



AXMINSTER & DISTRICT CHORAL SOCIETY



Registered Charity No: 900458

SoundBites - October 2021

A newsletter for members of Axminster & District Choral Society

Editor Juliet Henham

Chairman's Column and Annual Report to AGM – October 2021

It will be great to be back singing next week after half-term. Committee members have heard one or two members are not self-testing with a Lateral Flow Device test on a Tuesday before attending a rehearsal. Can I emphasise how important it is for all of us to follow this testing regime. There is more Covid-19 about in East Devon than ever before. Three of my family are isolating here as I write! Mary Ashby has agreed to be in the kitchen of the Minster before rehearsal next week on Tuesday 2nd November to help people have the test if they have any concern about it. The golden rule is here to protect each other – only come to rehearsal if feeling well and have had a negative LFT on the day. Thank you.

Annual Report to AGM

This has been my sixth year as chairman, and that is a year longer than I had anticipated due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The AGM provides the opportunity for members to use their democratic will and dump the existing management if needs be. No obvious rebellion so far! I will be looking for a successor during the year to take over the chair at the next AGM.

My report, which is about the management of the society not the music, is in two parts. Due to the cancellation of last year's AGM the first part covers the last two years and the second part about the future.

Your committee has been concerned that reluctance to sing in an enclosed space might reduce numbers to the extent we would have to close for business. This pessimistic scenario has not materialized. While some members have decided not to return to sing, we have been delighted to welcome many new members. I've asked Kathryn who runs the register to work out the numbers. She tells me:-

- We had 80 singers on our register for Spring 2020, prior to lockdown
- Of these, 32 have not returned for the Messiah, but 31 new members have signed up
- Hence, very similar numbers on the register, with an average attendance of 54
- As usual, the split between the parts is that the upper voices dominate in terms of numbers. We currently have:
 - 30 Soprano
 - 34 Alto
 - 5 Tenor
 - 10 Bass

Of these registered names, average attendance is as follows:

- 55% Soprano
- 75% Alto

- 95% Tenor
- 80% Bass

I expect attendance will steady after half-term as holiday plans are fulfilled.

You may remember that we were worried about the effect of the growth in members at the last AGM in 2019, not for rehearsals, but for the concerts. For our concert in November 2019 – Elgar’s Give Unto The Lord and Puccini’s Mesa DI Gloria - with a 16-piece orchestra + temps to fit in, we managed to seat everyone with a reasonable view of the conductor using some extra staging. The new lighting will remove any excuse for not being able to read our scores!

The next issue we will need to face is the Minster Makeover. More information in the next issue of Soundbites (our quarterly newsletter) when we find out the latest plans from the rector. It is a pleasure to say that all but one committee members have agreed to continue for another year. Sue Warren is resigning. Thank you Sue for your support on the committee and your role coordinating hospitality. We are looking for someone to take on this role. You do not have to also be on the committee.

Karen Curnow has taken on the mantel of publicity and with her experience in choral society management is already increasing exposure of our activities. We are looking for new committee members. New people – new ideas – new enthusiasms – are just what we need. As there are no offices or places on the committee being contested there will be no need to vote when we come to Item 9 – Election of Committee, which will save time. There is one vacancy and so please see me if you would like to be co-opted onto the committee. New members have not met our Secretary, Sheena Carr. She is currently shielding after major treatment in hospital but has confirmed that she hopes to be back in the New Year.

Our president, Andrew Millington, is unable to be with us this evening. He sends this message:-

Dear All,

I'm sorry that I am unable to be with you this evening, but I was delighted to hear that you are resuming normal rehearsals and re-connecting with the joys of live singing and getting together as a choir again. It has been a very tough time for choral singers, but I have been very heartened and impressed with the zoom activities which you have undertaken to keep things going. I'm sure that you all appreciate the excellent and inspired musical leadership of Peter, Judy and Peter and it is good to know that numbers at rehearsals are encouraging.

