

**MALVERN FESTIVAL CHORUS**  
**ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2017-2018**

**REPORT FROM JONATHAN BROWN – MUSICAL DIRECTOR**

Having only started working with you in February, I have been struck by the warmth and commitment that you have for Malvern Festival Chorus. You clearly love what you do and I have felt so welcomed and I am most grateful to you. There is a real sense of community in the choir and this is very evident.

As I wasn't involved with the Mozart programme in November 2017, you will forgive me if I concentrate on congratulating you for the Handel and Brahms programmes only. Messiah is a piece that is done frequently, yet it is deceptively hard. There are technical demands placed on the singer as well as many unexpected twists and turns, but all of these were managed very well indeed. As we worked through our rehearsals, I felt your confidence growing and this really came through in your performing. The concert was also notable for the opportunity afforded to the 6 prizewinners of the Young Voices project in being able to perform recitatives and arias in a professional setting. It is so important that young performers are given their opportunity to understand what it means to be a soloist in such an arena and to be part of this great tradition that we hold so dear. We were also fortunate to have Julian McNamara (organ) and Richard Powell (trumpet) come and join us.

Then, a different challenge completely. The opportunity to perform pieces like the Brahms with an orchestra don't come around very often and, whilst it is a joy to be able to do so, it can also be daunting. Brahms' giant Ein Deutsches Requiem is a massive challenge, with its long, sustained lines, often high in the tessitura. Add an orchestra and the need for vocal support and projection is even more important. It is a true tour-de-force, with a different technical emphasis needed - a real physical commitment! We were joined by The 1885 Singers once again with their conductor - Alison Hunka - and it was a real pleasure have them come and sing with us. I know that they really enjoyed their time with us and made a real weekend of it. We were most fortunate to have the excellent Regency Sinfonia come and join us (and who also performed the Tragische Overture so well), as well as our two terrific soloists – Louise Wayman (who was the soprano soloist in the other choral item – Mendelssohn's Hear my prayer, conducted by Alison) and Edward Robinson who gave such accomplished performances. Once again, I couldn't have asked more of you – you gave everything, and it really showed, with excellent projection and communication that the audience enjoyed so much. There was some absolutely marvellous singing that was a privilege for me to be part of, and you should all be incredibly proud of your performance.

I genuinely feel that the sound of the choir is changing – there is a brighter, more focused tone, and this was put to good use in both concerts, but particularly in the Brahms and Mendelssohn. This will be something that we will continue to work on in the coming months as this will allow us to produce the sound more efficiently and will aid the projection.

So, to next year. A varied programme ranging from J.S.Bach to Howard Goodall via Mozart, Faure, Janacek, Vaughan Williams and Durufle! I am really excited about this, and I hope you are too. Each of the 3 programmes has its own, different challenges, but I know that you will embrace them and continue to work on the technical things to continue to produce these really memorable performances. Thank you for everything that you have done. Well done.

**Jonathan Brown - Musical Director**

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## **TREASURER'S REPORT 2017/2018**

### **Position**

The position of the Accounts is shown on the Statement of Financial Activity, the Balance Sheet and the accompanying Notes.

### **Concerts**

Concert income for the season was £13,704 against outgoings of £23,095. The heavy cost of orchestral support for Autumn and Summer concerts was offset by using organ accompaniment to the Messiah concert in March.

The carol singing at Morrisons and Carols for All at the Priory raised £1,197. After deduction of expenses, the Choir was able to provide a donation of £933 to South Worcestershire Citizens Advice. Special thanks are due to Penny Vere for organising and conducting and also to all those who helped and sang at both events.

### **General Income and Expenditure**

Membership increased from 105 at the beginning of the Season to 120 for the July concert. Members have continued to raise money through the weekly raffle, the Bring-and-Buy and interval refreshments. The accumulation of small and not-so-small amounts makes a valuable contribution to our publicity efforts and our thanks are due to all of the Members who put in the work to organise and run these things. Money raised at regular rehearsals and at social events has also contributed to the ongoing maintenance cost of the Website, which has proved to be a very valuable and necessary information facility.

