



Newsletter

December 2020

Chairman

Christmas is almost upon us again. In some ways it's the same as any other. Bromyard's Christmas Lights are as magnificent as ever (do come and see them if you are able). Once again, I was determined to get my Christmas cards written early. Once again, I didn't manage to do so; hope triumphing over experience. Once again, we have bought a Christmas tree that's a bit too big for our needs and have draped it with a surfeit of lights and baubles. But at this point the familiar pattern shifts. This year there will be no presents heaped around the tree ready for excited grandchildren on Christmas Day. For the first time since we had children, we will be spending Christmas on our own.

It's been an unforgettable Centenary Year hasn't it? A virus that none of us had heard of this time last year has disrupted our lives, forcing the cancellation of our Centenary concert and denying us the opportunity to meet as a choir since. At the outset there was widespread optimism that as long as we all buckled down "it will all be over by Christmas". But it isn't. The second wave of the pandemic doesn't seem to be receding as quickly as had been hoped. One consequence of this is that we're not able to hold our traditional annual carol concert in Malvern Priory that is for many of us a high point of our Christmas celebrations. And now we have had to make some very difficult decisions about our future activities. At our recent committee meeting it was decided that we should not proceed with our planned Easter concert because we could not guarantee that we would be able to rehearse for it adequately. We needed to take the decision now because to do otherwise would have exposed us to an unacceptable financial risk. Similarly, we felt we had to revise our plans for the proposed postponed Gala concert next summer. There is too much uncertainty about the evolution of the pandemic to risk putting on a programme involving several guest conductors and the premiere of a piece of

music. That said, we do still plan to stage a summer concert with a smaller programme that will require less orchestral support. We haven't finalised the programme yet but Jonathan is planning it around the theme of "love", which we hope will lift our spirits a bit!

We certainly need to have our spirits lifted at the moment. Christmas hasn't been cancelled, as some of the tabloids were suggesting. Christmas is here to be celebrated as fully as it is safe to do so. We might not be able to have our usual carol concert but thanks to the efforts of Jonathan and Penny many of us have had the pleasure of singing carols in our recent Zoom sessions. I know how much these have been appreciated and enjoyed. I'm enormously grateful to Jonathan and Penny for the expert and enthusiastic way they lead these and our other on-line rehearsals. Thanks are due to David Angus as well, who has deputised for Jonathan on occasions. The Zoom sessions have helped us to stay in touch with each other and to exercise our rusty vocal chords and are particularly welcome these dark December evenings.

We had hoped to capitalise on our recent Zoom sessions by singing some carols outside Malvern Priory. Unfortunately, the current rules are such that we were not allowed to sing as we had planned. We explored the possibility of singing inside the Priory but this proved to be impossible as well. As I write this, we are exploring the possibility of finding another suitable venue for those of us who would like to sing carols together. In my last newsletter piece, I mused about the appointment of a Risk Assessment Officer; our concert manager John Price has of course been carrying out Health and Safety assessments before each of our concerts and we're very grateful to him for taking on the onerous task of drawing up risk assessments as now required under the Covid 19 regulations. As I wrote in last month's newsletter there are several measures that can be taken to mitigate the risks of choral singing. I've taken part in three more on-line Making Music seminars since then to try to keep abreast of the ever changing advice and regulations. One session was all about ventilation, something I never imagined I would need to learn about! Something I did learn was that there are three sorts of breath particles that can carry the coronavirus: large droplets, which fall to the floor, aerosols which disperse and are swept out by good ventilation and pesky little in between particles that tend to hang around in the air. These are the ones we need to be really concerned about, apparently. Their spread is reduced by wearing a mask and their concentration is reduced by keeping singing sessions short - forty minutes was suggested as a maximum - and then venting the room completely for at least fifteen minutes.

I know that there are strong feelings about masks and that in many churches singers take them off to sing. The advice given by Making Music is unequivocal: they should be worn and there are masks specially designed for this purpose. I've noticed that

professional singers who sing together without masks tend to stand more than two metres apart.

Many risks of singing together can be mitigated but the one that can't is *anno domini*. Advancing age poses the greatest risk of all; whilst the chances of infection in a well regulated singing session or other communal setting are small, the consequences for older people can be serious. Each of us has to make a personal judgement about the activities we're comfortable with, particularly those held indoors.

The most recent Making Music seminar was about the plans choirs had for Christmas and it quickly became clear that all the participants shared similar concerns about the difficulty of planning events in a rapidly changing Covid environment. Everyone agreed though that their primary concern continues to make every effort to keep choirs going until things improve. Many, like us, are running on-line singing sessions and also social events such as quizzes. We plan to continue to offer a variety of events on Zoom until the current situation improves.

When will that be? For the first time since the pandemic started there is real hope on the horizon. The long-wished-for vaccines have now arrived, an astonishing scientific achievement. Let's hope that the vaccines are distributed quickly and that everyone who is at risk accepts the offer to receive them. This will help to reduce the prevalence of the virus but we must not let our guards down yet. We will still have to remain careful and vigilant for many months I believe. Even those who are immune to it can carry the virus on their hands and spread it to others.

