

Director of Music's Review of the 2013/14 Season

It has been a real pleasure to direct the choir over the past year, and I truly feel that we have made some significant progress together. The atmosphere has been positive and hardworking, with a sense of commitment and camaraderie which is often hard to instil or sustain. So, bravo!

Our first concert (Durufle 'Requiem' and other French music) successfully explored the use of the chancel of St Michael's with an electronic organ. We were hugely fortunate to have the services of Jonathan Hope (Gloucester Cathedral) - the Durufle is one of the most challenging accompaniments in the choral repertoire, and he brought the score to life most effectively. As always, Claire Weston dazzled, and the programme was enthusiastically received by the audience. Choir attendance and a drop-out rate over the term put some pressure on us, but I was pleased with the concert overall.

The highlight of the season for me was our second, part-song concert. The choir pulled together what could have been a rather 'bitty' programme with some colourful and confident singing, and our guest soprano, Lindsay Gowers held the audience in thrall. Her selection of songs fitted beautifully with the choral items, and her characterisation was a joy to watch. I think you (the singers) could see the audience's reaction more readily than I, and by all accounts, the concert was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Well done!

It's not often that an amateur choir gets to perform with and for artists of the calibre of Julian Lloyd-Webber and his wife, and our summer concert was an event to remember. Singing to a capacity audience, and listening to the mesmeric playing of Jiaxin was a memorable experience. The afternoon rehearsal wasn't the easiest of my career, but I was very pleased indeed with the choir's rendition of William Lloyd-Webber's mass. It's true to say that the music of the second half was a better fit for the choir - though the CPE Bach came together remarkably well. We must stretch ourselves to sing Baroque music stylishly and convincingly, and I am glad that we have made inroads into this area. It is something that I want to consolidate over the coming years.

Looking forward, the music selected for the 2014/15 season is designed to develop the choral sound, most especially of the tenors and basses, and to build on the programming successes of the past year. Introducing a mix of sacred and secular music opens our appeal to a wider audience, and the inclusion of pieces like Saint-Saens' 'Carnival of the Animals' is designed to attract a slightly younger demographic! I hope you will enjoy preparing the music.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment over the past season. Please do try your hardest to sing in each concert, to make musical notes in your score, to rehearse in your own time, and to attend as faithfully as you are able. My sincere thanks to Geoff Lavery for his work as accompanist. Being able to leave the choir in his capable hands, and benefitting week on week from his inspirational playing are enormously important to us all. My thanks to the committee for managing the choir's affairs so securely, and for their support of my musical ideas. Here's to another successful year of music-making!