

Whitehall Choir AGM 2017
Conductor's Report

My final season with the choir has been a good one with lots of variety and some excellent singing. It has been a good note on which to end a long tenure. But whilst it has been essentially good, it has also highlighted the choir's weaknesses and the need for a fresh start and new recruits in all parts.

We began with a lovely programme in Smith Square in which we pitted Mozart against Richard Blackford – or perhaps it should be the other way around... Mozart's ideal 'Coronation' Mass, to the point, tuneful, dramatic, reflective, and with that fabulous soprano solo in the Agnus Dei. One of his best to my thinking. The orchestra then played Mozart's Divertimento in F – beautifully. That was a real pleasure to direct. Then came Richard Blackford's 'The Mirror of Perfection'. This was a real discovery and everyone enjoyed it including the composer. He was thrilled with the performance. How good it is to perform contemporary works which really get to the heart of the text, are not indulgent orchestra-wise, and which the audience immediately relates to. I hope I will have another opportunity of performing this work. You sang it extremely well.

Our Christmas concert was a break with tradition as it followed a format created by Ian Tindale where solo songs were substituted for readings. A very happy development. It was a lovely evening and the soprano Katherine Crompton sang a selection of suitable songs for the season amidst the choral numbers. You did well in this concert too. As always there was very limited time for rehearsal following the previous concert.

Then, in January came my highlight of the season as we responded to Bob Porter's invitation to sing a Bach programme at St. Martin-in-the-Fields. The headline work was the Magnificat, but the show-stopper was Bach's Cantata 21 'Ich hatte viel Bekummerniss'. Everything transpired to make this a voyage of real discovery. The orchestra was fabulous and really responded quickly to ideas and you sang really well. The whole was truly memorable.

Our Lenten offering was at St. Margaret's, Westminster and included a variety of shorter pieces including John Sanders's beautiful Reproaches. The second half was taken by the Durufle Requiem, a perennial favourite, which you sang with passion. This was a concert when some weaknesses showed themselves in blend and balance of parts despite being essentially a successful evening.

Then, lastly, we gave the concert last week – a programme of lovely English music which seemed to fire everyone up. It was full of contrasts and you really rose to the occasion. It was a lovely way to take my final bow with you. It was a wonderful gesture to encore my piece with Ian conducting and those opening words changed! It was lovely just to sit and enjoy it as you sang it so beautifully. Thank you so much.

This really is not the occasion for me to reflect further or look forward as you now move on to work with Jo Tomlinson whose approach will be very different, as will her emphases. I hope with all my heart that she finds ways of

recruiting new singers and of continuing to help you to make the very best of yourselves. It is an exciting time for the choir and I will look forward to watching your progress and coming to what concerts I can. The choir has been a central part of my life for a very long time and it is only natural that I should want you to succeed and to grow in all ways in the coming years. I wish Jo all very best of luck (and judgement!) with that.

Finally, I want to thank all the past Chairmen of the choir with whom I have worked: Heather Atkinson, Sam Foley, Graham Hand and Jonathan Williams. All have brought their own individual strengths to bear on the choir. We have had wonderful treasurers in Ken Holmes and Patrick Haighton, and a succession of excellent secretaries. Many other do great things for the choir some of which involve a great deal of work and I want to pay tribute to all of them. Without them the choir would not function.

Finally, a word of amazement at our extraordinary roll call of accompanists over my time: Richard Pearce, Iain Farrington, Paul Plummer and, best of all, Ian Tindale. I can't say how important these people have been in our development. Accompanying is such a skill and each one of these pianists/organists has brought exemplary musicianship and keyboard skills to our rehearsals and performances. Ian, though, has really related to us, been incredibly helpful both as a person and a player, and by his musicality has raised our game beyond what it might otherwise have been. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude and I will miss working with him very much.

So, thank you all for everything you have meant to me over these past 17 years and 'Go forth and prosper'!