

We've had an amazing year. Just 12 months ago many of us were on tour in the Netherlands!

In our formal season our singing has gone from strength to strength. We sang *The Dream of Gerontius* in November and what a thrilling performance that was. Wonderful soloists and a stunning location. There is something ritualistic or special about this work – partly the subject matter, partly due to the lack of any gaps in each half but primarily due I think to the intensity of the music. Many people commented how much they enjoyed being part of the complete performance and how the choral music made much more sense in context. The performance was confident and full of colour with excellent commitment from the chorus in particular.

The Christmas concert was hugely successful (our Treasurer in particular liked this!) and full of energy and fun. A wonderful debut by Zoe and the Minpins (no that's not a pop group we are founding!) made this event a particularly special occasion. We sang some fun music and were accompanied by Peter Holder from St Paul's Cathedral.

The Creation was a delightful event- a sunny Gloucester cathedral, a sunny composer and a terrific trio of soloists. Haydn's colourful and witty score was a sheer joy throughout and the chorus sang with vigour and energy.

We then had a brief departure from our regular season – Swansea 2015! We performed Faure's Requiem and a miscellaneous programme in the second half including music in 6 different languages (including Welsh you'll all remember!). This was the second time in recent years that we've journeyed beyond Gloucestershire to perform – previously we had sung Choral Evensong in Bristol Cathedral in July 2013. We sang to raise money for the Lord Mayor Swansea's Charity and I'm grateful to you for helping to make this a memorable occasion.

I believe that it would be good for the choir's development and continued success for us to perform one or two smaller scale events such as this each year. We are looking into venues for the spring and summer of 2016 and will let you know when we have more information. Most choral societies generally start the term with an unknown work and then gradually improve and perform a work, then move onto the next work. The Christmas concert and these smaller scale events will give us a chance to recycle repertoire and come back to works we already know – it is always lovely to come back to an 'old friend' again having encountered a new work in the meantime. It is also true that the more often the choir performs the better it will become. Obviously there is a balance to be struck and we wouldn't expect to perform every month, but the more 'match practice' you get the better you become. I'm sure these smaller events have contributed in

a small way to the improved confidence and musical standard we are witnessing in SCS. Miscellaneuous concerts also have their own balance and sense of satisfaction as there's something for everyone. The range of styles required of the choir is more challenging as for instance we could work on Renaissance or baroque works more frequently. As I've mentioned before, if any members have contacts where the choir might be welcome to sing in future, especially 1 -2 hours away from Stroud please do let someone on the committee know.

The June Rossini concert was boring and pretty routine... Well it wasn't! but amongst all the excitement (some of it musical) was the impressive observation that the one definite thing that I wasn't worried about was the singing of the chorus. Despite many wobbles in the rehearsal from the piano the choir sang with confidence and solid rhythm. It's amazing how easy a slight uncertainty can undermine one's sense of musical certainty, but I can honestly say that the chorus's response throughout the afternoon and evening was 100% . It was a stressful few hours, but Emma Brain -Gabbott (who is joining us as our vocal coach on January 30th) and Simon and Ed were terrific colleagues to have, they remained calm and flexible in the midst of all the chaos!

November 2015

Can you remember how difficult we found Rossini's 'Cum sancto spiritu' in the first rehearsal just after the Swansea concert? Walton's Belshazzar's Feast is a step up from Elgar's Dream of Gerontius. You need to get into a rhythmic groove – it's like singing the Devils chorus throughout in terms of rhythmic energy and punch required. About half of the choir attended the Singing Day in early July and we managed to just learn just over a half of the Elgar Music Makers (the first half) and about the same amount of the Walton. We will

also be performing Holst's Hymn of Jesus.

Some tips for helping with these exciting but challenging works

- Try and consider the music in 3 separate forms: rhythm (with words), pitch, shape/dynamics
- Try saying the words in rhythm and especially identifying the most awkward moments
- You'll often find one tricky moment is either counting a longer note or some quicker/quirky rhythms (often syncopated).

- Finding your first note: identify where your note is played or sung elsewhere

- If you find some tricky intervals then often you can look for a note you sang earlier in that phrase and try and remember that pitch. A longer note or the first note of a phrase is often memorable several bars later

- Dynamics: these are 110% part of the music so try and reading the text with this in

Belshazzar's Feast is a famous and iconic work which you'll enjoy. It is full of energy and dazzling colour. The Music Makers is a warm and romantic work, partly a review of Elgar's life and musical output (there are several short quotes from other works). The Holst Hymn of Jesus, not terribly well known is a really beautiful and atmospheric work which I've wanted to perform for many years. It begins hauntingly with some plainsong melodies. If you know The Planets you will recognise several moments in this lovely work. Bath Abbey Girls Choir will be joining us for this performance as the semi-chorus in the Holst – my daughter will be amongst them and I'm looking forward to hearing from her how I can improve....

March 2016

The Pelicantata is moving along nicely. I've had some few sneak previews from the composer and I'm sure it is going to be fun and full of character. It would be great to maximise our publicity from this landmark event – any contacts you have in the press/local radio/TV please pass onto the committee. Peter Ash is an engaging musician and he will be visiting us to discuss the work and help us with some performance tips too hopefully. We will be performing this in 2 versions: with orchestra in Bath Abbey on March 5th with The Melody Makers and again on June 26th in

Stroud – venue tbc. We have changed the remainder of the programme for this concert. Now instead of performing Schubert's Mass in G & Magnificat we are performing all 4 of Handel's Coronation Anthems. Most of you will know "Zadok the priest", but we will also do "Let thy hand be strengthened" (sung in 2011) and "The king shall rejoice" and "My heart is inviting". They are a jolly and elegant suite of pieces.

We have a few opportunities for people to brush up on their singing techniques – particularly working on sight-reading and vocal technique. There will be 2 sight-reading sessions before the regular Mondays on September 28th and October 5th as an experiment to see what form these classes could take in future. From

7.00-7.20 on both Mondays in the classroom next to the main rehearsal room at Marling. Then in January (30th 10-1) Emma Brain-Gabbott will be will be joining us for a vocal refresher day to help us work on singing technique with extended warm ups and vocal tips! Those of you who don't know her, she is a fantastic singer and a lively and fun person and I'm sure it will be an enjoyable day.

I hope you all have a wonderful summer. I must close by thanking the committee for their excellent work, especially Molly this past 6 months as acting chair. Also too we need to congratulate Zoe on her dazzling work as musical director and founder of The Minpins. As well as the other committee members there are many others who volunteer with ticket sales, poster and programme production etc. Without these very cheerful and hard working volunteers this choir would be much less enjoyable and successful. We owe them a great tribute and vote of thanks. We welcome back our glorious leader from his 6 months learning new strategies from North Korea (joke!), great to have you back Brough. Thanks to Simon for his wonderful work at the keyboard, it is a subtle but huge source of leadership and direction for the choir having him there confidently at the piano on a weekly basis. Finally, thanks to you for turning out week after week and giving of your time and musical skills!