

Choir report 2019/20

First of all I'd like to thank all choir members for your support and hard work during the past year.

I like to think we work as a team and we train on Tuesday evenings at 7.45pm each week. I think you will all appreciate that in order to progress we need to maintain a regular attendance and occasionally be prepared to do some extra work at home if needed.

We are not bashing for the summer concert at the moment and this can be quite frustrating as one part has to sit and listen while another part goes through notes. You will especially need rehearsal pencils as it means I do not have to keep repeating things if copies are marked up as we go along.

Once a month I would like to continue to do some rehearsal work with the tenors and basses. This will be the last Tuesday in the month and ladies may go home at 9.30pm. Hopefully this will help to give the men more confidence when we are preparing for concerts.

As a group we often share happy and sad moments. We were sorry to lose treasurer Geof and Terry, who both moved away. I think it must be something in the air with three of our members – Jackie, Carol and John all celebrating nuptials in various ways this year. Ron – quite a few of you will remember him, is still going strong with the help of regular blood transfusions and is now well into his 90s. Little Geoff always takes a CD to him after our concerts.

We have been delighted to see new members joining us during the past year, in both ladies and men's sections of the choir.

I feel and I hope you do too, that we continue to improve and our aim should be to try and go up a notch each time we give a performance. Looking back on last Summer's concerts, I thought Summertime went especially well. It's a tricky arrangement and I remember when we sang it previously in 2015, I wondered if we would get it up to performance standard. We did of course, but it was a lot easier to prepare last summer and I feel we are tackling new music with more confidence now.

The Christmas concerts again presented a challenge, with just 12 rehearsals for preparation and I do sympathise with those of you who learn by rote and have to work extra hard learning your notes. I felt the audiences really enjoyed participating in the '12 days of Christmas' (Janet's suggestion) and our a cappella singing continued to improve with the two carols – 'Ding dong merrily' and the 'Coventry carol'. Again the brass group added a Christmas feel to the concerts and they enjoyed hearing you sing. The audience attendance at All Saints was just amazing. I don't think there were many spare seats. There certainly were not many mince pies to be purchased in the area after we had mopped up all local supplies. I had wondered how we would do audience-wise, bearing in mind the competition on the television.

The Brian Goldspink Christmas Award to the Havering Talking Newspaper proved a very popular choice and it was good that Gwyn's daughter was able to come and receive the award and we were delighted with the thank you note Jackie received.

We have already made a good dent in working on the summer music. I'm pleased to hear, from a number of comments, that you are happy with the selection of songs. I will continue to try and include your suggestions for songs in programmes whenever possible.

Building a programme is not an easy or quick thing to do. I'm lucky that with Wendy being so efficient, I am kept accurately up to date with songs performed and on which dates. I usually leave a song for three years before considering it back on a programme.

I start by going through Wendy's list and select suitable songs unsung for three years and make a list. I know I have to aim at 18 songs in six groups of three, plus an encore. I then also look at the list in the back of my diary where I note suggestions from yourselves and add anything that might fit in the programme to this list.

I'm sure you will agree that variety is an important part of our programmes and so I need to look for fast and slow material, happy and sad material etc. And it all needs to balance and have audience appeal.

Unfortunately some of the songs that have been suggested in the past have not been possible to sing as arrangements that suit us are not always on hand and sometimes, as was the case with one song for the summer concert – we could not get a backing track and a piano accompaniment would not have been suitable.

We need a strong, lively fast tempo song to start the concert and something positive to end with. We need songs that will challenge those of you who read music, but still include songs for those of you who learn by rote.

Once I have a programme roughed out I walk away from it and leave it for a few days and then go back and inevitably will make a few changes.

The Christmas programme is now completed and I have tried to bear in mind that we prepare for this in just one term. Even so, there will be some new music. So you will find we have a few very simple but effective songs for the concerts and some audience participation again as that seems to go down well. We shall again sing some carols a cappella and this year I have included a chorus from Handel's Messiah – 'And the glory of the Lord'. I found an arrangement for SAB that I thought would suit us well. Some of you asked for 'White Christmas', so that is in and 'O Holy Night' as that always proves to be very popular.

I would like to thank the committee for their help this year. Behind the scenes a lot of work goes on as I am sure you realise. There is publicity, tech work, tea making, booking venues, a mountain of music to get out and put back twice a year and all this is done with care and commitment. It really makes my job very easy, and so a big thank you to members of the committee. A special thanks to Jackie, who has always said her job as chairperson is an easy one as she doesn't have much to do. However, she has been very good at keeping us all in order, and has done much to improve our concert department, and has sorted out problems quietly and efficiently without upsetting anyone. So, thank you Jackie. We're pleased we are not losing you and that you will still be singing in the 2nd sops. Welcome to whoever joins us as chair on the committee. We shall look forward to working with you.

There's is much to be done, so keep up the regular attendance and I am sure the choir will go from strength to strength this year.