

## Whitehall Choir AGM 15 July 2021

### Chair's Report: Philip Pratley

A year ago we met for our AGM on Zoom and I suggested that it had been a season unlike any other in our Choir's long history. Well, I reflect as we sit in the middle of July 2021 that this AGM, also on Zoom, brings us to the conclusion of an 18 month period unlike any other in our history. Although the record shows that because of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic we managed none of our major planned concerts in the 2020-21 season, we must also be careful to record the extraordinary hard work and commitment of so many which enabled us to meet weekly by Zoom during the extended periods of lockdown, ensured we could take the fleeting opportunities and fulfil, frequently at short notice, the requirements which would enable us to meet. And meant we were able to sing together, albeit in truncated socially distanced form, for some 6 weeks in the autumn and 4 weeks in the summer.

Just reflect on the number of risk assessments we have completed, the fact of having to complete the returns and compile socially distanced seating plans each week in advance, the agility in finding venues at almost no notice, pulling together a tech team for recorded weekly Zoom sessions and bringing livestream to our hybrid rehearsals, then on a set of volunteers run on WhatsApp to make the rehearsals possible. In parallel our on-line and social media team have had to balance on a fine line. And although we were concerned that we would not have any new members during the pandemic, it's great to report that, actually, we have. My thanks to everyone involved for their hard work, imagination and rapid switching, especially Rachel as secretary who has borne the brunt of so much of all this, Martin on the tech side, Anne on social media and with our new members, Fraser handling the disruption to our library so smoothly and those who stepped up when they saw the requests. Aileen got us into St Gabriel's as soon as we realised on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June that we might be able to start a shortened summer term. Ian and Laura had already hit upon the cracking idea of small groups singing in park or bandstand or garden. With more to come. My thanks to all of you for your contribution and patience week by unpredictable week.

We have been wonderfully supported, to an extent beyond any we could have imagined, by Jo Tomlinson and Ian Tindale, who embody what professionalism and passion in the arts really mean. It was a delight to be able to congratulate Jo and Neil on Tommy's safe arrival at the beginning of the year, and even more of a delight to see Tommy make the occasional appearance on Zoom.

And during the Spring Term, we were fortunate that Jo secured for us the services of Sarah Tenant-Flowers who gave us an absorbing sequence of illustrated sessions, with audio and visual examples, of the Rachmaninov Vespers. While we would very much prefer to have brought all that to a real life performance, with soloists, orchestra and of course audience, our final 'performance at home' evening was expertly brought together by Sarah T-F and it was a huge pleasure to be able to pass to her the spontaneous texts and emails of appreciation you sent me.

Jo has skilfully given us a varied set of pieces to look at over the year, to spark our interest, keep us thinking and to keep our voices engaged. Being able to have a Christmas concert in

St Peter's on minimal rehearsal with an entirely virtual audience and readings coming in by Zoom was such a thrill, even more so looking back on it, having no other concert this season. With Jo we have had a look forward, with a feel of the repertoire in the coming two seasons, which gives a sense of optimism and development. We know from the weekend singing day earlier this month that we will need to work hard on our vocal stamina to return in September ready to tackle a demanding albeit carefully calibrated season.

I'd like to turn now and pay especial thanks to Sarah Rollinson, our outgoing Treasurer. As everybody saw when we took the Annual Report and Accounts, Sarah has transformed the way we approach running our finances and maintaining our reports to the Charity Commission, and the reports to you our members. All of this against a constantly changing backdrop because of the pandemic and also under immense pressure of circumstances. Sarah, thank you from all of us.

Our approach in the absence of someone to take over the formal Committee role of Treasurer will be developed in detail over the summer. In outline, Rachel and I in a later agenda item will put to you the proposal to invite Sarah to stay as our account holder, a non Committee post, with a view to recommending a relaid set of responsibilities including paid external accountant to you at an AGM early next season. There are some tasks we would look to members of the Choir to take on, as non Committee roles, in order to reduce the scale of the external accountant's task, pending a further change we would hope to be able to introduce to a return to the Treasurer as a Committee post. One such task is Gift Aid administration, and our thanks to Bridget for agreeing to do this. The other tasks and the way we organise them will, as I say, be developed in detail over the summer break.

In the meantime, to ensure our due diligence requirements to the Charity Commission are properly fulfilled, we need to appoint a third Trustee, and I'm pleased to say that Anne has accepted the nomination to be put to you for election later in this AGM. I hope you agree that Anne's work leading our new members' administration, and our social media presence as well as her time on the committee as also part rep means that she would bring considerable breadth and understanding of our Choir to this role.

We also extend our thanks to those choir members who have been on the front line of our national and international response to the pandemic. Some have been involved in meeting the challenges met in so many different ways by the NHS. Others have been devising, developing and delivering the entirely novel policies required by and within Government. For some, the demands within their local communities have posed unimagined challenges. Our thanks to you all.

I conclude where I started. This unpredicted and unpredictable period has seen us provide a continuing degree of musical connection and friendship, but we have missed what we most enjoy: preparing, singing and performing to a high standard an inventive and ambitious repertoire to audiences who enjoy our concerts. The word unprecedented can sometimes be misused. Here it is entirely justified. Thank you all for the support and commitment you bring to our Whitehall Choir.

PP – 15 July 2021