



Newsletter

June 2020

Introduction – Kevin Ilsley

A month has passed since the last newsletter was circulated. It's hard to believe that we're almost at the end of June and that had things gone to plan we would be making our final preparations for our Gala Concert. Let's hope that by this time next year that's what we will be doing.

Zoom continues to feature prominently in the ongoing life of the choir. We've held a second Committee Meeting and are looking forward to our third in three weeks' time. Please let us know if you have any particular questions you would like us to address, or if there is any information you would like to have. Our main concerns remain the same as before: when are we likely to be able to rehearse together again and when will we be able to perform in front of an audience. No news about either of these issues, I'm afraid. I continue to take part in regular Making Music seminars to keep up to date with developments and to share ideas with representatives of choirs around the country. We have also held our first social event on Zoom! Thanks to everyone who took part in the virtual "Coffee morning" last week – it was lovely to see people again. We're still experimenting with the technical aspects of virtual meetings but agreed that it was worth continuing with the format. We will be holding a quiz on Wednesday 1st July at 7.30pm and we're very grateful to Peter Brook for volunteering to host this. Peter has already organised Zoom quizzes for another choir he sings with, so is experienced! We will also be holding another coffee morning a fortnight later. I know this isn't everyone's cup of tea (sorry!) but do give it a try if you can. Details will follow.

Jonathan has been researching the feasibility of running Zoom rehearsals next term and plans to start these at the beginning of September. We're very grateful to him and to Penny for volunteering to do this, something that neither of them could have imagined doing before the current crisis. It's almost certain that we won't be able to congregate for a full choir rehearsal until after Christmas but we're still hoping that we might be able to put on a carol concert in some form or other. Barbara has been making tentative plans for our concerts next year. We're not sure about dates or programmes yet but will keep you informed. We can confirm that the concerts will take place in Malvern. We have agreed however that it is unrealistic to commit to performing the "St Matthew Passion" next Easter as we had hoped. To do so would entail entering into financial commitments with

performers that would be crippling for us if we had to cancel the concert again and unfortunately there is still too much uncertainty regarding choral singing next year to allow us to make such a decision now. It remains the firm intention of Jonathan and the Committee to perform the oratorio in the 2021-2022 season.

Our Annual General Meeting normally takes place at the beginning of September. The Committee considered postponing this until after Christmas, as the Constitution allows, but there are important decisions to be made in respect of subscriptions and other matters, so it has been agreed that we should hold the meeting at the normal time. This will mean it will have to be held on Zoom, which does provide the facility for members to vote on motions. (Something else I'll have to learn about!). We plan to hold the meeting on September 8.

Please let Bridget know if you have any ideas about how we might improve our communication with you, or if you have any ideas that might be of interest to other members. We would like to share more information on the [website](#) and via our [Facebook Group](#). Please consider joining this if you haven't done so already.

I'm looking forward to the time when we can put this pandemic behind us and sing together safely again. Until that happy day, I hope we can keep in contact and up to date with developments by virtue of the internet.

Kevin Ilsley, Chairman, MFC

23 June 2020

Musical Director

Hello All

I hope you are all keeping safe and well. Haven't we had the most amazing weather! That said, I write this just as thunderstorms have arrived - just in time for the beginning of our summer holiday! Fingers crossed that the jet stream will meander its way back north for the foreseeable!

Since I last wrote, not much has changed really! Yes - some of the lockdown measures have eased to a degree, and there will, no doubt, be further modifications down the line in the coming weeks and months. However, despite an increasing amount of research into musicians and musical rehearsals in the last few months, a lot of that research has produced conflicting opinions on what is and isn't safe to do. As a society, the Committee has to have the safety and well-being of its members as the paramount priority and so cannot afford to take any risks at all. I know that Kevin has been joining in on many Zoom meetings with Making Music and, therefore gauging opinion of other musical groups and societies and so he is incredibly well-informed. Aren't we lucky to have someone of his enormous experience in the medical world and who is so well-connected with experts in the field?

