

## Brockham Choral Society

### Chairperson's Report 2019/2020

This year got off to a great start!

We met at St John's School for our first rehearsal with John Bawden as our Musical Director for the Autumn term. We began by enjoying the challenge of a slightly different genre of music with Gjeilo's beautiful "Sunrise Mass", and yet again were amazed by Marion's skill in being able to accompany us so beautifully throughout our weekly rehearsals. Although at times some of us were concerned about the difficulty of the split parts, we successfully rose to the challenge for the concert in St Martin's Church and the audience response was suitably enthusiastic. We all agreed that John's style of conducting was much appreciated. The concert was followed by a great party held at the Viva Restaurant, superbly organised by Jane Stride.

During this term we also organised and hosted the "Voces8" workshop and concert in St Paul's Church, Dorking. Thanks to Reuben Suckling's team of excellent organisers and all the helpers on the day, we welcomed 189 adults and children from local choirs, followed by 278 people in the audience for the evening concert. Due to the outstanding success of the event we were able to donate £1,125 to the Surrey performing arts library.

Social highlights during the year were the choir walk and pub meal in Abinger in September, and a quiz evening in January – especially happy memories now. The end of the Autumn term saw some of us gathering to sing carols at the Beaumont Reigate care home and Kenwood Court in Brockham, followed by a social gathering in the Red Lion at Betchworth and then a visit to sing carols in Broome Park Nursing Home. As we approached the Christmas break, we were left feeling very positive about the prospect of welcoming our new M. D. Cole Bendall in the new year.

Naturally, we were all wondering how we would find Cole's style of leadership, having enjoyed three years of Patrick's undeniable enthusiasm and expertise, so it was a joy to find that Cole had seemingly boundless energy and such a generous spirit, both during rehearsals and in his support of the committee's hard work. He quickly established an excellent relationship with us as we began to rehearse Haydn's 'Nelson Mass' and the three Bruckner motets. I am sure I am not the only person in the choir who felt extremely well prepared for the forthcoming concert which we were due to perform at the end of March. But then...

the Covid19 pandemic arrived.

Never in our wildest dreams had we anticipated that the year would turn out as it has. To say the rest of the year has been challenging for us is definitely an understatement. However, it has not been the nightmare it could have been had we not had Cole's creativity and the hard work of a dedicated committee who continued to communicate regularly via phone and email.

For me, the most difficult part has been in realistically acknowledging the necessity and huge disappointment of cancelling all of our planned concerts and social events and postponing the Composition Competition, and at the same time encouraging the creative thinking and work of Cole and our choir members. For some members, the sessions held via Zoom have been a great help in maintaining contact both with friends and music. For others, the challenge of singing 'alone' or attempting to overcome some technical difficulties was understandably too great, but I know that whether we chose to 'zoom' or not, we are all looking forward to the time when we can rehearse together again.

On the couple of occasions when my thoughts became quite negative, I was suitably encouraged by Ed Criswick's admirable positivity and unfailing hard work, for which I am extremely grateful.

So, as we come towards the end of this season, I want to acknowledge the support and hard work of everyone who has contributed to as successful a year as possible, despite the overwhelming concerns and difficulties that the pandemic has presented us with. Let us pay tribute to our Music Selection Committee – David, Diana, Jenni, Moira, and Sue R, who met several times in January to establish the repertoires for future concerts, only to have their hard work interrupted by the virus, and especially to our Secretary, Ed for all the hours he works on our behalf, and Treasurer, John Dimmer, who has wisely guided us in our financial decisions through this time.

I also want to thank lots of people for their hard work on our behalf – the number of people here is a reminder of what a great team BCS is:

The committee members – Ed -not only as Secretary but also for maintaining our website; Anne Mitchell for her publicity work and Music Selection Committee; Jane as Minutes and Social Secretary; Phil for concert programmes; Reuben and team for his work on the Young Composers Competition; Willo for organising our ticket sales so efficiently; Nick as NFMS rep (which enables him to provide

invaluable advice especially with regard to coronavirus developments and constitutional matters); John, not only for Treasurer duties but also overseeing the annual report and accounts.

Apart from the committee, many members regularly give up their time for which we are also very grateful:

Sue T for her time-consuming grant applications and orchestra teas, Anne S for overseeing orchestra teas, Chris for co-ordinating the advertisers, Mary S and Victoria as our membership secretaries, Romey for her care of the 'Friends', Ali as concert organiser for the Autumn concert, Robin and Victoria and team for concert staging, Ed and Tony and lighting team, Mary W, Janet, Moira, Diana, Robin L and Ray for continuing to act as part representatives each week, and of course, a big thank you to Jenni Lee-Potter as our Librarian. Not forgetting everyone's contributions to social events, chair moving and the provision of the 100 club and book table, ably run by Tony – last, but definitely not least!

**Although this seems like a long list, we really do appreciate the time each one of you contributes to the smooth running of the choir.**

Our work continues as we plan for the future, and the committee will be addressing the important tasks of promoting the choir to attract new members, establishing a social media officer, and responding to the changes that will inevitably occur as a result of this period of uncertainty.

I wish with all my heart that I could say that we will soon be back to normal, but as I write this, that is not yet possible. There are many optimistic signs – such as vaccines almost approved, progress in the research into air droplets and aerosol projection whilst singing, and updating of personal protective equipment in theatres and concert halls encouraging a move back towards concerts – but for now we have to remain patient, vigilant and adaptive to hopefully forthcoming positive change. The safety of choir members remains our priority, and whilst I totally understand the frustration we might be feeling as a result of the restrictions, let's continue to find ways to encourage one another, and let's...

**KEEP SINGING!**

*Estelle Earnshaw  
August 2020*