



HENLEY CHORAL Society

HERE'S THE PITCH

Issue 36
March 2017

From the Editor

Wow what a talented, prolific and busy lot HCS members are! There are great contributions to this edition. It is clear that some of you love writing about music (almost) as much as you love singing.

Next to singing and writing about singing you clearly love attending Choral Workshops. You really can't get enough! So, we have an impression of the HCS Workshop run by Bertie Rice by relative HCS newbie Soprano Paddy Austin; Bass Ian Heriot is 'Summoned by Bells' to Salisbury Cathedral; Alto Rosemary Woodroffe tells why she has been to an annual Workshop for twenty years, plus Bass Tim Osborn Jones' description of tackling the mighty Bach *B Minor Mass* jumps off the page with sheer pleasure.

There is also an interesting piece on MOOC (no me neither - see page 3) and a glimpse into the preferences of our esteemed MD. Mike Hails deserves his own raffle prize for a heartwarming account of the 'Power of Music' on page 7 plus no less than two other articles. Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed. Keep this up and we will

need a longer Newsletter...only joking! Please do not hesitate to send any feedback to this edition or articles for the next edition to: angelalaw@everysense.co.uk

Don't be so distracted by the great reads here that you forget to sell tickets for the Spring Concert though - it's going to be great and even better if sold-out.

Angela Law,
Alto and
Newsletter editor



SAT 25TH MARCH 2017 / 7.30PM

Purcell Dido & Aeneas

Vivaldi: Dixit Dominus
Pachelbel: Canon & Gigue

Featuring
Brandenburg Sinfonia

Samantha Crawford, soprano
Lauren Zolozzi, soprano
Mae Heydorn, mezzo-soprano
Matthew Durkan, baritone
Peter Asprey, conductor



St Mary's Church, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 2AU

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Samantha Crawford is a singer "whose fine cut soprano brings singing of class to her roles" (Opera)

Henley Youth Choir Update

Following the wonderful Christmas Concert with HCS, the 60 members of the Junior and Senior Henley Youth Choirs are focussing on preparing for their next sold out performance on Friday 17th March at the Kenton Theatre as part of Henley Youth Festival's Sing event.

As well as the weekly Monday rehearsals, the Youth Choir is keen to spread the word on the benefits of singing and recruit more members. So they held a workshop, led by Peter, at Gillotts School following on from some held in 2015. It was on Monday 30th January and was attended by over 45 pupils from Years 7, 8 and 9. Peter taught the students 3 varied songs - *Love lifted me*, Tallis' *Canon* and *Banuwa* (Liberian folk song) as well as doing some fun warm ups and exercises. Martha Golledge, who is in Year 7, commented 'I had a great time! I really enjoyed learning how to perform in canon, which is where one group starts and then another group joins in with the same tune several bars later.'

Peter was impressed by the students saying 'there were lots of promising voices in the groups. They picked up the songs very quickly and we performed them all with both groups at the end. There is clearly a lot of potential in these young people.' Frances David, Head of Music at Gillotts school mirrored the views of the pupils saying 'The students and staff at

Gillotts had a really enjoyable time in the workshop. It was great to see Peter engaging the groups of students with unfamiliar but successful musical repertoire and to have all the students together at the end for an informal performance was lovely. We are really looking forward to having more workshops of this nature in the future.'

Henley Youth Choir is planning more workshops at Gillotts and in other local schools.

Jo Dickson, Alto and HYC Committee Member



Have we always had Community Choirs?

Have we always had Community Choirs? We've had church choirs, choral societies, male voice choirs, but are Community Choirs a phenomenon started by Gareth (The Choir) Malone?

This thought occurred to me after reading an article over Christmas in the Church Times (there's a lot in the CT about music), on the new Military Wives Christmas CD. I learnt that there is now a countrywide network of Military Wives choirs, and that the CD was the combined effort of a number of choirs, one of which had been coached and conducted by our very own Will Dawes.

