



AGM - 27th September 2022 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

What a pleasure it is to be reporting on a relatively normal year, after the disruption of the previous 2 seasons. I do believe 2021-22 was a very successful year again for Royston Choral Society.

Of course, there are many different ways of defining and measuring success. Given that there were so many unknowns as we came out of the Covid pandemic I think it is appropriate to concentrate on:

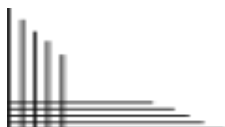
- The fact our members were happy to come back to in-person rehearsals in good numbers
- We put on 3 musically very good concerts
- We had reasonable audiences at all our concerts despite the nervousness that many people still feel about going to crowded venues.

Looking at these further, rehearsals were difficult at the start of the year. The committee took the sensible decision to begin the season with reduced numbers at rehearsals by having singers on alternate weeks. This allowed us to keep some reasonable physical separation in the Methodist Church. However, it became apparent pretty quickly that this was not sustainable and so we were lucky to be able to move to the much larger hall at Bassingbourn Village College. This has generally worked well with the easier parking being appreciated by many, but the fact it is outside Royston has been a shame in some respects. What was really pleasing throughout the year though is how well our singing numbers have held up.

When I look at the music we have performed this year, what really sticks out for me is the variety. We played it safe at the first concert with part 1 of Messiah, coupled with Haydn's *Little Organ Mass*, but it proved just the right combination of wonderfully tuneful and memorable melodies to help our voices get back into singing.

What has undoubtedly helped our rehearsals throughout the year is the presence of Michael Smith now as our permanent accompanist. To some extent it was a brave move to take on the additional expense in an uncertain year, but it has certainly paid off. It has allowed Andrew to concentrate more fully on the sound we are producing and of course also means on those weeks Andrew is unable to attend we have someone ready and primed to take the rehearsal. It was just a shame that because of a previous commitment Michael was unable to play the organ (in his own church) for the first concert. Besides Robin Walker, who played the organ, we were joined by a lovely quartet of soloists (including our own Ann Hoptroff) and a fine group of string players.

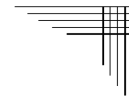
Our concert with orchestra followed in March when we returned to St Mary's in Ashwell for a performance of Mozart's Requiem, combined with anthems by Mozart, Brahms and Mendelssohn. It is a challenge from a logistics perspective to put on a concert in Ashwell because of the amount of furniture moving involved (and its weight). However, the resulting space and the acoustics do make it all worthwhile (as long as we don't do it too frequently!). Some of us performed the same work with Haileybury choirs a couple of days earlier at Haileybury. This, and the fact many of the first-rate orchestral players were the same, helped make for a really polished performance which everyone was justifiably proud of.



Royston Choral Society

Charity number 1090459

www.roystonchoralsoc.org.uk



Showing our flexibility and the variety of music we sing, the main work in the summer concert, at Holy Trinity, Chrishall, was Will Todd's *Mass in Blue*. This was a work that a few members of the choir already knew, and that a significant number viewed with great suspicion right up to the final rehearsal. On the day though, it really did all come together with the help of the wonderful jazz trio and excellent soprano soloist. The performance was a triumph and justifiably received a very positive response from the audience. The singers had all put in a lot of work which paid off. We arguably did ourselves slightly less proud in the first half of the concert when movements from Rutter's *Sprig of Thyme* and a few part songs felt a little under-rehearsed because of the need to spend time on the Todd.

So then a word about our audiences. At all the concerts they were never embarrassing and at least reasonable. However, at none of them did we fill the church. Being without a base for our concerts for the last 4 years I think has certainly made it harder to have a regular audience. The pandemic has also made it harder. However, as we hopefully move back to performing regularly at St John's in Royston (re-)building a loyal audience base needs to be the priority. We all need to do our bit towards that. If every singing member sold 3 tickets for each concert I could (and would) stop nagging everyone about selling tickets. In fact, if everybody sold 2 tickets for each concert, with other sales, I would probably also do so. Think about it.....

Talking of St John's the committee has continued to follow the progress of the restoration work following the fire in December 2018. We had thought we would be back there early in 2022. In the event it looks as though our Christmas concert will be one of the first events back in the building and even then we are taking the precaution of having a back-up venue in case the reopening is further delayed.

I mentioned earlier how good it was this season to have a permanent accompanist. The committee has also benefited greatly from having a secretary again. Sue, thank you very much for taking this on while still continuing with your alto part-rep responsibilities. It has made such a difference and made my life in particular much easier.

The other members of your committee also deserve your thanks for their on-going hard work and successes (most of it behind the scenes) but I would particularly highlight:

- Grant applications (Carole)
- Newsletters and other regular information to supporters (a lot of this information is produced by a good number of the choir but Chris deserves the thanks for arm twisting)
- Social evening on the Heath (Fay and Heather)
- Poster design (Penny)

Finally though I want to remind you all what a huge debt we owe to Caroline. The competent and understated way in which she keeps our finances and charity returns in order, not to mention the provision of all the music for our concerts, is hugely valuable. I will leave it to her to give the full picture around the accounts. We always knew this was going to be a tricky year but even though we suspected audience numbers would be down we felt it was important to come back with a statement - hence the ambitious programme and the commitment to booking high quality musicians to support us. But it all worked - and for that credit and thanks is due to us all.

