

ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

Chairman's Report to the Annual General Meeting held on 15th October 2012

In my report to you at last year's AGM, I said that the 2010/2011 season had been "another successful one but also, in several respects, a challenging one". How should I assess the 2011/2012 season?

First let me remind you of the events during the year. We followed our by now well established practice of three concerts, one in each of the autumn, spring and summer terms, at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and two "Carols with the Choral" concerts at the United Reformed Church in Hale. At the autumn concert we performed Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, with a very powerful visual display simultaneously projected on to a large screen above the choir, together with the undeservedly little known *Requiem* by the Hungarian composer Frigyes Hidas. In the spring we sang Karl Orff's, *Carmina Burana*, the four Spirituals from Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* and Jenkins' *Adiemus*, the latter for ladies' voices only. For the summer concert we presented – and I use that word advisedly – Johann Strauss's operetta *Die Fledermaus*, in a concert version of that evergreen Viennese work.

For our two "Carols with the Choral" concerts we were joined, once again, by the children of Stamford Park junior school under the direction of their ebullient conductor Liz Rowley.

The excellent Yorkshire Wind Orchestra accompanied us for our autumn concert and it was interesting to sing *The Armed Man* to that accompaniment which some said they preferred to the orchestral version which we had sung previously. In the spring we were accompanied superbly on two pianos by our own Lydia Bryan and Jonathan Scott and joined by a group of very enthusiastic young instrumentalists for the *Adiemus*. Finally, for *Die Fledermaus*, we had, as for several concerts previously, the fitting accompaniment of the Manchester Philharmonia – and the colourful spectacle of the choir dressed in fin de siècle costumes, with the ladies especially eye-catching in brightly coloured gowns, gloves and tiaras or feathers. Invaluable help was provided by Jessica Murrills, Frances Provost and others in achieving that spectacle.

Those are the basic facts but they tell much less than the full story. For all three of our RNCM concerts we had very close to full houses and the total audience number for the year for our three main concerts was the highest in the history of the society. All three concerts were enthusiastically received by the audiences and, for the Jenkins/Hidas concert, we

received a standing ovation – the first time that has ever happened - with people all over the concert hall rising spontaneously to their feet in prolonged applause. I am sure that all of us choir members will long remember that moment and feel proud and thankful to have been part of those three concerts.

So, to return to the question which I posed at the beginning of this report – “How should I assess the 2011/2012 season?” – I can say unhesitatingly that it was an outstandingly successful one. That is something from which we can all take much satisfaction and to which many have contributed but I want to thank some, in particular, for their important contributions.

The professional musicians who accompanied us so well were carefully selected by the members of the Music Sub-Committee. So, too, were the soloists, be they old friends making a welcome return, like Adrienne Murray, or outstanding young RNCM students, like those who sang with such wit and verve in *Die Fledermaus*. A great deal of work, unknown to most of us, was done by the members of the Music Sub-Committee to enable us to have that experience and I want to thank them all on your behalf for that.

As part of the total presentation of those concerts we provided, once again, programmes for our audiences which were in quality equal to or better than many provided by professional companies or orchestras and, for that, we are indebted to Ann Grainger, Elizabeth Jones and Melanie Jose.

But the pride which we can rightly take in the standard of our performances at those three concerts is directly due to the thorough and persevering rehearsing which we received from our Music Director, Steven Roberts, ably supported by our accompanist Lydia Bryan and our Deputy Music Director, David Lloyd-Mostyn. On your behalf I thank them warmly for that.

As you know, Steven’s work with us in rehearsals requires us to commit time each week to practising at home. That activity was greatly assisted, once again, by the excellent rehearsal CDs so capably produced by Stephen Secretan. Thank you Stephen.

I also want to thank you, our members, for the efforts which you made in selling tickets for those concerts, so ensuring the near full houses each time. Thank you also to Tony Campion and John Yates for arranging the full coaches of audience members. Those are excellent examples of what can be achieved when we all pull together and they also benefit, as you will hear from our treasurer, Sue Sinagola, in her report, our financial position.

Your committee had another busy year. In addition to the normal, pre-rehearsal monthly meetings throughout the year, two further, full-evening meetings were held. That was because, in addition to the usual planning and oversight of the Society’s activities and finances, there were a number of major matters to be considered and determined.

