Living in hope

Time to get music-making again? Matthew Berry is impressed by the positive attitudes of organisers planning festivals despite the pandemic.

The past 12 months have witnessed an unprecedented hiatus in music-making internationally, a painful void accentuated by the disquieting litany of lockdown postponements and cancellations. Apart from those in early March, not a single festival listed in our 2020 feature passed untouched by Covid-19. Over the past few decades, with the increasing ease of international travel and the arrival of the internet, we have become accustomed to accessing culture anywhere across the globe. Festivals have long been platforms for music from other countries, and we are undoubtedly all the poorer for having missed out on that cultural enrichment over the past year.

However, out of adversity came ingenuity as committees reconfigured programmes and tailored the festival experience for online viewing. The impromptu arrangements of 2020 have laid the foundations for pre-festival planning in 2021 as uncertainties remain. Some festivals are catering for varying scenarios, with live, online and hybrid formats; others are still finalising repertoire and performers as they tackle the logistics of hosting ensembles. Our listings come with the caveat that schedules may be amended up to the last minute. Please keep checking festival websites for all the latest developments.

At the time of writing, the outlook appears more buoyant and there is genuine optimism among festival curators. As one of the most hotly anticipated events in the international choral calendar, Europa Cantat celebrates its 60th anniversary with its 21st triennial festival in Ljubljana, Slovenia, home to one of the most innate choral traditions in the world. Planned guest choirs include Tenebrae, phenomenon of the social media age Accent, German vocal sextet Singer Pur, and Swedish a cappella group Ringmasters. Slovene contributing artists include composer-conductors Damijan Močnik and Ambrož Čopi, and the conductor of the remarkable St Stanislav Girls’ Choir, Helena Fojkar Župančič.

Interkultur is forging ahead with its roster of events, including the World Choir Games in Flanders, postponed from 2020 and now moved from July this year to October; and the 10th Canta al mar – Festival Coral Internacional heads to the sunny weather and sandy beaches of Calella and Barcelona. After a successful inaugural visit to Hanover in 2019, chor.com celebrates its tenth anniversary by returning to the north German city and its host of distinctive venues including the mesmeric brick gothic hall church, the Marktkirche.

Turning to the organ world, competitions and festivals return with renewed enthusiasm, albeit fashioned to the ‘new normal’. The Leeds International Organ Festival is first in the calendar and continues 2020’s online format with guest artists recording recitals in their own churches. Jonathan Rennert opens the festival, with other performers including the German virtuosos Friedhelm Flamme and Angela Meteger. The Leeds Cathedral organists, David Pipe and Thomas Leech, will stream live recitals from the cathedral’s four-manual Klais.

St Albans International Organ Festival (see News, page 9) returns with its concomitant competition (the latter online this year). A star-studded guest artists list includes Thomas Trotter, whose programme includes a tribute to the festival’s founder, Peter Hurford’s Suite ‘Laudate Dominum. The Oundle for Organists Summer School, led by Ann Elise Smoot, runs alongside the Oundle International Festival in the Northamptonshire market town.

Fans of Dutch organs are spoilt for choice with two major festivals, Orgelfestival Holland and the International Organ Festival Haarlem appearing in June and July. Haarlem’s programme has been slimmed down to one week, with the accompanying
Summer Academy incorporating a selection of courses from the cancelled 2020 event. Orgelfestival Holland runs alongside the Academy and the International Schnitger Organ Competition, with jury members Benoît Mernier, Michael Bouvard, Martin Schmeding, Johannes Strobel and Menno van Delft. Competitors play the world-famous organs of the Grote Sint-Laurenskerk in Alkmaar: the monumental Van Hagerbeer/Schnitger organ, and the 1511 Van Covelens Koororgel, known as the oldest playable instrument in the Netherlands.

In October, the Canadian International Organ Competition in Montreal presents its triennial international competition (postponed from 2020), open to organists of all nationalities under the age of 35. Limerick Sings is finalising plans for an online festival with three days of workshops and virtual concerts, while also pitching for choirs to participate in its Virtual Choral Trail.

