

Newsletter - Summer 2023

Notes from the Musical Director



St John's Smith square 1998

My first encounter with the B minor mass at the tender age of 18 and a memory I cherish. I was invited to join the Rodolphus Choir after spending two years working with Ralph Allwood in the National Youth Choir of Wales. We rehearsed the work for a week and then performed it with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and an incredible team of soloists which included Emma Kirkby, James Bowman, John Mark Ainsley and Michael George. Many of the choir went on to become an important part of my musical journey and some went on to become stars (the tenor next to me was Eddie Redmayne). It was one of my first encounters with Bach's larger choral works and a concert I remember very well.

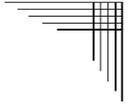
Six months later I ended up conducting the work (and Carmina the following week!) as part of the university 'Millenium Festival'. It was my first real experience conducting a large choral work, and I was blown away by the sheer complexity and brilliance of the work. It was hard work, but the effort was worth it and the experience deeply satisfying. The B Minor Mass had not been performed for sometime in Norwich so there was a general excitement about joining the choir and orchestra for the concert. We had six rehearsals then a rehearsal on the day. It went remarkably well, and it was performed to a packed church.



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Since then, I have performed it many times as a soloist but also with a consort group at the Snape Maltings (16 voices) conducted by Suzuki from memory! It is a difficult work but a work that is worth the journey. Everytime I return to the work, it moves deeper into my soul. I really believe that Bach wrote this piece for himself composing it out of love for the divine. It is certainly a pillar in the Western Classical tradition but also a canvas onto which Bach poured his compositional genius. It does not have the narrative of the passions or cantatas, but its emotional palate is vast and ever changing through the work. Over the next few months, I would recommend you listen to the piece as well as maybe watch one of the performances on Youtube. I am excited about rehearsing this work so here's to a wonderful new term!

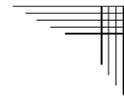
Andrew



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Notes from the Treasurer (email treasurer@roystonchoralsoc.org.uk)



Subscriptions

The subscription for the 2023/24 season will be £160 for the year. The easiest way to pay that is online; the bank details are:

Account name: Royston Choral Society

Sort code: 30 97 16

Account number: 00202356

Alternatively, you can bring cash or a cheque to the first rehearsal. That week is quite busy with music etc, so if it's cash, it's helpful if you put it in an envelope with your name on it, please.

If you'd rather pay by the term, the rates will be £65 for the first two terms you attend, and, if you're with us for a third term in the same season, you get a discount and it's £40 for that one.

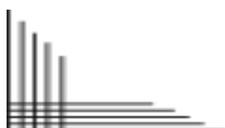
If this subscription is difficult for you, please remember that you can speak to me confidentially and we will work something out. We all have periods when things are tight, and some of us have more challenging financial circumstances than others. We turn no-one away from choir on the grounds of affordability.

If you're a tax payer and you haven't yet filled in a gift aid form, please speak to me – there is still a small number of you who haven't done so! The form is available from the downloads section of the website <https://www.roystonchoralsoc.org.uk/downloads>

Hundred Club

We run a 100 Club for choir members and anyone else we can persuade to join. The subscription for that is £20 per year, and we hold 10 draws during the year, for prizes of £25 and £10 each time. Julie Clements administers it, and is always happy to hear from new people willing to join. If we ever got to 100 members, it would raise £1,650 each year for funds. At the moment, we have 42, so there's plenty of space! An application form can be found again on the downloads section of the website <https://www.roystonchoralsoc.org.uk/downloads>

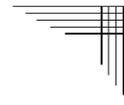
If you're already a member, your renewal is due at the beginning of this term. I'm sure Julie will remind you, but you don't need to wait for that!



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Music

This coming term, we're singing Bach's B Minor Mass, which we were due to perform when lockdown came. Some of you have ordered music, and I have that ready. If you haven't ordered a copy to buy, and you would like to purchase your own, doing so through RCS helps our funds too. We have an account that offers us a discount; you pay the normal price and we take the discount. The cost is £14.50.

If you've ordered a copy, you can pay for that when we're back or any time from now – the bank details are above.