I have enjoyed reading the Soundbites including the humour and the quiz element. I look forward to supporting the choir through the year and I can't think of a better work than Messiah to re-ignite enthusiasm for choral singing.

He has promised to put on a fund-raising concert in the coming year. I'll try to keep him to that promise!

Finally, would you join me in thanking all those who have contributed to the affairs of the society this year in one way or another and particularly our committee members and the two Peters – after all it is they who do all the work!

In particular will you join me in recognizing the huge effort PL made to prepare the music for our aborted concert – the UK premier of CPE Bach’s St Matthew’s Passion. Somehow, we must perform it soon. Will you also join me in recognizing the huge effort of Judy and Peter in creating two virtual concerts available on YouTube – Vivaldi’s Gloria and Mozart’s Requiem. They were great fun to sing and not too bad to listen to or even look at!

That finalises my report for the two years.

Thank you.

Cam Bowie, Chairman, October 2021.

Report from Peter Parshall Autumn 2021

I find myself in the extraordinary position of having something of a blank page in front of me. Looking back over the last season, there's an aching void which should have been full of music – but wasn't. This report, therefore, covers a two-year timeline.

Cast your minds back to the season which began in September 2019. Preparations were underway for a performance of the *Messa di Gloria* of Puccini coupled with the wonderfully evocative setting of Psalm 29 by Sir Edward Elgar. As ever, the Society and orchestra gave its all in a performance which was well-received. We then turned our attention to a new departure; a Christmas programme of West Gallery carols, together with a running presentation of the history of West Gallery music and extracts from Thomas Hardy and Laurie Lee. Peter Lea-Cox had very cleverly arranged all the music for the instruments available to us in our home-grown orchestra "The Pottlers" and the whole event proved to be something rather different: a refreshing break, perhaps, from the 'usual' Christmas fare.

In the Spring of 2020, we were to have performed the UK premiere of CPE Bach's 1789 setting of *The Passion according to St. Matthew*. Preparations were well-advanced by the time Covid-19 struck and the first national lockdown was announced. I must pay tribute to the extraordinary amount of work put into this project by our Accompanist Peter Lea-Cox, for it was he who suggested the work in the first place, as well as doing all the legwork of negotiating for and obtaining the then unpublished scores. As the Chairman has previously noted, given the amount of preparation which had gone into this project, we should look at the possibility of reviving it in the future. As far as I know, the work remains unperformed in the UK and possibly not since 1789 in the rest of the world, although that is a situation which will surely be rectified in the near future.

We were "late to the party" with online rehearsals performances during this first, and subsequent lockdowns. Many were, understandably, nervous of remote rehearsals and even more of recording their singing on mobile devices. An intrepid bunch of about twenty took up the gauntlet however, and we produced two very creditable remote concerts; the first, of Vivaldi's famous *Gloria* went out on our

YouTube channel just before Christmas 2020 and the second, of the Mozart *Requiem* was published there during this past summer. My thanks to all of those who embraced (and, dare I suggest it, even enjoyed?) this new means of performing whilst we were unable to meet in person. Little did I expect, eighteen months ago, that I should have to transition from the role of musician to that of video editor. They say that learning is a life-long process... I should also pay tribute here to Judy who gave up much of her Christmas and Summer holidays to look after the massive task of audio editing. If I'd had to undertake both video and audio aspects alone, I can assure you that you'd still be waiting for the Vivaldi to appear!

This is the point where, traditionally, I berate you for rehearsal absence and for not looking at the music well-enough in advance of the concert. Moving on...

So here we are. It is wonderful to have been able to welcome back all those who have returned, desperate for some live music-making after such a long break. Wonderful, also to see so many new members at the beginning of the current term. We hope that you have felt welcomed and are beginning to settle into our way of doing things. In addition, there are many not here now who have promised to return once local infection rates have subsided, so I think that the future of the Society, numerically at least, is assured – something which wasn't at all clear before our first meeting on 7th September.

