Together with the chorus she celebrates her freedom and prays for her deliverer, but she remains guilt-ridden at having endangered Didymus' life to secure her own safety. A messenger reports that Didymus has been captured and that Valens, enraged, has changed Theodora's sentence from prostitution to immediate death. Now the way is made clear for Theodora to match Didymus' generosity with her own and, despite Irene's protests, she gladly and unhesitatingly goes to offer herself in his place. Irene, in spite of her personal grief, recognises that Theodora has found a greater calling.

The final scenes open in the midst of Didymus' resolute defence of his disobedience. As Valens pronounces sentence Theodora enters, demanding that the judgement fall on her. Didymus and Theodora then both attempt to persuade Valens to let them die in place of each other. Septimius is so moved by their courage that he urges the awestruck Romans to join him in appealing for clemency. However, Valens, logically if vindictively, condemns both prisoners to death, which Theodora and Didymus, in a blissful duet, welcome as the door to a shared immortality. Led by Irene, their fellow Christians pray that divine love may enflame their souls.

Theodora Libretto - (Reverend Thomas Morell)

Part I

1. Overture
2. Valens 'Tis Dioclesian's natal day. Proclaim throughout the bounds of Antioch a feast, and solemn sacrifice to Jove. Whoso disdains to join the sacred rites shall feel our wrath in chastisement, or death. And this, Septimius, take you in charge.
- 2(b). Valens Go, my faithful soldier, go: Let the fragrant incense rise, To Jove, great ruler of the skies.
3. Chorus of Heathens And draw a blessing down, On his imperial crown, Who rules the world below.
4. Didymus Vouchsafe, dread Sir, a gracious ear to my request. Let not thy sentence doom to racks and flames, all, all whose scrup'lous minds will not permit them, or to bend the knee to gods they know not, or, in wanton mood, to celebrate the day with Roman rites.
Valens Art thou a Roman, and yet dar'st defend a sect rebellious to the gods and Rome?
Didymus Many there are in Antioch, who disdain an idol-offering, yet are friends to Caesar.
Valens It cannot be. They are not Caesar's friends, Who own not Caesar's gods. I'll hear no more.
5. Valens Racks, gibbets, sword and fire, shall speak my vengeful ire, against the stubborn knee.
6. Chorus of Heathens For ever thus stands fix'd the doom, Of rebels to the gods and Rome, While sweeter than the trumpet's sound, Their groans and cries are heard around.
7. Didymus Most cruel edict! Sure, thy generous soul, Septimius, abhors the dreadful task of persecution. Ought we not to leave the free-born mind of man still ever free since vain is the attempt to force belief with the severest instrument of death?
- 7(b). Didymus The raptur'd soul defies the sword, secure of virtue's claim, and trusting Heav'n's unerring word, enjoys the circling flame.
8. Septimius I know thy virtues, and ask not thy faith; enjoy it as you will, my Didymus. Though not a Christian, for I worship still The gods my fathers worship'd, yet I own, something within declares for acts of mercy. But Antioch's President must be obey'd; such is the Roman

- discipline, while we can only pity, whom we dare not spare.
- 8(b). Septimius Descend, kind Pity, heavenly guest, descend, and fill each human breast with sympathizing woe.
9. Theodora Though hard, my friends, yet wholesome are the truths, taught in Affliction's school, whence the pure soul Rises refin'd, and soars above the world.
- 9(b). Theodora Fond, flatt'ring world, adieu! Thy gaily-smiling pow'r, Empty treasures, fleeting pleasures, Ne'er shall tempt or charm me more. Faith inviting, Hope delighting, Nobler joys we now pursue.
10. Irene O bright example of all goodness! How easy seems Affliction's heavy load, While thus instructed, and companion'd thus, As 'twere with Heav'n conversing, we look down On the vain pomp of proud prosperity.
- 10(b). Irene Bane of virtue, nurse of passions, Soother of vile inclinations, Such is, prosperity, thy name.
11. Chorus of Christians Come, mighty Father, mighty Lord, With love our souls inspire, While grace and truth flow from thy word, And feed the holy fire.
12. Messenger Fly, fly, my brethren, heathen rage pursues us swift. Arm'd with the terrors of insulting death.
- Irene Ah! Whither should we fly, or fly from whom? The Lord is still the same, today, forever, And his protection here, and everywhere. Though gath'ring round our destin'd heads The storm now thickens, and looks big with fate, Still shall thy servants wait on Thee, O Lord, And in thy saving mercy put their trust.
13. Irene As with rosy steps the morn, Advancing, drives the shades of night, So from virtuous toil well-borne, Raise Thou our hopes of endless light.
14. Chorus of Christians All pow'r in Heav'n above or earth beneath Belongs to Thee alone, Thou Everlasting One, Mighty to save in perils, storm and death
15. Septimius Mistaken wretches! Why thus blind to fate, Do ye in private oratories dare Oppose the President's decree, and scorn With native rites to celebrate the day Sacred to Caesar and protecting Jove?