### **2018/19 Season**

Budgets are being put in place for the coming Season.

There were 120 paid-up subscriptions by the end of last season, 2017/18; these are the principal source of funds which pay our musicians. Gift aid raises an individual annual subscription by 25% - at present 103 Members have given their support to the scheme. Subscriptions may be paid by direct transfer to MFC's Bank or by cheque/cash. Alternative methods for paying subscriptions are currently under review by Committee.

All Members are exhorted to do their utmost to sell concert tickets, which pay for concert venues, contribute to the cost of musicians and keep losses on concerts to a minimum. Ticket pricing structure is also currently under review.

Eleven local enterprises placed advertisements in concert programmes this Season, generating £1,010 which offsets the cost of printing programmes thus enabling sales revenue to further offset the production costs of concerts. Any additional advertisers would be most welcome.

The charge of £3 per term for music hire will remain for next season.

### **Sponsorship**

Whilst the Chorus generally operates on a sound financial footing, it will sometimes be necessary to seek extra support through sponsorship and similar efforts. In recent years grants have been received from The Elgar Society and the Elmley Foundation. Some effort is needed to seek out further sponsors and to put in bids for support.

The 2019/20 Season will be the Society's Centenary Year and preparations for additional fundraising will need to be started during the coming season in order for the Choir to mount performances appropriate to the occasion.

Help from any Members having experience of fundraising would be appreciated.

### **Independent Assessment**

The above figures are given subject to agreement by the Independent Assessor, Stuart Wollaston, to whom the Committee's grateful thanks are due.

**Michael P Tweedie - Treasurer**

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### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

This has been something of a roller coaster of a year, a year of unexpected events, a year of highs and lows. Our Musical Director Richard Knight had mapped out an ambitious programme for us, which included the option of singing with the 1885 choir in London, inviting young singers to perform as soloists in a performance of Handel's Messiah and rounding off the season with a full orchestral version of Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem, to be sung in German. The year started well. With Richard's encouragement we managed the daunting task of rehearsing for our own concert as well as the one in London. In October Richard joined those of us who had elected to sing Elgar's Dream of Gerontius with the 1885 choir at St John's Smith Square for a well-received concert. In November we enjoyed singing Mozart's Requiem, a piece that many of us had sung before. The experiment of scheduling the concert on a Sunday afternoon worked well, attracting additional audience members.

Once again Penny Vere organised and conducted our annual carol concert in the Priory in December. As usual there was some uncertainty about how many members would be able to take part in this and particular anxiety about whether there would be enough male voices. In the event our numbers were boosted by friends who had been persuaded to join us and there was a good balance of voices. Penny put together a varied programme of music and readings and the concert was enjoyed in equal measure by choir and audience. The Malvern Gazette covered the presentation of our cheque to our chosen charity the South Worcestershire Citizens Advice Bureau.

Richard's unexpected resignation in January presented us with an existential crisis and precipitated a period of intense activity for the Committee. We were able to continue preparations for Messiah because David Angus agreed at short notice to take rehearsals. The Committee then agreed a strategy for appointing a temporary Musical Director. In consequence, Jonathan Brown, the Head of Music at Malvern College, was approached and invited to take on this role and conduct the concert. He generously agreed to do so, on condition that the Head Master of Malvern College was happy with this proposal.

The concert in Malvern Priory in March was exhilarating to take part in, with the soloists from the Young Singers project adding an extra frisson of excitement. It was clear that their involvement brought in a large number of audience members who had not attended MFC concerts before. Our President James Oxley, who had contributed so much to the Young Singers project, not only sang as a soloist but also joined the tenor ranks for the rest of the concert. We are very grateful to him for helping to make this such a memorable occasion and for the support he has given us throughout the year. The concert was well received but the enjoyment of the audience might have been tempered by the absence of interval drinks had Martin Purser not quietly remedied this oversight!

