

Henley Choral Society AGM 2018

Chair's report

This evening is my chance to thank people who have made major contributions to the choir, give a brief resume of our activities over the last 12 months and outline some plans for the future.

I would like to start by thanking our four professional musicians, Peter Asprey, Jessica Norton, Dave Smith and Anita D'Attilis. We are indeed fortunate to have such talented musicians working with us every week.

Peter is now starting his third year with us and continues to bring his expertise, sensitivity, as well as his awful jokes, to rehearsals, which are fun as well as inspiring. He has spent time over the summer working on our repertoire for this year and into the following year. It is a rich mix of the popular, Messiah, and other less well-known works. While it is always fun to sing familiar music, it is also very rewarding to learn to sing new music.

In late spring, Peter decided that he wanted to concentrate on working with adult voices and the HYC's summer workshop at the Henley Festival was his last performance with the Youth Choirs where it was clear how much fun and energy he put into working with the children and we were sorry to lose him from this post.

Thus, in the summer term we were involved in advertising and interviewing for a musical director for the Youth Choirs. Jessica Norton was appointed but as she is not available on Monday evenings, the rehearsals have moved to Thursdays. We interviewed three good candidates but the decision to appoint Jessica was unanimous across the selection committee, HYC volunteers, and Jessica came top of the children's' vote.

We have had a busy year. Two Christmas concerts, the Mozart Requiem and the summer concert of American-English music. We were involved in two other performances. Some of us joined other singers for the Chiltern Arts' first Henley concert for Faure requiem. We also sang this in Falaise on our May trip to France. Around 60 members of HCS joined with Henley-Falaise Twinning Association for a weekend trip where we sang with Interlude, one of the Falaise choirs, in a beautiful, enormous but chilly church. Our young soprano Valentine, sang the Pie Jesus, a sublime moment, and the HCS received great feedback, including from our two coach drivers. Not only was the trip great fun and an opportunity to get to know one another, but also a good opportunity to sing with others in a different venue. So, 6 singing opportunities during the year plus a great workshop with Ken Burton.

We take management of our money seriously and are careful to operate in line with our constitution and the Charity Commissioners' guidance. Mindful of this, the trustees developed a reserve policy. This money has been set aside in case of last-minute cancellations, problems with storing, renewing our staging or any special future projects. Our money comes from subscriptions, Gift Aid, sale of concert tickets, Friends' donations, Gift Aid, etc. Our subscriptions cover core costs: musicians' fees, rehearsal venue hire, insurance, Making Music membership, rehearsal venue hire, hire of storage space for the staging, bank charges and subsidy of the choir's music. Concert tickets should cover most concert expenses.

Our careful stewardship has enabled us to finance additional activities.

- 1 We successfully applied for a Henley Town Council grant which we put with the choir's subsidy for our trip to Falaise. These included concert fees and expenses for our Musical Director and organist; accommodation for our coach driver; musician fees and venue costs of the extra rehearsals leading up to our Falaise concert.
- 2 We are delighted to be supporting a new venture, Peter's singing lessons for choir members.
- 3 Exceptionally, the committee agreed to make a grant to Valentine Ford who sang with us for three years and has recently taken up a Master's degree in performance singing at York University.
- 4 We have also extended free membership to those under 30. We are satisfied that all these activities are in line with the Objectives of our Constitution.

A busy, interesting musical year has been offered to all for less than £4 a session. Pretty good value.

None of the above, however, would happen without a large band of volunteers. Thank you to all my fellow trustees, to all voice reps and to everyone who serves on the committee. Thank you to the many others who willing offer help when needed and special thanks to Romey Poston who stepped in at the last moment to host our annual summer party.

I can't thank everyone by name but I need to thank the following who give so much time to the choir. First my fellow trustees.

