

AGM-NOVEMBER 9TH 2020

Report from the chair-Tessa Storey

We would like to welcome you to the first AGM *Cantate* has held in two years. It marks a new phase in *Cantate's* history, as the first to be held since Lucy Joy Morris took the helm as Music Director.

At the end of what has been an extremely challenging year, I would like to thank the whole music team for their dedication and determination to keep on making wonderful music available to the members of *Cantate*. Our wonderful music director Lucy Joy Morris, assistant music director and accompanist extraordinaire Charlie Penn-Jones and assistant music director and outstanding percussionist Graham Instrall have maintained the vision for *Cantate* and the enthusiasm to make Sunday afternoons an enjoyable time for our singers, despite all the current restrictions.

Even before the pandemic struck, the last few years have been years of uncertainty for the choir. But thanks to the various trustees (some of whom have now stepped down) who have dedicated their time to supporting *Cantate* since 2018 and thanks to the vision and energy of the musical team, we have managed to steer the choir through a couple of extremely difficult years. Hopefully we are now on course for what we really hope will be an exciting and positive future!

We trustees appreciate that a great many of you will not know any of us. We hope that the various reports posted on the website will act as an introduction to us, how the choir is run and what has been going on over the last couple of years.

The reason why this is the first AGM in two years is that the previous body of trustees resigned *en-masse* very suddenly in 2018. They left very little in the way of a paper trail or organisational know-how for the new team of trustees who were energetically rounded up at the last minute, largely by Steven Baird, who also assumed the helm as Chair. We are very grateful for all he did to steer us through the initial rocky months. Indeed, at the start of 2019 we were immediately faced with the huge challenge of finding a replacement for Nick Shaw who had been music director for more than 10 years and who decided it was time to move on to pastures new, as well as to reclaim some time with his family. Finally, out of the many applications and four conductors we auditioned, the post was offered to our wonderful Lucy Joy Morris who thankfully accepted and joined us in September 2019.

The first concert of 2019 was held at Stansted Mountfitchet by the Senior Choir and featured a kaleidoscope of music from across the centuries from Purcell to the Beatles. The audience were also treated to an amazing percussion piece for basketballs written by Wolfgang Reifeneder and arranged by Graham Instrall.

This was followed by a joint CJC and CTC showcase held at Summercroft on a Sunday afternoon in May, and allowed both younger choirs to perform entertaining repertoire and percussion pieces to an appreciative audience, followed by well-received refreshments in the playground.

The next concert took *Cantate* to Cambridge at the end of June to sing in the magnificent Church of Great St. Mary's, on one of the hottest weekends of the year! This was a huge joint concert with two other internationally renowned youth choirs: The Bloemfontein Children's Choir from South Africa and the Peabody Children's Choir from Baltimore, USA. Both choirs were on tour and had asked us

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whether we could host a joint concert with them. We had hoped to include a social element, so the choirs could meet one another but in the end it was a sufficient challenge simply to find an indoor venue which we could afford where so many young singers could both rehearse and perform. Ultimately, despite the many challenges the day presented (intense heat, 150 singers from three separate choirs, changing facilities, toilets, risk assessments, unloading the staging, invasions of tourists and more) we made it!! The choirs first performed individual sets, ranging from Bach to Spirituals, with world music and lots of amazing choreographed-singing from the South African choir. They then came together *en-masse* to sing that great *Cantate* favourite, David Fanshawe's setting of The Lord's Prayer. It was a really memorable evening, with a packed church and we even turned a modest profit!

The final concert of the season was the annual summer picnic concert held on the green at Bishop Stortford College. It was a glorious afternoon with a fantastic turn out of parents and friends. This was Nick Shaw's final concert with *Cantate* and the Trainers, Juniors and Seniors were joined by many former *Cantate* singers who had belonged to Nick's 'graduate choir'. All had their own sets as well as joint pieces, and there was, as always, some rousing percussion with Graham Instrall. It was a very emotional concert as the choirs sang many of their favourite pieces with Nick for the last time: and some leavers dissolving in tears.

