



Come Singing Newsletter November 2025

Dear All,

November is here, with ups of snuggling into autumn, digging out fleeces, bedsocks and hot water bottles and downs of slippery leaves underfoot, gales and raincoats dripping in the hallway! Leaves and berries have been especially vivid this year against deep blue skies and now wind and weather are beginning their annual work of clearing the decks for the months ahead.

In November there are lots of Norwich musical anniversaries. Perhaps the one closest to Come Singing hearts is the birth on November 13th of Sarah Ann Glover, the inventor of the Norwich sol-fa system, who gave us all the joys of Julie Andrews and 'Doe, a deer, a female deer'!

She was born in The Close, christened in the Cathedral, and had the idea of this simplified notation when teaching a Sunday School class. A similar system (ut re mi) had been in use since the 11th century, but was more limited and rigid. Sarah Ann's idea was to give a fixed name to each step of the major scale, whatever the starting note - doh. re.mi, fa, so, la, ti (or si) doh. This made it much easier to imagine the sound and to sing at sight.



To help teach the system, she also invented the harmonicon, an instrument rather like the glockenspiel with glass keys and a roller displaying notes of the alphabet. The picture here shows one made under her direction for the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace.



Another singing-related anniversary on November 4th is that of the 1987 exhibition in Norwich Cathedral commemorating a concert given in 1854 by the soprano Jenny Lind.



Known as the Swedish nightingale, Jenny Lind grew up in difficult circumstances but was 'spotted' - overheard singing by a passer-by with connections to the Royal Opera House. Her talent soon brought her fame throughout Sweden, but she lost her voice after too much strenuous singing and only recovered with careful retraining in Paris. She toured Europe to great acclaim and was invited to Norwich in 1847 by the then Bishop whose wife had heard her in London. On her visit she was greeted by crowds lining the streets, church bells ringing and gun salutes. This clearly touched her, and she came back just two years later, especially to raise money for what became the Jenny Lind Infirmary for Sick Children, only the second children's hospital to be established in the country. She later said:

"... of all the money God allowed me to give away when my poor throat could call an audience to listen to its production, none has borne a nobler or more genuine fruit than the Jenny Lind Hospital in Norwich."

Jenny Lind returned twice more to support the hospital founded in her name, and later generations of her family continued their support. The hospital was located first in Pottergate, then moved to Tombland, later to Unthank Road and finally became part of the NNUH in 1975.



Interestingly her 1847 Cathedral concert drew a grumpy response from one Dr. Gifford who wrote: 'Farewell to the primitive purity of the the establishment when it affords a resting place to nightingales.' Hmm...

Here's a quiz with a few birds...

1. At which cathedral would you find the little old lady who feeds the birds?
2. An exotic bird walking down the Kings Road!
3. Your sleep might be disturbed by this lovely song.
4. Which bird finds a spoonful of sugar helpful in getting to work?
5. Who tells us that every little thing is going to be all right?
6. A traditional folk song describing 'the sweet.... 'as she sings in the valley below.
7. An annoying one here, but the only song from an animated short film to be nominated for an Oscar!
8. An Australian favourite, often sung as a round.
9. Which birds do you think will be flying over the white cliffs of Dover?
Lots of options!
10. This majestic creature is said to be silent, but to sing beautifully before it dies.

I'll spare you Tom Lehrer's 'Poisoning pigeons in the park'...

As leaves come down, it becomes much easier to see beautiful outlines of the trees and the huge variety of patterns in their bark. Bark is fascinating stuff. As the skin of the tree it's a way to keep moisture in and infection out, protection against the weather, habitat for other creatures and sometimes a deterrent to things that might cause damage - sun, fungus, or insect damage.. It may have other functions too: oak bark, for example is rich in tannins,(traditionally used in the leather trade) but which taste nasty to predatory insects.

The white bark of the silver birch shields it from ultraviolet rays as seeds are often blown far and wide, meaning that solitary trees may grow alone. Without shade from others, they need extra sun protection - how amazing is that!



It's lovely to see the swirling patterns in sweet horse chestnut, and the smooth silver surface of beeches has for centuries been a canvas for people to carve messages or their initials.



If you have poor eyesight and a vivid imagination, you can have great fun spotting creatures and people hiding in the tree bark. How about this sad gentleman? It's irresistible once you get started!



Hallowe'en is over for another year, but you can still go hunting for other seasonal skeletons - leaves which have dried out to leave just the structure of filigree lace.



It's a bit early just yet, but if you can't wait, you can easily produce your own.



You'll need sturdy rubber gloves and an expendable saucepan but it's well worth it. Here's how:

1. Take some leaves - glossy ones are best
2. Fill a small metal saucepan with 2 cups of water and 3 tablespoons of washing soda (not baking soda) and stir.
3. Bring the water to the boil and then remove the pan from the heat.
4. Put the leaves into the boiled water and let them soak for about 20 minutes.
5. Once cooled, remove the leaves and use a paintbrush or toothbrush very gently to remove the softened leaf pulp between the leaf stalk and veins.
6. Let the leaf skeleton dry.

And there you go. They are wonderful as decoration, in collages or as part of greeting card design. You can also leave the pulp on the softened leaf and use it as a stamp with an ink pad. Endless possibilities!

Falling leaves <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gnp58oepHUQ>

We'll gloss over fireworks this year, and simply note that in 1611, a display in honour of the election of Mayor Thomas Anguish went horribly wrong, causing a stampede and thirty-three deaths. For a while fireworks were banned in the city, although they were very popular elsewhere: Queen Elizabeth I created the position of "Fire Master of England".

Two final Norwich things to celebrate in November are the opening of two splendid musical venues: the Assembly House in 1755 and, after a chequered history as tourney ground, burial site for victims of the plague and a reservoir, Chapelfield Gardens in 1880.



It's good to have reasons to be cheerful in November!
Take care, stay cheery and we'll hope to see you soon at singing!

With much love from all at Come Singing

1. St.Paul's <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHrRxQVUFN4>
2. Pretty flamingo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTxzmLyVFYY>
3. Blackbird singing in the dead of night
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDxfjUEBT9I>
4. A robin feathering his nest
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_L4qauTiCY4
5. Three little birds <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNBCVM4KbUM>
6. Sweet nightingale https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8o_SMmpoQ8
7. Woody woodpecker
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8o_SMmpoQ8
8. Kookaburra <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3M3hkWpkHw>
9. Your choice! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovfQjR3iU-A>
10. The silver swan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8kUIKE10-E>