Presteigne Festival of Music and Arts, a cradle for musical innovation in the Welsh Marches for over 35 years, welcomes Cecilia McDowall, recently honoured in the Ivors Composers Awards, as composer-in-residence. Rupert Gough and the Choir of Royal Holloway, on the back of premiere recordings of Pierre Villette’s Messe ‘Da Pacem’ and Joanna Marsh’s The Tower and Pearl of Freedom, return to the festival in collaboration with their own composer-in-residence, Welsh musician Nathan James Dearden (see New Music, p.36). Elsewhere, the International Choral Festival Wales / Gŵyl Gorawi Rhyngwladol Cymru returns to Cardiff after a one-year absence, and the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod focuses on digital options and a weekend hybrid event as an alternative to the traditional live competition strands.

In addition to its traditional slot at the start of October, The Cumnock Tryst in Ayrshire is set to hold a Summer Festival from 18-20 June 2021. As founder-artistic director James MacMillan states: ‘It’s important that The Cumnock Tryst continues to think imaginatively about its future, especially in these constrained times. Therefore, we present two festivals in 2021! But we have also maintained a creative edge through lockdown, working with senior pupils at the Robert Burns Academy on their compositions.’ A hundred miles to the north-east, the East Neuk Festival returns with a bespoke offering both live and recorded, digital and in-person. The festival will collaborate with BBC Radio 3 on four broadcasts, and the Tallis Scholars mark the 500th anniversary of the death of Josquin with a performance of his Missa Ave maris stella alongside music by Gibbons, Byrd and Tallis. Meanwhile, organisers of the Edinburgh International Festival (6-29 August) are planning their annual showcase of music, theatre, opera and dance from around the globe (details still to be released).

A round-up of the UK concludes with a tour of the English highlights. The Three Choirs Festival, from 24 July to 1 August, will take place in Worcester. It will be the first festival under the artistic direction of Samuel Hudson, appointed director of music at Worcester Cathedral in 2019. JAM on the Marsh is curated this year by one of Britain’s most accomplished chamber musicians and accompanists, the pianist Anna Tilbrook. Concerts take place in the 14 medieval churches scattered across the wetlands of Romney Marsh; the full programme will be unveiled in May. Stile Antico are among the guest artists at The National Centre for Early Music’s ‘jewel in the crown’, the annual York Early Music Festival, which is set across the city’s myriad historic churches and other very fine performing venues. King’s Lynn Festival will feature a reduced programme in three Lynn churches and the 15th-century Guildhall. And the UK’s biggest classical music festival, the BBC Proms, will take place from 30 July to 11 September live and online.

It is a joy to soak up the enthusiasm that is rife among musicians and festival organisers. Ending on a liturgical note, the Edington Music Festival, directed by Richard Pinel, will be running a mini-festival, following the traditional framework of three or four services a day and featuring two choirs, the Schola and the Consort, only. Live streaming will be available, as only a limited congregation will have access to each service. Both the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music and Musica Deo Sacra are expecting to welcome singers and audiences to their respective festivals in May and August.

Although we may need to continue expecting – and accepting – the unexpected for some time yet, it is a joy to soak up the enthusiasm and barely guarded optimism that are rife among musicians and festival organisers desperate to cast off the fetters of prolonged isolation.
FESTIVALS 2021

Events correct at the time of going to press, but readers are strongly advised to keep checking websites for any changes.