Fi Harding and Joanne Harris have been stalwart trustees and a great support to me. Thank you Fi for all you do for not only HCS but your terrific work with HYC. You have managed to create strong links between the youth choirs and HCS and I know these will continue even though you will not continue as a trustee. I have my fingers crossed that you will still be around to help sort out the mechanics of getting the choir onto the stage. Joanne, is stepping down as deputy chair but continuing as a trustee and will continue with her fabulous role as our social secretary. Thank you both so much.

Treasurer: Yolanda has been a most excellent treasurer who regularly presents our finances in a clear and accessible way. She has been exceptionally patient when her approach has been challenged and quietly sought professional advice. We are confident that management and documentation of our finances are compliant not only with the Charity Commission but also has the approval of professional accountants/financiers whose advice we sought. We are in good shape, financially and are exceedingly fortunate that Mark Turner will be taking over. Thank you, Mark. I am nominating Yolanda for assistant treasurer and trustee. So, thanks to the new finance team that includes Arthur Weir who will continue to look after the Gift Aid and Nigel Grundy who pays in of cash and cheques.

Secretary: Thanks to Nick Tuggey who is a brilliant secretary. Among his many tasks, he has helped steer the committee through the painful business of GDPR as well as help draft and update policy papers for the Society. We now have policies on safeguarding, reserves, complaints and a risk assessment document, all of which will need regular updates. Thanks to David Cairns for his early contribution to these. Jane Hutton has taken on the task of keeping a membership list up to date and is compliant with GDPR. Thank you, Jane and thank you Nick, for all you do.

Publicity team: There are changes in this team which Emma will cover. Big thanks are due to Emma who has managed the publicity so well over the last few years and will support Melody Hermon who has agreed to take the lead. Thank you, Melody. Thanks to Dru who is taking over from Paddy who has done such a great job but would really appreciate someone to work with her. I know Emma plans to thank the team but I just want to mention one other change. After many years of selling tickets, Jan French is stepping down She introduced direct sales at rehearsals and has managed the outlet at Gorvett and Stone. Thank you, Jan, for all your magnificent work. We are very fortunate that David Bentley has agreed to take over. I know Jan will help David find his feet.

Another of the big committee jobs is that of Librarian: sincere thanks to Felicity Bazell for sourcing all our music, often a very difficult and time-consuming task - imagine 8 different pieces for music each for 120 singers and that was just for one concert. As the Americans say - 'You do the Math'. Felicity also works out costing of music, collects the money and pays the suppliers in good time. Thank you, Felicity and thanks to those who help you.

Of course, there are many others of you who do essential jobs from managing the staging to running the bars to setting up and clearing away after every concert, to setting up and clearing the rehearsal venue. Thanks to you all. Since I've been Chair, I have tried to build teams of volunteers, partly to help succession but also to reduce the load. It has been great to have more people helping as it makes each task that much lighter.

Posts to fill – It would be great to find someone to fill the post of **Deputy Chair** and some-one to help Dru with the **programme editing**.

We also need a new Secretary to look after our **HCS Friends**. Our Friends provide great support by coming with their friends and families to our concerts as well as providing some financial support. We are urgently looking for someone to keep in touch with them and recruit new Friends.

Looking ahead

In March we are singing Messiah in Reading Concert Hall, a fabulous but expensive venue. Your committee is discussing what, if any, fundraising events we might need. So far, we have agreed to run a Come and Sing: Saturday January 19th at the Christ Church Centre, with organ. Joanne Harris and Angela Law have started discussing mailing lists and our publicity team have plans for advanced publicity of the event. Two members have already offered to help and more help would be very welcome, especially on the day. I am keen to get plans in place before we break for Christmas.

2023/4 will be our Golden Anniversary (50 years) and the committee is already considering some exciting plans to mark the occasion. Lots to look forward to.

If you are interested in learning more about how we run and having your say, do consider joining the committee.

And finally, we all need to be thinking about a new Chair. In my experience, members of HCS are unusually good at volunteering to do stuff, even if I do have to ask several times. If you would like to serve HCS in this way, please step forward or come to me with possible nominations. It's a great job, honestly.