One such matter concerned a Choral Day, with Sue Sinagola putting forward a detailed proposal which was considered and accepted. The day, as I hope you all have noted, will take place on Saturday, May 18th 2013, when, with invited non-members, we shall rehearse and sing the Mozart *Requiem*. The event will form part of the Bowdon Festival and take place in St. Mary's church. We hope that it will attract new members and you can all play your part in achieving that.

Other committee activities included promoting the sales of our CD, recorded in summer 2011 and launched at the November concert. Sales, organised by Kathy Duffy, have continued at subsequent concerts and at a stall which we took at the Francis House Christmas Fair. £1 from each CD sold goes to Francis House our charity for the year. We took a stall at the Altrincham Festival to promote the society and again sell CDs, an event initially organised by Kathy and then, when she was unfortunately prevented from continuing, taken on by Marie Dixon, Kate Barlow and Melanie Jose. The stall looked most impressive and more than twenty members came to demonstrate our singing prowess to the crowds. We were organised and conducted, with a truly infectious enthusiasm, by David Lloyd-Mostyn.

For our annual dinner the committee chose a new venue, the Masonic Hall, and the event was very well organised by Marie Dixon. A remarkable range of normally hidden talent was revealed by members of the choir in both singing and dancing, sometimes in truly spectacular costumes. All this was presented by a flamboyant master of ceremonies, Ian Provost, and a thoroughly good evening was enjoyed by all.

In 2013 our long established biennial tour will take place. This time it will be to the attractive Rhine Valley. Proposals from Kathy were approved by the committee and it is good to know that there has since been an enthusiastic response from members.

The committee were very pleased to receive from our president, Roger, his completed composition *The Poppies Blow*, a setting mainly of First World War poems for choir, orchestra and children's choir. On the Music Sub-Committee's recommendation we shall give the premiere of the work, appropriately, at our November 2014 concert at the RNCM.

During the year there were a couple of changes to the composition of the committee. A new post of Projects Manager was established for which Kathy Duffy's talents are especially well suited. Marie Dixon agreed to be co-opted as Deputy Chairman in succession to Kathy. And Kate Barlow agreed to be co-opted as Tickets Secretary when Elizabeth Taylor stood down from that post.

Elizabeth and her husband Brian, one of our basses, are long serving members of ACS. Elizabeth served as Tickets Secretary for five years during which time she carried out that important role thoroughly and conscientiously – and always in a characteristically quiet, unobtrusive manner. On behalf of us all, I thank you Elizabeth for that valuable contribution to ACS.

A position which does not involve committee membership, but which is very important none the less, is that of Patrons and Sponsors Secretary. Elisabeth Lawrence agreed to take it on during the year and she has already done much to increase the number of those special supporters. We can all assist her in that task by putting to her the names of possible patrons or sponsors and I ask you all, please, to consider doing so.

I now want to thank two longstanding members of the committee who are standing down to-night as you may have noticed from the nominations sheet. Audrey Smallridge ceases to be the Alto Rep after serving in that capacity since 1981 and diligently recording attendances and distributing tickets during all that time. Thank you Audrey for undertaking that role for so long.

The other committee member who is standing down is Andrew Wragg. Andrew, as you all know, is our Concert Manager and carries out his duties with great competence and always in a warm and cheerful manner. But what you don't know – and what I learnt from our Secretary, Pat - is the number of years he has served on the committee. Records show him serving as Treasurer in 1985 and he was Chairman in the early 1990s, so that his membership of the committee extends over some 30 years. Andrew has been one of the pillars on which the edifice of ACS has been built and we shall miss his wise counsel at meetings – but it is typical of him that he has agreed to serve as Concert Manager for the coming year to enable his successor, Bill Hetherington, who will serve on the committee, to have the experience of working alongside him. Andrew – we are truly indebted to you for all that you have done.

Finally, I want to thank all the members of the committee and the Music Sub-Committee for their important contributions during the past year and also those many members who are not members of either committee but who undertake so many tasks on behalf of the society to ensure the satisfying and enjoyable experience we all have week in and week out.

Let's together make this 2012/2013 season another happy and successful one.

John Mulholland, Chairman

15th October 2012