- 15(b). Septimius Dread the fruits of Christian folly,
And this stubborn melancholy
Fond of life and liberty.
16. Theodora Deluded mortal! Call it not rebellion,
That thus we persevere in spirit and truth,
To worship God: it is his dread command,
His whom we cannot, dare not, disobey,
Though death be our reward.
- Septimius Death is not yet thy doom:
But worse than death to such a virtuous mind,
Which Didymus wants eloquence to praise.
Lady, these guards are order'd to convey you
To the vile place, a prostitute, to whom
Valens thinks proper to devote your charms.
17. Theodora Oh, worse than death indeed! Lead me, ye guards,
Lead me, or to the rack, or to the flames,
I'll thank your gracious mercy.
- 17(b). Theodora Angels, ever bright and fair, Take, oh take me to your care!
18. Didymus Unhappy, happy crew! Why stand ye thus,
Wild with amazement? Say, where is my love,
My kind instructor in fair virtue's path,
My life, my Theodora? Has the tyrant
Seiz'd on his guiltless prey?
- Irene Alas! She's gone.
Too late thou cam'st to save, if in thy pow'r
To save, the fairest, noblest, best of women.
A Roman soldier led her trembling hence
To the vile place, where Venus keeps her court.
Yet on his brow reluctance seem'd to sit,
And helpless pity bade us wait our doom.
- 18(b). Didymus Kind Heav'n, if virtue be thy care,
With courage fire me,
Or art inspire me,
To free the captive fair.
19. Irene O love, how great thy pow'r! But greater still,
When virtue prompts the steady mind to prove
Its native strength in deeds of highest honour.
20. Chorus of
 Christians Go, gen'rous, pious youth,
May all the pow'rs above
Reward thy virtuous love,
Thy constancy and truth,
With Theodora's charms,
Free from these dire alarms;
Or crown you with the blest,
In glory, peace and rest.

Interval

Part II

21. Valens Ye men of Antioch, with solemn pomp,
Renew the grateful sacrifice to Jove;
And while your songs ascend the vaulted skies,
Pour on the smoking altars floods of wine,
In honour of the smiling deities,
Fair Flora, and the Cyprian queen.
22. Chorus of Queen of summer, queen of love
Heathens And thou, cloud-compelling Jove,
Grant a long and happy reign,
To great Caesar, king of men
23. Valens Wide spread his name, and make his glory
Of endless fame the lasting story.
24. Valens Return, Septimius, to the stubborn maid,
And learn her final resolution.
If ere the sun with prone career has reach'd
The western isles, she deigns an offering
To the great gods, who subjected the world
To conqu'ring Rome, she shall be free; if not,
The meanest of my guards with lustful joy
Shall triumph o'er her boasted chastity.
25. Chorus of Venus laughing from the skies, will applaud her votaries.
Heathens While seizing the treasure we revel in pleasure,
Revenge sweet love supplies.
26. Symphony
30. Didymus Long have I known thy friendly social soul,
Septimius, oft experienc'd in the camp
And perilous scenes of war, when side by side
We fought, and brav'd the dangers of the field,
Dependant on each other's arm. With freedom then,
I will disclose my mind. I am a Christian,
And she, who by Heaven's influential grace
With pure religious sentiments inspir'd my soul,
with virtuous love inflam'd my heart, Ev'n she, who, shame
to all humanity, is now condemn'd to public lust.
- Septimius No more!
The shame reflects too much upon thy friend,
The mean, though duteous instrument of pow'r,
Knowing her virtues only, not thy love.
32. Didymus Oh, save her then, or give me pow'r to save,
By free admission to th'imprison'd maid!
- Septimius My guards, not less asham'd of their vile office,

