

Royston Choral Society

Charity number 1090459

www.roystonchoralsoc.org.uk



AGM - 13th October 2020 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

I think it is probably true to say the 2019/20 season for Royston Choral Society was like none other in our (almost) 50 year history.

As for so many other organisations and businesses, what was shaping up to be another very successful and exciting year came to an abrupt end in March with the lockdown as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

We began the year taking part in a concert at Haileybury with 8 other choirs. The brainchild of Sarah Beazley, the Hertfordshire High Sheriff's Community Choirs concert was intended to demonstrate the cooperation, inclusivity and the sharing of a positive experience that choirs experience. Sarah, in her year as High Sheriff, wanted a focus on building stronger communities and felt choirs demonstrated this by performing both individually and together in a concert which was a joyful celebration of the power of song and community spirit. It was a well received event, that allowed us to explore some slightly different repertoire as well as reusing some of the material from the previous summer concert.

We returned to Haileybury again in November to perform Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*. The highly acclaimed performance was in collaboration with Haileybury College Chapel and Lower School Choirs, as well as Haileybury Choral Society and the Hertfordshire Philharmonia Orchestra. Elgar's 3 big oratorios are some of the classics of the repertoire but require large orchestras and, consequently, large numbers of singers. The choral society was incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to perform the work and we should embrace periodic such collaborative events in the future as a way of getting to perform works which would otherwise be beyond our resources. On this particular occasion we also record our very grateful thanks for Haileybury College for their generosity in absorbing all of the costs.

Our final concert of the calendar year also ended up being our final concert of the 2019/20 season. This was our Christmas concert which, as last year, took place in King James Academy whilst the rebuilding work continues at St John's in Royston. The concert was billed as "*A traditional family Christmas concert of carols and seasonal music*" and I think certainly met the brief with an appreciative (if not particularly large) audience. The atmosphere in a school hall is not always ideal for such an event, but we were certainly helped in this regard by having J50 with us again. Brass medleys instantly bring a smile to peoples' faces.

Soon after starting rehearsals again in January we took a week out to enjoy a very successful social evening at the Old Bull. A good number of members enjoyed a great evening with a lovely atmosphere. Many thanks to Fay for organising the event and also setting the entertaining quiz.

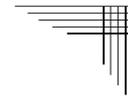
The big test of the season was due to be Bach's B minor mass in March. I know there are mixed feelings about this piece within the choir. I'm certainly not a non-biased chair when it comes to this though. I think it is an absolutely fantastic piece. I've sung it 5 times before and would definitely like to sing it 5 times more (at least). However, I do accept that it is hard and potentially takes



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some 'getting into'. So I would like to express a very sincere thank you to the many of you who hadn't sung it before but worked hard coming to grips with the work. You won't regret the hard work and when we do eventually get to perform the piece you will be buzzing!

Having said it is hard, things looked even more challenging when we realised that Andrew would be on adoption leave for a number of weeks. We were very fortunate that he was able to arrange to have Laurence Williams cover the majority of the rehearsals he missed and also of course to have the ever-dependable Michael Smith.

In the event of course, the coronavirus pandemic stopped us being able to show how far we had come. It was a very difficult decision to cancel the concert at such short notice, but definitely proved to be the correct one. I would like to record our thanks to Ashwell Church for their understanding in waiving the cancellation fee, and also to David Boarder who having fixed the orchestra for us then also handled the whole sensitive issue of the loss of performing fees with the players.

At the start of the season the woman who had been designing our posters and programmes announced she would not be able to carry on doing so. We are very fortunate to have in the choir someone with the skills and flair to take this on. Thank you very much Jess. I think your clean and modern look to the posters has been refreshing. On behalf of us all thank you for all the hard work which I know always ends up having to be done under tight time constraints.

A highlight of the season for some of us was to have been a singing tour to Rome. About 30 singers were signed up for a trip, led by Andrew, in July. Sadly this became another casualty of the pandemic and there was an anxious few weeks while we tried to second-guess what might happen in order to minimise any potential losses. In the event we were able to redirect all the monies paid towards a rescheduled trip in June 2021. My fingers are crossed....

So that covers, the year, but, as usual, there are a few other people I would like to call out and thank:

- Carole Kaszak, who continues to do a great job in tracking down and successfully applying for grants to help offset the costs of concerts.
- Chris Lee for continuing to keep our supporters warm with regular news updates. Thanks also to the many of you that help him (sometimes after different levels of persuasion) by providing material.
- The Methodist Church for continuing to host our rehearsals.

Normally I would finish my reports by talking about what an exciting year we have in front of us (whilst also of course *reminding* you of your duty to sell more tickets for our concert!). I can't really claim that to be the case right now. However, I do know that when we can return to regular in-person rehearsals and concerts we will have an exciting future in front of us. Whether that is after Christmas, after Easter or not until next September is just impossible to tell right now. But as long as we all 'keep the faith' and come back when we can, Royston will be filled with the sound of excellent choral singing again. That moment, when it happens, will be very special.

Huw