Browsing the BBC Sport website I came across a news item about a group of singers from Edinburgh who were taking part in the Great Edinburgh Winter Run on Saturday 7th January. I looked it up because I was wondering if they sang as they ran, but apparently not. They belong to a group called Sing in the City (guess what? - they have got a website - for more info, look them up). This group, which was started in 2010 by Kirsty Baird, has about 500 singers who sing for charity and have raised over £55,000. There are in fact eleven Sing in the City choirs in Scotland, mainly based in Edinburgh. Some of them have a love of running, and so formed this small group of runners, and they were taking part in the Run, but not singing as they ran.

Having found this group, I wondered if there were any others, and so Googled Sing in the City Oxford, and came up with the Oxford City Singers, a community choir (based in Oxford of course), which was started in 2009. A quick look at their website

found that the founder (Michelle Anthony-Cresswell) had moved to Edinburgh and started another group called the Edinburgh City Singers, so I checked that website, only to find that she had now moved to Bath and started the Bath City Singers. These are all Pay-as-you-Go choirs, and you pay for each rehearsal, rather than on a termly or annual basis. Each has a website, if you are interested.

So, back to my original question: have there always been Community Choirs in the UK? I'm still not sure. There is an interesting series of posts on the internet by Chris Rowbury on how to start and develop a Community Choir, but I can't find anything which gives me a history. I found one article about community choirs in the USA, where they seem to have been going for about 40 years, and it has been estimated that about 25 million Americans sing in choirs. As you can imagine, there are lots of hits on Google about choirs and community choirs, but I will stop there, as I am beginning to think: 'Well, it depends on what you mean by a Community Choir.' See Chris Rowbury for more on that.

Mike Hails, Bass and Raffle organiser



Splendid Choral week

Each year in August I attend a residential choral workshop week which I thoroughly recommend! We stay in Cranleigh School, which is fairly near to Guildford - so not too far to travel - and the week includes full board (and far too many delicious cakes!!)

The music is split into two sorts. Everyone there (usually about 150 people) is split into 3 or 4 choirs (one being all ladies - and you can choose that one if appropriate!) and we spend the first four days practising smaller pieces for a concert on the Thursday evening which is held in the school chapel.

Each evening, and also the Friday and Saturday, are dedicated to learning the larger piece(s) of music for the big concert with full orchestra, usually performed in Guildford Abbey on the Saturday evening. The 2017 course runs from Sunday, August 13th until Sunday morning August 20th and we will be performing *Carmina Burana* and also Elgar's *The Music Makers* in

the Abbey. There is a fair amount of rehearsing, naturally, but the afternoons are free until a short rehearsal before dinner. There is always evening entertainment for those who want to join in; a quiz night, a party piece concert where those extravert folk can shine (always amazingly good, amusing and entertaining) and buffet suppers on the 2 concert nights after the performances.

It is a really fun week, meeting people from choirs all over the UK, some of whom, like me, have been going to this residential workshop each year for the last 20 years! That should be recommendation enough! If anyone would like more information you could speak to me at choir and/or look at their website which is www.ccweek.org.uk

Rosemary Woodroffe, Alto

'MOOC' Music?

Many of the world's best universities provide MOOC courses, Massive Open On-line Courses - bear with me, this doesn't get technical! I have been studying the Yale University 'Introduction to Classical Music' led by Craig Wright, Professor of Music at Yale. It's a 9-week course working through a little music theory, then Medieval era through to Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modern. For a newby like me, it's brilliantly presented, very rewarding with lots of study tools and completely free. Other HCS members might want to give it a go.

Tim Vaughan, Tenor



60 second interview with Peter

What's your first musical memory?

Singing the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* solo at school when I was about five. I can still remember the whole song and the words. My family tease me about it!

What is your greatest experience to date as a member of the audience?

Hearing Handel's *Messiah* with Polyphony at St John's Smith Square. I cried a lot!

...And as a singer or conductor?

Conducting Mozart's *Requiem*. It's such a powerful piece.

Would you choose a long walk or a loll on the sofa?

Ideally I would like to do one after the other...I'll let you decide which comes first!

Brunch in the city or Sunday roast in the country?

Sunday roast in the country.

Favourite city?

Paris - you can do it at any pace you want - I like sitting in a cafe with a carafe of wine watching the world go by.

Favourite performance venue?

St Mary's Henley, obviously. Apart from that, I loved Berlin Symphony Hall.

What book is on your bedside table?

The bible and a John Grisham thriller.

What music on your ipod might surprise us?