- Will second your intent, and pleasure me.
 Didymus I will reward them with a bounteous heart,
 And you, my friend, with all that Heav'n can give
 To the sincerity of Pray'r.
- 32(b). Didymus Deeds of kindness to display, Pity suing, Mercy wooing,
 Who the call can disobey?
33. Irene The clouds begin to veil the hemisphere,
 And heavily bring on the night, the last
 Perhaps to us. Oh, that it were the last
 To Theodora, ere she fall a prey
 To unexampled lust and cruelty.
- 33(b). Irene Defend her, Heav'n! Let angels spread
 Their viewless tents around her bed.
34. Didymus Or lull'd with grief, or rapt her soul to Heav'n
 In innocence of thought, entranc'd she lies;
 Her beauty shining still, like Cynthia,
 Rising in clouded majesty.
- 34(b). Didymus Sweet rose and lily, flow'ry form,
 Take me your faithful guard,
 To shield you from bleak wind and storm -
 A smile be my reward.
35. Theodora Oh, save me, Heav'n, in this my perilous hour!
 Didymus Start not, much injur'd princess, I come not
 As one, this place might give you cause to dread;
 But your deliverer, sent by just Heav'n,
 To save the world's unrivall'd ornament
 Of virtue, faith, and every Christian grace;
 And that dear ornament to Theodora,
 Her angel-purity. If you vouchsafe,
 But to change habit with your Didymus
 Theodora Excellent youth!
 I know thy courage, virtue and thy love;
 And never can consent they should destroy
 Their author. This becomes not Theodora,
 But the blind enemies of truth. Oh no, it must not be!
 Yet Didymus can give a boon, will make me happy, nor
 himself endanger.
- Didymus How, or what? My soul with transport listens to the
 request.
36. Theodora The pilgrim's home, the sick man's health,
 The captive's ransom, poor man's wealth,
 From thee I would receive.
 These, and a thousand treasures more,
 That gentle death has now in store,
 Thy hand and sword can give.

37. Didymus Forbid it, Heav'n! Shall I destroy the life I came to save?
 Shall I in Theodora's blood embrue
 My guilty hands, and give her death, who taught
 Me first to live? Or say, what right have I
 To take, what just reflection bids confess
 Not at your own disposal? Think it too,
 No less a crime, if, thus inflexible,
 Your safety you refuse. Time forbids more,
 Strait then resolve to gain your liberty,
 Preserve your honour, and secure your life.
- Theodora Ah! What is liberty or life to me,
 That Didymus must purchase with his own?
- Didymus Fear not for me; the pow'r that led me hither
 Will guard me hence. If not, His will be done!
- Theodora Yes, kind deliverer, I will trust that pow'r
 To hear my pray'r for thee, so lately heard
 For Theodora; who had ne'er exposed
 Her friend to shun a danger that concern'd
 Only her Life. Farewell, thou generous youth!
- Didymus Farewell, thou mirror of the virgin state!
38. Theodora & Didymus To thee, thou glorious son of worth,
 Be life and safety giv'n.
 To thee, whose virtues suit thy birth,
 Be every blessing giv'n.
 I hope again to meet on earth,
 But sure shall meet in Heav'n.
39. Irene 'Tis night, but night's sweet blessing is denied
 To grief like ours. How can we think of sleep,
 While Theodora wakes to misery,
 And threat'ning death hangs hovering o'er our heads?
 Be pray'r our refuge, pray'r to Him, who rais'd,
 And still can raise, the dead to life and joy.
40. Chorus of Christians He saw the lovely youth, death's early prey,
 Alas, too early snatch'd away!
 He heard his mother's fun'ral cries:
 "Rise, youth", He said. The youth begins to rise.
 Lowly the matron bow'd, and bore away the prize.

Part III

41. Irene Lord, to Thee each night and day,
 Strong in hope, we sing and pray.
42. Irene But see, the good, the virtuous Didymus!
 Wakeful as Philomel, with throbbing heart,
 He comes to join with us in pray'r for Theodora.

