

## Henley Choral Society Chair's report 2020

At the end of my first year as Chair I started my report by saying that the year had been a little busier than I had anticipated. Covid-19 has made my final year busy in ways no one could have anticipated

Autumn term 2019 concluded with two wonderful Christmas concerts when we sang with our Henley Youth Choirs and a small group of minute, impressive Suzuki violin players. It felt like a real community concert. We ended the concert singing *A Winter's Night* in front of the composer, Cecilia McDowell who was so gracious about our performance. Surely this experience cemented our ambition to continue with our commissioning work with her.

We didn't realise that our Christmas concert would be our last for some time.

We had just got to grips with the tricky Stanford, ready for the March concert (prophetically title, '*In Times of Trouble*', one of the titles of Haydn's Mass) when the lockdown was announced. So, no concert but we started working to ensure the choir's survival. As many of you know, we agreed immediately to put our four musicians on our own furlough scheme although both our conductors proved to be very imaginative and stepped up to provide on-line sessions for us. Peter pulled out all the stops, providing on-line voice work, talks, taught us new music and recording techniques. He put all our offerings together, cut out the rubbish and produced a pretty good recording. A first for Henley Choral Society, I think.

Peter is a man of vision that shows in his music programming for our concerts but also in the way he has handled the lockdown. He has worked hard to keep the choir active, fun and productive. Over 80 members have already paid their subscription for the coming year which is a great reflection on your directorship, Peter. I'm sure you will all join with me in acknowledging Peter's support, expertise and teaching skills. Thank you, Peter, we appreciate your hard work.

### **Core Values**

Overarching the business of running the choir is the need to be mindful of our core values. These were articulated some time ago by a working group when Ben Goodson became our conductor and it included Mellissa, Fi, Angela, Wendy. Core values were extracted from a choir survey and still hold today. We are ambitious, aim to improve our singing using a wide range of music. We are inclusive and outward looking, provide a friendly environment where music making is joyful. Not a bad list to keep in mind as we survive this terrible pandemic, keeping our eye on the light ahead.

Here are some of the ways I think we have followed those values over the last 5 years.

### **Singing to the best of our potential**

We have had regular workshops, sectionals, developed the ambition to maintain 80% attendance at rehearsals and introduced Peter's individual singing lessons. Under Peter's tuition, I think we are better at sight-reading and increasingly willing to sing off-copy and even scramble. All these changes are helping us to reach our ambition to sing to the best of our ability.

## **Friendly and inclusive**

Inclusiveness is helped by encouraging volunteers to join in, sometimes I admit my encouragement is somewhat energetic. Give it a try and find out how friendly we all are. It is great when people step up and say, 'I'll have a go at that' or 'I'll help you with that' (thank you Hugh) and very disappointing when there are no volunteers, despite desperate calls from me: altos, I'm looking at you.

## **Outward looking**

In good times, we reach out beyond regular rehearsals and concerts. Since I have been Chair, we have contributed to Henley's Advent Calendar; put on termly workshops which we sometimes share with the public; sung as part of a Chiltern Arts Festival and travelled to France to sing with a choir in Falaise. While we were there, seeing one of our youngest members singing Faure's Pie Jesu from a decaying balcony in an enormous, freezing French church was quite something. I even persuaded our two coach drivers, who claimed not to like classical music, to listen to our music. They were mightily impressed. An outstanding, outward leaning event was our September orchestral concert this year when Orpheus Sinfonia provided musical magic on a quintessential late summer's afternoon: another first for HCS. Many thanks to Mark for his great idea, to all who helped and especially to Jane our concert manager.

## **Thanks**

I have experienced a great deal of friendliness and support as Chair. I am grateful to all my fellow trustees: Nick our efficient secretary, and wise counsellor; Mark, and his finance team, including Yolanda, who expertly manage our financial affairs; and Joanne who has morphed into a fantastic social secretary enhancing our efforts to be a friendly choir.

I would like to thank our committee, especially those who do difficult jobs cheerfully: the voice reps who are special conduits of all information and keep the sections engaged; the publicity team that includes Melody, Cath, Dru, Toni and Emma and all those that help spread the spoken and written word; Liz and Christine (who is also a fab soprano rep) who are doing an excellent job building up the support of Friends of HCS; Francis and his team of stage builders. Won't it be great when we can get all that kit out again!

Our stalwart librarian, Felicity has for many a long year provided us with music in a timely way. She has always managed to produce a spare copy from her copious bag for an unexpected new member or someone who has forgotten their music, ensured our concert musicians have music, tirelessly tried to track and trace hired copies that forgetful singers have failed to return and managed to swallow hard when members moan about the copy they have been allocated. Felicity, you have served with efficiency and charm. You deserve a break. On behalf of us all, a mountain of thanks for all the work you have done. Thank you, thank you.

## **Henley Youth Choirs**

HCS is unusual in sustaining two youth choirs. Fi Harding continues to do fantastic work with our young members and frankly deserves more support from us. Children are our future. Give yourself a treat and tune into their next on-line concert or, when things get better, sample their performances. You

will come away feeling that little bit happier and more hopeful about life. Our thanks also to the two HYC musicians, Jess the MD and Anita their talented and charming pianist.

And now thanks to two people we couldn't do without: Wendy, the founder member, who is always there for the choir with a wise word and loads of good cheer and our pianist Dave - how great to see you back at the piano, Dave.

Finally, my thanks to you all for these beautiful flowers and for making the last busy five years enjoyable. My very best wishes to those who will now take the choir forward.

Susan Edwards

19 October 2020