

Musical Director: Ian Ray



SEVENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEDNESDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2017 IN THE LION WALK CHURCH HALL

The meeting was opened by our President, Gordon Kuphal who welcomed members. Gordon said that the 2016/2017 had been a good and interesting one with varied music. He had especially enjoyed listening to the Chanson de Matin as he used to play the violin himself – although not to audiences! Gordon said that he looked forward to a good season ahead and was particularly interested in the commission from Alan Bullard.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Jane Askew, Sarah Norcross-Davies, Gail Collins, Lindsay Wilson, Steph Say, Dido Arthur, Angela Lawrence, James Weale and Hazel Thornton.

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-THIRD MEETING

The minutes were approved and there were no matters arising.

Proposed: Heather Attwell-Davis

Seconded: Mary Davidson

The motion was carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

As you will see in the Annual Report I have included a summary of the concert accomplishments attained by the Choral Society in the last year. We were again challenged by the repertoire to perform in different styles and with very varied emotional content. The Tippett Child of our Time will be long remembered for its dark tones, lightened by the Spirituals: the Christmas concert was most enjoyable with the children's input and actions, and it was wonderful to present Bach's St John Passion with period instruments. The Elgar evening gave the choir the opportunity to sing in a more relaxed, lyrical and ensemble style.

I would like to say how proud I am of all the hard work, effort and commitment undertaken by the choir to achieve such a consistently high standard of performance. And I'm sure you know we receive many compliments from our audiences expressing their appreciation. I was particularly encouraged by the audience member who remarked after the Tippett that it wasn't a concert they so much enjoyed as were incredibly moved!

We could be a society which settles for the more approachable sing-a-long pieces heard so often. But it is a tribute to the choir and Ian's masterful direction that we are able to challenge ourselves and our audience, which in turn gives us the satisfaction of achieving so much, and I would suggest occasionally surprising ourselves in the process.

I would formally like to express our thanks to Ian on behalf of the Society for his faith in us, that we can achieve more than we imagine, for his patience and perseverance and teaching ability to bring the best out of us, and his brilliant musicianship which inspires us all to be better musicians.

Nigel made mention in his outgoing report last year that we were looking at the possibility of a choir tour to Prague or Rouen etc. However this plan has been put back and instead we shall be making a recording to include a commissioned work written for the Society by Alan Bullard. This will replace the Summer concert and has been made possible by a very generous legacy from Richard Daniels, whom many of you will remember fondly.

We have returned to a major choral work for the November concert with rehearsals well under way

for Beethoven's mighty work, his Missa Solemnis, which although challenging, will again be performed admirably. In spring we look forward to a lighter more intimate concert with works by Fauré & Poulenc.

It is difficult for me to understate the thanks I wish to express to all members of the choir. Without all your personal commitment, dedication, patience and musicianship, we would not be able to achieve what we do and I am very proud to be part of this wonderful choir.

As Chairman I would like to thank all the members of the Committee who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure all the planning is undertaken smoothly and efficiently, and my special thanks go to Judy who has had a difficult year, and to Jane who manages our accounts so brilliantly.

I am also very pleased to acknowledge and thank all the other members of the Society who contribute so much, by promoting the Society, distributing posters and leaflets, running raffles, coffee rotas, catering, librarian duties and so many more.

Prior to becoming Chairman I was only aware of some of the support the choir receives to ensure the concerts are a success, but there is much more to the Society, and I am humbled to be able to thank each and every one of you for your support and contribution to the Society.

Peter Bartlett

Gordon thanked Peter for his report.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Jane's report was read in her absence by Judy who told members that Jane would be happy to answer any questions at the next rehearsal.

This is my third report to the Society's AGM as Treasurer and it has been a relatively challenging year financially. Although the accounts show that we made a surplus for the 2017/16 financial year of £6,713 this surplus was due entirely to the receipt of a very significant and generous legacy of £10,000 from the estate of Richard Daniels, for which we are immensely grateful. Excluding this legacy, we made a loss of £3,287. This was despite the removal of the over 60s concessions for both subscriptions and ticket prices which was voted through at last year's AGM.

We started the year in a reasonably healthy financial position and had budgeted to make a deficit this year, with an ambitious programme which inevitably came with associated costs, such as a large orchestra for Tippett's A Child of Our Time and 6 professional soloists for the St John Passion in March. The deficit was however over £1,400 higher than budgeted and this was largely due to not achieving the anticipated levels of ticket sales. Total ticket and programme sales for the year were £8,327, a reduction of £1,406 from the prior year. Attendance at every concert in the season was below budget, with budgets being set at the average number of tickets sold in the past 5 years. We are immensely grateful for all choir members and friends who have helped organise and contribute to the choir's fundraising activities during the year, including the raffles, barbeque, quiz night, coffee breaks and bring and buy sales. The generosity of our members led to donations and fundraising income totalling over £2,500. We are also delighted to now have seven corporate patrons whose annual contributions to the Society total £840.