- Theodora No, Heav'n has heard your pray'rs for Theodora.
Behold her safe! Oh, that as free and safe
Were Didymus, my kind deliverer!
But let this habit speak the rest.
44. Chorus of
Christians
&
Theodora Blest be the hand, and blest the pow'r,
That in this dark and dang'rous hour,
Sav'd thee from cruel strife.
Lord, favour still the kind intent,
And bless thy gracious instrument
With liberty and life.
45. Messenger Undaunted in the court stands Didymus,
Virtuously proud of rescued innocence.
But vain to save the gen'rous hero's life
Are all entreaties, ev'n from Romans vain.
And, high-enrag'd, the President protests,
Should he regain the fugitive, no more
To try her with the fear of infamy,
But with the terrors of a cruel death.
- Irene Ah, Theodora, whence this sudden change,
From grief's pale looks, to looks of redd'ning joy?
- Theodora O my Irene, Heav'n is kind,
And Valens too is kind, to give me pow'r
To execute in turn my gratitude,
While safe my honour. Stay me not, dear friend,
Only assist me with a proper dress,
That I may ransom the too gen'rous youth.
46. Irene Whither, Princess, do you fly, Sure to suffer, sure to die?
- Theodora No, no, Irene, no, To life and joy I go.
- Irene Vain Attempt, oh stay, oh stay!
- Theodora Duty calls, I must obey.
47. Irene She's gone, disdainng liberty and life,
And ev'ry honour this frail life can give.
Devotion bids aspire to nobler things,
To boundless love, and joys ineffable:
And such her expectation from kind Heav'n.
- 47(b). Irene New scenes of joy come crowding on
While sorrow fleets away
48. Valens Is it a Christian virtue then,
To rescue, from the hands of justice, one
Condemn'd by my authority?
- Didymus Such my religion, it condemns all crimes,
None more than disobedience to just pow'r.

- And had your sentence doom'd her, but to death,
I then might have deplor'd your cruelty,
And not attempted to defeat it. Yet,
I own no crime, unless it be a crime
To've hindered you from perpetrating that
Which would have made you odious to mankind,
At least the fairest half.
- Valens Aye, aye, fond man
It was the charms of beauty, not of virtue,
That tempted you to save her. Take him hence,
And lead him to repentance, or to death.
- Theodora Be that my doom. You may inflict it here,
With legal justice, there 'tis cruelty.
If blood your angry laws require, behold,
The principal is come to pay the debt:
And welcome sure to Romans the exchange,
A warlike hero for an helpless maid.
- Septimius Dwells there such virtuous courage in the sex?
Preserve them, O ye gods, preserve them both.
Ye Romans, join in the request, if e'er
Lucretia's memory was dear to you,
Or this your leader's valour and renown.
49. Septimius From virtue springs each gen'rous deed
That claims our grateful pray'r.
50. Valens Cease, ye slaves, your fruitless pray'r!
The pow'rs below no pity know,
For the brave, or for the fair.
51. Didymus 'Tis kind, my friends, but kinder still
If for this daughter of Antiochus,
In mind, as noble as her birth, your pray'rs
Prevail, that Didymus alone shall die.
Had I as many lives as virtues thou,
Freely for thee I would resign them all.
- Theodora Oppose not, Didymus, my just desires;
For know, that 'twas dishonour I declin'd,
Not death, most welcome now, if Didymus
Were safe, whose only crime was my escape.
52. Chorus of
Heathens How strange their ends, And yet how glorious,
Where each contends, To fall victorious,
Where virtue its own innocence denies,
And for the vanquish'd the glad victor dies!
53. Didymus On me your frowns, your utmost rage exert,
On me, your prisoner in chains.
- Theodora These chains are due to me, and death to me alone.