I have also been in touch with musicians from other schools, and I have to say that most of them feel that Societies such as ours are unlikely to be meeting live, for some time to come. With this in mind, we have to look at 2 things really...

- what contingencies we have to make to keep MFC active in the short-medium term
- musical programming in that period

If I can take the second point first. As I have said before, the St. Matthew Passion, for me, is a priority to perform, given how close we were to doing so just a matter of weeks ago. However, we are in incredibly uncertain times at the moment and planning for a concert of such enormous scale in terms of cost of musicians and venue availability makes this a very high-risk venture, and one that, frankly, would not be prudent to plan for this year, given the uncertainty of everything around the music world at the moment. The Committee are aware of how important it is for us to perform it when we can and we will do so - that I do know. However, at this point for this coming year, it is just too risky, and so we have decided to change tack for next year's first concert.

It is intended that the Centenary Gala concert will go ahead as it should have (it would have been yesterday...) and we are working on securing a date and venue (and visiting former MFC conductors of course) for around this sort of time next year. The concert earlier in the year is going to need to be re-programmed so that our performing forces will be substantially reduced. Having looked at when previous performances of various works have been and the forces needed to perform them, as well as choosing music with a 'something for everyone' approach, we have agreed to do Haydn's Nelson Mass (last sung in 2008) and The Armed Man by Karl Jenkins (2010).

In terms of how we are going to operate from September, this programming was also a consideration. Having spoken to other musicians who run choral societies such as ours, it would seem that a virtual rehearsal is going to be the only way that we are going to be able to operate for the time being. Choosing music that is likely to at least be partly familiar to most and, in the case of the Jenkins, not terribly taxing. This should allow us to prepare this programme in the new rehearsal format as well as making a start for the Gala concert, which will have a lot of music in it. So, making an early start on this repertoire too will be most helpful to preparations.

How are we going to do it? Zoom!!! We will be having to find our way a little bit to start with I think it is fair to say, but the plan is that, broadly, we will aim to run a training session with them just before the first rehearsal, and from that point onwards we will run rehearsals on a two week cycle:

Week 1

- Warm ups
- Sectional rehearsals - 30 mins for Sops & Altos then 30mins with Ten & Bass
 - singers muted with the piano playing out their lines and them singing along at home

Week 2

- Warm ups
- Full rehearsal
- Penny or I sat at a piano - everyone muted
 - Choir using the Zoom 'chat' function to converse with each other/criticise my beat etc
- Run a movement – singing along to a professional recording via zoom 'share audio'. Me conducting - talk about the musical content, technical stuff etc
- Run it again.
- On to next movement etc

It will be a bit trial and error to start with but this is a template I have had from another choral society and their DoM thinks it works well. So, this is how we will kick things off, and as we go along, we may well modify how we use it, to suit us best.

Brave New World!!!

So, there we go. It may sound a bit daunting but I'm sure the more we do, like most things, the more familiar and comfortable we shall be. For those of you who are not familiar with Zoom, it is not as scary as it may seem. Kevin is the world expert on it now - the Zoom Master I've heard it said - and I'm sure that if anyone wants any help or advice on getting it set up, we as the Committee have all been meeting using it over the last few months and would be happy to try and help and have practice conversations!

Anyway, you've had me ramble on for far too long, so I shall sign off. All the very best for now, and we'll be back in touch before too long.

Thank you, as ever,

Jonathan

Singing during lockdown, and beyond!

Joy Black

Desperate to be able to still sing when lockdown came upon us, I searched the internet. Kind friends pointed me toward Gareth Malone, which was fun, but I craved something more classical. Eventually I came across The Isolation Choir, which proposed to 'do' the Messiah, and record/broadcast on Face Book the final effort, so I thought I'd give it a go.

