

Whitehall Choir AGM – 5 July 2022

Chair's Report – Philip Pratley

Very deliberately, I'd like to open with what were my closing remarks a year ago.

This unpredicted and unpredictable period has seen us provide a continuing degree of musical connection and friendship, but, I said as we completed our second season in the pandemic, what we have missed is what we most enjoy: preparing, singing and performing to a high standard an inventive and ambitious repertoire to audiences who enjoy our concerts.

Back to today, and we've been able to begin addressing that this year. So in this, the third season in succession in which we, Whitehall Choir have coped with the many constraints of the Covid 19 pandemic, I'd like to thank all of those who have brought us back to preparing and singing such an inventive programme.

It's a feature of our choir that so many contribute their time and assistance to giving us such a vibrant sense of enjoyment and purpose. Thank you all. I would especially like to thank Aileen for the meticulous way she has recast our approach to concert and event management, and Rachel for the immense amount of work which has been required to ensure we have been able to accommodate the changing requirements and protocols. It's difficult to summarise the extraordinary degree of detail which Rachel addressed through each phase of the Covid-19 protocols, and if I tried to run through the details we would be

here for a long time. So I shan't even try the summary. But I would want to record formally on behalf of us all how fortunate we are to have the professionalism, adaptability and commitment of those who made this season possible. It was their commitment and the wholehearted involvement evident throughout our Choir that enabled us within the last week to perform the exciting 'Ice and Fire' Baltic programme which has been on hold for two summers, then go almost directly to Choral Evensong in Rochester Cathedral. That we succeeded says more for those efforts than I can put into words.

In order to make all of that happen, we are so fortunate in having Ian Tindale as our accompanist. We rely in ways that we all recognise every week on Ian's phenomenal musical presence and unflagging personal commitment. There's such an contagious excellence in everything Ian does that he encourages us to reach the highest standards. Ian, thank you.

The commitment and energy of Jo, Ian and of everyone on the Committee is a real strength of our choir. My thanks to all of you for this year of enormous achievement. Particular thanks to those who are standing down this evening Ruth after more years than I can count, roles a plenty and untiring energy. Fraser having guided us through the librarian maze. And especially Sarah for continuing to run our accounts with such professionalism and for her wise advice.

Inevitably as the season ends, we say farewell to a number of members moving away from London, some of you quite a long way from London, several of whom have served a while on the Committee. Our thanks for your friendship and all you've brought to Whitehall

Choir. Best wishes for the future and hope we might see you at in the audience. As we saw again at the Monteverdi and 'Ice & Fire', it's both a pleasure to see those who've been members, plus it's also a testament to the importance of friendships across our Choir. And of course it's a reminder to us of the importance of welcoming potential new members at the beginning of next season.

In turning to introduce Jo for her report, I wondered how to attempt to summarise all that Jo brings to us. But in a way there isn't a single summary. That's because each week Jo brings such a sense of musicianship and vitality that we each respond in individual ways. And it's not just *our* response as members of the Choir. The difference Jo makes is also reflected in the wonderful responses¹ we have heard from our audiences. That's all the more important as we emerge from the extended gaps the pandemic has imposed in our rehearsals and concerts. In recovering our performance standards, we can look back at a stimulating and fulfilling season while looking forward to an exciting season ahead, with another varied repertoire. So in introducing you Jo, I do so offering our warmest thanks for everything you give us.

¹ See attached extract from our website