A chat with...

Jurgita Leistrumaite

By Nick Finney

Jurgita is a leading light in the classical choirs on the Isle of Wight. She was responsible for creating the Salutaris and Ave Vita choirs, and in more recent years for developing the Ryde Chorus, all amateur choirs. Under her direction the choirs are developing quickly and reaching wider audiences.

Jurgita was brought up under the Soviet regime in Lithuania and, having musically inclined parents, attended music school from quite an early age before graduating from the Music Academy of Lithuania.

She has a modest and reserved manner which makes for some difficulty in extracting information. "It's not about me that I want to talk," she emphasises. "The choirs and the audiences are what matters."

After moving to London in 2000, shortly afterwards she came to the Island for family reasons, and here she has stayed. In 2010 she formed the Camerata Choir, which post-Covid she was instrumental in reforming to establish two new choirs, Salutatis and Ave Vita, and she became musical director for Ryde Chorus in 2023.

While she enjoys playing the piano and is improving her grasp of organ techniques, her real passion is that of musical direction, particularly in the field of choral music. "It's a challenge that is tremendously exciting and motivating," she explains. "My hobby is my job and music is my passion.

"I want audiences to feel the emotion and complex depth of what I feel and experience the joy of the choir's singing which reaches out to them."

Choral music is very popular and deeply ingrained in Lithuanian culture, with its roots in folk music and religious traditions. Choirs abound, from amateur groups to professional ensembles and large choral music festivals are popular across the country. It is that instinctive love of choral performance that Jurgita brings to the Island.

Listening to her talk, it is clear that she is an exacting taskmaster always seeking improvement. She sees herself as having an important teaching role in encouraging choir members to become more confident in their use of techniques to enhance their performance. Her excitement in palpable, when talking about the forthcoming concert in Newport Minster, when the three choirs will perform together for the first time in a major performance of Vivaldi's Gloria and Puccini's Messa di Gloria.

"I am so pleased that we have professional musicians joining us to add to the excitement of the concert," she adds.

Behind Jurgita's quiet and self-effacing exterior lies somebody who still has much more to bring to the Island's choral scene. Those with a love of classical music will doubtless follow her musical development and her career with great interest.