Billy Joel, Queen, Paul Simon.

Who is your role model or mentor and why?

My Director of Music at school. He made us believe that we could do anything we wanted and encouraged us to have a go.

What music is guaranteed to get you on the dance-floor?

I am a REALLY reluctant dancer. But anything cheesy and a glass of wine!

What one possession would you save from a burning building?

My laptop. My whole life is on it!!

What alternative career might you have pursued?

Teaching or maybe the church.

How do you know when you've had a good day?

When I feel that I have given my best in the things that I have needed to do...

Interview by Angela Law, Alto and Newsletter editor



Summoned by (Cathedral) Bells

After negotiating the grid-lock of Salisbury's summer traffic I eventually found the entrance to the cathedral precinct. The inevitable yellow-jacketed traffic czar was suitably placated by the words 'Sarum College' and I was waved through to my free parking and lodgings for the week. The college accommodation tended more to the monastic than to 5 stars but was fully adequate with en suite facilities and excellent food, but no radio or TV - clerics are expected to have their minds on higher things. My purpose was to join the Royal School of Church Music Residentiary Choir. This is a very sociable group of 40 choristers recruited from throughout the UK, including some from North America, who each year visit a different cathedral to sing all the services for a week when the regular choir is on holiday. The choir sings choral Evensong on week days plus Choral Mattins, Eucharist and Evensong on Sunday. A typical service can involve an introit, Preces & Responses, a psalm to Anglican Chant, a through-composed service setting (Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis or Mass), an anthem and congregational hymns; quite an undertaking with different music for every service - not to mention a posh wedding on Saturday (Walton, Duruflé and Hadley!)

The daily routine starts with a full half-hour session with the resident voice coach. (Each choir member also has an individual session during the week and an audition for next year). There follows a major morning rehearsal in the college chapel. After a, thankfully, long lunch break, there is an afternoon rehearsal prior to the stalls rehearsal in the cathedral to check the acoustic (fantastic) and to get the right balance with the organ. This can be difficult as visiting organists can be carried away by the opportunity to play a large, full-blooded four-manual instrument - one of 'Father' Willis' best. Then follows the service proper, the high point of the day. After dinner there is yet another rehearsal before one is allowed to topple into bed, or the adjoining pub. Altogether, a very demanding regime that requires discipline to conserve one's voice and physical stamina to survive the week.

The proceedings were led by Scott Farrell, Director of Music at Rochester Cathedral. He freely describes himself as 'the big red windmill' - generous physique, red cassock and flailing arms. He and the voice coach, Charles MacDougal, made an entertaining 'Little and Large' comedy duo but, nevertheless, demanded exacting standards. Choir members are expected to sing confidently 'off the page' as rehearsals concentrate on interpretation, dynamics, ensemble sound etc. (Some private note-bashing is thus an essential preliminary as there can be no reliance on gentle osmosis, as with HCS.) The anthems tend to be the set pieces with some amazing effects possible with a big acoustic and a versatile organ. However, the benchmark for any church or cathedral choir is the quality of its psalm singing (listen to BBC Choral Evensong.) Much time is spent on polishing interpretation, phrasing and precision of this seemingly simple Anglican art form.

The Evensong services were surprisingly well-attended, even allowing for a tourist location like Salisbury. There were usually two congregations: the cognoscenti who sit in the quire and those dipping their toes in the water who remain in the nave. The latter group I suspect were also intrigued by the procession of the cathedral clergy in rich vestments as well as our own colourful display of different robes and academic hoods. The Sunday Eucharist draws a regular congregation of several hundred; no doubt attracted by the high standards of music, liturgy and preaching.

Overall, this week was an amazing opportunity to sing great music in one of the best locations in the world under the direction of acknowledged masters of the art and in the company of singers much better than me. Salisbury Cathedral and the precinct have an unrivalled ambience and the daily round of music and services gives a feeling of being a 19th century vicar; the location was after all the inspiration for Trollope's 'Barchester' novels.

Ian Heriot, Bass



Finding Your Tail and Managing Grippy Notes: Navigating a Choral Workshop

On a chilly and grey Saturday morning, we gathered at d:two for a choral workshop, and no doubt more than one person wondered why they had slid out of a warm bed earlier than necessary on a weekend.

