

AGM report - music director

I can't believe it's already been two years since I started working with you, it's flown by and been thoroughly enjoyable working with such a welcoming and dedicated group.

We've had another good year and been able to stabilise our membership so we're now at a steady number at our self-imposed maximum, meaning recruitment can now be just replacing those who leave, though of course I'd always welcome more tenors for balance however full we are!

We began the year with a super Mozart Requiem project, combining a well attended Come and Sing in Clapham with an enjoyable concert as part of the Brandenburg Festival at St Martin in the Field. The Come and Sing worked well – everyone seemed to really enjoy the day and we also gained members from this. Do help spread the word about September's *Messiah* day – it really could be a very popular day if we promote it well so please could everyone make an effort over the summer to tell all your singing friends about it.

Our Autumn concert was a feat of musical endeavour and organisation, as we'd invited our friends from Cantus Novus Wien to join us for our concert featuring music by women composers and it was attended by the composer of our main joint work, Roxanna Panufnik. This was followed by a well attended Christmas concert a few weeks later.

The Spring saw a return to St John's Smith Square in a nuanced performance of Haydn's Creation with London Baroque Sinfonia. This was one of several pieces requested by choir members in the previous year's survey as was this term's Shearing. I was delighted with the singing in the Haydn. Because the notes were relatively easy and there's not too much music for the chorus, we managed to work on achieving a fantastic sound and a huge amount of detail in text and phrasing. It was very much enjoyed by our fantastic and engaged new President Antonia Romeo. I have learnt from this concert that it's imperative at St John's that the choir is as far forward as possible on the stage due to the strange acoustic at the back.

I think we should also take from this concert that the amount of thought and detail that you achieved vocally and musically needs to carry through into all repertoire even when there's more to learn. This means we need to get quicker at learning notes in order to embed the detail, either with better sight reading skills or early preparation of notes at home, or preferably both. I think this choir likes to be challenged but we can only do harder music well if the notes can be learned relatively easily so there's time to make it all sound good too. There's no point just about being able to sing the notes: coming to a concert should be an exciting and engaging experience and I felt we were able to do this at last week's summer concert despite a much larger amount of music to learn than in the Haydn. I was delighted with the whole performance on Thursday, you created an exciting and fun atmosphere and I have had some lovely comments about your tuning, diction and performance.

We've had a lot of focus this year on facial expressions and connecting to the text and to the emotion of the music we sing, and really expressing ourselves. This is starting to come, judging by comments from the audiences over the last two terms, but getting heads up and communicating still needs some work from a few members.

I suggested to the committee that other than improving sight reading, and the continued work on vocal and communication skills, the other thing that would have significant impact on the quality of our singing would be a re-audition with proper detailed feedback for each singer, asking anyone who needs to make more significant changes to sing to me and Ian again in six months having been working on those issues. I'm grateful the committee have agreed to a full day of auditions with me and Ian this month and I hope everyone will find the experience useful and not at all scary. Ian will

lead on the audition so that I can write lots of notes so people get detailed written feedback of what they can be focussing on.

It's been fantastic to have the new piano for rehearsals and of course we are so lucky to have the continued support of our incredible accompanist Ian, who not only accompanies us brilliantly but is so warm, funny and very much part of the team.

A huge thanks to all the committee for their hard work: every one of them does a brilliant job. It's been a great pleasure for me to work with our new chairman Philip this year, who has really understood the musical direction I've wanted to go in and been incredibly supportive of that. Ruth who is stepping down from the secretary role has worked so hard and with such passion for the choir and we thank her for all the time, effort and dedication she's put in. Patrick will be starting to handover and again a huge thanks to him for the years of care and commitment he's given to the choir.

It's an exciting time to get involved with leading the direction of the choir. There's a great energy and positivity in our singing and in the feel of the choir, so it's an exciting time for you to come on board to help shape the choir's future, and step into Ruth's role. Do speak to me or Philip if you might consider this.

Finally a big thanks to you all for making this a job that I can't wait to get to and come out from buzzing!