

## **Henley Choral Society Chair's Annual report 20/21**

In summary, 2020-21 has been a year dominated by Covid-19, with the Government singling out amateur choirs for greater restrictions, but our resilience and patience is seeing us through.

### **Rehearsals**

During the year, we had a few rehearsals together, often with restricted numbers, but generally we had to revert to zoom only rehearsals. Peter Asprey, our Musical Director, did an outstanding job of keeping us interested. We had very high levels of participation on zoom rehearsals, even though the conditions were far from promising and for many members, zoom was a new experience. At our peak we had 75 screens participating, many with multiple family members. We had times of combined in-person and zoom rehearsals, which our MD handled incredibly well. To maintain our interest, we had members of the choir sing to us, interviews with professionals and piano performances by our talented accompanists, Anita D'Attellis and Dave Smith.

### **Autumn term 2020**

...well, Christmas was cancelled. Jane Hutton (our concert organiser) and Carol Kelly (Vice-Chair) did an inordinate amount of work preparing for concerts and then carols but to no avail as Covid-19 surged in the UK. But we did produce a great video of the Choir singing Christmas pieces, with nearly 800 views on YouTube. We also sent the video to HCS Friends, family and other notable groups. It was much enjoyed by the staff of Henley Town Council.

### **Spring term 2021**

Once again, we made plans to perform, with lots of work being done by Jane and Carol, but no. During the term we sang mostly Chamber music, as it more suited zoom rehearsals. However, we did start to rehearse Brahms' German Requiem, supplementing zoom with online rehearsal aids.

### **Summer term 2021**

We made preparations to have a summer party in Alexandra Hodgson's garden and to perform Brahms' German Requiem at the Christ Church Centre in Henley. But the Government focus on amateur choirs as a high-risk activity meant we had to postpone our concert and all the efforts were to no avail. The end of government restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July came too late for 2020-2021 season.

### **Autumn term 2021**

Although not strictly part of 2020-21 it is important to complete the tale of all our attempts at performing. With Covid-19 restrictions being largely lifted, although with the virus still being very active, we decided to make the Brahms' German Requiem a

focus for a Bring and Sing workshop with performance, rather than a concert. Given all we had gone through it was a great success including:

- We made friends with 65 singers who joined us as guests.
- In total 124 of us made a great sound.
- We had an audience of 96; given the required spacing arrangements, it would have been hard to accommodate any more.
- The two soloists, Hilary Cronin and Hugo Herman-Wilson were outstanding.
- Our accompanists, Annita D'Attellis and David Smith, were similarly excellent.

Many of our guest singers commented on their skills and musicality. A reminder of how lucky we are to have them accompany HYC and HCS respectively.

- "So interesting and so clever" was how Peter was described by one enthusiastic 90-year-old singer. She wasn't the only one to comment on his combination of musicality, erudition and fun. Indeed, many of our singing guests remarked how brilliant he was.

There were many people who contributed to the success of the workshop, including Meg Ashby, Jan French, Mary Wood, Diana Piesse and Anne Frankum who organised the cakes; Jenney Wager, our librarian who organised loan copies; Catherine Reynolds who ran the online ticket sales; Angela Law who did an amazing job with publicity (including contacting local choirs; Dru Ross who brought together the programme; Carol Kelly who helped with the overall organisation; and especially Jane Hutton who brought together and ran the whole event brilliantly and with great grace.

We are back rehearsing, with good ventilation, masks and the choir either vaccinated (the majority) or having had a recent negative Covid-19 test.

### **Thanks**

There are many others I have not already mentioned in the context of the workshop and whom it is important to acknowledge:

Thank you to

- the HCS Committee who provide wise words and experience.
- Voice representatives, of whom we ask an increasing amount; welcoming new members, communicating, representing, getting subscriptions paid, checking on vaccinations and more.
- Jeremy Hill who helps update the members section of our website
- Liz Ware and Christine Valentine who have managed our very important group of HCS Friends.
- Fi Harding and the HYC team- I will not steal their thunder but they have emerged from this difficult year in great shape, successful, growing and with a dynamic new Musical Director
- Wendy Hawkins our founder and membership secretary
- Mark Turner, who does a great job as treasurer

There are some people who deserve special mention and thanks:

Joanne Harris, our outgoing and excellent social secretary.

Christine Valentine who left her role as Soprano Voice Rep and Friends representative.  
Welcome Nicky Normantin, new Voice Rep and Fiona Franks, HCS Friends co-leader.  
Carol Kelly, our wise and hard-working vice-chair  
Susan Edwards who has been generous with her advice and support  
Nick Tuggey, our HCS Secretary, who has done an outstanding job, providing the Society with great service. He stayed on as Secretary beyond his usual tenure and has been a great support to Carol and I. Thank you to Caroline Rake who has put herself forward for election as Secretary.

### **Conclusion**

I have taken over as Chair of a thriving choir, with healthy financial reserves and an outstanding level of active volunteering. We have a wonderful accompanist, Dave Smith. We have a music director that is improving our standards year on year and can bring in great soloists and orchestras and above all makes choir enjoyable.

Many of you do a great job supporting the choir, thank you. This is why we are able to steer our way through the pandemic. Thank you to you all. This really is a choir of the members and I feel honoured to be part of a near fifty-year-old group of committed people who want to come together and make great music. Henley Choral Society is thriving and I am sure will continue to do so in years to come.