It was very strange at first, just seeing the conductor, Ben, waving his arms about on the screen, while I sang to myself during whole choir and then the Alto sectional rehearsal, but I was impressed by the scope of their ambition. The WHOLE of 'Messiah' yes, even those odd little choruses you either didn't know were there, or had always skipped!] + soloists/ orchestra, all recorded and presented on Face Book, with a Summer school lasting three weeks to follow and a performance of 'Elijah' in September. There is, of course, a fee for each area to cover the costs, and you can use their online score, or your own, but it seemed reasonable, and I soon found myself enjoying it.

Recording myself on a video to send in was terrifying! The faces I pulled and how I sounded on 'tape' bore no resemblance to the fine, controlled choral singer I'd hoped I was! You could record all, some or even none of the movements. It was up to you. By the time we had finished there were nearly 8000 singers from all around the world and a very lively 'chat' stream happening as we worked. How they pulled the final version together is beyond me, but it duly premiered, albeit with one aria hilariously out of synch, but the live chat stream was highly entertaining, and some of us opted to dress up and join in with the broadcast, rather than just watch or listen. The version that shortly ended up on Face Book had had the wrinkles ironed out. We are now about to launch into the first Summer School week – one devoted to John Rutter's music. With a 'concert' on the Friday of that week, followed by two more with music as diverse as Stamford, Patrick Hawes 'Quanta Qualia' and Vivaldi's 'Gloria'.

It's not what we are used to and I miss the camaraderie, atmosphere, fun, encouragement and support of physically singing with others. But it does allow you to get some of the emotional and health benefits we all know that comes with following our love of choral music in these strange times. Just click on the links below to have a look.

<https://www.theselfisolationchoir.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfocHZTpBcD1CIZ4EJ6kT4A>

Most of our days are like everyone else's these days. Time to read and relax with walks and plenty of gardening: hedges all trimmed, lawns mowed, beans planted, roses blooming and borders better than ever. Like others, we have also found time for wider social interaction, largely (but not solely) over the Internet. Cathedral Chamber Choir has fortnightly ZOOM socials, each with a quiz. We provided the last one and will be using the same questions for MFC on July 1st at 7.30 pm. There's talk of ZOOM rehearsals - maybe a section at a time at first - which will allow us to compare experiences with whatever the MFC does.

Peter has also had ZOOM U3A French Conversation, which has worked well but can be challenging when you allow for different accents, poor microphones or echoing rooms. Also, some work for an international professional organisation - others are in US and Australia. Previous meetings have been over the Internet anyway, so there's been no real difference, and it's quite interesting to hear how they're coping in Nevada or Tennessee.

Manby Road has been surprisingly social - we've seen more of our neighbours recently than when we were less tied down! It all started with a surprise party for Dee's Big Birthday in late March as we entered lockdown. At the appointed hour, a cake appeared on a table at the bottom of our drive, and drinks were handed around. This set the trend. Thursday night clapping for the NHS quickly developed into communal singing lead by Carol Green (music teacher and Hills Singers' conductor) who distributed song-sheets beforehand and accompanied on flute. *Over the Rainbow, We'll Meet Again, Bridge Over Troubled Water, Long and Winding Road* - all slightly wistful. Two really good rock & folk guitarists (both professional and living in the road) joined later events, until we were out there for an hour or so each time, with children playing in the road. We even tried madrigals one night - *Now is the Month of May* and *April is in my Mistress Face* - unrehearsed, with two soprs, one tenor and a bass. Non-one begged us for an encore, but it added to the fun. The VE Day Party went on for 3 hours with fizz - all socially-distanced of course. Look out for news of *Manby Rd Arts Festival* in events section of the Malvern Gazette!

We've had to work hard to keep in touch with our daughters and their little ones, the oldest of whom had a 3rd birthday party with candles and cake, again over ZOOM. We went to see them last Saturday for a picnic in their garden and catch up with their young baby who is just 14 weeks - about 6 times older than the last time we saw him. Our second daughter in London is expecting her second in Sept and we haven't seen her since February. We'll find a way of putting that right soon, and in the meantime

have FaceTime chats, including hearing little Isaac counting from 1 to 10 in Welsh (Da lawn!).

