Whitehall Choir 2026 AGM
Music Director's report – Joanna Tomlinson

Each year I say that the choir is sounding better than the last, but I certainly feel we've made another big step forward this season. We have recruited some superb singers this year. Being in a position where we have a waiting list means that we have been able to balance the choir better, filling spaces in sections where needed, which has really enhanced our sound. At the 3-yearly re-auditions, which fell in February, it was wonderful to hear such excellent singing from our members. In general, the choir is now singing with excellent tuning, a vibrant and beautiful sound and able to get a huge amount of detail into performances. The choir looks much more engaged and professional on stage.

The first event of the season was a recording day in early November. Having given a rare performance of Isabella Leonarda's *Dixit Dominus* last season, it was very special to make the first recording of this piece. The more we can continue to shout about this recording the better - recordings are vital to help pieces of music get into the choral repertory and for more choirs to start performing it. Likewise for the first recording we made that day of Michael Higgins' *When Music Sounds* which was commissioned for us and now, I gather, will be published by OUP next year.

Our first concert of the year was later in November - a Venice-inspired performance including works by Gabrieli and Schutz. This was quite a challenging programme, including pieces for smaller ensembles by composers such as Lucretia Ortsina Vizzana and I felt that this challenge really helped choir members to think about the detail and variety that they could find in their singing.

Christmas was a joyful concert as ever, with notable solos in *O Holy Night* and Cornelius' *Three Kings*, which I still hear comments about!

Our 2026 started with a bang, in an extremely well attended Come and SIng Verdi *Requiem*. I appreciate what a huge amount of organisation goes into these days, and all the work every member of the choir puts in, but it was so well received and will have enhanced our reputation as a choir and put a bit of money in the pot! Again it was amazing to see that we had soloists from amongst the choir who could perform sections of this, which was so impressive to our visitors.

The concert performance of Verdi *Requiem* followed in March. This kind of large Romantic repertoire is not something that the choir performs often and it was exciting to see how quickly they managed to develop their sound to suit this repertoire, with luxurious, vibrant and supported singing. It was an excellent and memorable performance, in the arrangement for two pianos, organ and percussion by Richard Blackford. This reduced orchestration allowed space for so much detail in the phrasing, articulation and text. We were supported by tremendous professional players and soloists.

This summer term, we have been working on Russell Hepplewhite's *Living Voices*, a set of 10 songs with newly commissioned poems by top poets and we gave the first performance of the full set of songs on an extremely hot June day. It has been great to work alongside the composer, and to meet some of the poets at our concert. The performance was outstanding, and pretty extraordinary that it still had a huge energy and rock solid tuning, given the heat.
The final event of the year is a recording weekend of these songs, and Whitehall Choir's first release on a professional record label. There is a fabulous party planned at the end of the recording sessions, to celebrate the wonderful work everyone has done this year.

This has been a great year to showcase our brilliant accompanist Ian Tindale, particularly in the Verdi and Hepplewhite and as ever I'm hugely grateful to have such an outstanding musician alongside me.

A year like this with two recording projects and a *Come and SIng*, in addition to our usual concerts puts an extra strain on our brilliant committee. We owe these amazing volunteers such huge thanks for the care and love they put into everything they do. I hope choir members will take a chance to thank each one of them individually for all they do for us.