

AGM 2019

## Music Report

First of all, thank you all very much for your hard work and excellent singing over the course of the year. Thank you also to the various members of the committee and others who have contributed to making this year run so effectively. All these things behind the scenes provide the platform for our music making, without which it would be impossible for us to do what we do. I would also like to welcome all those who are singing with us for the first time this year. You are very important to us. We always need fresh faces to keep the choir vibrant and growing.

Christmas 2018 was a programme in which various Christmassy items were interspersed between movements of Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols. Mary Reid joined us on the harp and Jeremiah Stephenson on the organ. Jeremiah was extremely unwell and it was good of him not to pull out of the concert at the very last minute. Mary played beautifully both in her solos and alongside us in the Britten. It was symptomatic of how well we look after our professionals that she commented afterwards how delightful the choir was to work with – not always the case, she said!

The combination of forces and choice of repertoire led to a quieter Christmas concert than in previous years but it seems to have been well-received by the audience nonetheless. We attempted two pieces by heart – the processional from the Britten, with the children joining us for this, something that worked very well; and also Ding Dong! Merrily On High, conducted by Jessica. The concert ended with William Mathias' rousing A Babe is Born. There were nice contributions from the youth choirs, providing colour to the afternoon and evening events.

In the spring term, we did a workshop on Handel's Messiah that was very well attended. Thank you all who contributed to one of the most remarkable cake displays I have ever seen. It was a successful day and people seem to have enjoyed it tremendously, although it would have perhaps have been nice to have seen a greater take-up of new members into the choir from the event.

By the time that we came to performing Messiah later in the term, the choir were very well prepared, meaning that the rehearsal on the day felt easy from a choral perspective. I felt very confident in what the choir were doing. For me, this term was important in our growth as a choir. We developed a greater ability to listen to each other and the sound in the concert was the best blended sound I have heard from the choir. Many people also commented on how well the men, in particular, were looking up. We even managed to sing the first chorus by heart.....just.....I picked an orchestra that play the work together on a regular basis and this paid off. They phrased very naturally and knew the piece well. I am aware that not everyone responded to the early instruments but I thought that the sound was lovely and we got through the rehearsal relatively easily on the day. I also felt that we had four soloists who understood the music and were able

to deliver their arias with a huge amount of intensity. Perhaps a particular shout-out goes to counter-tenor Peter Bozi for his off-copy rendition of He was Despised.

We engaged more young performers for our summer concert: The Bell Quartet and Valentine Ford, an old friend of the choir, joined us for Henry Purcell's Welcome to All the Pleasures and other English music (mainly secular) from across the centuries. This was another concert singing something by heart, this time Now Is The Month Of Maying by Morley. The summer concert presents a challenge for the choir in terms of blend and ensemble. We are very close to the audience in a church with very little acoustic and a seating arrangement that sees us sitting in a wide formation, meaning for example that the altos are a long way away from the sopranos. This is always a good exercise in our ability to blend and listen to one another. I like being close to the audience. It creates an intimacy that audiences love. It feels like the right venue for that concert, even without air conditioning!

Valentine sang Dowland songs and an arrangement of William Byrd's Retire My Soul with the Bell Quartet, something that I felt worked particularly well. The quartet were delightful to work with and brought a lot of fun to the concert with their performance of the Danish 'Sterrands Rand.' Special mention should be made to Dave, who employed all 30 of his fingers for his two Charles Trenet improvisations. It was a really dynamic moment in the evening. I was thrilled to be able to offer solos to choir members in this concert. We are an amateur choir and part of that should be about giving opportunities to our members to broaden their experiences. I thought that all five singers did a brilliant job. Thank you to all of them for stepping up.

On reflection, I feel that the sound of the choir has developed hugely over the year. I would like particularly to mention the basses on this occasion, who I feel came on very well over the year. I feel that we make a more homogenous sound than we did 12 months ago. I am trying now to build on that by creating some colours that have some more excitement, without losing the work that we have done on blend. The early signs this year have been promising. I know that Giles Underwood's workshop will help with this. We have been strengthened by the recruitment of some new members of the start of this year. Thank you to all who have been involved in the process of attracting new members. Messiah recording from concert.....

All in all, this bodes very well for 2019-20. I wish you all a happy year with us.