** Chairmans Report May 26th 2020**

Of all the events I might have anticipated happening between March 14th and May 26th 2020 COVID -19 and the country in total ‘lockdown’ wasn’t one of them! The eight weeks since the start of ‘lockdown’ have been strange for everyone and desperately sad for so many. For those of us lucky enough to have remained healthy it is certainly a test of our IT skills, patience and ingenuity.

For my final report as Chairman of ICS I want to begin by saying a huge thank you to our committee. We are really fortunate to have committee members who are dedicated to and work hard for the choir. In doing so they promote, develop and enhance the life of the choir and its membership. Individuals within the committee bring many skills and much creativity to the meetings. Thinking back to the start of my time as chair, the dedication of our committee was never more clearly demonstrated than when we needed to recruit a new Music Director. At this time, in addition to regular committee meetings, committee met for weekend workshop sessions in order to identify the requirements of the choir, and construct the process necessary to find the best person. I wish to give my personal thanks to them all for their support … and patience over the last six years.

My thanks must also go to Robin, for his generous support of my role, and for his teaching skills and sense of humour which have enriched our weekly rehearsals since he joined us in 2016. There is no doubt that the feedback we have received from our audiences is evidence of the improvement Robin has made to our level of performance, and ability to embrace a wider range of musical styles.

Looking back over the last twelve months there is so much to celebrate - the trip to Italy in May 2019 was without doubt a great success, and our a cappella performances were fully appreciated by our generous hosts and audiences. It takes a good deal of skill (and courage) to sing well without accompaniment, and I believe we grew in ability and confidence with every concert we performed.

Our ‘Homecoming Concert, as Robin has said, was an excellent way of making sure the whole choir could enjoy the Italy programme, and our ‘home grown’ soloists for the Vivaldi Gloria helped to showcase our talented membership.

The October singing/movement workshop with Robin and Mary wasn’t to everyone’s taste, but as we had already learned from working with Mary before, the way we move and how we present ourselves on stage is an essential part of the high standards we set out to achieve. I am always impressed by the way in which ICS members open their minds to learning new techniques.

Chorus! Well, what a great event that was. The programme was a stretch for us to begin with and certainly taught us new ways of singing, and I’m sure I‘m not alone in appreciating the way in which Daniel Law and Claire Weston made the event all the more enjoyable for the choir. In terms of programme popularity our audience figures for that concert says it all.

For our Christmas Family and Friends concert, choir members pulled out all the stops and catered for the party as well as delighting the audience with the programme! I thank every member who took part in the event and who gave generously to the party table afterwards ….what a team!

And so to January 2020, all was going well in the rehearsals for the Verdi Requiem with The Royal Hospital School, and arrangements for our workshop for April until the COVID-19 pandemic struck! It has been a dreadfully sad time, for many and for us as a singing community. I know how much we are all missing our Tuesday evenings together. That being said, the lockdown will not last forever and so Committee continues to meet (via Zoom). Together with Robin, in addition to developing events for our anniversary year, committee is planning options for when we are able to meet again and sing together. So, however you do it, keep your voices in fine fettle so that when we receive our ‘Get out of Jail free’ cards, the choir can re-establish itself as quickly as possible.

Challenges for an ‘open’ choir: Ipswich Choral Society is known for its friendliness and acceptance. Our status as an open choir creates opportunities for singers of any ability and style to be a part of the group and to enjoy the time spent developing their singing skills. On occasion this can create challenges, but as we have all been helped in some way and supported over the years by the ICS membership, I feel sure the warm and welcoming nature of ICS will continue to be a core value for all of us long into the future.

A great deal of change has happened to our lives as a result of COVID-19, but for ICS the same old challenges remain – keeping up standards of performance, developing our singing skills further and of course … ticket sales!

On the point of fundraising – this is always an essential part of maintaining the choir and securing its future. Now, more than ever, we need every choir member to be actively involved in raising funds so that a really exciting anniversary year of singing can be created. Thank you to those who have already been finding ways of raising funds, in particular to June Catling our Social Secretary. June has been a loyal supporter and fund raiser for ICS for many, many years, during which time June has donated thousands of pounds each year from her hard work. We thank June for her commitment, time and … and of course for her baking skills.

Singing together into the future? In spite of the current uncertainty, there is much to look forward to as we build up to 2024 and beyond. Plans for events are going ahead and, as ever, committee will welcome ideas and suggestions for programmes.

To finish, I want to say thank you to you all for the support you have given me as Chairman during the last six years, and I know that whoever becomes the Chair on 26th May will enjoy working alongside you all as much as I have done.

Christine Pearce

Chairman