- Valens Are ye then judges for yourselves?
 Not so our laws are to be trifled with.
 If both plead guilty, 'tis but equity that both should suffer.
54. Valens Ye ministers of justice, lead them hence,
 I cannot, will not bear such insolence.
55. Didymus And must such beauty suffer?
 Theodora Such useful valour be destroy'd?
 Septimius Destroy'd, alas, by an unhappy constancy!
 Didymus Yet deem us not unhappy, gentle friend,
 Nor rash; for life we neither hate, nor scorn,
 But think it a cheap purchase for the prize
 Reserv'd in Heav'n for purity and faith.
56. Didymus Streams of pleasure ever flowing,
 Fruits ambrosial ever growing,
 Golden thrones, Starry crowns,
 Are the triumphs of the blest.
 When from life's dull labour free,
 Clad with immortality, They enjoy a lasting rest.
- Didymus &
 Theodora Thither let our hearts aspire:
 Objects pure of pure desire,
 Still increasing, Ever pleasing,
 Wake the song, and tune the lyre of the blissful holy choir.
57. Irene Ere this, their doom is past and they are gone
 To prove that love is stronger far than death.
58. Chorus of
 Christians O love divine, thou source of fame,
 Of glory, and all joy! Let equal fire our souls inflame,
 And equal zeal employ, That we the glorious spring may
 know, Whose streams appear'd so bright below.

Andrew Storey (Director of Music)



Andrew Storey was born in the seaside town of Blackpool and as a youngster was inspired by the sounds of the Tower Ballroom, and the shows and cabaret acts in local pubs, clubs and hotels. These formative years inspired him to take up the organ and he is now a busy choral conductor, organist and repetiteur in and around London. He has performed major choral works at venues including the Royal

Festival Hall, St John's Smith Square, Brussels Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and St Paul's Cathedral. Andrew firmly believes that every concert is a performance and should leave the audience feeling they have connected with the emotion of the music. He often says, *"There is nothing better for an individual's well-being than being part of live music making"*.

For the past 30 years Andrew has been the Assistant Musical Director of the Hackney Singers. In 2005 he was appointed conductor of the Ashted Singers, one of premier chamber choirs in Surrey. In 2016 he was delighted to become the first musical director of the Old Bailey choir who sing at the annual Christmas Carol Service and in concert. For their 10th Anniversary concert Andrew was delighted to make his conducting debut with the English National Opera in sellout performances of *Trial by Jury* staged in the Central Criminal Court and described in The Times as a performance where *"Art meets real life, and both gained from the encounter"*.

In 2018 Andrew was appointed Musical Director of Ashted Choral Society and in the last 8 years he has seen the choir grow. He is delighted to lead them in performing choral works with professional orchestras and soloists including *The Dream of Gerontius* (Elgar), *Ein Deutches Requiem* (Brahms) and *Stabat Mater* (Dvorak). He maintains that *"Monday evenings are always a highlight of my week, as I get to explore the finest musical works known to man with such fabulous people."*

Cheryl Enever (Soprano)



Cheryl Enever is an Operatic Soprano known for her versatility and infectious enthusiasm for music. She has sung major roles for many companies including Royal Opera House and English Touring Opera and is just as at home entertaining big crowds as she is smaller, more intimate gatherings. She has sung *Tatiana*, *Donna Anna*, *First Lady*, and *Franzi* for English Touring Opera, *Violetta* and the title role in *Tosca* for the Bermuda Festival.

Other roles include *Musetta*, *Fiordiligi*; *Countess Almavia*; *Elettra (Idomeneo)*, *Forestbird*; *Rusalka*; *Mařenka The Bartered Bride*, Kentish Opera; *Countess Capriccio* for the Strauss Society; and for The Wagner Society *Eva Der Meistersinger* at the Linbury Theatre, Royal Opera House. She sang *Michaela* in a production of *Carmen* for HRH the Prince of Wales in a project at Dartmoor prison. She has performed with Sir John Tomlinson in a programme of Verdi, Wagner and Britten for the Mastersingers. For the ROH she created the leading role of *Joanna* in *Ludd and Isis*, a community opera. Cheryl went on to create the title role in Joseph Phibb's opera *Juliana* based on the Strindberg play, *Miss Julie*. It was premiered, to critical acclaim, at the Cheltenham Festival with subsequent performances at St John's Smiths Square, London and at the Presteigne Festival, Wales.

