



## Chair's report AGM 2019

Welcome to all of you who have stayed for this AGM which as a registered charity, we are obliged to hold. It is great to feel supported by you.

### 1. Thanks to our professional musicians

Let's start with some rowdy thanks – sincere thanks from the whole Society, adult and the youth sections, to the four wonderful professional musicians we employ: Peter Asprey and Jess Norton our two highly talented conductors; and our two fabulous accompanists, David Smith and Anita D'Attellis. Without them there would be no choir and without their talent and commitment we would be so much the poorer. They are all skilled and sensitive musicians and we are truly fortunate that they are prepared to work with our choirs. As far as the adult choir goes, it never fails to amaze me how patient Peter is with us all, even when we are being completely hopeless, and how every evening is a joy. Peter is now starting his fourth year with us and I know I am not alone when I say that I really hope he will be able to put up with us for many more years to come.

Thank you, David for being a consummate accompanist ... we loved your jazz accompaniments to our warm up the other evening!

### 2. Range of music we sing

Each summer Peter spends considerable time developing the programme for the coming concerts and so far, each and every one has turned out brilliantly. Our conductor specifies the music, including the edition to use, while the librarian is involved in the crucial and tricky task of obtaining the music in a timely manner.

It is inevitable that some individuals in the choir will like some music better than other but by singing the full year's repertoire, we can improve our singing, grow together as a choir and extend our knowledge of the vast choral repertoire that is out there. I am saddened when members opt out of a concert because they say they don't like the music in contrast to the many who say how they come to love the music by getting to know it. So, give it a try.

### 3. Organisational matters and the need for volunteers (nomination form)

This is my penultimate report as Chair of Henley Choral Society as I will not plan to serve a 6<sup>th</sup> and final year. (Our constitution specifies that officers should serve a three-year term with an option for a further three years.) I have asked several people if they would consider taking on this role, so far with no success, but by the end of this year I hope I will have a potential successor. If no one is prepared to step up, then the Society will be in difficulties. Bit like trying to get a deal ...

Our constitution specifies that we have a Board of Officers (or Trustees) responsible for the 'control and management of the Society'. The Officers include Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Ideally there will be a trustee who can act as liaison between our Board and the Henley Youth Choir and a Social Secretary.

The Officers (or Trustees) are part of the committee which, in addition to the Trustees, includes Voice Reps and other Society members such as publicity, librarian, staging manager, concert manager, and so on. Tonight, you are here to appoint or confirm members of the committee. By the way, all this is in the Henley Choral Society Handbook which all members have received and it is also available to all members on our website.

Thank you from me to all my fellow trustees and committee members for all the work you have done in the past year. Essential choir jobs take time and effort and I know that many really appreciate the work of the many volunteers. Why not turn over a new leaf and think, what can I do to help things run smoothly? Many of our present volunteers juggle jobs, children, grandchildren, volunteer elsewhere and belong to other choirs yet manage to give time and effort to HCS. Please remember this. While constructive suggestions are welcome, it can be very discouraging to hear the distant (or sometimes face to face) moans. This year we are looking to fill various roles. Why not step up and try doing something new! Unlike many organisations, HCS has a great record of members volunteering. It would be wonderful to welcome more on board.

#### **4. New important role**

One new member to our committee is Jane Hutton who, in addition to keeping choir records, has agreed to take on the role of concert manager. This involves many of the tasks that I have done over the past four years but it is time to share. I am also mindful that I need to make the role of Chair less intimidating. Any one considering taking over from me will have, I assure you, a manageable and workable role. Thank you so much Jane for making this possible.

#### **5. Quick review of past year**

We performed 4 concerts in last year's season, two Christmas concerts, a spring and a summer concert and had two workshops. The spring workshop on Messiah, open to non-choir people, was very popular. Many thanks to Peter for sharing his expertise with us and to all involved, from conception, publicity, hosting and clearing up. Peter's skills and wonderful insights into the work were much appreciated: indeed, several attendees applied to join our choir. This led up to our very successful spring concert when we performed Messiah in Reading Concert Hall and, despite some house-keeping problems (for which we received a discount) was thoroughly enjoyed by all of us. I received more complimentary audience feedback about this performance than I have ever had for any of our other concerts. Performing at Reading takes away the heavy work of preparing staging and bar etc at St Mary's and at Christ Church Centre, but it requires forward planning and, on this occasion, follow-up. I have really appreciated those of you have acknowledged that.

#### **6. Singing development**

In addition to the concerts there have been various other musical activities through the year. Peter has continued to offer singing lessons to a growing number of members as part of our singing development. These lessons are subsidised by us which is why we must restrict them to Members of HCS. As part of this initiative, there was also a social evening for the singers when a number of those receiving lessons were brave enough to stand up and solo. Scary but really good fun.

We will also run two workshops during this year. The first is next Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October. Giles Underwood who many of us will remember from two HCS concerts

is providing the one this coming Saturday. Currently nearly 70 members are committed to attending which is excellent but only just over 50% of the choir. It would be great if more could find time to attend.

## **7. Looking ahead and final thanks**

This coming year we will be in our familiar venues and, as usual, success will depend on Society members playing their part. We have a great tradition of rolling up sleeves and joining in but there is always room for more helpers. The more the merrier. Most importantly, it is essential that all members play their part in promoting concerts and selling tickets. Without ticket sales, we could not afford to perform as we do. Some members sell fist-fulls of tickets while others sell none. It is the responsibility of us all. If we want to sing in concerts, we each have a job to do. We are trying to keep a careful track of ticket sales, including mode of sale to see how we might improve. Thank you to Nick Tuggey and David Bentley for their work on this.

Trustees and the committee continue to forward plan. There are three pieces of this work I would like to mention.

1. A small group have been considering how to mark 50 years of singing with HCS in the 2023 -4 season. One of the suggestions we have accepted is to commission a new choral work which Peter has already told the choir about. Bernard (lately bass rep) led this group.
2. Bernard has also recently initiated a recruitment drive for male singers at Henley Rugby Club. Thank you, Bernard, for both of these pieces of work.
3. We are starting to renew our contact with a choir in Leichlingen, Germany and hope to arrange exchange visits with the help of the Henley-Leichlingen twinning group. We hope this might be in 2021.

None of the above, however, would happen without a large band of volunteers. Thank you to all my fellow trustees, especially Nick (our efficient and supportive secretary), Mark (who as treasurer leads our finance team) and Joanne (who ensures there are various of social events through the year) My thanks also go to voice reps, and to everyone who serves on the committee, including Melody who leads on publicity, Dru who edits the concert programmes and Felicity, our splendid librarian. Special thanks this year to Bernard and Jana as they relinquish their roles as voice reps. Thank you to the many others who willing offer help when needed. We would not function very well without you all.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all the hard work Fi and others devote to keep the Henley Youth Choir running. We are unusual in having a youth branch so please support them – they are our future.