

Conductor's Report 2019

It has been an excellent season and like every season it has had its particular 'character'.

I am calling it the Season of the Four H's.

Omnipresent throughout the season was the First H, Franz Joseph Haydn, Kapellmeister, with both his 'Nelson' Mass and his 'Creation'.

The December 2018 concert in All Saints Kingston featured two star soloists, Mary Bevan (soprano) and James Gilchrist (tenor) who sang both **Joseph Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass** and, the Second H, **Herbert Howells's 'Hymnus Paradisi'**. The solo quartet in the Mass was splendidly completed by Rachel Helen Smith (mezzo) and Peter Lidbetter (bass). Iain Farrington played the organ along with the Brandenburg Sinfonia, having himself re-arranged Howells's rather overwhelming full orchestral score into a version for strings, harp, timps and organ, made with permission and financial backing from the Howells Trust and the publishers Novello. Full marks to the choir for giving not only an elegant Haydn performance but also a sensitive and brilliant account of the Howells, whose very challenging and at times tiring choral writing was learnt during the weeks of rehearsal with some difficulty but with your customary determination.

Happily, Bob Porter agreed to our airing the 'Nelson' Mass again at the last concert of his Spring Brandenburg Choral Festival of London in May 2019. This time we performed it without the organ part thanks to a few cues taken by the solo violin, some juggling between the violas and second violins, and some passages played softly by the trumpets. It was nice to have the chance to revisit this tuneful and energetic work within the same season, particularly in such a wonderful venue as St Martin-in-the-Fields, and I thought it was a fine performance all round including some extra colour from the additional youthful trumpeters.



Skipping to the summer and staying with the first H, we performed **Haydn's 'Creation'** in All Saints Kingston in June 2019. It can be fairly argued that two major works by Haydn in one season is overkill. In explanation, the 'Nelson' Mass was already earmarked as a companion piece to the Howells because of the similarity of orchestration, the neat contrasting of styles and the perfect lengths. In addition Iain Farrington was all set to make his re-orchestration of the Howells. The committee were then offered the brilliant prospect of considerable anonymous financial sponsorship for the 'Creation' and so, given our pre-set plans for future seasons including the Centenary Season, it was agreed that this summer would be the best 'fit'. I for one have no regrets. Haydn's 'Creation' is one of the great choral masterpieces and it has a delightful story to tell, from Chaos, through six days of Creation, to Adam & Eve. It seems to be the consensus that our performance was a sweeping and moving interpretation of Joseph Haydn and Baron Gottfried van Swieten's take on the opening of the Book of Genesis, thanks to masterly solo playing and ensemble work from the Brandenburg Sinfonia, thanks to the three soloists plus the intrepid Felicity Williams at number four(!), thanks to Rebecca Taylor at the ready with well-chosen piano chords, and thanks to the choir who were truly turbo charged.

The first time I waved my arms at this piece I was a raw student at Oxford and I later performed it with Whitehall Choir, so it has been a privilege and pleasure for me to wave my arms at it one more time. Thank you for your terrific singing.

The choruses in 'Creation' mostly fall at the climax of each 'Day' of creation and are therefore each of them a hymn of praise. In rehearsal this can be a bit 'full on' vocally. The Workshop in May 2019 led by Scott Inglis Kidger on these choruses was both instructive and hugely stimulating and it was very helpful that Scott was also able to join us at the last rehearsal to share his extremely pertinent vocal tips. Honourable mention must be made of our in-house soloists who featured proudly and bravely at the workshop - Alison Williams, Chris Britton and Keith Long. Very well done all three of them - and well done the choir for having such great talent to call on from the ranks!



Having covered the first and last parts of the season, we now move on to the Third H, **William Harris**, whose '**Faire is the heaven**' is arguably the finest of the nine varied and delicious pieces selected from the OUP volume of English church anthems and motets for our Cathedral Classics programme in St Andrew's Surbiton in April 2019. As well as the Harris we sang **Herbert Howells's 'Like as the hart'**; **Charles Wood's 'O thou the central orb'**, **Samuel Sebastian Wesley's 'Wash me thoroughly'** and **William Walton's 'Set me as a seal'**; **John Stainer's 'I saw the Lord'** and **Charles Villiers Stanford's 'How beauteous are their feet'**; **E. W. Naylor's 'Vox dicentis'** and **Felix Mendelssohn's 'Hear my prayer'**. Chris Britton's solos in Walton and Naylor and Alison Williams's gloriously sung Mendelssohn were the icing on the cake of a superb concert in which the rich sound and general musical flexibility of the choir, accompanied beautifully by Rebecca Taylor, was for me a high point in 45 years as your conductor.

And then, straight off to Italy, we repeated it all three times more in awesome acoustical spaces, Perugia Cathedral, Todi Cathedral and the Papal Basilica in Assisi. Rebecca did a grand job underpinning our performances in spite of some less than perfect organs and the Mendelssohn solo was taken superbly by Kathryn Singleton. We all felt that it was a super tour – thank you Felicity!

Finally, I come to the Fourth and Last H. The extra piece we sang at our Surbiton concert was **Robin Holloway's 'On a drop of dew'**. What a difficult piece it turned out to be! I sincerely thank you and salute you for 'sticking with it!' This was the Twickenham Spirit in action.

In fact, may I say in conclusion that the TCS Spirit shows in everything you do as a group, whether it is in the multitudinous tasks you undertake for the smooth and successful functioning of all the choir's enterprises (keeping the show on the road!), or the individual effort you put in to make sure your vocal contribution enhances the final musical performance.

Please give yourselves a hearty pat on the back as we look forward eagerly to an exciting and truly varied season 2019/2020 with Poulenc, Honegger, Pärt, Tye, Lassus, CPE Bach, Handel and in September a reprise of Naylor, Harris and Mendelssohn along with Mozart's ever fresh Requiem.

Thank you! Christopher

P.S. Here's a Fifth H!

Clive Hall has survived 3 conductors and 50 years singing bass then tenor in TCS! Bravo Clive!