Many thanks once again to Ian for his hard work behind the scenes in finding orchestral players and soloists while keeping to, and below, a tight budget; to those within the choir who have taken on solo parts in the concerts; to Lindsay for producing high quality publicity material; to Steph for her fantastic work building up and maintaining the Friends membership numbers; to Rosemary for running the coffee break and refreshments, and to all those who give their time and effort to the Society free of charge.

Ian has carefully selected our repertoire this year to ensure that orchestra and soloist costs are low which should enable us to retain our accumulated funds position. Cutting costs can only go so far however, and in order to stay afloat and perform such a varied repertoire we need to ensure that we sell as many tickets to our concerts as possible, as well as recruiting new members and raising the Society's profile in the town and beyond.

As a Committee we were keen to ensure that the legacy from Richard Daniels was used for a

specific purpose rather than to subsidise our 'day-to-day' spending. As Ian has mentioned, we have therefore commissioned Alan Bullard to compose a piece for the Society in his memory and will be recording this in June 2018 in place of that term's concert. The legacy has therefore been shown as 'designated' in the accounts in order to reflect this intention.

We are not proposing an increase to the subscription rates this year, having removed the reduced rate for over 60s last year. The subscription rate for all members other than those under 25 is therefore £105. Although you can pay in termly instalments, we do ask that you pay the full annual amount even if you can't sing with us every term. If anyone has difficulty finding the money to pay their subscriptions, please have a word with me in confidence as we do not wish any member to be obstructed by the financial cost of membership.

As a registered charity we are able to claim gift aid on a proportion of our membership subscriptions. This brings in extra income for the Society at no extra cost to yourselves and we were able to claim over £1,100 last year. If you have not filled in a gift aid form in the past please ask me for one at the next rehearsal.

You have the Financial Statements for the year to 30 June 2017, which were approved by the Committee on 20 September and signed by the Independent Examiner on 22 September.

Jane Askew

Hugh Waldock wondered if there might be a possibility of a programme more suited to enthuse younger people with maybe stories. He also encouraged greater use of social media. Caroline Faiers said that the committee has discussed the use of facebook and is grateful to Helen Spicer who is doing this for us. Theresa Chapman mentioned the possibility of our concert poster appearing on facebook. Helen has this in hand and a pdf is also available to members to send to their friends.

The motion to approve the Treasurer's report was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Ian Hunter

Seconded: Louise Brooks

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Tim O'Connor of Scrutton Bland has agreed to be appointed as Independent Examiner for 2017-18. He does this free of charge in memory of David Foster who was a partner in Scrutton Bland.

The motion to approve the appointment of the Independent Examiner was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Andrew Carpenter

Seconded: Geoff Whittaker

Gordon expressed our gratitude to Tim O'Connor for his services.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The proposal to elect current officers and committee members 'en bloc' with the addition of Mary Davidson was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Mike Pluck

Seconded: Giles Job

MUSICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last season's programme included very successful performances of two of the biggest musical challenges contained in the standard oratorio repertoire; Tippett's moving 'A Child of Our Time' and J.S. Bach's much-loved setting of the St John Passion. Sung in German with the inspiration of the authentic sound world of the period instrument accompaniment provided by Peter Holman's John Jenkins Consort this allowed the choir to explore the lighter more flexible sound world appropriate for Baroque music. The summer concert gave the choir a chance to enjoy the challenge of singing some of the Elgar Part-Songs as a 'warm-up' for this season's a cappella recording project scheduled for next summer.

An AGM can easily be viewed as a rather bothersome annual formality which has to be endured and dispensed with as rapidly as possible in order that we can get on with the real business of making music. However it also provides us with a chance to pause and reflect on our aims and objectives.

Since 1976 when I became only the second Musical Director the Society has ever had I have continued the tradition established by the choir's founder, the great W.H. Swinburne OBE whose guiding principle was to stimulate projects which allowed the choir to get inside the music by working steadily at the repertoire over a number of weeks of regular rehearsals, and then to gather together the relevant resources – in most cases an orchestra and professional soloists capable of inspiring the choir to bring to life the musical vision of the composer. My particular objective has been to develop a friendly choir that folk are proud to be part of which sings with the same level of finesse and musical intelligence as a chamber choir whilst avoiding the cliquish, or preciousness which can sometimes afflict the small choir world.

