

PART 2

You are going to read a newspaper article about singing in choirs. Six paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from the paragraphs A-G the one which fits each gap (9-14). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Transfer answers to answer-sheet (the form on a separate page).

Introducing choral music to children is like opening a door to a magical world

Here's an important question. What's calming, therapeutic, healthier than drugs, and could well prolong your life? Answer: singing in a choir.

9

In fairness, there was a specific angle to this study, which compared the collective experience of choral singing to that of taking part in team sports. Choirs apparently win hands down, because there's 'a stronger sense of being part of a meaningful group', related to 'the synchronicity of moving and breathing with other people'. And as someone who since childhood has used singing as a refuge from the sports field, I take no issue with that.

10

I know there are occasional initiatives. From time to time I get invited as a music critic to the launch of some scheme or other to encourage more collective singing among school-age children. There are smiles and brave words. Then, six months later, everything goes quiet – until the next launch of the next initiative.

11

I know a woman who's been trying hard to organize a performance of Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* – perhaps the greatest work ever



devised for young children to sing together – as a tribute to the composer's centenary this year. But has she found her local schools responsive? Sadly not: it was all too much trouble.

12

We sang Herbert Howells's *Like as the Hart*. And whatever it did or didn't do for my cardiovascular system, my emotional health, or any of the other things that turn up in research papers, it was the most significant experience of my childhood. It opened a world to which 11-year-olds from unfashionable parts of east London don't generally get access. It was magical, transcendent. It spoke possibilities.

13

The other weekend I was in Suffolk, celebrating Britten, where in fact there were a lot of children privileged enough to be pulled into the centenary events. There was a great *Noye's Fludde* in Lowestoft. And on the actual birthday countless hordes of infant voices piled into Snape Maltings to sing Britten's school songs, *Friday Afternoons*, part of a project that involved 100,000 others, internationally, doing likewise.

14

Just think: if we could finally get Britain's children singing, it would filter upwards. And we wouldn't need university researchers. We'd just do it, and be all the better for it.

- A It was an extraordinary experience that many of those children will carry with them all their lives, like my experience all those years ago. There's a plan for it to be repeated every year on Britten's birthday. But that will only happen if there are resources and sustained commitment (for a change).
- B In fact, I have no argument with any of these piles of research – bring them on, the more the better – because what they have to say is true. The only thing I find annoying is that such an endlessly repeated truth results in relatively little action from the kind of people who could put it to good use.
- C One of my enduring life regrets is that I never got the chance to take part in such an event as a child. I guess I went to schools where it was also too much trouble. But I did, just once, aged 11, get the chance to go with a choir and sing at Chelmsford Cathedral.
- D But being there was even better. And as I was sitting near the choir – who were magnificent – I saw the faces of the boys and thought how fabulously privileged they were to have this opportunity given to them.
- E And that, for me, is what a choir can offer. All the physical and mental pluses are a happy bonus. But the joy and thrill of access to that world of music is what counts.
- F It's not a new discovery: there are endless dissertations on the subject, libraries of research, and celebrity endorsements. But people have short memories. So every time another academic paper is published, it gets into the news – which was what happened this week when Oxford Brookes University came up with the latest 'singing is good for you' revelation.
- G The hard fact is that most state schools don't bother much with singing, unless someone in the hierarchies of government steps in to make it worth their while. They say they don't have the resources or the time. And even when a worthwhile singing project drops into their lap, they turn it down.