

## Musical Director's Report for 2020

*Robert Burns wrote, "The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley. Likewise, Edmund Blackadder once said, "I think the phrase rhymes with clucking bell."*

There are things you can prepare for when starting with a new choir. Disagreements with members and committees, differences of opinion, difficult rehearsal situations. These come with the territory of working with passionate, determined people wanting to make music to the best of their ability. Nowhere in the manual (note to self: spend quarantine writing a manual for choral directors) does it tell you that you should prepare for the eventually of the outlawing of group singing making collective practice a criminal activity. Honestly, never saw it coming. How foolish of me.

But this is the world we are in for now and a world where we've had to make changes. In many ways, this is a motivator and catalyst for change. Change is a part of our lives and often it comes so gradually that it's hardly noticed. Sometimes, change is disruptive and sudden and anything that disrupts is, understandably, frightening. But change brings with it new questions, new truths, new ways of viewing the world and people and all the good that comes with that. Change feels weird but generally leaves me feeling optimistic and excited for a new discovery.

Our first planned season was full of discoveries. We were to partner with new orchestras and ensembles, including Covent Garden Sinfonia, soloists from RAM and Glyndebourne, and Surrey Youth Choirs alongside the composer Cecilia MacDowall. We were developing partnerships with new musicians. We were discovering new music as a group. We were developing technical skills to review the meaning of music of the old. We were determined to proceed in the face of significant challenge. And when the venues closed, and the concerts stopped, we kept singing in our living rooms, our gardens, our kitchens, our bedrooms on the most advanced of computer set ups to the most basic of phones. This is the spirit of a choir that I value and am committed to.

The next year will likely continue to be full of new discoveries for us all. We commit to a new pattern of sessions that will continue to help us work on technique, language, choral practice and a diverse range of works that can form the basis of recording and performance work in the future. We monitor health and government guidance regarding group amateur rehearsal and will review the ways in which we can consider practice and perform again live and in person (when this does occur, it is likely to be in very small groups initially, gradually expanding). We monitor new technologies and methods of rehearsing and recording together remotely and making sure that even if you can't rehearse live, you can still feel part of our community. We review new work and new repertoire that will advance our skill set and promise for now and our future. And we will continue to partner with new musicians, inspiring leaders and work together to ensure that you have the most fulfilling experience possible within our group together. We must adapt to the changing world – organisations that do not will fail. And that requires us to work together.

My thanks to our sterling committee for their communication throughout this time, and all office bearers past and present. My thanks to my predecessor, Patrick Barrett, and interim cover, John Bawden, as I prepared to join in January. My thanks to Marion Lea for her communication, input and collegial spirit as we have worked together. My thanks to all of our singers – some of whom I've gotten to know well already and others who I look forward to getting to know more soon.

A final personal note: this is not what I expected on starting with Brockham Choral. However, we owe it to ourselves and to our future to commit to making music together – online and in person. I relish the opportunity to work with you all through this period and come out stronger for it. If the period of lockdown has taught us anything, it's the intrinsic value of arts, of expression, of collaboration and connection possible through choral music. Our connection, if nurtured in this patch, will be all the stronger and a beacon for our community once we make music together live again. I, for one, cannot wait. For now, back to work.