**Ipswich Choral Society**

AGM, May 2020 – Music Director’s Report

The last twelve months have been a time of continuing musical growth and development. From my viewpoint I feel the choir is becoming more confident in its ability. I feel that we are now able to maintain a higher standard for longer, and with more certainty than we have before: rather than short moments of inspiration there is now the ability to reproduce the quality of sound and ensemble which we want to achieve, and that will continue to develop.

We have welcomed a good few new members to the choir this year, and I hope we can continue to be a welcoming and happy group, and that we can continue to grow steadily towards my aim of a choir of 100 regular members by the time we celebrate 200 years.

**Concerts this past season**

**Summer 2019 Italy tour/home concert and music day**

In preparing a completely a cappella programme for the tour to Italy we took on a big challenge – and made a great success of it. Singing programmes with lots of shorter pieces rather than a single large oratorio, does put a bigger pressure on preparation and is a bigger test of a group, especially when it is also without accompaniment. It was a great achievement to do this – taking the programme on tour and then to give the programme again at home (with the whole choir together again).

It was a great pleasure for me to conduct the singers on the tour – and to be able not only to enjoy the amazing scenery, food and wine – but also to be able to give really good concerts with you all in some stunning surroundings. Thanks to those who organised the trip, and thanks to all the singers who were willing and happy to rehearse in the dining room for an extra hour each morning to be sure we would do a good job in our concerts!

We gave our ‘homecoming’ concert with the addition then of the Vivaldi Gloria, and I give my congratulations to our excellent soloists from the choir. Thank you to everyone who put themselves forward to audition for solos in this piece – I hope we will have future opportunities to showcase the many talented singers we have in our group again before too long. If you weren’t brave enough to audition last time then do pluck up the courage to sing to me next time there is a chance.

**Follow-up singing and movement workshop with Mary in October 2019**

This afternoon workshop with Mary and some of the dancers we worked with for Ipswich Remembers was a great way to refresh and continue the work we started with Mary last year. It was a precious opportunity to build on our stage skills, and our confidence singing without music and whilst moving. The work we did in this session really showed in our concert performance in November – in the sound we made, but perhaps even more exciting for me, in the way we handled ourselves on stage. You all looked ‘at home’ on the concert platform, relaxed and ready to go, and that was a large factor in what a good evening it was.

**November 2019 Chorus!**

With Claire Weston and Daniel Law

What a great evening this was. All the hard work in preparation paid off with a superb evening concert – sung to a packed house. It was great to sing so many famous pieces from the stage repertoire, and to sing from memory show songs too. Singing for a full house is so exciting, and also important for our ongoing finances, so let’s not forget what a buzz it was, and let’s work hard to keep that memory fresh and get out and push tickets for our next concert!

**Christmas Family and Friends December 2019**

This was our third Family and Friends event, and I think our most successful to date musically. The small groups which came together to sing items were superb, again showcasing the strength in depth in the choir, and the group items were great fun – and importantly performed to a high standard too.

**Into 2020**

In January we began (early) Verdi Requiem preparation which went very well. With the long preparation time for this concert my focus was not just on learning the notes, but on developing vocal technique, fitness and strength. I hope people felt I had found a reasonable balance for rehearsal time, and that weekly rehearsals were enjoyable and challenging enough to keep everyone interested. I aim keen to keep as many people happy as possible in terms of the level of music-making we can do, and the level I pitch rehearsals. Please keep your feedback coming.

**Interruption due to Covid-19**

The cancelling of Stainer Crucifixion Come & Sing, and then postponement of Verdi Requiem have been our most immediate and disappointing aspects of the current Covid-19 pandemic. It’s been strange to put things on hold and have to wait and see when we are able to gather together again for rehearsals and to perform. Thanks to the energy and positivity of the committee we have been able to make plans so that we can be up and running as soon as we are allowed, and plans are in place for concerts into the future. It’s particularly great that after all the hard work we have done this year on the piece that we have a date for next June for the Verdi, and that our soloists have confirmed they can sing for us on that date.

**Thanks**

I wish to thank the committee as ever for all the amazing work they do to make the choir function so well, and to every singer for the gifts they bring to the group. I do want to offer particular thanks to Chris as she prepares to step down from her time leading the choir. Chris has made a long-lasting and exceptional commitment to the life and success of ICS, and has been a support, encourager (and as necessary given me the occasional push…), and a real motor for the choir. I’m looking forward to working with Phil as he takes up his new role.

Until we meet again,

Robin

6th May 2020