We're no nearer knowing when it will be over or how long to restoring previous activities – especially singing. But there are aspects of the last few months, with a simpler way of life, that we might look back on nostalgically - if only the girls were nearer

Peter & Dee (Brook)

Zooming back in time

Jackie Tolliday

Like many of us, I was both sad and relieved when our St Matthew Passion concert was cancelled. I'd worked so hard to get to grips with the work but it was definitely the right decision. What to do with all my spare time though? How to fill those 20 minutes after lunch spent practising all those awkward corners, score in one hand, coffee mug in the other? I was missing my singing.

I heard an interview with Simon Halsey talking about his Sing Along Concert Online project with the RundfunkchorBerlin rehearsing Brahms's German Requiem and available on YouTube so I gave it a go. It's still available at <https://www.interkultur.com/newsroom/competitions-festivals/details/news/sing-along-concert-online-how-lovely-are-the-sounds-from-our-dwelling-places/>. It was quite fun, particularly as Simon Halsey conducts the rehearsals in a mixture of English and German! I also tried some of the Self-isolation Choir's Messiah rehearsals on YouTube. Again, it sort of filled the gap but both initiatives felt so impersonal.

Then I was invited by my previous choir to join their online rehearsals via Zoom. As a complete Zoom-novice, I leapt at the opportunity particularly as rehearsals took place at 7.45 on a Tuesday evening. As a comparatively small community choir in a Northamptonshire market town, the choir's repertoire is somewhat different to MFC's but it brought back happy memories of my time with the choir. The music was made available to download via Dropbox which made it very easy to access so all I had to do was click on the meeting link I'd been sent and there I was among faces I hadn't seen and voices I hadn't heard for over 7 years.

The rehearsals were very well organised with the indefatigable Musical Director, a professional soprano soloist and teacher, accompanying and singing the various voice parts as required. All the choir members were muted so I happily sang along with whichever part was being rehearsed. We were then split into breakout rooms

for sectional rehearsals for upper and lower voices – all very slick – before coming back together for a final sing-through.

One of the highlights of the rehearsals was the week we were asked to dress up as a character from a film. For reasons I have yet to comprehend, I thought Dumbo the Elephant would be a good choice! Maybe I thought the ears would complement the lockdown hairdo! We were asked to include our character's name in our Zoom meeting name so Dumbo Jackie duly joined the rehearsal amid much hilarity. Unfortunately, my technical prowess deserted me the following week when I forgot to change my name and Dumbo Jackie again joined the rehearsal - this time minus the ears!

A further challenge was being asked to record ourselves individually singing Charlie Chaplin's Smile for a choir compilation, a deeply stressful but ultimately rewarding experience.

Towcester Choral's online rehearsals have given me so much. The opportunity to see old friends and make new ones, have a good old sing once a week, as well as to get to grips with technology I wouldn't otherwise have bothered with which has proved immensely useful in other areas of my new daily life. Yes, I still miss singing surrounded by other people but it has given me the incentive to keep singing for which I'm profoundly grateful.

Rare Vintage Typewriter from the 1950s Lets You Type Sheet Music

On a different note this article about an extraordinary invention was shared with the committee by Alice Osmond. To view the full article please use the link below.

<https://mymodernmet.com/keaton-music-typewriter/>

and in response to this article, Joy Black shared this link,

<https://youtu.be/jinGW7ZDGPM> **The Typewriter** (a concerto for orchestra and solo typewriter).

It is a piece of music I had heard, but never seen performed before. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Dates for your diary

Wednesday 1st July 2020. 7.30 pm Zoom Quiz and Social Evening.

Thursday 13th July 2020. 11 am Zoom Coffee Morning.

Tuesday 1st September 2020. Proposed first Zoom Rehearsal, details to follow.

Tuesday 8th September 2020. Proposed AGM via Zoom, details to follow.

Editor's note

Thank you very much to all the contributors.

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. I have deliberately created this newsletter in a simple format, on a word document. If you would like to edit the next one, let me know.

Bridget Corlett

bridget.corlett@btinternet.com