Our relief following Jonathan's appointment was short lived. We realised that we had to make provision for the longer term in order to ensure that our summer concert could go ahead and that we would be in a position to plan for next year's programme. We agreed that the longer there was any uncertainty about the appointment of a Musical Director, the more likely it was that we would lose members from the choir. After further lengthy discussion the Committee agreed that Jonathan should be offered the post of our Musical Director, initially for a mutual assessment period of one year, subject to the agreement of the whole choir. An Emergency General Meeting was held in April, at which the reasons for our decision were put to the members, who then voted overwhelmingly to endorse Jonathan's appointment. The Minutes of this meeting summarise its process and outcome. Jonathan's has thrown himself into his role with enthusiasm and has

energised the choir. We are looking forward to working with him on the programme he has organised for us.

Our final concert, given in conjunction with the 1885 choir, was a fitting end to the year. Alison Hunka conducted us in Mendelssohn's Hear My Prayer, before Jonathan conducted our performance of Ein Deutsches Requiem. He had organised two extra rehearsals for this, which were well attended, and these together with the contribution from members of the 1885 choir certainly enhanced our performance. The audience was larger than we feared it might be but it would have been better if the rousing performance could have been enjoyed by a full house. I'm very grateful to everyone who contributed to entertaining our visitors from London and particularly to Dee Brook for organising accommodation for them.

The issues we have had to deal with this year have underlined the importance of having a strong and active committee. As Trustees of Malvern Festival Chorus, members of the Committee take on a lot of responsibilities and I am enormously grateful to the people who agree to serve on it and for the support they have given me this year. There have been several personnel changes this year, which Barbara has alluded to. In February we agreed to offer our loyal accompanist Penny Vere honorary membership of the choir so that we could then invite her to be co-opted onto the Committee as a non-voting member. Penny agreed to join us and we have benefitted enormously from her musical expertise and advice.

As Barbara's report indicates, the committee has been very active this year. I am particularly grateful to her for the enormous amount of work she does on a day to day basis for the choir. I'm also grateful to Bridget Corlett, who deputised for Barbara whilst she was on holiday and was kept very busy, taking on the role in addition to her responsibilities as our Librarian. Bridget also generously hosted all our committee meetings. Thanks are also due to Mike Tweedie for the professional and scrupulous way he manages our financial affairs, to our Membership Secretary Vivienne Austin and to John Price for keeping us in order during our concerts.

If the choir is to thrive we need to attract new members. Membership has improved latterly but we need to keep up the momentum. Publicity is the key to this and we're very grateful to the members who have helped us with this. Kate Cross and Jan Inglis have handled our publicity for several years and this year they have been ably assisted by Julia Needham. Liz Gait has encouraged us in the use of social media and Jackie Tolliday has improved our website as well as liaising with the local press. Helen Lyons has coordinated the distribution of posters – which is an effective method of advertising our concerts as long as the small army of helpers can make sure they are displayed. Heather Williamson has urged us all to buy tickets and to publicise our activities to our friends. Thanks are due to all of them.

We also need to make sure that the choir is a welcoming place. We are members of the choir because we love singing and for many of us that is all we want to do. But there are others who welcome the opportunity to socialise. I am very grateful to everyone who has contributed to our social programme that Barbara has outlined in her report. I'm also grateful to Val and Mike Tweedie for supplying the interval refreshments at our rehearsals, which gives us the opportunity to chat with each other. I'm also grateful to everyone who has helped raise money to boost our reserves, particularly to Viv Austen and Marna Gowan for organising the weekly raffle.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the choir for their support and understanding this year. Let's look forward to another enjoyable year of singing.

**Dr Kevin Ilsley - Chairman**

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## SECRETARY'S REPORT

The season has been one of challenges and changes.

We challenged ourselves to an ambitious programme of music in the Autumn with Mozart Requiem headlining our November concert, for which we rehearsed in tandem with the Dream of Gerontius, in preparation for our participation in 1885 Singers' concert in St John's Smith Square in October. A group of around 40 MFC members made the journey for what was a memorable concert under the baton of Alison Hunker.