In concert, Cheryl has frequently performed Verdi's *Requiem*, the *Requiem*s of Dvořak, Brahms and Mozart and his C Minor Mass, *Solemn Vespers* and *Exsultate Jubilate* ; Mahler *Second*, *Fourth* and *Eighth Symphonies* Haydn *Creation*; Mendelssohn *Elijah*; Dvořak *Stabat Mater* ; Rossini *Stabat Mater* and *Messe Solennelle*; *Beethoven Ninth Symphony* and *Mass in C*; Fanshawe *African Sanctus*.

Richard Decker (Countertenor)



A finalist in the 2024 Kathleen Ferrier Awards, Richard Decker has been hailed as a “countertenor star of the future” (Opera Now). He trained at the Royal College of Music, graduating MMus with Distinction in 2024, and previously read Italian and French at St John’s College, Cambridge, where he was a choral scholar. His operatic roles include Arsamene (*Serse*), Orlovsky (*Die Fledermaus*), Public Opinion (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), and the Sorceress (*Dido and Aeneas*). Contemporary

works include *The Fall of Lucifer* (Burgon) and *The Anthem* (Eaglesfield). He has worked companies including Merry Opera, HGO, Kentish Opera and Tête-à-Tête, and this summer makes his role debut as Rinaldo with Ensemble OrQuesta.

A versatile oratorio and concert artist, his repertoire ranges from Handel’s *Messiah* and Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* to Orff’s *Carmina Burana* and Rossini’s *Petite Messe Solennelle*, and he collaborates frequently with composer and critic Jonathan Whiting. He won Third Prize and the Early Music Prize at the 2024 AESS English Song Awards, and was a finalist in the 2024 Schubert Song Prize.

Richard is also a conductor and organist, and currently serves as Musical Director of Dartford Choral Society and St Augustine’s Church, Tooting. He is looking forward to joining Ashtead Choral Society again this evening, having last joined them for *Carmina Burana* in 2023.

Cathy Bell (Mezzo Soprano)



Cathy Bell studied English and Medieval Literature at Cambridge and singing at Birmingham Conservatoire. She is a former CREAR Scholar and was a member of Handel House Talent 2014-15. Baroque music continues to be a specialism, with recent solo debuts at the Valletta International Baroque Festival as Venus (Pepusch *Venus and Adonis*); and as

Second Witch (*Dido and Aeneas*) for both the Academy of Ancient Music and Barokksolistene Norway.

Cathy particularly enjoys her work as a concert soloist. Highlights include *Scarlatti Salve regina* at Wells Cathedral; *Mendelssohn Elijah* at the Royal Festival Hall; Handel *Messiah* at Cadogan Hall and Nottingham Royal Concert Hall; and Rachmaninov *Vespers* at St Magnus International Festival in Orkney.

Opera roles include Carmen for Barefoot Opera; Russian Nanny (*Death in Venice*) for Garsington; Third Lady/Third Boy (*Die Zauberflöte*) for Diva Opera and the Palestine Mozart Festival; and roles in contemporary operas for Tête-à-Tête, Grimeborn and WNO MAX. Chorus contracts include Scottish Opera, Garsington, Grange Park, Bergen Nasjonale Opera and festivals in Aix-en-Provence and Beijing.

Cathy works regularly with choirs and consorts including the BBC Singers, Sonoro, Polyphony and AAM. She lives in London with her husband Jon Stainsby, also a singer, and their two young daughters.

Ed Saklatvala (Tenor)



Ed Saklatvala studied music at Cambridge University where he sang in the choir of King's College and studied singing with Sue Waters. Following a brief stint working as an Artist Manager, Ed returned to music and took singing lessons with Robert Dean.

As well as singing in church and cathedral choirs across London, Ed has divided his time between concert work and opera. Roles include Lensky (*Eugene Onegin*), Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*), Tamino (*The Magic Flute*), Jupiter (*Semele*), Dardanus (*Dardanus*), Idamante (*Idomeneo*), and Basilio and Don Curzio (*The Marriage of Figaro*).

In concert, Ed has performed with several of the country's leading groups such as the Philharmonia, the Academy of Ancient Music, the Orchestra of

the Age of Enlightenment and the BBC Singers and as a soloist he has sung several of the most popular works in the repertoire including Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, *St John Passion* and *St Matthew Passion* at venues around the UK.

In 2018 and 2019 he appeared as one of the judges on the BBC One singing competition 'All Together Now'. Ed also maintains a busy schedule as a singing teacher and teaches students at Dulwich College, St Paul's School and St Dunstan's College, where he is Head of Singing.

