

Phoenix Singers AGM, 27th September 2017

Chair's report

It is again my great pleasure to present my chair's report for the past year, the fortieth since our foundation, and to spend a few moments looking back over such a varied and exciting season's singing.

Monteverdi Vespers is an extraordinarily ambitious piece for a small non-auditioned choral society such as ours to put on. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity attracted new faces to the choir, keen to sing the Vespers, and a very large audience. Drew's personal enthusiasm for the work and an excellent cadre of musicians, soloists and supporters, including the Firebirds, powered us through to a truly memorable evening in the beautiful setting of St Michael's, itself rendered just a bit magical by the lighting of Jim Laws.

It was hard not to feel a sense of anti-climax in January but, for many, the knowledge that, at the other end of the year, in June, we were to join Holbrook Choral Society for a full on performance of the Dream of Gerontius, kept the excitement alive. Less rare in performance, but, nevertheless always thrilling, our Dream night embodied all the majesty of big choral and orchestral forces tackling a major work intended to move the spirit by its sheer power.

In between was a chance for Phoenix Singers to take centre stage in a concert of Cathedral Anthems; an altogether gentler occasion and a chance to hone, and display, our vocal skills as an ensemble, accompanied by Alex Binns. There were doubts as to whether we could cope and whether an audience would turn up to such a relatively low key evening. They did and we sang as well as ever. The concert was all but sold out.

This successful year has been made possible by a great deal of hard work both behind the scenes as well as on the platform. We have shown that Choral Societies such as ours can really thrive when their members are fully engaged in the business of running the choir. The companionship of the performance is mirrored in the companionship behind the scenes, making canapes, organising raffles, getting people to sit in the right place, keeping singers informed, managing the supply and return of scores; just a few of the many many little actions coming together to keep the choir healthy and performing at its best.

I asked myself the other day why I have bothered to turn out almost every Wednesday evening for the last twenty year to go to Phoenix Singers' rehearsal. I know why: it is a perfect antidote to our increasingly impersonal world. A place and time where our collective effort is directed to beauty, the creation of which is the most human and humanising endeavour. So in this our fortieth year I think we can say that we have remained true to the vision of our founder, the late Malcolm Russel, of a choir rooted locally, open to all but striving for musical excellence and so enriching the lives of its members and contributing to the health and stability of its community. Long may we continue to do that.

Looking forward, we are privileged, this term, to be directed by Geoff Lavery with Alex Binns accompanying and we also look forward to the return of Drew Cantrill in the new year for Pizzetti and Mendelssohn and then on to our summer concert in the Headmaster Porter Theatre, Framlingham College for music by Poulenc and Brahms.

Before I conclude I must return to my theme of behind the scenes work. This year your committee has worked together very well to run the choir and support our rehearsals and performances and, as your chair, I would thank them for all their efforts and wisdom. Then there are lots of choir members who do invaluable jobs, such things as proof reading, running the bar, helping with technical things on concert day and also the many of you who enjoy cooking almost as much as singing, and make treats for our receptions. And, lastly, let me pay tribute to the energy and dedication of our musical team, Drew, Geoff and, this term, Alex. Thank you all for making last season such a success.

Here's to the next.