

Write for Guernsey Press about GCOS trip to New York and Carnegie Hall

We had just finished our final rehearsal of Karl Jenkins' "Gloria", for the 2010 Christmas Concert when Helen told us that we had been invited to sing his new work at the world premiere in New York in 2012. We had performed his much celebrated "The Armed man" the previous year in the Choral Workshop and were so inspired by the music, that an opportunity to sing a brand new composition by the "most popular living composer" was just too good to miss. What's more, we would be performing in Carnegie Hall, known as the most prestigious concert stage in the U.S. where so many leading classical musicians, and, more recently, pop stars have performed. Needless to say there was a lot of interest and in the end an enthusiastic group of 16 decided to sign up to go.



It is difficult to describe Jenkins' choral music: he started out as a jazz musician and there is certainly some influence there. The music could be described as a mix of classical, lyrical and jazz with influences from world music: the "Gloria", for example, had very strong percussive moments reminiscent of African music, whilst the more lyrical "Peacemakers", which is what we sung in New York, had a more Eastern flavour with it's use of Indian and Japanese instruments with orchestra.



The “Peacemakers” was to be performed on Martin Luther King Day. It is set to words of peace from iconic figures such as Ghandi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King with quotations from the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa Anne Frank amongst others and includes religious texts from the Bible and the Qur’an.

As the music had never been sung before we had to learn it from scratch and we are very grateful to Helen Grand, the conductor of Guernsey Choral and Orchestral Society (GCOS) who helped us in her own free time to rehearse the music before leaving for the States.

There was a huge feeling of anticipation building up in the couple of weeks before leaving. Ali Bourgaize organised the trip and both she and Helen Grand dealt with the reams of paper work and disclaimers that came in from the US. Brian Gaudion (who is a bit of a foodie!) researched and booked restaurants and made some excellent choices!

We went straight into a 4 hour rehearsal the day after arriving in New York and again on the following day. Here we joined with all the other people who had come from both far and near to sing: There were 3 choirs from the UK including us and a choir from Australia and Canada and of course choirs from the US. The rehearsals, which were excellent, were run by the Musical Director of DCINY (Distinguished Concerts International New York) Jonathon Griffith, who taught us so much about singing and choral technique. It was worth going just for that! All in all there were about 250 adults and 50 children in the choir.



On the final day (Monday), we had a dress rehearsal and our first taste of singing in the huge auditorium at Carnegie Hall, to be followed by the performance in the evening. It was very intimidating at first as we sounded so different from how we did in the original rehearsal room and the dress rehearsal did not get off to a good start at all. The adults were nervous and weak and the children were very much outside their comfort zone. In fact they were so bad we wondered whether they would be

able to do the performance that evening at all. (We were muttering to ourselves “what a shame we didn’t have the children from our brilliant Music Centre choirs”!) In the end it all came good and the problem was solved by having two conductors – one for the adults and one for the children! It was wonderful singing in such a large choir and in such an impressive hall, and we after the difficult afternoon rehearsal we found we were able to relax and enjoy the evening’s performance. It was undoubtedly very good as Karl Jenkins, Choir and orchestra were given a standing ovation at the end and the two conductors were very pleased with the outcome. There must have been an audience of around 2000, even so the auditorium, with an audience capacity of 2800, was not full! We all felt very privileged to be there in that famous hall singing beautiful music that had never been sung in public before, and conducted by the esteemed composer himself!



After the concert there was a reception and dinner where we were able to meet and talk to Karl Jenkins. We asked him whether he could come to Guernsey and he replied he had had some fond memories of the island when he came to play jazz here many years ago! So, you never know, we might just be able to persuade him to come here and perhaps compose a little piece for our Liberation day! So watch this space!

Of course we all had quite a lot of free time too and Manhattan , is a great place to wander round and explore and shop. Saw a Broadway show and did some serious eating. Were blessed by wonderful, if very cold weather with clear blue skies