As ever, we must pay tribute to our excellent soloists, both the 'live' ones and the 'online' ones. Two of them – Harriet Mountford and Charles Cunliffe – fall into both categories. Charles has recently been named as the Royal Academy of Music's "outstanding student of the year" and has also been presented with the Silver medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. Anyone attending or

watching, online, the Oxford Lieder Festival this week, might have spotted him duetting with Dame Sarah Connolly. He clearly has a bright future ahead of him and so we're delighted that he'll join Harriet, Magnus Walker and Juliet Curnow, both of whom have sung for us before, as a soloist in our forthcoming performance of Messiah on the 18th December. I hope that you'll also join me in sending our best wishes to Harriet whose second child is due today!

Thanks must also go to Anne Kimber, who has booked and then unbooked and then rebooked superb orchestral players for us and to our President, Andrew Millington, who remains an enormous support to the society. As ever, I have been hugely supported by Peter Lea-Cox. His ability to not only to play whatever is thrown at him, but also to transpose it into a different key with no notice is quite awe-inspiring and this, coupled with his enormous experience as a performer and academic musician, makes for a solid team week by week. As ever, a sincere thank you to the choir's committee which works very hard on everyone's behalf.

And so to the future. We had always planned to perform Elijah by Mendelssohn in the Spring of 2022, so that's what we'll do. In November 2022, the Requiems of Duruflé and Fauré (which were to have been performed last Autumn) will form our programme and our Christmas concert next year will include the Fantasia on Christmas Carols by Ralph Vaughan Williams, in recognition of his 150th birthday. Much to look forward to and to enjoy.

That concludes my report.

Peter Parshall

Musical Director
12 October 2021

Concert Arrangements

On the day of the concert there will be a run-through for the choir with the orchestra. Please keep the day free. The exact timetable will be announced nearer the day.

As part of our Covid precautions please take a lateral flow test that morning.

Dress code for concerts:

Men – dinner suit or black trousers and jacket, white shirt, black bow tie. Other coloured bow ties may be an option for some concerts.

Women – black long skirt or trousers, black top with long or three quarter sleeves.

We will provide coloured handkerchiefs for the men and scarves for the women.

We use black folders for our music. If you do not have one already you can buy one from the librarian. New ones are £6, and there is a limited supply of second-hand ones for £3. For heavy scores (like Messiah) you may if you prefer cover your copy with black paper.

Returning your music scores

Please return your copy at the first rehearsal after the concert (4th January). If you are not expecting to be at that rehearsal please return it at the end of the December concert.

Your music should be returned in the condition in which you received it. For instance, if you were given a clean copy please rub out all the markings you have made in it. However if you have had to rub out a lot of previous markings you need not necessarily remove all your own.

Please let the librarian know if you need to buy a folder or if you have a problem about returning your music. Her email is ejtwinning@gmail.com, phone 07980 508846.

We will be looking for people to help on the day, for instance with food for the orchestra and soloists and with putting up the staging and chairs both before and after the concert.
Please do volunteer if you can.

Elizabeth

Calendar

Season	Event	Date	Programme
2021-22	Autumn term begins	7-Sep-21	
	AGM	12-Oct-21	Reduced rehearsal; AGM;
	Concert	18-Dec-21	Handel's Messiah
	Autumn term ends	18-Dec-21	
	Spring term begins	4-Jan-22	
	Spring concert	9-Apr-22	Mendelssohn's Elijah
	Spring term ends	9-Apr-22	
	Summer term begins	26-Apr-22	
	Summer concert	18-Jun-22	
	Summer term ends	18-Jun-22	
2022-23	Autumn term begins	6-Sep-22	
	AGM	11-Oct-22	
	Main concert	19-Nov-22	The Requiems by Duruflé and Faure
	Christmas concert	17-Dec-22	Vaughan Williams Fantasia + Carols
	Autumn term ends	17-Dec-22	
	Spring term begins	3-Jan-23	
	Spring concert	1-Apr-23	
	Spring term ends	1-Apr-23	
	Summer term begins	18-Apr-23	
	Summer concert	17-Jun-23	
Summer term ends	17-Jun-23		