In the autumn sadly due to a combination of circumstances we were only able to put on one concert, the Christmas concert. On the one hand, it was important for Lucy and the choirs to have time to establish their relationship with one another. Secondly, it was agreed that it was time to introduce fresh repertoire to the choirs. However, learning enough new repertoire to fill a whole 60 or 90 minute concert is a time consuming business. In addition to this, the choir had been gradually losing members which resulted in a short-fall in subscriptions and lower ticket sales which would normally be used to cover the costs of hiring venues. Finally, with so few trustees and active parent-helpers on the team there simply weren't enough of us to organise and manage the various administrative challenges *and* organise several concerts.

Thankfully, a generous donation from some parents allowed us to return to our traditional Christmas Venue of Hockerill Church for a lovely first concert with Lucy directing. The choirs sang both old favourites and some new ones, whilst the parents and relatives joined in with carols and to some extremely energetic Christmas songs when instructed! One of the highlights of this atmospheric evening was *Gaudete*, as the choirs moved through the church to the accompaniment of Grahams drumming, holding candles. Mince pies and wine added to the mood!

Finally, the Senior choir were invited back to St. Paul's Cathedral to join the adult choir *Coro94* for the annual family carol service held at the Cathedral. They were singing under the direction of Michael Kibblewhite, who founded *Cantate Youth Choir* 25 years ago and was its music director until Nick Shaw took over. This is always one of the high-points of the choral year for the seniors. Apart from the early start (!) there is nothing quite like it: singing their hearts out to an audience of several thousand people, the Cathedral glittering with lights and candles, with four lucky singers chosen to perform the solos in *Gaudete*: it is always a magical end to the term, for parents as well!

Although strictly speaking the first concert in March 2020 belongs to the next AGM report, I think that given the extraordinary circumstances the choir finds itself at present due to the pandemic, it is worth mentioning it. We were extremely unsure as to whether we should hold the concert in March 2020 in Standen church, for obvious reasons. But since the government had not yet introduced any restrictions we decided to go ahead. In particular we felt that it was really important for the singers to see and hear the end result of all their hard work. This was particularly the case since so many of

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our members are relatively new and because we had had only one concert since the previous summer. We wanted the singers as well as new parents and relatives to experience a real *Cantate* concert and realise what an amazing choir they have joined!! We also guessed that the choir might be disrupted for some time and we wanted everyone to have something positive to look back on in these long months of lockdown. In the event it was a great success, many new faces, new music, a new sound, and a very good turnout despite everything.

So, to conclude, we would like to thank you all, parents and young people and friends of the choir for supporting us through these difficult times. For your continued subscriptions; for bringing your children sometimes great distances to rehearse at the weekends; for coming to the concerts with as many family members as you can possibly round up.

We are also really very grateful for all those who have helped us in so many ways, whether lending a hand with the staging, with tickets, with helping at concerts. I would like to mention a few people in particular without whose hard work we would not be where we are now:

- Steven Baird for pulling together a team at such short notice, guiding us through those tricky first months of the reconstituted committee and doing so much to set us back on course:
- Alison Fox for all her hard work Standing as secretary, risk-assessor and much much more over the last two years.
- Alison Thompson for putting together material and doing a great deal of publicity for us with local magazines and on Facebook.
- Our absolutely indispensable choir managers, who week after week are there making it all happen. Without them we couldn't hold any rehearsals and there would be no *Cantate*. So three cheers first to Liz Proudfoot, Helen Wallis and Alice Pedley, as well as to those parents who have recently started helping them - Pamela Ferriman, Liz Morgan and Claire Pelly who has been doing the tuck. And looking back, likewise thanks to Charlene Harrison, Helen and Michael Davey, former choir managers and tuck organisers who have had to step back from duties over the last year.

Clearly, with the pandemic in full swing once more and another lockdown upon us, we can make no firm plans for a return to in person rehearsals or events as yet. However if at all possible, pending Government guidelines, we will return to Summercroft on December 6th and the music staff are already planning a "live" Christmas Zoom Concert for members, their families and supporters. We will let you know about the date and time as soon as plans have been finalised.

I would like to finish with a big plea for more help from parents. There are so many ways in which people could help, big and small, regularly or occasionally. The more helpers we have the more we will be able to provide for your children in terms of concerts, workshops and socials. Please e-mail chair@cantate.ac.uk if you can offer any help, or speak to your choir manager.

In the mean time we thank you all once again for your support and wish you all the very best for the next few challenging months.

Tessa Storey
Chair

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