

## Conductor's Report 2014

On 26 June 2014 the Choir had its last Thursday evening rehearsal in the Hall at Clifden Centre, Twickenham, marking the end of a long and generally happy period of affiliation with Richmond Adult Community College. We left the building at 21.40, not with a whimper but with a bang... or two... or three, the caretaker making his feelings felt as he slammed the windows shut and cast the long pole to the ground! In contrast to that sadly negative display I want you to share the email I had from Janet Croney, who has effectively been my 'line manager' at RACC while so many of the admin staff have been falling away like flies. She wrote:-

*As we approach the end of term, I just wanted to email you to thank you for all your hard work and patience over the last few years. TCS has been affiliated to RACC for so long that it will be strange not to have you 'in the fold'. I am sure you will not miss the bureaucracy involved with the college. However, we will miss Twickenham Choral Society for many reasons and I wish you the best for the future.*

As we all look ahead feeling very positive about our new venue in St Catherine's School and basking in the friendliness of our new hosts, I hope we can also look back and feel equally positive about the years we have spent at Clifden Centre. In the old days the Adult College had a much more human face. The name Miss Jean de Leon will conjure memories for many of us who go back that far! If TCS has been mostly ignored by RACC in recent years, at least we have had a place to rehearse and we have generally been left to our own devices.

The Choir has emerged from the 2013/2014 season, a season that has been ultra-complicated but I think immensely successful and fulfilling.

1. Haydn's 'Harmoniemesse' and Iain Farrington's fantastic arrangement of the first movement of Mahler's Eighth Symphony at St John's Smith Square in December 2013 was sung to an enthusiastic audience and performed with panache by the Choir, along with magnificent soloists and the totally reliable Brandenburg Sinfonia. This was Twickenham Choral Society's first self-generated concert up in town and a high water mark in the Choir's history.
2. Many of us were up in town again at St Martin-in-the-Fields to reprise some of the madrigals we had sung the previous Spring as well as a few totally new ones. This was a truly amazing event! With minimal rehearsal you splendid people pulled a prize rabbit out of the hat, singing English and Italian madrigals to a select audience on a miserable March evening at 9pm. You sang in smaller groups for most of the madrigals and came together for a few of them. It really worked a treat. Well done all those that cheerfully endured the less than perfect pre-concert rehearsal environment in St Martin's and sang the concert itself confidently and stylishly.
3. Bach's 'St Matthew Passion' was precluded by another successful Tim Brown workshop at St Andrew's Surbiton. These events have many benefits including a financial plus for the choir coffers and some outreach to non-TCS singers.
4. The 'St Matthew Passion' concert at the Landmark Arts Centre went very well. There were many moving moments and the whole work from beginning to end was performed to a very high standard. The two violin soloists, the alto soloist and the Evangelist stood out in many people's minds but I also thought you all sang wonderfully. It is nice that our audience now tends to give us not only positive but even ecstatic feedback after concerts

5. Not content with such a rich helping of repertoire in one season, we decided to join in a performance of Verdi's 'Requiem' as the guests of Vivace Chorus at the Royal Albert Hall, along with Wimbledon Choral Society, the London Philharmonic Choir and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Observing the proceedings from the worst seats in the house, I could not but admire the energetic and appropriate way you appeared to be singing. You seemed to me to be 100% on the ball! On balance I believe this was a very good thing to be part of, capitalising on our own recent concert at the Rose Theatre.
  
6. Finally, I want to thank you for being so patient and cooperative with the eccentric rehearsal schedule we had to devise for the summer concert. The shortness of the period after a late Easter and the interruption caused by the Verdi rehearsals necessitated the additional late December, early January and Easter rehearsals. I am grateful to both Freddie and Tom who took some of these rehearsals in my absence. The foundations they laid must have been solid because the end result – the concert on the day – was a smash hit. Lauridsen's 'Madrigali', made tricky by the Italian, the three Whitacre pieces, the Debussy Chansons, made tricky by the French, and the two Saint-Saëns pieces all came off brilliantly in spite of some anxious moments in rehearsal. Michael Cox's quite extraordinary flute solos gave the final touch to a concert we should be proud of and one that triumphantly rounded off a vintage TCS season.

TCS is obviously the sum or more of its parts: the Conductor, the Assistant Conductor, the Officers, the Committee, the Part Reps, people who fulfil other crucial roles, and the rest of the membership who attend regularly, do their homework and sing their hearts out at the concerts. Chris Britton as Chairman will be thanking some of you individually. I want to thank you all collectively for the cheerful way you support and work for the success of TCS. As they say – 'We are all in it together!' – 'it' for us is the glorious music we are so privileged to experience in rehearsal and performance.

The 2014/2015 season promises to be yet another sack full of goodies! There is another chance to sing Iain Farrington's 'The Burning Heavens' along with Domenico Scarlatti's 'Stabat Mater' and VW's 'Dona nobis pacem' in December – all these to mark the centenary of WW1; in the spring we will sing motets by the Norwegian composer Knut Nystedt and J S Bach, including a very original and effective piece by Nystedt called 'Immortal Bach'; and Handel's 'Israel in Egypt' will round off the season in the summer. Along the way we have another opportunity to air Mozart's 'Requiem' in St Martin-in-the-Fields and there will be a tour in Romania for many of us.

To conclude, I would like to take the liberty of quoting two members who have just left the choir.

*I have hugely enjoyed my two years with TCS and will miss sharing the creativity and camaraderie of such a fine ensemble.*

*TCS has given me so much pleasure over more than 25 years. When I joined, my motivation was to find a good choir with a challenging repertoire and a friendly atmosphere and I certainly made the right choice. In this friendly and talented choir I have been introduced to so many works that were new to me and the pace of rehearsals has made every Thursday evening challenging and rewarding. The Choir peaks just at the right time and achieves a great standard and we have fun along the way too.*

Christopher Herrick