

AGM - 26th September 2023 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

Looking back on the last year, as the society began to celebrate its first 50 years of music making, I am struck by just how far we have come in the last few years, and in particular how quickly we have 'recovered' since the dark days of the Covid pandemic when we had no face to face music making.

I will leave it to Andrew to give most of the narrative around the musical achievements and Caroline to give the good news from a financial perspective. Instead let's consider some of the more administrative type things.

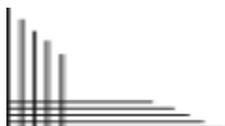
This was the first time since the 2018/19 season that we had put on 4 concerts. Andrew took a sabbatical in the first term and so for the first two concerts Michael agreed to take the podium. The decision, just a year earlier, to have a permanent accompanist was certainly vindicated. Michael did an excellent job and took most of the rehearsals without an accompanist. He also challenged us to think more about diversity by insisting on the incorporation of female composers. Diversity is important and this is something we need to think about more going forward. The meat of the first concert was Duruflé's atmospheric Requiem. David Poulter was the perfect choice of organist playing with a sublime composure that belied the vast amount of black on the page!

It was wonderful in December to do a Christmas concert again - and all the more so because we were back in St John's in Royston for the first time since 2018. It wasn't until relatively late that we were really certain we would be back there but I think that also helped the audience. There was certainly a curiosity factor connected with getting back in to see the parish church. The addition of J50 always jollies the atmosphere and it was great to see, on the organ, another side of Olly Lallemand who had earlier in the year been our outstanding pianist for Todd's Mass in Blue.

Andrew returned after Christmas and work began on Haydn's Creation. Rehearsals also returned to St John's. We are very grateful to the Methodist Church and Bassingbourn Village College for providing us with venues during our nomadic period but, back in Royston, we all came to appreciate the improvements made (not least to the heating!). Creation is such a joyous work and one which I think grew on us all as we worked on it. We are extremely lucky with the quality of soloists and orchestral players that Andrew is able to engage. For me, I think this was probably the most polished concert we have performed since I joined the society and also performed to one of the best audiences.

I have spoken a lot in the last couple of years about the need to sell tickets. With the size of the audience at Creation and then again in the summer concert I feel we are making some good progress. Don't stop doing all you can to sell tickets (and I won't stop nagging!) but thank you for what you have done which I believe is probably also helped by being back 'home'.

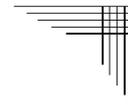
The music in the summer concert was hard for us. We are not used to that kind of a capella singing (and the double choir aspects showed a need for us to balance our parts somewhat) but I think the way in which we brought it off (with probably fewer rehearsals than was really required -



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a consequence of the way the calendar fell) shows just how far we have come since Andrew conducted his first concert with us in 2015. Well done everyone for sticking with it. It is by challenging ourselves like this that we continue to grow.

As well as diversity, another important topic during the year has been safeguarding. Fortunately not because of any issues but because, quite reasonably, funding bodies and venues ask to see more detailed policies. Our existing one at the beginning of the year was revised - and will now be reviewed by the committee and circulated to everyone annually - and we have also appointed a safeguarding officer. We should all be grateful to Jane Osgathorp for taking this on but it is also my hope that each year that this role will involve no work as was the case this year.

There is inevitably a certain sense of *deja vu* in the end of my report each time as I thank, on your behalf, the members of your committee. They all work hard for the society with an awful lot of the work not being particularly visible or exciting, but nevertheless essential to keep us going. Amongst the work I must particularly highlight:

- The success that Carole enjoys chasing grants. These make such a difference to how our accounts look.
- The wonderful posters that Penny designs are really eye-catching. Shops in the town have been positively keen to display them because of how attractive they are.
- The excellent work Sue performs writing minutes, agendas, making rehearsal and concert bookings and, most importantly, reminding me of all the things I have said I would do that I have forgotten about.
- Everything that Caroline does which, truth be told, is probably more than the rest of us put together and is more than it is fair for one person to do.

Which of course brings me to my penultimate point (or perhaps plea?). In the newsletter we listed 4 jobs that really need filling with additional people if we are to continue to get better and meet our ambitions. Are YOU someone that could help? If you hate the thought of being on a committee (as I do ironically enough!), none of them necessarily require that, but they do need doing. Please think about it.

Finally I want to acknowledge how fortunate we are in Andrew and Michael. I have sung for quite a few choral conductors. Most are nowhere near as calm, patient and good-tempered when, for the nth week running, we still get particular notes or phrases wrong. The fact that they do display such patience is one of the things that makes singing with RCS so pleasurable. I hope they feel some relief that, on the night, we normally get most of it right!

To Bach, Verdi, Vivaldi and more
Huw