We soon found out why - we had come to have a very unusual encounter with a man whose skill and warmth very quickly had us pleased that we'd made the effort. Robert (Bertie) Rice has a very impressive CV: from professional singer to singing teacher to choir master, and he has a beautiful voice to match it, both speaking and singing.

Surprisingly, we spent very little of the first half actually singing. Instead, we stretched and bent, ignoring the indignant creaks of our bodies, and working on our posture in order to support our voices in their quest for resonance and pitch. Casual passers-by would have kept their heads down and walked on quickly if they'd heard the squeaks and growls that emanated from the rehearsal room - just us coming to terms with our sliding and grippy notes.

He then put us through the vocal and brain-gym hoops (thanks, Peter, for dropping the *Grand Old Duke* on us the previous week - we surprised him, I think!) Bertie has a marvellous turn of phrase, so we were making a sound like the Metropolitan Line, the men were blowing off, and we were constantly reminded to check where our tail was (these last two not connected...). For avoidance of doubt, he wasn't talking about the coccyx, but about the imaginary appendage proudly sported by many of our friends in the animal kingdom. Surprisingly, this approach is very good for the posture.

As a relative newbie, and someone who hasn't had a lot of voice training, I learnt a lot, and found that

the time absolutely flew by. From the animated conversations in the room and later at Zizzi's, I gathered that other attendees enjoyed themselves and found it useful too.

The last word goes to Bertie, who says, 'It was a pleasure to work with HCS. They showed an obvious intention to sing well and healthily, and were able to work really quickly through the morning's programme, as well as having a lot of fun. I'm also glad that they laughed at my jokes - some were better than others, I fear!' Thanks to the committee for giving us this opportunity, and thanks to Joanne for her superb organisation of the lunch at Zizzi's - it capped the morning off perfectly.

Paddy Austin, Soprano



Weekly Raffle

Thank you for your support of the raffle over the past year. The amount raised in 2016 was £1427, about £50 short of the 2015 total, but a good contribution towards funds. I also have a small but growing collection of foreign coins which find their way into the pot after people have been on holiday.

In recent years, the proceeds have been boosted by the Champagne raffles, which started at the end of 2011. Thank you, Wendy, for that idea. I must also thank Andrew Hawkins for boosting the raffle with sales of his garden produce. The success of the raffle depends, of course, on your support in the form of donations of bottles of wine (and champagne) and of books of raffle tickets, and your support through the regular purchase of raffle tickets each week. For any new members of the choir: tickets for the regular

weekly raffle are 20p (5 for a £1), and for the Champagne Raffle £1 a ticket.

Thank you again.

Mike Hails, Bass and Raffle organiser



'The Mightiest...The Greatest...The Most...'

There I was on Saturday 10th December, 2016, six rows up in St Mary's, bang against the precious rood screen, mesmerised, looking down on twenty Henley Youth Choir Juniors, doing their thing with *Zadok* and staring at their mums, their dads and the rest of the world, surrounded by one hundred HCS members, led by a fanfare of brass and organ, all brought together under the inspiration of Peter, our Musical Director. I thought and felt: 'WOW, what a mind blow for them!'

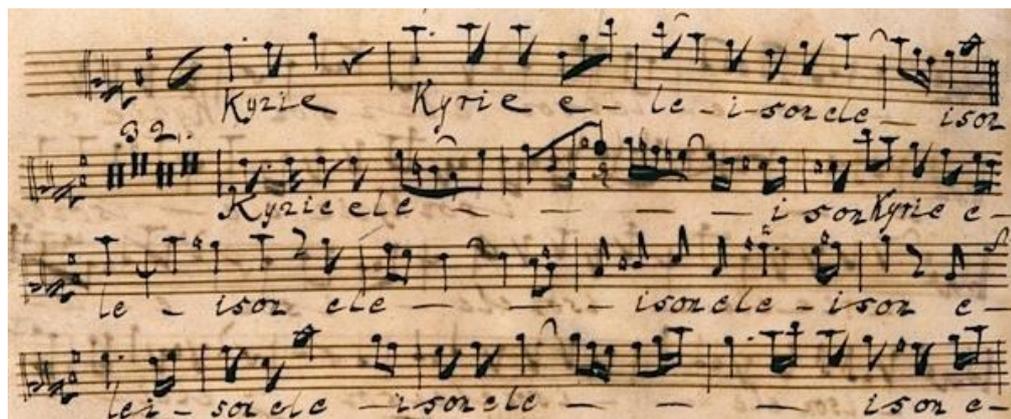
Now on Saturday January 14 2017, it was my turn, experiencing for my first time Bach's *B Minor Mass*: WOW! Fortunately I was closely neighboured, side and back by Reading Bach Choir (RBC) singers, amongst a workshop of 150. I had bought John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir concert performance CD, but otherwise had no knowledge, let alone experience, of singing this 'Mightiest..., Greatest..., Most...' fine work [RBC flier]. It is complex in structure and detail and a challenge for most, let alone very modest, music readers.

