

East Malling Singers – Chairman’s Report to Annual General Meeting 25/01/2017

The 45th season – September 2015 – July 2016 comprised the traditional four concerts given in the church.

Our autumn concert was once again the traditional ‘Come & Sing’ event, this time featuring Dvorak’s *Mass in D* in its original setting for organ and choir, and Bruckner’s *Four Motets*. Vanessa Ashbee, Kathy Nicholson, Tom Robson and Lawrence Broomfield joined the choir for the Dvorak which was accompanied by Nick Bland on the organ. The Dvorak Mass is perhaps not as well known as some of the works we have recently sung and this affected audience numbers. Nevertheless, those who did attend were able to enjoy some beautiful music.

For the Christmas concert, the choir performed Vaughan Williams’ *Fantasy on Christmas Carols*, with Lawrence Broomfield singing the baritone solo part. He also joined the choir in some carols. In addition there were performances by two small guest choirs: Benesonantes and Innominata, folk duo performances by Janey Rosenorn-Lanng and Adrian Waters, and readings by Martyn Begbey and Richard Gretton. As usual the concert was a sell-out and much enjoyed by the audience.

The spring concert was devoted to choral works by Howard Goodall: *The Lord is My Shepherd*, *Love Divine* and his requiem, *Eternal Light*, featuring Vanessa Ashbee and Adrian Clarke. In addition the string orchestra performed J S Bach’s *Brandenburg Concerto No 3*, Albinoni’s *Adagio* and the *Intermezzo* from *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni. Sadly, the concert had to be abandoned when Peter Woolley, one of our Bass singers, collapsed during the performance of *Eternal Light*.

In the summer, the concert took choir and audience alike on a musical tour of the world. The choir was accompanied in some of the pieces by Tom Ryan on the drums and Wil Jarvis as a Maori High Priest! There were also performances by Innominata, Nick Bland and Adrian Waters’ English Folk Ensemble. Once again, the audience was disappointingly small, but everyone who came thoroughly enjoyed the performance.

In previous years the choir has also taken part in the annual Choirs Concert in Maidstone, organised by Jupiter Workshops. However, the Committee decided not to take part this year because of lack of support from choir members in the past, leading to very unbalanced performances. Sadly, the concert itself was cancelled owing to the sudden death of Jeffrey Vaughan-Martin.

In December, as in recent years, a group of our members sang Christmas carols at Spadework’s garden centre in Offham in aid of their funds. Thanks again to Sue Payne for organizing this and conducting the singing in her usual efficient way. We were also invited to perform at the Catenian Society Annual Christmas Dinner which took place at the Aylesford Priory. This was organised by Geoff Redmore. Thanks to Sue Greenham who battled with an unreliable keyboard to accompany the group of singers who volunteered and thanks to the Catenian Association for their donation of £170.

Fundraising continued to contribute usefully to choir funds. The main vehicle for this in 2016 was the Classic Cars and Cream Teas event, organised by Martyn Begbey. This time it was held in Offham, with the cars parked around the village green and teas being served in the village hall. I would like to thank Martyn, his wife Pam, Erica Martin, Janet Anderson & Elizabeth Miller for their help in organising this very successful event.

In July, the choir’s annual dinner took place at the Wealden Hall, Larkfield. This was well attended: the card game organised by Mike Rosenorn-Lanng to raise funds for the Apple Tree Room was both fun and successful! Thank you to Janey Rosenorn-Lanng for organising this very enjoyable evening.

The AGM took place on 27 January 2016. It was a momentous occasion in that it marked the moment when Robert Greenham stepped down as Chairman after 17 years in the role! He was presented with

a 'Thank you' card signed by members of the choir, and the gift of £130 worth of Amazon vouchers, purchased with the proceeds of a collection. I would like to thank Robert for his long service to the choir. During his stewardship the choir has grown from 35 members to almost 100 and our repertoire has increased in ambition and complexity. He also steered the choir through the appointment of two full-time music directors. I know that his extensive knowledge of the Singers, which he is always happy to share, has been invaluable to everyone connected with running the choir.

I was elected to replace him (a difficult job!) and in so doing stepped down as Concert Manager. Liz Williams and Janey Rosenorn-Lanng both volunteered to take over as Joint Concert Managers, although Janey is unable to serve on the committee as her husband, Mike, acts as our Independent Examiner of Accounts. Two other changes to the committee took place, one during and the other following the AGM: Adrian Waters stepped down as Bass and Tenor Representative and was replaced by Michael Taylor and Geoff Redmore stepped down as Publicity Officer. His role has been taken on by Martin Begbey, who is happy to combine this with his work as Fundraising Officer. Both were thanked for their dedicated service to the choir. Their replacements were welcomed.

I would like to thank all committee members, past and present, for their support to the choir throughout the year, and especially to me as the new Chairman. Of those not already mentioned, I have to thank Margaret Mannerings for maintaining membership and subscription payment records, Liz Williams for her efficiency as Joint Concert Manager, Bob Norris for the hours he spends sourcing all our music and rubbing out performance marks, Mike Rogers our meticulous treasurer, and John Clayton our exceedingly efficient honorary secretary and programme proof-reader!

I would also like to thank all the non-committee members, as well as some non-choir members, who have continued to give invaluable and regular help to the committee. I hope I do not leave anyone out, but I would like to thank Janey Rosenorn-Lanng for immediately stepping forward to offer to help organise the concerts when I took over as Chairman, even though she was unable to join the committee. I would also like to thank Livia Harasztos and the Pilsden Community for providing extra chairs for our concerts – without them, either members of the choir or members of the audience would have to stand or sit on the floor! Thanks must go also to Belinda Hunter for ensuring that the piano is tuned before each concert, for help with setting-up, and for occasionally holding the fort when our music director has been delayed; Ted Dain and friends for helping with the rostrum and moving the piano each week; Vanessa Talbot for arriving early to set out the tea and coffee things; Michael Taylor, Sue Payne, Pat Ashbee, Norman Kemp, Robert Greenham and others for helping with the furniture moving before and after concerts; Sue Greenham for being the choir's box office and ticket seller for our concerts; the many singers who help to man the raffle and refreshments tables during the concerts including Hilary Parker, Shelagh Jones, Trudy Caplen, Christine West, Erica Martin, Pam Begbey, Norma Diston and Barbara Kavanagh; and Francois Gordon and Matthew Williams for taking over the ticket desk shortly before each performance.

Thank you to all our patrons for continuing to support East Malling Singers, and to the members of our audiences throughout the season.

Finally, I want to thank our music director, Ciara Considine, for her inspiring enthusiasm, energy, dedication and patience which she brings to every rehearsal session and concert.

Elaine Gordon
January 2017