Timothy Dickinson (Bass)



Timothy was a Choral Scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge, and went on to join the National Opera Studio in 2014-15. He spent four years in the Glyndebourne Chorus before taking on his first role as Dr Grenvil in Verdi *La Traviata* in 2014. Since then, he has performed roles at Longborough Festival, Buxton Festival, Scottish

A current member of the BBC Singers, Timothy has also performed with numerous ensembles, including The Sixteen, La Nuova Musica, Polyphony and Solomon's Knot. On the concert platform, Timothy regularly appears as a soloist in Handel *Messiah*, the *Passions* of J S Bach and the *Requiems* of Fauré, Mozart, Verdi and Duruflé, among other works.

Timothy has also enjoyed an immensely rewarding relationship with the Education department of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, performing with young people across the UK. These experiences have informed the work that is now under way with 'The Echoing Air', the ensemble he founded in 2023 with Amy Carson.

Kent Sinfonia

Kent Sinfonia was founded in 1962 by Hungarian conductor Dr Béla de Csilléry, who served as Kent's inspirational County Music Advisor for more than two decades. The orchestra comprises leading professional musicians in Kent and the surrounding region; many also play with major London orchestras and opera houses. A strong advocate of contemporary music and of performing works by 20th century British composers, its first album, *Lost England*, featured George Butterworth and Walter Leigh.

Kent Sinfonia's work aims to build the future of classical orchestral music through programmes for all ages. It's education projects support children's musical development, especially those lacking exposure to live orchestral music. We affect positively children's development and overall learning with interactive workshops and concerts, introducing a diverse range of music. Our children's programme *Birds and Beasts!* has been performed in multiple venues.

Kent Sinfonia also performs regularly with choral societies in the south of England, has toured three times to China and most recently, in France to Les Musicales de Redon Festival in Brittany. The orchestra has also accompanied opera productions and live film screenings. Kent Sinfonia has a strong commitment to education projects enriching both primary and secondary school children's development with interactive workshops and concert programmes.

In February 2024, Kent Sinfonia worked with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and Albion Records in recording sessions on the theme of 'Vaughan Williams and Shakespeare', including RVW's music written during 1910 -13 for Stratford Shakespeare Company performances. The recording was released in November 2024 to acclaimed reviews; downloads and streaming are available, also CDs from Kent Sinfonia.

For more information, please see the website: www.kentsinfonia.org.

Ashtead Choral Society – About Us

Ashtead Choral Society is one of the leading choirs in Surrey, celebrating over 75 years of joyful singing. Today the choir numbers more than 100 singers who are passionate about providing unique, enjoyable and high quality performances and having lots of fun in the process.

Under the direction of our inspiring conductor, Andrew Storey, we usually perform three major concerts a year with professional orchestras and soloists, singing a range of beautiful choral music. Recent concerts have included performances of *Petite Messe Solennelle* (Rossini), *A German Requiem* (Brahms), *Requiem* (Rutter), *Nelson Mass* (Haydn), *Requiem* (Fauré), *African Sanctus* (Fanshawe), *Stabat Mater* (Dvořák), *Dream of Gerontius* (Elgar) and *St John Passion* (Bach). In addition, each December we hold a Carols for Charity event in Ashtead raising funds for local charities.

Please email us at secretary@ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk if you would like to join us or just come along to a rehearsal. We meet on Monday evenings from 7:45pm to 9:45pm between September and June at Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall, Woodfield Lane, Ashtead.

For more information, please see our website:

www.ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk

You can also follow us on Facebook, Instagram and X :



Would you like to become a Friend or Patron of Ashtead Choral Society?