I have participated in several 'choral workshop days', including *Les Mis* with the Witt-Morgan Choir in Reading, two HCS events in St Mary's (Verdi *Requiem*) and Trinity (Elgar's *Dream*) and *Messiah* in Harpenden. I find exceptional uplift in these workshops and they are always good value for money. There is a core of well-practised singers, a lot of visitors, relaxed but concentrated atmosphere and a lot of singing; perhaps above all you get an appreciation of the whole without the stress of a concert performance.

So back to this day: all 5*! A fine venue (Caversham Heights Methodist Church), generous, efficient and friendly organisation (including choccie biscuits for tea), brilliant accompanist, Tim Hawken, and amazing Musical Director, the Reading Bach Choir's own Matthew Hamilton. Matthew has been with the RBC for some time but has recently moved on to the Hallé, and is sharing a departure celebration with the Choir's 50th foundation anniversary. We visitors, including a fine troop from Henley, were privileged to share in the occasion. Matthew gushes that amazing combination of challenging enthusiasm, technical mastery and passion for the music shown through engaging anecdotes of the composer's life and circumstances and the *B Minor*'s place in the pantheon of music.

I rented a score so don't have the detail but, from the cover of my CD, I reckon that in our 'performance' at 4pm to a modest but lovely audience (particularly the 5-year old who led the clapping) we gave our best to (parts of) the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Et Incarnatus Est*, *Crucifixus*, *Et resurrexit*, *Sanctus*, and *Dona nobis pacem*. Roll on the next and my thanks to all at RBC and especially my neighbour: how do you get that good? May I also take this opportunity to thank and admire our own HCS Committee for their enormous good cheer and remarkable success with the Youth Choirs.

Tim Osborn Jones, Bass.



Help yourself & get the most out of rehearsals

Free resources

- www.cyberbass.com
Free resource where you can play and download SATB parts to aid practice at home.
- <http://johnfletchermusic.me.uk>
Same as above, enjoyed by Francis Piesse.
- www.youtube.com
Listen to performances—anything and everything & varied quality!
- Just try Googling the name of the piece with 'voice' part after it. i.e. Purcell *Dido & Aenas*

Tenor part – you will be amazed at the variety of free resources, videos and recordings that turn up! Variable quality but useful for basic note bashing, so that you can 'refine' your performance at rehearsals!

- Paid resources include:
- www.saffronprompt.com Tel: 01799 586269; Address: Quintus Benziger, Great Stampford, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 2NY
- www.choraline.com Tel: 0845 3045070; you can buy SATB rehearsal CDs (or download MP3 Files from their website.) Address: Music Dynamics Limited, Stroud House, Station Road, Stroud, GL5 3AP

Power of Music

Over the years we have had some illustrations in *Here's the Pitch* of the effects of music, especially singing, on mood, health, etc.

I recently came across another example in a book called 'Jail-Bird: the inside story of the Glam Vicar' by Sharon Grenham-Thompson. You might have heard her presenting 'Pause for Thought' on the Radio 2 Breakfast Show. Sharon has been a Prison Chaplain, and, during the course of her work, was contacted by a student choir from Cambridge University who were keen to sing to, and with, the prisoners in her prison. The choirmaster had given a presentation to prison staff, explaining the rehabilitative effects of getting men to sing together, such as team work, listening to others, improved self-esteem, presentation skills, and the uplifting effect on mood. As part of the presentation, the choirmaster encouraged all the staff at that meeting to sing, and, eventually, they really enjoyed it. She describes in detail the various steps that had to be accomplished in allowing the choir to visit the prison, but, eventually, the choir arrived, 17 students, and they met with 12 rather wary prisoners who had expressed an interest in taking part.