MAY
Leeds International Organ Festival
10-13 May, Online
Contact info@leedsifo.org
leedsifo.org / lifefive.org.uk
London Festival of Contemporary Church Music
16-23 May, St Pancras, London, UK
Contact + 44 20 7388 1461
info@lfcsm.com
lfcsm.com
Norwich & Norfolk Festival
17-30 May, Norfolk, UK
Box Office: +44 1603 531800
boxoffice@nnfestival.org.uk
nnfestival.org.uk
The English Music Festival
28-31 May, Horsham, West Sussex, UK
Contact +44 7808 473889
em.marshall-luck@emmarshallluc.com
2021
JUNE
Limerick Sings International Choral Festival
11-13 Jun, Virtual
Contact +353 61 213312
information@limericksings.com
limericksings.com
The Cumnock Tryst Summer Festival
18-20 Jun, Cumnock, Ayrshire, UK
Contact +44 141 332 5057
hello@thecumnocktryst.com
thecumnocktryst.com
Orgel festival Holland
18-25 Jun, Alkmaar, Netherlands
Runs alongside the International Schnitger Organ Competition.
Contact info@orgelfestivalholland.nl
orgelfestivalalkmaar.nl
JULY
East Neuk Festival
1-4 Jul, Fife, UK
Contact +44 330 2211093
ian@eastneukfestival.com
eastneukfestival.com
International Choral Festival Wales
2-4 Jul, Cardiff, UK
internationalchoralfestival.wales
St Albans International Organ Festival
5-16 Jul, St Albans, UK
Contact +44 1727 844765
administrator@organfestival.com
organfestival.com
Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod
6-11 Jul, Hybrid / Digital
Box Office + 44 1978 862001
music@llangollen.net
international-eisteddfod.co.uk
Jam on the Marsh
8-18 Jul, Romney Marsh, Kent, UK
Anna Tilbrook (festival curator)
Contact +44 800 988 7984
sarah@jamconcert.org
jamconcert.org
Oundle International Festival
10-17 Jul, Oundle, Northamptonshire
Contact information@oudle festival.org.uk
oudle festival.org.uk
York Early Music Festival
12-16 Jul, York, UK
Box Office +44 1904 658338
boxoffice@ncem.co.uk
ncem.co.uk
Europa Cantat 2021
16-25 Jul, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Contact +386 1 24 10 500
info@ecijublana2021.si
ecljubljana2021.si
International Organ Festival Haarlem
17-24 Jul, Haarlem, The Netherlands
Contact +31 6 28426540
office@organfestival.nl
organfestival.nl
King’s Lynn Festival
18-31 Jul, King’s Lynn, Norfolk, UK
Box Office +44 1553 764864
info@kingslynnfestival.org.uk
kingslynnfestival.org.uk
Three Choirs Festival
24 Jul-1 Aug, Worcestershire, UK
Box Office +44 1452 768928
info@3choirs.org
3choirs.org
Musica Deo Sacra
26 Jul-1 Aug, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, UK
Contact +44 1684 850959
info@tewkesburyabbey.org.uk
tewkesburyabbey.org.uk
BBC Proms
30 Jul-11 Sep, UK
Box Office bbc.co.uk/promstickets
bcbc.co.uk/proms
SEPTEMBER
chor.com
23-26 Sep, Hanover, Germany
chor.com
4th Voices for Peace
26-30 Sep, Perugia/Assisi, Italy
interkultur.com
The Cumnock Tryst
29 Sep-3 Oct, Cumnock, Ayrshire, UK
Box Office + 44 141 332 5057
hello@thecumnocktryst.com
thecumnocktryst.com
OCTOBER
Toulouse les Orgues
5-8 Oct, Toulouse and region, France
toulouse-les-orgues.org
4th Kalamata International Choir Competition and Festival
11-17 Oct, Kalamata, Greece
interkultur.com
Canadian International Organ Competition
11-25 Oct, Montreal, Canada
Contact +1 514 510 5678
info@cicomp.org
cicomp.org
10th Cantal mar – Festival Coral Internacional
21-25 Oct, Orense and Galicia, Spain
interkultur.com
11th World Choir Games
30 Oct-7 Nov, Flanders, Belgium
Box Office +32 3 650 0000
interkultur.com

† (l to r) Nigel Short and Tenebrae will be guest artists at St Albans; the wetlands of Kent host JAM on the Marsh; the star of International Organ Festival Haarlem