We sing a wide variety of repertoire, some of it very challenging. Could we take an easier and less demanding path? Most certainly. Attempting only music that we find easy to sing and limiting ourselves to the familiar and predictable, rehearsing in less depth without bothering about the finer points of accuracy and style, dynamics and phrasing would definitely be more relaxing (is that a synonym for less stimulating?). Would we feel the same sense of satisfaction and pride when we achieved our objectives with a varied repertoire exploring a wide range of styles? I doubt it. One of the advantages of going through the period of frustration health-wise that I have experienced in the last few months is that I have been forced to fall back on my secondary passion of exploring English novels. One I particularly enjoyed was a book called *Will & Tom* by Matthew Plampin. This novel is a fictionalised account of a relationship between the great English painter William Turner and his friend and fellow artist Tom. At one point Tom comes out with this beautiful expression of a basic truth of our human existence: 'But isn't there hope in honest imperfection – in a striving that has yet to attain?' This may be worth remembering when we don't get it right first time. As a wise man once said we have to learn to enjoy the journey and not merely be obsessed by arriving at the destination. In any case if you find the going tough, you can always console yourself by remembering that numerous investigations in recent years have revealed how beneficial physically and mentally the act of singing is!

So here's a toast for the journey of our new season I give you to the three ancient virtues of faith, hope and love.

So firstly; Faith - in each other and in ourselves expressed by loyal commitment to CCS and all its activities and by being prepared to entertain the idea that with positivity and effort we can become successful at that awkward phrase in bar 23 at the top of page 6.

Secondly; Hope expressed in talking up our projects hopefully whether musical or social - seeing the glass half full rather than half empty and enthusiastically selling tickets for our concerts and really thinking hard about Steph's message to us last week encouraging us to think of individual friends or relatives we can invite to become Friends of the Society (who incidentally this season will be getting a free copy of our new CD in lieu of a third concert ticket).

Lastly and most importantly: Love of the wonderful treasure house of music that we have inherited and love of the thrill of being part of a community that is fortunate enough to enjoy the fun of bringing it to life by singing together in harmony.

A conductor with no choir would achieve nothing so a huge Thankyou to each and everyone of you for your loyalty and commitment, and special thanks to those who have served through the years and are currently serving as officers and also thanks to those members doing all the many jobs that are vital to the continued life of the choir. Particular thanks for all the support and care shown in the many kind messages and cards you have sent me as I continue my travels through my recent health related misdemeanors.

Looking forward we have plenty to enjoy in this season's programme: – the inspiration of tackling the Mount Everest of Beethoven's sublime *Missa Solemnis* in November, the quiet lyrical ecstasy of the Fauré *Requiem* and the bitter sweet Poulenc *Penitential Motets* in March alongside the

excitement of learning of our newly commissioned 'Images of Peace' by Alan Bullard. This will become the main work in the professional recording we will be making in the summer term. Providing we are prepared to give the necessary patient commitment needed a recording will give us something a little more permanent to enjoy than a single live performance.

I want to share a few thoughts about the importance as I see it of the 'Here Comes Christmas' concert held annually in December. For some years now CCS has enjoyed charitable status which gives us certain financial advantages. One of the tick boxes that helps us retain this status is the evidence of regularly being seen to promote educational projects; so getting 50 children along to sing in our annual Christmas concert, apart from being self-evidently a 'good' thing to do from the children's point of view, is also beneficial to us as organisation. I understand completely that the lead up to Christmas is a busy time for us all but I would urge you to continue to support this community focussed event.

I will end by giving you my keyword for our development as a choir this season – 'blend'. So how is good choral blend achieved in a group of voices which are often very different in quality and with singers of varying levels of competence and experience? It's actually fairly straightforward – the more confident experienced singers sing more lightly and the less experienced singers, with what they consider to be smaller voices, sing more positively and all of us remember the title of the legendary soprano Isobel Baillies's autobiography: 'Never louder than lovely'. Let's remember at this point, as we did last year that being part of a community and putting the common good above our individual whims and fancies is perhaps often seen as unfashionable and not very sexy, but the 18thc American scientist, printer and writer Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said 'A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle'. One of the exciting things about singing in a choir such as ours, which is always aiming for perfection, is that we can enjoy being part of a big bundle and achieving together so much more than we would if we simply sang as a collection of individuals.

Ian Ray

The motion to approve the Musical Director's report was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Anthony Percival

Seconded: Charles Clark

Gordon asked Ian to please have no more 'health misdemeanours'. He said that we treasured Ian and hope that he will continue to direct us for many years.

In conclusion Gordon thanked the committee for all their work. Although he is still invited, he no longer attends meetings.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Louise Brooks asked when and where the proposed recording would take place. In reply Ian said that it was not just a recording but a professional recording. Unfortunately the recording engineer had had a fall and was therefore unable to meet Ian as planned. The recording is scheduled to replace the Summer Concert. Further details will follow.

Hugh Waldock raised the question of how more young people could be involved. He wondered if the repertoire was intimidating and put people off. Ian replied that this question comes up every year at the ABCD conference with no solutions found. However, any ideas should be fed to the committee.

Joanna Voelker asked about the possibility of a family ticket to which Peter Bartlett replied that we are going to have reduced price tickets for all under 25.

Gordon then closed the meeting, saying that any further questions could be put to the committee afterwards.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.