



AGM - 30th September 2025 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

This season marked Andrew's 10th year as our musical director - and what a successful year it turned out to be. Numbers of singers in the society remained high, but even more significantly our audience numbers exceeded expectations and once again we completely sold out our November and April concerts.

Musically the season allowed us to perform some of the classics of the choral repertoire along with some lesser-known works. In November our first concert combined Fauré's sublime *Requiem* and his beautiful *Cantique de Jean Racine* (paying tribute to the centenary of Fauré's death) with Parry's *Blest pair of sirens*, and Britten's wonderfully whimsical *Rejoice in the Lamb*.

We were joined by a couple of talented musicians from St Edmund's college. Isabelle Lai (flute) played *Fantasie for flute and piano* by Faure and Patrick Marshall was the baritone in the *Requiem*. Mention must also be made of the wonderful step-out soloists from the choir - Marianne Laker, Ann Hoptroff, Nick Keep, Steven Sivyer and Melissa Dell'Anno. As a society we are so fortunate to have such talent to call upon - often a short notice!

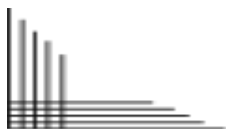
East Herts sinfonietta and organist Jonathan Lilley combined to provide the accompaniment and the concert was sold out.

The format of the Christmas concert was changed a little. Being cautious about overall concert costs for the year, we forwent the brass quintet again. I hope this year we will be able to have the brass again since they certainly add to the festive atmosphere. However, we introduced a number of seasonal poems into the programme which were read excellently by members of the choir and extremely well received by the audience. We also (for the first time ever? - at least for the last 10 years) sang the concert in a mixed-up seating arrangement. I realise a number of members felt significantly outside of their comfort zone. However, the positive effect on our tuning was really most marked and this is an experiment I hope we will be brave enough to repeat again. For the couples in the choir it was certainly a pleasure to sit next to our partners for once in a concert!

The highlight of the season for many of us was the performance in April of Bach's momentous St Matthew Passion. This is a long work which many conductors cut sections of in order to make it easier to rehearse. Doing so inevitably breaks the story to some extent and Andrew bravely took the decision not to do so (although I promise not to mention his amnesia over one particular repeat in the performance again!). It meant everyone had to be on their toes for the fast-paced final rehearsal but that was mitigated by an earlier rehearsal of many of the evangelist's recitatives.

Andrew had assembled a most wonderful group of vocal soloists - several of whom are now regular performers with us. It is a testament to the musical standard and friendliness of the choir that they are happy to return time and time again. For the record they were:

David Webb - Evangelist, Johnny Herford - Jesus along with Elinor Rolfe Johnson, Rebecca Afonwy-Jones, Sam Furness and Dawid Kimberg.



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Their own shared social media postings and relaxed enjoyment on the day showed how much pleasure they got out of the performance. This was the third time we had sung in German for Andrew - hopefully it gets easier each time and is something we get another chance to do this coming year with the Brahms Requiem.

As well as the quality of the vocal soloists the instrumental players were excellent. It was lovely to be able to borrow a chamber organ from Waltham Abbey which was expertly played by Jonathan. We were also joined by students from St Edmund's College and Prep School to form the ripieno choir and again benefitted from some members of the choir singing the small solo parts.

The concert was something of a baptism by fire for the newish concert managers - Pauline and Lyn - with the problems of fitting all the performers into St John's whilst also allowing for the greatest possible audience. However, they rose to the challenge with aplomb and the concert was once again sold out (some days in advance). A large number of members helped to provide food for the musicians in the break which was very much appreciated and for which, on behalf of us all, I say thank you very much.

Our final concert of the season was a little later in the year than normal. Inevitably that has an impact on the size of the choir since many members want to take advantage of holidays before schools break up. But judging by the audience we suspect it may also have an impact on ticket sales. Certainly this year we are deliberately going 3 weeks earlier to see what difference that makes. Musically the concert was again a success. We celebrated Henry Purcell with his verse anthem *Rejoice in the Lord*, his birthday ode for Queen Mary, *Come ye sons of art* and his opera *Dido and Aeneas*.

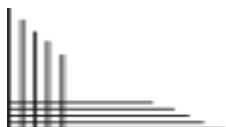
It was good to have a couple of students from the Royal College as soloists along with Lucy Taylor as an excellent Dido. With the Element string quartet, the ever-reliable Jonathan and some soloists from the choir the audience enjoyed an excellent evening rounding off a lovely season.

Perhaps inevitably most of this report has touched on musical aspects of the season. However, we must also recognise the social aspects of the society. It is good that volunteers come forward (generally without too much arm twisting) to serve tea and coffee during the rehearsals. Fay deserves our thanks for again organising the winter and summer social evenings both of which were well supported and very enjoyable.

Many of the committee and other members work hard behind the scenes keeping the society running smoothly. Caroline, in particular, as treasurer, music sourcer and general doer deserves special mention and thanks for all that she does without fuss or drama. Sue, as secretary, does wonderful work keeping us all on track with agendas and minutes for meetings (along with timely and often necessary reminders about actions). Julie Clements running the 100 club, Carole chasing grants in an ever more austere environment, Melanie keeping track of music, Chris trying to keep our supporters loyal through email newsletters and articles in the press.

On behalf of you all, thank you to all the committee and part reps for everything they do.

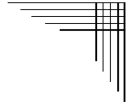
However, it wouldn't be a report from me without a plea/nag. You will have read in the summer newsletter about our desire to appoint a publicity officer to the committee. Could you be that



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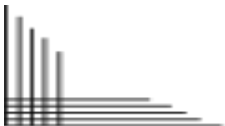
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person or do you know someone that could? Increasing the volume as well as improving the format and style of media used in our publicity I believe is essential to ensure our on-going success.

Finally let me return to where I started. Andrew has completed 10 years as our musical director and still displays the same enthusiasm for coming seasons that he had at the start. That is a really important part of what makes Royston Choral Society such a vibrant and exacting choir to sing in. That he turns out each week with a smile on his face and seemingly abundant amounts of patience and humour is to be cherished. I hope you are all looking forward to singing with him in the coming season as much as I am.

Huw



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