I repeat something else I wrote in the last newsletter. We must stay positive! The shortening days will soon begin to lengthen again. We live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country and nature in all its glory is there for all of us to enjoy, for free. Many of us will find ways to celebrate Christmas joyfully, singing carols, attending church services, sharing time with family indoors or out. Perhaps raising a festive glass or two...

A very Happy Christmas to everyone and best wishes for the New Year. Let's hope for a better one than the last.

Kevin Ilsley

16 December 2020

Q: Why couldn't Mary & Joseph join their conference call?

A; Because there was no Zoom at the Inn

Q: What Christmas carol is sung in the desert?

A: O Camel, Ye Faithful

Musical Director

Dear All,

I hope that you remain safe and well. As I write, we have just had our final singing session of the term, and what an odd term it has been. I have been reflecting on it for some time, not least as I compare what we have been doing with what we have been doing at the College. It has been lovely to round off the term with some Christmas music - without our usual programme of Carol services and Christmas concerts, I have certainly missed this a lot, and the music is so special at this time of year.

We, like Kevin, have our Christmas tree and a whole host of decorations and lights up around the house, but ours will also not be a usual Christmas. One of our daughters has chosen not to come down from Dundee (the uncertainty of two different tiering systems was just too great a risk to take in trying to travel here and back), while we will be joined only by our other daughter which will be lovely. However, we would normally have 10-12 round the table on Christmas Day and this, clearly, won't happen. We also heard that my wife tested positive for Covid earlier this week and so we are having to self-isolate until December 23rd, putting paid to all the little bits and pieces that we needed to do! However, we count our blessings that her symptoms are mild and really only a minor inconvenience - nothing in comparison to what others have been through.

Clearly, it is not really possible for me to assess what we have managed to achieve this term as I have hardly heard a note! I say 'hardly' - there have been just a moment or two when the mute button wasn't activated, but what I did hear was lovely! However, the feedback that I have had has been undeniably positive, and I think that I have learnt a lot about how to run and execute the online rehearsals, not least in that, even when I am focusing on a particular voice part in note-learning, all voice parts can continue to sing, thanks to the mute button. To that end, you probably get a good deal more singing done than in the average hour when we rehearse live. It has also been increasingly clear that me singing with you when learning your own parts has been helpful, and it is these two things that I will continue to run with as and when we rehearse online. I should add that I am always looking to improve my *opus operandi* and if you have any suggestions as to other ideas that you have/have experience of (if you sing with other groups online for instance), then I would certainly welcome them. In the meantime, though, thank you to those of you who have joined us and persisted with this new way of working. I'm hoping that what you (and I) have temporarily lost in

the corporate experience in singing together, and the pleasure of all being together, you have gained in independent singing!

Kevin has alluded to our re-evaluation of our direction of travel in our programming after Christmas. At the most recent committee meeting, we had to look at our musical preparation for the Jenkins and Haydn as well as the concert itself. When I was proposing this programme for March, I was looking to put on a concert as normal as possible but with reduced costs - a smaller-than-usual orchestra, fewer soloists etc, and the chosen music reflected that. However, as the term progressed, it became increasingly clear that our ability to all meet together regularly after Christmas looked increasingly uncertain and that, even should we be in a position to present a concert of our usual high quality, the chances of having a reasonably good-sized audience were slim. The financial exposure of this could have been really quite damaging. Having consulted with both an orchestral manager and professional soloist, they both felt that, in our position, there are too many uncertainties and variables for us to proceed with what we would usually expect in our concert programming with any sort of confidence. Our decision not to proceed seems to be consistent with most other musical organisations and it would seem that there is a dearth of opportunities for professional musicians - I'm hearing of them driving vans for Tescos and Amazon and working in Royal Mail sorting offices...

And so, it is clear that, until we, as the general public, are able to return to life in any sort of normality (albeit the 'new normal' that we hear so much about), we need to be creative in what we do to be able to programme concerts whilst reducing our financial risks. So, to that end, I have put forward a revised programme for July on the assumption that there is going to be greater confidence amongst us all (including the concert-going public) as well as giving us 6 months to get it all together - assuming that we will be combining zoom and face-to-face rehearsals.

The first thing to say is that we are looking to have a long one-half concert - approximately an hour in total with no interval. This seems to be quite a popular option these days and it would seem to be sensible.