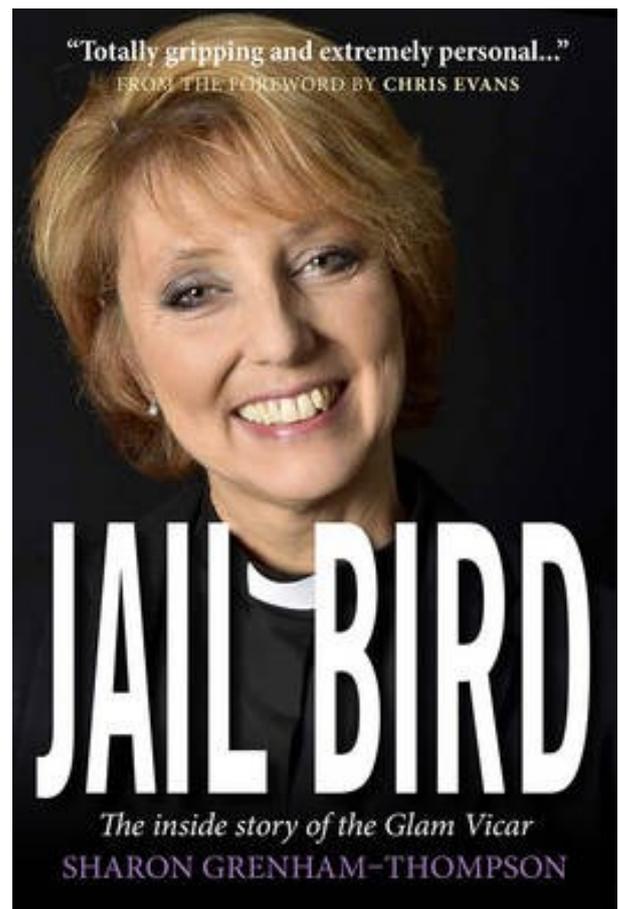
That morning the choir taught and rehearsed the men in four songs, using simple harmonies and catchy tunes, and took them from being rather embarrassed, giggling kids to men who were surprised at the sound they could make. In the afternoon they reconvened and the choir and the small group of prisoners gave a short concert for the other prisoners. This concert was a great success, and the choir has been back several times since. The power of music was illustrated by examples which the author gives, of its effect on at least two prisoners. One was a real trouble-maker, in and out of jail, assaulting prison officers and other inmates. However, during the rehearsals and the concert, he behaved perfectly, even teaming up with another inmate who was getting over a recent bereavement, to encourage and support him. He continued to attend the future concerts, his behaviour improved and he began to demonstrate respect and self-restraint. Some months later, during a Building Community event at the prison, he was presented with a certificate for having distinguished himself. After receiving the certificate he said that he realised that he had actually achieved something, and that it had all started with the choir. He said 'they believed in me, showed me I could do something I didn't think I could, and I'll never forget this.' Another prisoner, an older man who had suffered with depression, wrote to the chaplain after the first concert, saying how much he had enjoyed singing with the choir, appreciating the time the students had given, and saying that he felt it had been the best day of his life.

During the summer I was also reading in the Church Times about Music in Detention (MID), a charity that works with detainees in immigration removal centres (IRC). Set up in 2009, the aim is that by using music the well-being of detainees can be supported by giving them courage, helping them to feel stronger, and strengthening identity and autonomy. Jo, who founded the Luton Gospel Choir, has started a choir in Yarl's Wood IRC, and says 'Singing is a cathartic activity, and has many health and healing

properties. In a place like Yarl's Wood, making music is more necessary than ever to help detainees cope with insecurity and stress of detention.' MID has made 11 CDs and you can hear them on www.musicindetention.org.uk.

