

AGM - 29th September 2026 Report from chair - Huw Jenkins

We should all congratulate ourselves on another very successful season - musically, financially and socially - for Royston Choral Society. It is the result of everybody 'mucking in' and helping out in whatever way they can. The most visible jobs are not always the most valuable. Week by week at rehearsals we should all be grateful to Jenny Gilson for ensuring milk, biscuits, tea and coffee are available for the willing makers to serve. Julie does a great job keeping the 100 club going which raises useful funds for the benefit of us all - but wouldn't it be wonderful if it actually had 100 members? If you are not currently a member, please do think of joining and help to support the society financially. And then there is Melanie with the unenviable task immediately after each concert of sorting and returning all the scores. No mean task - particularly after a concert like our summer one with a myriad of different pieces of music - but wonderfully handled. Thank you all!

The 2025-26 season was Andrew's 11th season as our musical director, so included a mixture of works we have done with him before and some new ones. All the concerts were chosen around a theme of *Journeys by Sea and in Spirit*.

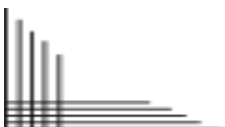
Our first concert of the season, on November 15th, included Britten's cantata *St Nicolas*. We are fortunate that, given Andrew's position at St Edmund's, we had instant access to a wonderful trio of 'pickled boys' and David Webb once again joined us singing the part of Nicolas - a part he really 'got into' singing with real passion and power.

The whole tone for the evening was set by Thomas Hipkin's exquisite playing in the Finzi Eclogue. The string playing accompanying him (and indeed throughout the evening) was I am pretty sure the best we have ever had. It was lovely to have Emily Groom (who has helped with our orchestra fixing for a number of years) leading the players and contributing some virtuosic solos in the Britten. Anja's solos in Celia MacDowall's *Ave maris stella* were just beautiful - so pure and assured - well done. As a society we are very fortunate to have a number of excellent voices in each voice who can be called on to sing such smaller solo parts. Our pianists in the Britten were also excellent and along with the variety of percussion instruments really made Britten's word painting come to life.

The success of the non-musical aspects of a concert day are very much down to the concert managers. This year brought a new pairing of Pauline and Tracy and there were various aspects of this concert which made it a real baptism of fire, but they rose to the occasion magnificently.

Ticket sales were not quite where we had hoped. However, the audience was respectable. We do though I think sometimes lack confidence in ticket selling for less well known works. We probably shouldn't - Andrew is very good at judging what we are capable of and encouraging us to perform on the day. A good example of that was in the final rehearsal of the MacDowall when there were a number of sections which, in his shoes, I would have made us do again (and again?!). However, he knew better, and we did indeed 'get it right on the night'. Let's remember that when encouraging friends and family to come to our concerts.

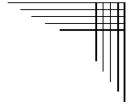
The Christmas concert was well attended as ever. The usual mix of audience and choir carols interspersed again with some Christmas poems and stunning organ solos from Jonathan (including Thomas Trotter's arrangement of *Sleigh Ride*). The enormous and iconic Christmas tree that decorates St John's church each year contributed to the festive atmosphere.



Royston Choral Society

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Concert day at Christmas is often a bit of a roller-coaster when holes appear in the helper schedule because of various lurgies but it was all covered in the end.

The centre piece of the March concert was the *German Requiem* of Brahms. Andrew had included this in his very first concert with the society (in the composer's piano duet version) and it was great to return to it again - this time in the full orchestral version. The Brahms was combined with *Songs of the Sea* by Stanford and *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen* from the *Rückert-Lieder* cycle of Mahler.

We were blessed with the most wonderful pair of soloists. They were outstanding in the Brahms, but Gareth Brynmor John completely transformed the Stanford (for me at least) telling the story so well. Similarly Nina Bennett's singing of the Mahler was so controlled it made it absolutely sublime. Our excellent orchestral players were led again by Emily Groom and the concert was sold out.

We brought our season of "Journeys by Sea & in Spirit" to a close in June with a variety of English composer classics. At its heart was Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, in an arrangement for SATB suggested by Jonathan. A sweeping voyage through wonder, danger and desire, which I thoroughly enjoyed since I will never get to perform it in its original solo form! We also sang an arrangement of John Ireland's *Sea Fever* a setting of Masfield's well known poem that captures the irresistible longing for a return to a seafaring life. Parry's exultant *Blest Pair of Sirens*, Britten's *Jubilate* and works by Howells completed the programme, with two virtuoso solos from Jonathan.

The street food festival nearly took us by surprise and had it not been for sharp-eyed SueP we might not have managed to get the staging to the church. As it was, the team that responded, at no notice, early on Saturday did a great job. A huge vote of thanks to Tom Wornham for the use of his muscles and trailer on concert days, which this season even included a concert that he was unable to personally take part in. The day also ended with some minor drama when the police were called to the cemetery chapel after a report of "people in black trying to break in", as we were returning the staging. We weren't arrested fortunately but I did regret afterwards that we didn't break into a rendition of *The Policeman's Lot* from *The Pirates of Penzance*.

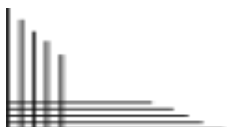
Musically, our success is very much down to our wonderful musical leaders. Thank you so much, Andrew and Jonathan, for your skills, patience and good humour which means we all leave St John's at the end of a Tuesday rehearsal humming a good tune and feeling better about ourselves and the world.

Besides the concerts we enjoyed a couple of very pleasant social evenings during the year. The winter one in particular was very well attended, the summer one slightly less so but it was still a lovely and enjoyable evening. We have put the expected dates of social evenings for this year in the newsletter to give you all plenty of notice in case that was the problem. If you have never been, do consider trying one - Fay organises great events and generally puts together a very entertaining quiz.

I will finish this report with a paragraph taken verbatim from last year's. You will have read in the summer newsletter about our desire to appoint a publicity officer to the committee. Could you be that person or do you know someone that could? Increasing the volume as well as improving the format and style of media used in our publicity I believe is essential to ensure our on-going success.

To another successful year

Huw



Fine music, made locally