

Conductor's Report 2017

To start with I would like to thank Chris Britton for his unfailing support and for all the hard work he has put into being Chairman for the last 6 years. Building on the excellent work of a distinguished roll call of Chairmen before him, he has overseen an extremely good period in the Choir's history in which musical standards have risen noticeably and the repertoire has been remarkably adventurous and stimulating. To keep the wheels rolling smoothly along the track, an ambitious choir like TCS has a large number of tasks which need to be undertaken. One of Chris's legacies has been to spread the jobs between more people. It is really inspiring that so many of you give of your time and talents serving on the Committee, acting as Part Reps or taking on specific roles, such as Maggie Crisell who has been tirelessly pounding the streets of Twickenham, Teddington and Kingston to drum up advertising for our programmes, and Katrina Lidbetter who has been writing numerous well directed letters which have resulted in mouth-watering sponsorship sums going into the choir coffers.

On the horizon looms the TCS Centenary, and a sub-committee led by Adrian Mumford has been hard at work positioning us to be able to celebrate Season 2021-2022 in style. Sad to report that the Officer triumvirate has not only lost Chris Britton but has also carelessly lost Monica Darnbrough, who suddenly took herself off mid-season to live beside the seaside! Her lively presence in the choir will be hugely missed. I'd also like to express my warm thanks to Rebecca Taylor who, for instance, expertly coached the Schütz and Purcell soloists as well as continuing to dream up lively and beneficial warm-ups each week. And finally, heartfelt thanks to all of you for your amazing work keeping TCS afloat and in particular for your spritely and joyful singing.



What a season it has been! Looking back on it to write this report I realise how busy we have been and what a range of repertoire, venues and musical experiences we have enjoyed together. We have had a big orchestra (Rachmaninov etc.), a middle sized orchestra (Vivaldi), a string orchestra (Scheidt etc.) and no orchestra, singing *a cappella* (Poulenc etc.). We have gone from Schütz to Stravinsky and from Purcell to MacMillan. We have travelled from Vienna to St Martin-in-the-Fields and from Bratislava to Teddington/Surbiton/Kingston.

It is good practice, when we perform up in central London, at St Martin's, St John's Smith Square or in due course at Cadogan Hall, to perform repertoire that is reasonably familiar to us. On that basis, a reprise of **Vivaldi's 'Gloria'** at **St Martin-in-the-Fields** was a good choice for the Brandenburg Choral Festival in October. The Brandenburg Baroque Soloists lead by Persephone Gibbs supported us wonderfully. However, I rather preferred having two trumpets, as we had in our own local concert, rather than the more authentic single trumpet and single oboe. You can't win 'em all...

In December we performed one of our most scary and enterprising concerts to date. Brandenburg Sinfonia was the stunning orchestra supporting us in **Stravinsky's 'Symphony of Psalms'** and **Rachmaninov's 'The Bells'** at **All Saints Kingston**. With input from former Assistant Conductor Iain Farrington, who subtly thinned out the orchestral texture making for a better choir/orchestra balance, you the Choir in my opinion sang like angels, overcoming the harmonic, rhythmic and melodic complexities of the Stravinsky as well as the Russian verbal gymnastics of the Rachmaninov (helped by our Troika of Russian coaches). Three excellent soloists crowned the event, Sarah Fox and Peter Auty singing for us again and Edward Price coming in at one day's

notice and wowing us all. The string players started the concert with a magnificent performance of the Serenade for Strings by Tchaikovsky. It was one of TCS's finest concerts.

In March we were once again fortunate to have a distinguished choral director for the Workshop on **Parry's 'Songs of Farewell'** at **St Andrew's Surbiton**. Ralph Allwood had the choir eating out of his hand, mixing relevant and entertaining information with useful choral tips. Workshops are a lot of work to set up but are extremely good for outreach to other choral singers and for choir members to get a new perspective on the repertoire.

In April an especially large audience graced our next concert, no doubt thanks in part to Timothy West's appearance on the posters. He precluded each of our choral items with the words we were about to sing, many of them of particular poetic richness. The tough programme we sang at **St Mary's Twickenham** was **Poulenc's 'Quatre Motets pour un Temps de Pénitence'**, five of **MacMillan's Strathclyde Motets** and **Parry's 'Songs of Farewell'**. I was very pleased with your musical and energetic response to these beautiful and varied pieces. We were well placed to take the programme on tour to Vienna and Bratislava where we had fantastically good acoustics in all three places, as well as full houses and very responsive audiences. 'The Tourists' rose to the occasion each time singing splendid concerts. (The lady tenors sank to their parts very well!)

It isn't so much of an effort to recall our most recent concert in July. This was probably unique in TCS history. Thirty people had put themselves forward to sing solos, duets, trios or ensembles where they had to hold their voice parts individually. This unusual programme, **Purcell's 'Hear my Prayer O Lord'**, **'O sing unto the Lord'** and **'My Heart is inditing'**, **Scheidt's 'Ich hebe meine Augen auf'** and **Schütz's 'Musikalische Exequien'** was performed at the **Landmark Arts Centre** accompanied by another ace group of string players from the Brandenburg Baroque Soloists stable. Aren't we lucky to have Bob Porter on hand to fix us such great bands? Persephone Gibbs was once more the marvellous leader and she commented that it was a real pleasure for the players to perform such interesting repertoire and she praised the choir for being so game to take up the challenge. Well done all of you for unravelling such a large swathe of notes, bravi the brave and first class soloists and thank you all for being so sporting and patient with the choreography between items! By the way, it was good earlier in the term having former Assistant Conductor Jonny Beatty back for a session on the German pronunciation.



I hope you are all looking forward to our next delicious season with two concerts up in Town and two in All Saints Kingston. In November, a careful selection of some of the **Parry**, **MacMillan** and **Purcell** pieces from last season's repertoire will be paired with the glorious 40 part motet **Tallis' 'Spem in alium'**. The big December concert **Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio'** should be a winner. I have asked another former Assistant Conductor – a real blast from the past, Jonathan Katz – to come one Thursday in October, hotfoot from lecturing in Oxford, to train you up in the German. The Spring concert should be delightful with **Bernstein**, **Lauridsen** and **Finzi** as well as **William Godfree's 'Requiem'**. Some of you will remember giving the first performance. By the way, William entertained us at two summer parties recently and he also created the printed copies of the Schütz and Scheidt for us. He is yet another former TCS Assistant Conductor! To round off next season **Vaughan Williams's 'Sea Symphony'** will be paired with **Stravinsky's 'Symphony of Psalms'**. The advantage of singing the Stravinsky again is that we can all approach it with much more confidence this time around. What a musical cornucopia to look forward to!

Christopher