

PHOENIX SINGERS CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE AGM ON 10TH OCTOBER 2012

I think that the past singing year will go down as one of the more eventful in the 35 year history of our choir and one from which I believe it is in the process of emerging refreshed and strengthened.

The tone for the year was set by two rather woeful reports from the then Chairman and Music Director to the AGM of 2011, painting an image of a failing institution running out of ideas, talent and money and losing membership. The back story of the following twelve months, as the committee we elected last year tried to get to grips with turning round the fortunes of the choir, surfaced from time to time in a series of resignations firstly of committee members, then of our accompanist and finally our former Music Director and further committee members.

Meanwhile, the choir kept singing and offered a lively Messiah at St Micheal's church last December, and took part in a massive and exciting performance of the Verdi Requiem at Snape in May which sold out, pretty much, and was met with considerable acclaim.

An informal concert for family and friends at Thomas Mills School in March was amongst the choir's less fine moments although some of us, and I will confess to being amongst them, rather enjoyed trying to turn back the years to play love lorn dudes and dudettes from the New York of the early 1960s in our concert performance of the medley from West Side Story.

Some like it hot!

Others may prefer Scarlatti.

I suppose that illustrates one of the perennial difficulties faced by institutions such as ours. Consensus is so important but so is leadership and successful groups in small communities have to strive to balance these two imperatives. We are used, in modern society, to behave as consumers, to believe in the primacy of choice as a means of self expression but to make smaller communities and organisations really benefit their members requires both compromise and contribution across the board.

Striving for these values will, I hope, characterise the next phase in the story of the Phoenix Singers, oiled by a belief that singing and performing well is rewarding but so is contributing to excellence in other aspects of the choir's life in, for example, the way we present ourselves to our local community and audience, the way we nurture our support network of musicians and soloists and, indeed, each other at coffee time, and the way that we ensure that every thing we need to function as a choir is available and that we can pay for it.

To be really successful I estimate that we need about 20% of members to be actively involved in non-singing activities. More would be even better.

Don't panic, we are almost there, but you may be contacted by a committee member some time in the not to distant future to see if you would like to help in one way or another. Please accept the call. Believe me, it's fun.

So, to bring our story up to date, Drew Cantrill accepted an appointment as temporary Music Director in late August and he, and Geoff Lavery, our accompanist, who was appointed by the former committee are now preparing us for our next concert.

Drew will say more in a minute, but, as a rank and file voice, I am already impressed by the work rate and focus that each of us is now achieving in rehearsal, aided by amazingly effective warm ups which get you ready to go from note one. This gives me great confidence that the November concert, and its successors, will be a wonderful experience for our audience and see the Phoenix Singers once again contributing its best to the local music scene.

I should close by paying tribute to some of the important personalities who have contributed in large degree to the life of the choir over the last few years who are no longer associated with us, including our former music director, Edmond Fivet, who enlivened our musical life over the last three years or so with new repertoire and inspiring leadership, and long serving committee members Liz Fivet and Rosemary Martin.

A special vote of thanks must go to our retiring treasurer, Maggie Smith, who has unerringly put the interests of the choir first over the last few months as well as developing the treasurer's role and leaving an improving financial picture for her successor.

To complete the picture, there are some welcomes too, for new members and members who, for one reason or another, have not been with us recently but are now singing again. I would extend a special welcome to our founder Malcolm Russell and Judith, his wife, to William Glasse, as a choir can't have enough tenors or secretaries, to Gillian Howell, Kate Blount and many others.

So here's to a great year's singing and performing.

Giles