

## **Whitehall Choir**

### **Secretary's Report on the 2013/14 Season**

It falls to the Secretary to give a report of the year's activities. I have tried to leave the field open knowing that Paul's report and a discussion on our future path are yet to come.

Our first concert of the season was Handel's oratorio, Jephtha, performed at St John's Smith Square - a terrific piece which gave rise to great drama, ably taken on by the choir, our line of soloists and supported by the London Baroque Sinfonia who played superbly. We sang to a large and very responsive audience. Paul and Ian had both worked like warriors all afternoon getting through a huge amount of rehearsal in a very short space of time. Both Handel and St John's suit us well.

Moving smartly into the Festive Season preparations began for Christmas Carols, first at one of Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons' Christmas Carol Concert evenings - for just 30 of our number, and then at our annual carol concert at St Stephen's. Having performed Jephtha a little earlier than usual in the autumn term, we had plenty of time for preparation of a programme including several lovely French carols. Those who sang at Le Manoir came back positively glowing with satisfaction both musical and gastronomic. They had treated the guests to a magical evening and by all accounts sang beautifully. Our carol concert at St Stephen's was also a great success, bolstered by the extra rehearsal time. The security we felt enabled us to respond really well to Paul's direction. In the audience was Samuel Parsons, the winner of our composition competition with his piece "Christ on the Cross", there to receive his prize from our President, Martin Donnelly, the Permanent Secretary of BIS, ...

which leads me neatly to "Ascendit: Music for Passiontide to Ascension" which formed the meat of our work for the year. The menu was mouth-wateringly lovely, with a beautiful and unusual mix of pieces from Philips to Purcell, Lotti to Leighton, Vaughan-Williams to MacMillan and of course the new Parsons piece. We worked towards a concert in early April and a weekend recording session during the early May Bank Holiday weekend, both at St Alban the Martyr in Holborn. We didn't quite manage to be concert ready with all the pieces and we faced the prospect of the concert with a fairly high degree of trepidation, but St Albans has the most wonderful calming atmosphere and as we started rehearsing for the concert, the cloud lifted. We gave a strikingly good, if not exactly note perfect performance which was received with real enthusiasm by a large audience who had somehow managed to find the church, sheltering as it does well away from the public eye! Many of us had excellent feedback from our friends and the evening had a wonderful buzz to it. Ian played his organ pieces with great authority perched as he was in the magnificent organ loft. The biggest mention has to go to Mya who sang her solo in Pascha Nostrum with breathtaking beauty leaving the audience and choir aghast and entranced - for many, it was the highlight of an already pretty exciting evening.

And the recording.... I'm not sure how to approach this but to cut a long story short, we needed one further evening session at the beginning of June to complete it. The mouth-watering menu was alas, in part, rather indigestible and needed more time to settle than we had allowed ourselves. The weekend itself was always going to be hard work but it was also great fun and very fascinating. While the sun shone warm and bright outside we froze inside and on the Sunday sang in a thick fog ..... of incense. Gallons of tea and coffee were provided by Ian, Jean and helpers without whom nothing would have been accomplished. Paul and Neil Ferris

kept morale high and developed a really glorious sound from the choir. I can't wait to hear the result of all our hard work and angst, and I must thank the choir, Ian and Paul for the amazing commitment and forbearance shown over the whole project.

And so rehearsals began, rather late in the day, for the concert that we have just performed at Holy Trinity Sloane Square. Our performance felt rather like a fairly good dress rehearsal and I for one would love to give some of the pieces another go some time - especially the Rheinberger Mass. We were short on rehearsal time and energy I think and a rather small audience meant that there was not quite the usual Whitehall Choir celebratory feel to the evening, but despite that we have had some very good feedback. The new organ at the church is wonderful and Ian had the time of his life playing some tremendous pieces on it and whirling us through Kodaly's hymn of praise to the organ "Laudes Organi"!

So yes, it was a hard year, but my goodness we have got through a lot of fantastic music and now it's time to take stock and plan confidently for future seasons.

Joanna Tomlinson  
Secretary  
July 2014