If you have enjoyed this concert and would like to support Ashtead Choral Society, we welcome new Friends and Patrons. Our secretary, Anne Bailey would be pleased to give you further information. Please contact her at:

secretary@ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk

If you would like to receive news of our events by joining our Supporters Group, please sign up to the ACS e-newsletter at our website:

www.ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk

Ashtead Choral Society

First Sopranos

Rita Brewis
Lynda Bridges
Sheila Campion
Jill Chapman
Hannah Clemans
Sarah Coulam
Pam Crosby
Val Delamere
Alison Dickie
Gill Edlund
Cheryl Greenwood
Carey Kelting
Kathy Lewis
Susan McGrath
Sarah Meech
Lucy Morrell
Susan Morris
Val Moss
Claire Price
Prue Steel
Margaret Stephen
Rosie Welton
Hilary Williams

Second Sopranos

Anne Bailey
Alison Bennett
Liz Broughton
Rosemary Bull
Rosie Cox
Linda Crook
Alice Curran
Karin Desvaux
Gillian Deville
Ishbel Kenward
Barbara Laird
Fleur Standing
Jessica Stuart
Barbara Thomas

First Altos

Jennie Beck
Sarah Boyle
Rosie Campbell
Katherine Carter
Lesley Clarke
Alix Gaughran
Cathy Gilbertson
Marian Guess
Margaret Hibbert
Sue Huxtable
Janet Kay
Cathrine Kell
Viv King
Naomi Kulasingham
Jin Lee
Anita Littler
Sue Mcdonald
Beverley Mehta
Anne Mizzi
Jill Preiss
Freya Reilly
Karen Smyth
Anne Thomson
Jane Thorpe
Lynn Todd
Phillippa Watkins
Sue Weeks

Second Altos

Veronika Binoeder
Linda Brown
Sandra Brown
Anne Doyle
Sue Early
Susan Grant
Patricia Healy
Pat Kitley
Susie Lintott
Irena Lyczkowska
Michelle Macdonald
Ruth Maidment
Sue Moore
Eileen Perren
Gabrielle Petter

Second Altos cont.

Anne Ridge
Barbara Wakefield
Teresa Whalley

First Tenors

Lesley Coles
Duncan Stuart
Bill Hibbert
Rob McCaffrey
Andrew Moss
Michael Preiss

Second Tenors

Vincent Desmond
Alan Gaughran
Martin Hiley
Geoff Knight
Ray Steptoe
Tony Williams
John Wilson

First Basses

Norman Blackwell
Robert Maidment
Philip Nash
Douglas Robertson
Nick Rule
Malcolm Sargent
John Watkins

Second Basses

Cliver Barger
Dick Beddoe
Stephen Bridges
Mike Browne
Stuart Butler
Andrew Hodson
Godfrey Morrell
Roger Morris
Graham Parkin
Richard Price
Chris Turner
Stephen Turner

NewSPAL

New Surrey Performing Arts Library

Home to one of the UK's largest
collections of Performing Arts resources

MUSIC & DRAMA SETS TO
BORROW, WHEREVER YOU
LIVE IN THE UK

CHAMBER MUSIC, SCORES,
SHEET MUSIC AND BOOKS
FOR INDIVIDUAL HIRE

For catalogue, repertoire lists and reservations visit

www.newspal.org.uk

Bourne Hall, Spring Street, Ewell KT17 1UF

Programmes for Ashtead Choral Society Concerts printed by Dyer&Son

Dyer&Son, 32 North Street, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 7AT

Telephone: 01372 373100

Email: dyerandson@gmail.com

**EPSOM CHORAL
SOCIETY**

A SEASON TO SING

**A choral reimagining of Vivaldi's The Four Seasons
by Joanna Forbes L'Estrange**

Dark night of the soul | Ola Gjeilo
Luminous night of the soul | Ola Gjeilo
Sure on this shining night | Morten Lauridsen

Saturday 20th June 2026 at 7:30pm

St Andrew's Church, Northey Ave, Cheam SM2 7BZ

Julian Collings | conductor

Peter Jaekel | piano

With string quartet

Tickets: £20 (Under 25s half price)

Box office: www.epsomchoral.org.uk/tickets | 01372 274418



**EPSOM
CHORAL
SOCIETY**

Registered charity number 273757





Ashtead Choral Society

Join us for our next concerts



21 November 2026

Tsunami Requiem

Chris Williams

Gloria

John Rutter

Motets

Anton Bruckner

20 March 2027

Requiem

Giuseppe Verdi

Rehearsals for these concerts will begin again in September 2026. Fancy joining to sing them? Get into contact via our website below.

Tickets and details of upcoming concerts will be updated over the summer on our website.

ashteadchoralsociety.org.uk