Major changes came in the spring term with the resignation for personal reasons of our conductor Richard Knight. The Committee found themselves challenged with the need to find a stand-in conductor for Messiah in the Priory in March. They and the society as a whole owe a debt of gratitude to Chairman Kevin Ilsley for steering us through this period, the outcome of which was the agreement of Jonathan Brown, Director of Music at Malvern College, to take us on for the concert.

Also for this concert we had started in the Autumn to prepare for a Young Singers project, with the aim of auditioning aspiring young soloists for the solo roles in Messiah. This project gathered pace in the New Year, with Meg Russell, Julia Needham and Bridget Corlett undertaking the organisation and our President, James Oxley holding a masterclass to provide coaching and support to the 6 young soloists appointed.

The concert was a triumph and the Choir recognised their good fortune in having Jonathan prepare and conduct them. As a result of this positive experience and following due process, the Committee obtained Jonathan's acceptance of the offer of MD, endorsed by the head of Malvern College and voted for by MFC membership at an EGM in April. It was agreed that there would be a 12-month mutual trial period.

Members demonstrated their commitment to the choir with their preparation for the summer concert, Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem. A number of new and returning members joined, following an open rehearsal at the start of the term and extra rehearsals were held in the final weeks running up to the concert. The Requiem was performed in German with orchestra and the choral programme also included Mendelssohn's Hear my Prayer with Alison Hunka conducting. We were delighted once again to join forces with 1885 Singers for this concert and the audience showed their appreciation with very lively applause. The concert was a fantastic finale to the season.

The Committee has held what may well be a record 10 meetings during the season, as the challenges were addressed and a backlog of future plans was put into place. We welcomed new Committee members at the start of and during the year - Louise Rosoman, Meg Russell, Judith Keene, Penny Vere and Liz Gait - but there were resignations too, principally due to other commitments. My thanks go in particular to Bridget Corlett, who was my stand-in during my 4-week holiday in February-March.

Activities "behind the scenes" have included a project undertaken to ensure compliance with the new Data Privacy legislation, establishment of soloist and musician contracts, actions to address Safeguarding requirements, and dealing with the processes required by the new lettings agency through whom we now have to book our main rehearsal venue, the Chase School hall.

There have been sad moments during the year as we learnt of the deaths of a number of past and current members; longstanding former members Lilian Stockton and Moira Davies, at whose services a number of choir members sang, Roy Palmer, and Pam Harding and most recently Denise Soper, who were still singing with us.

We continue to be committed to ensuring the choir is sociable and welcoming. Regular bring & buys, as well as raising much-needed funds, bring members together. A quiz night with curry supper and our end-of-season garden party/hog roast organized and hosted by Julia Needham, and supported by perfect weather, were our two social events for the season. We thank everyone who has been involved in these activities and in particular Julia for a lovely end-of-season event.

Another way we've moved forward has been to increase the (mainly free) publicity we have obtained during the year. Through Jackie Tolliday's efforts to establish a relationship with the Malvern Gazette we have had pre-concert features for all of our main concerts. This, in addition to advertising in the Theatre brochure, our inclusion in the digital displays in the Theatre foyer and prominent placing of banners, has added significantly to our visibility. With Liz Gait's help, we are also taking steps towards increasing our social media presence, in the hope that we may attract younger members and audience. We have continued with more traditional publicity with the production of posters and leaflets and we recognize that this still plays a significant part in maintaining our visibility. We are grateful for the support we get from members, and particularly Helen Lyons, in distributing them.

An important part of our singing calendar has for many years been our Carols for All concert between Christmas and New Year, and carol singing in the run-up to the festive season, through which we raise money for charity. Our chosen charity for this season was South Worcestershire Citizens Advice. These efforts would not have been possible without the organisation and leadership of Penny Vere, as well as the participation of members.

We have another full season in prospect for 2018-19, details of which can be found on our website, as well as continuing to develop ideas and plans for our Centenary year in 2019-20. We hope you will continue to enjoy singing with us and when possible, provide your support for our activities and projects.

We'll be starting the new season with an Open Rehearsal on Tuesday 4th September and we look forward to welcoming you and your singing friends then.

**Barbara Moss - Secretary**

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