



3/5 Management of collective vocal practices Tours, 18/22 – Saint-Lô 23 October 2014

The vocal sound of the choir using the collaboration of a voice teacher with a conductor

Susan Yarnall-Monks, National Youth Choir À Chœur Joie, led by Philippe Forget

It took the form of a master class for the National Youth Choir of France (who we had heard in concert the evening before) led by conductor Philippe Forget and vocal teacher Susan Yarnall-Monks. For the 1.25 hour session, Dr Yarnall-Monks workshopped aspects of the Purcell (*Hear my prayer*) and Holst (*Nunc dimittis*) which had been performed in the concert.

Yarnall-Monks introduced the choir to techniques they could use to enhance listening, and awareness of the overall group. One technique involved having the entire choir turn their back on the conductor (and vice versa), to focus the singers' awareness on the non-visual aspects of communication which are present in ensemble singing. By removing the visual cues given by the conductor, the choir had to listen and tune in as a group to non-visual cues which had the effect of enhancing the feeling of ensemble. Singers (and delegates) were also asked to perform a listening exercise which placed them in Tomatis' "Listening Posture". This has the effect of encouraging an erect but not stiff posture, an open chest and a relaxed jaw.

In response to questions from the choir about how not to tire their voices, singers were advised to stay balanced on their tail bone when seated, take time to periodically free the jaw (which will tense when worrying about notes), and to remember the Janice Chapman's injunction to SPLAT: "Singers, Please Loosen Abdominal Tension".

While the master class was instructive, it may have been helpful to have had a somewhat less experienced choir take part, which would have been more representative of the majority of choirs that conductors and vocal teachers will work with.