There will, of course, be library copies for everyone who prefers to borrow.

Refreshments

Each week, we provide refreshments at the break, and there's a pot for contributions towards the costs. However, many of us no longer carry cash. If you would like to contribute to the cost of refreshments but you'd rather do that online for the term (or some other period) please do so to the usual account with the reference 'refreshments'.

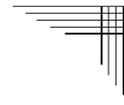
Caroline



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Notes from the Part Reps



RCS Soprano Part Rep – Brigid Hickey (email partrep.soprano@roystonchoralsoc.org.uk) writes:

As we return to another exciting Autumn term, I do hope you've all enjoyed the wonderful summer break. I did not get away this year but had fun entertaining family and a visiting Sister from South Africa.

We went to the Lightroom Kings Cross to see the David Hockney exhibition. A good place to spend a peaceful hour. Kings Ely Evensong, which is always a delight. Granchester Orchard for afternoon tea. We are so lucky to be surrounded by lots of scenic villages in North Herts and Cambs. Historic places

I hope you are all keeping your vocal cords exercised ready for the next rehearsal on 5th September. Yet another exciting term, commencing with Bach B Minor in November, Verdi Requiem in March, Vivaldi June. Time to get practising.

Our end of term "Celebration of English Music" was very well received with lots of positive comments from the audience.

What fun it will be to get together again and start our season of Joyful music.



RCS Alto Part Rep - Sue Pegram (email partrep.alto@roystonchoralsoc.org.uk) writes:

This 2022/2023 season, our Autumn concert included the Durufle Requiem (one of my favourites!) and Parry's Songs of Farewell, at St Mary's in Standon. In December we were delighted to be back in our "home venue" of St John's in Royston for our Christmas concert.

In January we welcomed two new altos - Sarah Neesam and Bavna Quinn - who joined in time for our spring concert, Haydn's Creation, which I think was one of our best performances.

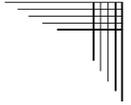
Summer term proved slightly more challenging with the double choir format for the Vaughan Williams Mass in G, and the Tippett Spirituals, but we triumphed in the end! Personally, I felt that



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the Spirituals were the better half of the concert performance. I believe (although some may not agree!) that it's good to stretch us as a choir by learning a variety of musical styles, so let's not be afraid next time...

Now looking forward immensely to performing the magnificent Bach B Minor Mass. We should be able to pick up from where we left off when the March 2020 concert was cancelled, so this one should be absolutely fabulous! Can't wait!



RCS Tenor Part Rep - Chris Lee (email partrep.tenor@roystonchoralsoc.org.uk) provides feedback from members of the tenor section on:

Why tenors like singing with the Royston Choral Society

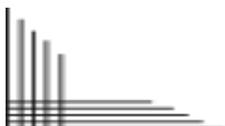
For James B, it's the sum total of our individual input *"the opportunity to be part of something larger than myself working together to make a great sound."* He also appreciates the inclusivity of the choir *"It provides an opportunity for people of different ages, abilities, backgrounds and musical experiences to get together to perform great works to a high standard in a friendly environment."*

The power of the performance is also an attraction for our other James B *"I like working on something that challenges both individually and collectively. This culminating in a concert with a sense of occasion and hopefully giving those moments of beauty and joy whilst getting it absolutely right. The whole room can feel it and so will you."*

Alan B praises the quality of leadership in our musical director, Andrew O'Brien. *"Andrew is an excellent choral trainer and it is in fact a privilege to sing under his leadership. Over a period of 55 years I have sung in a number of choirs including the BBC Choral Society and I can only think of two other conductors as stimulating, and one of those was Malcolm Sargent in the early 1960s."*

Alan also enjoys the qualities of the choir. *"For a relatively small town we have a choir with real potential - I cannot wait to start on the Bach B Minor Mass [our November 2023 concert]."*

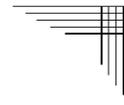
For me the performance – when we get it right – makes all the effort worthwhile. I'm pleased to report that the attractions of singing with the Choral Society keep the tenors coming back, and we've enjoyed a record number joining during the year!



