

twentieth season. At this point, it looks as if it will be its last."

The choir recently returned from a tour of the Far East and Australia. In the past, the Choir has commissioned works by Sir Malcolm Arnold and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies amongst others and has won numerous prestigious awards.

David says that for some time now those working in education have been all too aware of the growing pressure being put upon youngsters of school age. It shows up in all manner of ways, from parents reporting a child's absence from the choir's weekly rehearsal "because of preparing for SATS next week" to youngsters leaving the choir a year or two early because of the burden of school work either at the transfer age of 11 or at the start of the GCSE course in year 10 or ahead of the final year of secondary school, the GCSE year.

"The week on week preparation that choral work demands does not sit well with the quick burst of enthusiasm generated by the annual school play or seasonal sporting fixtures. Young people who aspire to higher standards than those on offer by their school can be made to feel guilty for not supporting their school when it suits the school to demand it. As long as the school can boast a choir or an orchestra, it doesn't matter too much what the standard of achievement is – because national attainment targets have not been set for the arts.



**David Victor Smith, founder and director of Farnham Youth Choir.**

"The combination of fewer members offering themselves for audition and experienced members leaving ahead of time has a dramatic impact. Repertoire cannot be carried over into another year, concert engagements cannot thus be honoured, recordings of repertoire are unviable and the reputation for excellence, forged in previous generations, cannot be sustained. A choral tradition is lost."

Former opera contralto Joyce Ellis formed her Kinder

Children's Choirs of the High Peak 14 years ago, towards the end of an operatic career that included performances as a principal at La Scala, Milan. She was introduced to choral singing in a Stockport youth choir after having failed a voice test to get into her school choir. She believes everyone has the potential to become a valuable chorister, and set out to prove it brilliantly in the High Peak. Kinder accepts children without audition or voice test and offers choral tuition and performances regardless of financial considerations. About 100 children are involved in the choir system. The 36-strong concert choir has also won numerous national and international awards, appeared many times on TV and performed with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Liverpool Philharmonic and Opera North. Its recital at St Paul's Cathedral at a Children's Society service to mark the late Queen Mother's 100th birthday was breathtakingly beautiful.

Yet, like her colleagues, Joyce believes her choirs are under serious threat. "We are not just seeing a reduction in quality recruits, we are seeing a reduction in recruits full stop. We also seem to have another problem these days, that of 'poverty of aspiration'. On a recent workshop tour of our Boys' Choir, nearly 800 children listened to the Choir over the day. Over 25% of that number showed enough enthusiasm to take home a leaflet and a joining form, but as yet as only four applications have come back.

"What is going on when a child shows enthusiasm to take part in any particular activity only to be discouraged, or at any rate not actively encouraged to at least give it a go, when he/she gets home? I have seen a child so de-motivated and unhappy at school that the only solution was to change his school only to find later that it was the constant "teasing" about his choir activities that was causing the problem? What is the future of the arts in our country when children are forced down one-track populist avenues not just by their friends, but also by the media, by adult attitudes and sadly by the effects of our education system?

"These attitudes are slowly having a profound effect on all aspects of our society, not just in choral singing. What are we doing to stop it?"

Is anybody listening?

## City Cries and Passionate Pavans

The magnificent Middle Temple Hall is the venue for an unusual and exceptional concert on Tuesday 29 June. The year 1604 is the starting point for a programme called *City Cries and Passionate Pavans*. The leading viol consort Fretwork and Paul Hillier's superb vocal ensemble 'The Theatre of Voices' present music by one of the greatest of all English composers, John Dowland. His *Lacrimae, or Seaven Teares*, published when Dowland was living in Fetter Lane in 1604, is a remarkable set of ensemble music. A sequence of 'Seaven Passionate Pavans', all based on the same four-note motif, is followed by another 14 almands and galliards.

One of the other important publications of 1604 is also featured – Michael East's First Set of Madrigals, published by Thomas East in Aldersgate. Framing these are Richard Deering's *City Cries and Country Cries* and Orlando Gibbons' *Cries of London*, all fascinating and humorous sound portraits of life in early 17th-century England.

This concert is being promoted as part of the City of London Festival in part to commemorate the granting of a Royal Charter to the Musicians' Company by James I on 8 July 1604. The Company is supporting the concert with a donation and the Festival is reciprocating with a special ticket offer for the Livery.

Assistant Leslie East (no relation!)

### CITY OF LONDON FESTIVAL EVENTS SUPPORTED BY THE COMPANY

<b>21 June - 2 July</b>	Jazz in Finsbury Circus. Lunchtimes.
<b>29 June</b>	Concert at Middle Temple Hall in celebration of the Company's Royal Charter of 1604. 7.30pm
<b>7 July</b>	Jazz at the Guildhall 7.30pm
<b>12 July</b>	Kenneth Leighton celebration concert at the Church of St Lawrence Jewry 6.00pm.



**Farnham Youth Choir performing in Adelaide during their recent tour to South East Asia and Australia.**