Here's another example, also from the Church Times. In an article called 'How to live well with dementia,' Pat Ashworth says that 'Singing is one of the most helpful activities for people who have dementia'. She bases this on her own personal experience of helping at a session run by the Alzheimer's Society called Singing for the Brain. Breathing and voice exercises also reduce stress and anxiety. Songs evoke memories of earlier times, and the words are still remembered, even if a person can no longer hold a conversation. As well as singing old, familiar songs in the group, the leader has found that people also embrace a chance to learn something new. There is also a Gloucester-based charity called Mindsong which has launched a project called A Choir in every Care Home, to explore ways in which singing could feature in such homes.

Mike Hails, Bass and Raffle organiser



Conductor's instincts made for a most satisfying festive concert

Packed as always, St Mary's Church hosted Henley Choral Society's double Christmas bill, as well as the debut of their new musical director, Peter Asprey. Wherever one looked critically, nothing had been left to chance.

All was beautifully planned and choreographed – from the witty introductions by the respective comperes to the immaculately turned-out adult and junior choir members – a festive canvas of red, white and black. The line-up was completed by Onyx Brass, eminent organist Daniel Moulton, and local concert pianist Anita D'Attellis.

The five-piece Onyx Brass were a class act. They added welcome orchestral texture to the organ and piano accompaniments, while their versions of *Jingle Bells/Deck the Halls*, *Wexford Carol* and a *Carol Fantasy* were a brilliant fusion of wit and technical mastery. That such brash instruments could be played so delicately was a revelation.

This can also be said of Daniel Moulton's scintillating demonstration of the organ's versatility in the two Bach versions of *In dulci júbilo* and the more recent timeless romp, Leroy Anderson's *Sleigh Ride*.

Peter Asprey's initial period with the junior Henley Youth Choir clearly paid dividends, judging by their confident afternoon performances of *The Holly and the Ivy* (Gardner), *Walking in the Air* (Blake) and the *Sussex Carol* (arr Willcocks).

They articulated punchily, had a solid grasp of tempo and responded positively to Asprey's insistent directing style. Two or three-part harmonies appeared to present no problems and soprano Chloe Cormack's rendition of *Walking in the Air* was coolness personified.

In Handel's *Zadok the Priest*, tucked in amongst the adults, they also held their own, as did their counterparts in the senior Henley Youth Choir.

The latter, appearing in both concerts and substantially grown in numbers, showed considerable maturity in *Torches* (Joubert), *Shepherds' Farewell* (Berlioz) and *This Little Babe* (Britten).

And, like the juniors, they were undaunted by sudden forays into two- and three-part harmony. They were

also able to sustain the lively momentum of the challenging Britten piece, anchored by D'Attellis's rock-solid accompaniment.

The Henley Choral Society itself – at half-strength for the children's concert but at full strength for the main evening one – had their work cut out with a clutch of solo carols and a substantial programme of ambitious choral repertoire – *Zadok the Priest* (Handel), *Canite tuba* (Palestrina), *God is with us* (Tavener), *O magnum mysterium* (Lauridsen) and *Te Deum Laudamus* (Stanford).

Peter Asprey proved outstanding in the handling of his resources. Clearly endowed with the gift of performance, he was able, in the moment, not only to sculpt the overall shape of each of the works but to bring out the musical nuances that make such a difference to the listening experience. He has a perfect instinct for tempi, rubatos, crescendos, diminuendos and how much time to allow between phrases.

A more evenly balanced Henley Choral Society, thanks to its burgeoning men's section, rose to the task magnificently – enunciating clearly, projecting forcefully and adjusting musically to every slight tweak of the baton or eyebrow.

Zadok the Priest took the venue by storm, while, of the solo carols, the last verse of *In the Bleak Midwinter* (Darke) stood out as a moment of sheer beauty. Palestrina's complex contrapuntal texture was beautifully handled, the entries accurate and well measured.

Tavener's hallmark use of a ground and perfect fifths were well exploited to bring out his own signature sound world, building gradually to a huge climax as the organ burst on to the scene.

The Lauridsen was carefully controlled. Its complex harmonies were expertly managed and the closing bars were divine. The Stanford, for me a relatively less convincing piece, was nonetheless confidently performed and ended the evening's proceedings on a high.

The appointment of Peter Asprey will not be regretted. This was one of the most satisfying Christmas concerts I can remember – a sentiment echoed by many.

Review by Trevor Howell, reprinted from *The Henley Standard*

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