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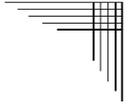
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Can you help?



Listed here are a couple of initiatives which the committee has discussed and think could benefit the society. However, we don't feel we have the bandwidth to drive them and so are looking for others to help. Similarly there are two specific roles to help in the running of the society which members of the committee do between themselves, but, as we grow the jobs really need their own dedicated role holders. If you think you could help with any of these please talk to any member of the committee.

Friends of Royston Choral Society

We have a number of loyal audience members who come to most, if not all of our concerts. The idea behind establishing something like a Friends group is to make them feel appreciated and for us to hopefully perhaps get even more out of them.

Some thoughts the committee has had are to perhaps let them buy 'season tickets'. So a ticket per concert but perhaps with a small reduction. We need to be careful that we don't in effect lose (too much) money here though, so another alternative, rather than reducing the price, might be to offer them a drinks reception before a couple of the concerts where they perhaps get a chance to mingle with Andrew and perhaps the soloists. Or maybe they get invited to a rehearsal?

I think there are lots of possibilities but is there someone that would take this on as a project and come up with a solid proposal we could implement before the end of this season?

Orchestral Player Sponsorship Programme

The idea behind this initiative is to persuade individuals, groups of people or businesses to help fund our bigger concerts by 'Sponsoring' an orchestral player. The precise details need to be worked out and for individuals there is almost certainly scope for sponsorship to qualify for additional money through gift aid.

It is probably one of those things that we won't know whether it will work unless we try it but I do know of one choral society that runs this quite successfully. In the end it was the initiative that allowed them to regularly have two concerts with an orchestra in a season.

Could you be the person who could make this work for us?

Stage Manager

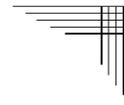
We are really fortunate that there is a regular band of helpers that turn up early on concerts and stay late collecting staging, building it, tearing it down and returning it. However, the organisation of what we need, how we arrange it etc is currently shared between Heather and Huw. Those of you who have sung with the society for a while will remember Peter Murray used to do this job extremely effectively. It would really help, moving forward, if there was a dedicated person who again would do this. Because of our larger numbers we need someone to think about how we could extend our current staging to get more of us on it. We also are way overdue getting Andrew a better 'podium'. There really is a limit as to how long the current Heath-Robinson box, propped up on an odd assortment of blocks of wood from my shed will last! Is this something you could take on?



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Librarian

For too long Caroline has been doing double duty as both treasurer and librarian. It is not fair that we keep abusing her good nature in this way and given her professional skills as an accountant it is very important to us that we keep her in the treasurer role.

We therefore must find someone to take her place as librarian. The job is not consistently onerous, instead peaking around the early weeks of each term and just after concerts.

In a nutshell the job involves sourcing hire scores for the various works to be performed in a concert and then ensuring their safe return shortly after the concert.

Without someone to perform this task we will require everyone to buy independently a copy of every piece we are to perform.

Caroline will happily provide every support to someone taking on this role as they learn the ropes.

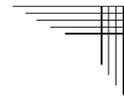
Isn't it time YOU took on this job to help the smooth running of RCS?



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Key Dates for 2023-24 season



Tuesday 5th September 7.45pm	First rehearsal of the season.
Tuesday 12th September 7.45pm	Open Rehearsal
Tuesday 26th September 8.45pm	AGM
Saturday 25th November	Concert - Bach B minor mass. Afternoon rehearsal.
Saturday 16th December	Christmas Concert. Afternoon rehearsal.
Tuesday 9h January 7.45pm	Rehearsals resume
Tuesday 16th January 7.45pm	Open rehearsal
Saturday 23rd March	Concert - Verdi Requiem. Afternoon rehearsal.
Tuesday 16th April 7.45pm	Rehearsals resume
Tuesday 23rd April 7.45pm	Open rehearsal
Saturday 29th June	Summer Concert - incl Vivaldi Gloria. Afternoon rehearsal.

All rehearsals and concerts are currently expected to take place in St John the Baptist Church Royston (Royston Parish Church).

