

## Whitehall AGM 2022

It was fantastic to get back together in September in a slightly more normal season after such a long time affected by Covid restrictions. We knew there would be some rebuilding to do but I think compared to many choirs the membership has remained fairly stable and vocally it didn't take us long to build back stamina.

We have taken on a number of excellent new members this year and on paper the membership is currently the same as in pre-pandemic times although in reality we will need another recruitment drive in the Autumn to replace those who are leaving at the end of the season. We will miss those leaving and wish them very well.

I was really pleased with the programme for our November concert, all music with strings including the Faure Requiem arranged by Michael Higgins, alongside works by Jake Runestad and Libby Larsen. The pieces were just right for the vocal rebuilding that we needed to do. It's been fascinating to see how the choir's confidence, support and intonation developed across that term. Excitingly, very early in the season we had a visit from American composer Jake Runestad, who kindly answered our questions about his piece and his career. This gave us a real boost at that time and I was so happy with the joyful performance we gave in November.

We then worked toward our Christmas concert and although we'd had a wonderful rehearsal on the final Tuesday, we ended up having to cancel our concert. Covid levels were getting so high and in addition to our concerns about safety, many members were understandably worried that they would miss seeing family at Christmas if they had to isolate, so the concert was sadly cancelled.

In the Spring we were able to work towards our Monteverdi Vespers concert and this was an exciting and popular programme for us as a choir. I think many members who had performed it with Whitehall Choir and London Baroque Sinfonia before enjoyed revisiting it. For me, it was the first time conducting it, so there was a huge amount of work to do in terms of research and decision-making but it was very rewarding to put it all together and we had superb players and soloists to enjoy working with too. The only stress of the concert was that Covid is still affecting things and we lost a number of strong singers for the concert.

In the summer term we finally began work on our long-postponed programme of music from the Baltic region *Ice and Fire*. This was an ambitious programme of challenging repertoire, much of it a cappella, which I had chosen when the choir was at a superb point in 2019-20. Our successful performance shows that we have now got back to where we were then. It was a humid evening, challenging singing circumstances, so the fact that we managed to sustain this programme was very promising for the next season. We were joined by Richard Moore, organist from Guildford Cathedral, who gave some stunning performances. I was very pleased with the mixed repertoire which included some lesser known nineteenth century repertoire from the region as well as music by female composers – which was somewhat harder to track down than the well-known works by Part and Tormis.

Finally two days later we went to Rochester to sing choral evensong at the cathedral. We decided at quite a late stage that a social day out would be very important for the choir so we were very lucky to get an opportunity to sing at Rochester - huge thanks to members of the committee for putting this day in place so quickly. We had a beautiful day for our visit and we were asked back so it would perhaps be a nice thing to consider again, and if we had a little more time to rehearse in advance we could have even more social time!

This year could be considered as a re-building year but actually we have given extremely enjoyable performances of a big variety of music both well-known and unusual so we should be proud of what we achieved.

Next season we need to continue to develop our sound and this will be done by continuing to attract excellent new members, by reauditioning everyone in the Spring, so I can give individual feedback for people to work on and some sectional rehearsals to hone the sound of each section. We have another ambitious year, with a return to St John Smith Square and a plan for recording sessions.

We are incredibly lucky to have Ian Tindale, such a kind, supportive and hugely talented part of Whitehall Choir, as well as a committed and passionate committee who care deeply about the choir and us all.