

## AGM Report

Thank you, Nick. Let me start by thanking all of you for your excellent music making over the course of the last twelve months. It has been a hugely successful year and I would like to offer my congratulations to all choir members for their dedication, sense of fun and energetic commitment to their singing. To speak from the perspective of the professional musicians who work with us, Henley Choral Society continues to be a friendly, welcoming place to work. I always feel supported here and I am grateful to you for that.

Last Christmas we opened our concert with some Hildegard of Bingen, with Valentine singing solos from the back of the church and the sopranos echoing at the front. This was an excellent piece with which to work on our intonation, requiring immaculate tuning against the organ drone. The main pieces were Finzi's setting of the Magnificat and Parry's I was Glad, for which we were joined for the second year running by Onyx Brass. It was a pleasure to have them once again, rather fresher than they were the previous year when they had arrived from Japan that morning, half of them with the flu. They joined the choir for a number of items and played some delightful solos of their own. Our Youth Choirs sang solo items by Howells, Coots and Gillespie and Bill Withers amongst other things and joined the whole choir for a rousing rendition of Gaudete.

In the spring, we sang Mozart's Requiem and Haydn's Te Deum in C with the Brandenburg Sinfonia. Lauren Zolezzi gave an admirable performance of Exultate Jubilate on the first concert since returning from cancer – she had undergone chemotherapy just a week earlier. Cecilia MacDowall was sadly unable to join us to hear a performance of her Ave Maris Stella. This seemed to be popular with choir and audience alike. I heard many comments from singers about that particular work that when they started learning it, they were far from sure, but by the time it got to the performance, they were extremely fond of it.

We also went on tour to Falaise where we joined forces with....Interlude....in a performance of another Requiem, this time Gabriel Faure's. I felt that this was an extremely happy occasion for those choir members who went. We were generously hosted by our French guests, Valentine narrowly avoided stepping on a dead pigeon in the gallery of the church whilst singing her solo and we were treated to an amazing lunch the day after the concert in which pretty much every local speciality imaginable had been provided, including some of Serge's own, homemade cider.

Our summer concert was an anglo-american programme which perhaps provided the biggest musical challenge of the year. It required us to be able to hear some quite unusual notes in some unusual chords in Bob Chilcott's Little Jazz Mass, and to be able to hold those notes with confidence, whilst maintaining excellent rhythm. It also required us learning pieces by Pearsall in eight and ten parts, with half the alto section singing down an octave! The choir took to this with admirable patience and good humour and, with a little help from Dave, I think that we pulled it off, all the more impressively due to another sweltering summer's day on which to perform.

I have been delighted with the tone of the choir that is developing nicely as we move forward. We have worked hard on our intonation and, perhaps, most of all, on finding the appropriate musical sounds for the mood of the music. It is my experience of HCS that whenever we are thinking about that particular discipline, we tend to listen better and the sound is then more homogenous.

I have already set a goal for this year of singing something in every concert by heart and of us improving our watching, something commented on by people when they come in to lead workshops with us. The theme of the year perhaps is taking risks in performance in order to encourage this looking up. It is wonderful to hear the difference when the whole choir is doing this.

Other musical developments this year have been excellent workshops with Joanna Tomlinson and Ken Burton. Joanna recently worked technically on the quality of the consonants and the position of the tongue in the mouth. We have also started singing lessons with various choir members and will be holding our first 'sherry and song' evening on February 16<sup>th</sup> for members of the choral society who may wish to perform a solo song in an informal, friendly environment. It is my hope that this will go a long way to developing the vocal confidence of our individual members, thus bettering the sound of the choir as a whole. Quality of voices.....I have also been delighted to see the numerical health of the choir as we return this autumn, and in particular to welcome a number of new tenors and basses. This is always encouraging. Jessica Norton has joined us as Musical Director of the Youth Choirs and will be conducting us all at Christmas in one of the joint items.

In closing, my thanks go to Dave in his absence, especially for all his playing in the summer concert, for which he had quite a considerable number of notes. I would also like to thank Anita d'Attelis for her support for an accompaniment of our youth choirs, occasionally stepping in for Dave at HCS as well. And finally, thank you to everyone on the committee. I know that I say this a lot but it is because it is true – that we have a wonderful committee here who work so hard to make it all happen for us. Thank you to Susan for heading it all up, for her support and her friendship. I look forward to the year ahead with you all.