

AGM - 24th September 2019 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

Can I start by congratulating you all on a most successful season for the choral society in 2018-2019? Musically we really challenged ourselves, but triumphed. Financially, we ended the year with our reserves significantly stronger than at the start. The number of subscription-paying members grew (slightly), but more importantly the number of you singing in all the concerts is higher. As a result, we do still look like a choral society at the summer concert - rather than a chamber choir.

I know it was also a year when some of the choir felt outside their comfort zone with some of the music. Whether it was the dissonances of the Britten, or getting to grips with German, Spanish, Welsh, French.....Even when you feel this, I would encourage you to 'stick at it' if you possibly can - it is how we all learn and develop and it's always 'alright on the night'.

We kicked off the year participating in the finale concert of the Royston Arts Festival. We do this this every other year, since it is somewhat disruptive to rehearsals for a big November concert. In the event reprising some of Rutter's Sprig of Thyme worked well, but the concert itself perhaps needed better management. A number of us felt it was too long and before we agree to take part next year, it would be good to share Andrew's knowledge and experience of putting on school concerts with multiple groups with the festival committee.

Britten's War Requiem was a triumph. The notes in isolation are not really that hard. Britten was a genius at helping singers. But, putting it altogether is anything but straightforward. As a society we were so lucky to have someone of Andrew's calibre in charge and it was good to sing with the young and experienced voices of Haileybury College and Haileybury choral society respectively. Hertfordshire Philharmonia proved to be excellent. We were fortunate to have the services of Simon Bland to help prepare us when Andrew was rehearsing the orchestra on a number of Tuesdays. It is not a work many choral societies ever get a chance to perform and the success is further proof of the way RCS is continuing to develop.

As we were preparing for our Christmas concert St John's in Royston was hit by a major fire. I want to pay thanks to the committee for the way they rallied round, searching out venues for concerts and rehearsals, at this difficult time. We are very lucky to have been able to secure the Methodist Church for our Tuesday rehearsals. Our thanks go to them, and in particular to our members Nick and Ann Keep who provide the 'local knowledge' and do so much in terms of getting the church ready for the rehearsal and even more importantly making sure everything gets put away in the right place at the end each week.

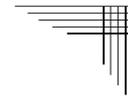
The Christmas concert was held at the Meridian School. The school was magnificent in helping us and other groups ousted from the Parish Church. The 'Britten theme' was continued with his Ceremony of Carols forming the first part of the concert. A beautiful performance enhanced by the lovely harp playing of Ruth Holden. We missed the presence of an organ for the carols in the second half, but Michael Smith got the best he could out of the high-mileage grand piano.



Royston Choral Society

Charity number 1090459

www.roystonchoralsoc.org.uk



Our March concert, of Bach's St John Passion, took place in Ashwell Parish Church. It was a long time since the society had performed there and again came about because of the fire in Royston. What a grand venue it turned out to be, with a lovely performance area and fine accoustic. We look forward to returning there with a very similar line up of soloists (who were all excellent in the Passion) for Bach's B minor Mass next March. The finances of the concert were also very satisfactory with only an insignificant loss. (You can tell I am not a treasurer). However, that was down to some excellent work from Carole Kaszak in chasing down grants. We didn't sell enough tickets. We could have fitted another 30 or 40 members of the audience into the church and had we done so there would have been no loss. The one distressing item for me in the accounts is that our audiences (excluding the War Requiem) are lower this year than last. Two final points on this concert:

- I would like to record our thanks to David Boarder for once again fixing a fine orchestra.
- A big thank you to so many of you who helped get the church back to normal at the end. It was a big job but a good example of many hands make light work.

For 'Songs of Love' held at Barkway church in June we combined Brahms' Liebeslieder Walzer with Lauridsen's sublime Nocturnes, a setting of Suo Gan by Richard Prince and Love's Philosophy by Alexander L'Estrange. A lovely mixture but one I know some of you struggled with for a variety of reasons. It did feel touch and go at times during the term, but the Brahms really came together in the final couple of weeks. Our accompanists were Simon Bland and Warwick Hewson who also wowed the audience with their opening performance of Schubert's F minor Fantasia. Whether the piano will ever recover perhaps remains to be seen!

So that covers the year, but there are some additional people I would like to call out and thank:

- Sue Sanders has done a lovely job of photographing and recording parts of our concerts this year. Combined with the work Chris Lee has done around generating marketing material (with the assistance of some of you) to keep our audience informed during the year, this has allowed the website to get a fresher, more colourful and exciting appearance.
- Jenny Leitch continues to do a great job on our publicity and programmes, assisted by Neil Heywood writing programme notes and Suzie Harrison chasing down paying advertisers.
- Caroline does a huge amount for the society. Not just with the money and music, but all the little administrivia tasks she quietly gets on with. Caroline is fount of all knowledge around what needs to be done, and how it has been done in the past.
- Michael Smith for all his help with rehearsals - whether assisting Andrew from the piano or showing infinite patience when note bashing!
- Finally I want to thank Janet Backer. Janet has for many years been the RCS refreshment organiser (also known as tea rota czar) but stood down during the year because of other pressures. She has proved a difficult act to follow, because she has not yet been replaced....

Which brings me to my final point. Your committee does a great job of running the society, but not every job needs to be done by a committee member. It would be great if there were one or two other members who would like to get involved. Top of the jobs list looking for volunteers is the Tea Rota and Librarian.

Thank you for putting up with me. I look forward to another really exciting season for the society.