In terms of my proposal for the musical content, the centrepiece of the programme is going to be Brahms' Liebeslieder Waltzes. I have chosen these for a couple of reasons really. Firstly, they are accompanied by piano duet (as they were originally written for), which Penny and I will play, and I will direct from the keyboard, thus avoiding the cost of hiring an orchestra. Secondly, there will be no soloists for it. We may need

to have one soloist for other bits and pieces in the programme but we certainly won't be requiring a full set. We would sing this in German. If you don't know them, they are really charming and quite light in style, certainly not like his Requiem! These last approximately 30 minutes. The rest of the concert, then, would be different, but equally light repertoire and I thought that singing choruses from the Shows would be a really nice departure from what we would usually do, with an underlying thread of 'Love' which the Brahms and our choice of choruses would reflect. We have not confirmed where this will be performed and are in discussion about a suitable venue, but more of this anon. The date would remain the same as we were hoping for the Gala concert - i.e. the weekend of 3rd/4th July. So, an entirely secular concert but one that I hope appeals.

My thanks go to you all for your continued support, despite the very strange times and circumstances that we live in, and the inevitable challenges that we are all facing - musical or otherwise. I would also like to record my thanks to David Angus (for stepping in for me a couple of times this term), the committee for their support, advice and good humour. And, of course, to Penny who has been working with me and yourselves on Tuesdays.

All that remains for me to do is to offer you all my very best wishes for a safe and happy (if unconventional) Christmas. I trust that we will be able to meet face-to-face at some point in the New Year, but we shall only do so when we feel that it is safe to do so. I, for one, am champing at the bit...

Take care of yourselves.

Yours,

Jonathan

Q: Why can't Boris Johnson make his Christmas cake until the last minute?

A: He doesn't know how many tiers it should have.

Q: What is Dominic Cummings' favourite Christmas song?

A: Driving home for Christmas.

Q: Why are Santa's reindeer allowed to travel on Christmas Eve?

A: They have herd immunity.

Mary and Joseph..... Now they had a stable relationship.....

A Carol for 2020

At our last Zoom rehearsal, we all enjoyed singing Eileen Tomlin's new carol, to the tune of Good King Wenceslas. Thank you, Eileen, for sharing it with us.

Covid-19 locked us down, Clear of all infections. Choir has helped us stay in touch, Strengthens our connections Now, although we meet by Zoom, Sharing fun and singing, We can see each cheerful smile, Hope and friendship bringing.	Even though we stay apart, Covid cannot beat us. Choral Spirit spreads afar, Lock-downs won't defeat us. So, to all our singing friends: Don't be sad or fearful, Merry Christmas one and all! Please 'Stay Safe', 'Stay Cheerful!'
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For the Longest Time

This is an amusing link to a Canadian Choir singing an alternative version of 'For the Longest Time'.

<https://enchantmentathamilton.org/20200601ForTheLongestTime.mp4>

Thank you to Peter Brook for sending this in for us all to enjoy

Q: How did Mary and Joseph know Jesus was 7lb 6oz when he was born?

A: They had a weigh in a manger.

Q: Why are there no jokes about turkey giblets?

A: Because the punchlines are offal!

Q: Why didn't Mary and Joseph make it to Bethlehem?

A: All Virgin flights were cancelled.

Q: Why did the pirates have to go into lockdown?

A: The 'Arrrr!' rate had risen

Did you hear that production was down at Santa's workshop?

Many of his workers have had to elf isolate!

These are the answers to the Autumn and Harvest Quiz in October's newsletter

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|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Back | 23. Dionysus |
| 2. September | 24. Greer Garson |
| 3. Herbst | 25. Rock |
| 4. 1978 | 26. Spider |
| 5. 1978 | 27. Switzerland |
| 6. Battle of the Bulge | 28. Pubs |
| 7. Peter Phillips | 29. 1944 |
| 8. Flower | 30. For me and my gal |
| 9. Of red and gold | 31. Neil Young |
| 10. Fall | 32. Mell-supper |
| 11. Deciduous | 33. The Wurzels |
| 12. Italy | 34. Vincent Van Gogh |
| 13. John Keats | 35. 10,000 |
| 14. Stubble burning | 36. All is safely gathered in |
| 15. Northamptonshire | 37. Constable |
| 16. Winona Ryder | 38. Stack of barley |
| 17. The Kinks | 39. Boxing |
| 18. 1843 | 40. Wrestler |
| 19. Full moon nearest to the Autumn Equinox | 41. Little Boy Blue |
| 20. Hunter's Moon | 42. Corn Dollies |
| 21. Ted Hughes | 43. Labour |
| 22. Europe's smallest mouse | 44. Blue |

Dates for your diary

Tuesday 5th January 2021 Zoom rehearsals recommence

3rd/4th July Summer Concert date and venue to be confirmed

Editor's note

Thank you once again to all the contributors. Thank you to all those who sent in Christmas jokes.

There wasn't a November Newsletter. I was in the Isle of Man looking after my father. He had just had a pacemaker fitted in Liverpool and he had to be in quarantine for a fortnight on his return to the Island.

We are intending that future newsletters will follow, and we would be very grateful to have your ideas about what you would like to have included. If you have any links to interesting articles, performances and recordings that you think other members would be interested in, please send them to me. If you would like to edit the next one, let me know.

Wishing you all a safe and peaceful Christmas, I look forward to us all singing safely together in person sometime in the New Year.

Bridget

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