

## HCS Music report 2019-20

Such is the way that this year has gone that our Christmas concert 2019 feels like a long time ago! Allow me to jog your memories: the two main works in the concert were George Dyson's Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in D and Cecilia McDowall's A Winter's Night. Due to personal reasons, Cecilia was unable to join us the previous Christmas and so we were delighted that she was able to make it this time around, in particular because she has agreed to take on a commission for our anniversary year. She always writes very well for the voice and also well for amateur choirs, with music that is always varied and interesting but singable and, importantly, learnable for a large group of musicians. We performed her piece well, coping well with the subtle variations on famous Christmas tunes, although, and I must take responsibility for this, there was one small section that was slightly less well-known. The Dyson is a great sing and the choir showed off a good command of dynamic range, displaying power in the key moments, tenderness in others, such as at the start of that quiet Nunc Dimittis.

In between, we performed a variety of well-known carols alongside the delightfully easy-to-work-with Richard Moore on the organ and the rather suave Dan D'Souza as our baritone soloist. At times it did indeed feel like Richard Moore on the organ and Roger Moore singing baritone. And yes, Dan D'Souza and not Charles Cunliffe, who had to pull out just a day before the concert after being hit by a car. I can tell you all for certain that he is absolutely fine and the silver lining was getting to experience Dan's Rolls Royce of a voice performing various Christmas songs both well and lesser known.

All in all, audience and choir seemed to enjoy the experience. I felt that the concert had been a big success, although I personally regret not programming the Dyson at the end and Cecilia's piece somewhere nearer the start. I just felt that we sang the Dyson really well.

Inevitably, 2020 has been a disappointing year in terms of performance. I think particularly because the feeling that I was getting from the choir was that they were particularly enjoying Haydn, Allegri, Mendelssohn and Stanford and from my perspective, I felt that we were a choir who were well prepared, on top of our game and ready to give a great concert. It was also a programme that I was particularly proud of and felt disappointed not to give it.

Having said all that, I would like to pick out a couple of positives from this year and share what I have learned. First of all, I have been greatly encouraged by the standard of singing of those who have been present in our recent rehearsals at d:Two. In particular, I have noticed how well people are breathing and how well placed the sound is for many of the singers. What I have learned from this is that it really is worth spending the time to look at particular technical things. Lockdown has given us more time to do this and I feel that it has made a lot of difference to the way that we are singing. This is very encouraging.

Secondly, singing both on one's own and then in a socially distanced context, or sending a solo recording in, does encourage singers to take responsibility where

at other times it is easier to hide in a group. This can only be beneficial for the overall standard of the choir. I am looking forward to us having a permanent record of our singing during this period from the recordings that we have or will have made.

And finally, it has given us the opportunity to fulfil a part of our charitable status, which is to support musicians in the profession. The recent concert in the park was a great success and you could tell how much it meant to the musicians involved. The Orpheus Sinfonia put together a lovely programme of well-loved music, ably arranged for the relevant forces by members of the orchestra and beautifully presented with charm and humour by conductor Thomas Carroll. We hope to be able to work WITH them next time around.

Having said all that, I am nonetheless aware that this has been tricky for those helping to organise things. I offer my sincere thanks to all involved in making things happen and for looking after me financially during this period. Thank you to all who have supported the society by subscribing again this year. I look forward to easier times ahead.

Susan