

PHOENIX SINGERS – ANNUAL REPORT FOR AGM (2018-2019)

This is my first report to you after my first season as your conductor, and what a season it has been! A variety of high quality music-making with, I hope, much fun on the way. As I stated last year, when I spoke of my intentions for the choir, I want us to go into performances totally confident but with just the right amount of adrenalin "edge"; and certainly NOT sung out with intensive final rehearsals. I hope that abandoning the Friday evening rehearsal before the concert day, and a gentle final rehearsal on the day itself, have achieved both these aims. Do feel free to comment as this is a two-way process and I need to know your thoughts too. Incidentally, that goes for the rehearsals themselves. We are all working towards a final performance – you and me. It is Team Work (there is no 'I' in 'Team' - as the saying goes!!!!).

The season began with Rossini's wonderful, tongue-in-cheek "Petite Messe". I love this piece and every time I prepare and then perform it, it always comes up fresh. Your performance was just as stunning as any other performance I've conducted. Our four young soloists did us proud and I must mention Jonathan Rutherford's meticulous and sympathetic accompaniment. SO many notes..... and all in the right order!! Marvellous.

Post-Christmas, we began our preparations for the Verdi "Requiem" concert in May at Snape Maltings, with Beccles Choral Society, the Gippeswyk Singers, Ipswich, and Lambeth Orchestra. The two joint rehearsals prior to the day were most useful and allowed us all to experience what singing in a choir of about 170 is really like before the day itself. Although we are self-sufficient in our concerts, in my opinion it is good to expand our repertoire and sing the larger scale works that normally we could not perform. The concert was a great success, both organisationally and musically. The choirs sang magnificently, accompanied by Lambeth Orchestra who were on top form. The four soloists were excellent and I was particularly pleased with the tenor – so Italianate – and the Mezzo, whose vocal quality was wonderful throughout her wide range. We sold out the Maltings, performing to a full house, and eliciting an amazing response at the end – I thought their silence was never going to end! As a result, although the budget for such a joint venture was enormous, we actually made a small profit– an added bonus! Thank you to all who were involved in the organisation of the Project in so many ways.

The summer concert, coming so soon after Snape, meant that we had a smaller number of rehearsals but singing a main repertoire work helped. However, I was stunned that the choir that had sung at Snape reduced by a third, roughly! This must happen every summer, and I quite understand why, but I had not really noticed such a reduction in singers until this year when I was actually standing in front of you! It came as quite a shock. However, those who did sing contributed to an excellent and most moving Mozart concert in July and I thank you. The two actors placed the three works in context and, for me, I realised for the first time (amazingly) the true emotional impact of the "Requiem". There was a good size audience but something that we must build on in future years I think. Those who did not come missed a treat – especially hearing the young clarinet soloist. He was described as "*confident but without any arrogance*". How true and what a talent! Many people assisted behind the scenes making this concert possible and I am very grateful.

I am pleased that a Concert Plan has been formulated for the next five seasons, post 2020. The programmes are exciting, full of variety and with many musical challenges. There are exciting times ahead for us all.

Thanks to the Committee, with William as Chair, for their support and encouragement. I feel in very safe hands! BUT, above all, I must thank you, the Phoenix Singers, for your support, your friendliness and your sheer hard work and musicality. You have made me very welcome as I have moved from behind the piano to stand in front of you; and amidst the laughter and fun on Wednesday evenings, there is also a cool professionalism about the way you go about things – ranging from the organisation of the concerts to your total concentration in the rehearsals themselves. Making music together has been a total delight and I look forward, with keen anticipation, to next season with its own variety of music from Britten to Opera, with Bach's wonderful "St John Passion" next Easter. It will be a busy year but, I hope, an enjoyable one!! Thank you.

Geoff Lavery (August 2019)