

Music Director's AGM Report – Lucy Joy Morris

I've now been in the post of MD for Cantate for 14 months and certainly couldn't have predicted the turbulence we have encountered when I took the job! Getting to know the members, music staff and volunteers has been great and I have felt hugely supported by the Cantate community who have welcomed me warmly.

A year ago I was just finding my feet, as we began preparations for our Christmas concert. There were so many wonderful traditions to continue, as well as an opportunity to begin new ones and I enjoyed the first performance very much. The atmosphere of the concert was very memorable!

We began the Spring term with plenty of ambition by visiting several schools to spread the word of Cantate. As a result, the 'fun sing' was attended by dozens of visitors, a large number of whom signed up to the choirs, and our two younger choirs doubled in number. We also held a successful Music Works day in March with rehearsals, workshops, games and craft sessions - this was brilliantly supported by many volunteers and it was received well by all! We were hoping to make this a termly event...and hopefully it will become so in 2021.

Less than two weeks later we faced a tough decision as to whether to hold the Spring concert, before any formal restrictions were in place for covid-19 by the government, but as fears of the virus were mounting. Following consensus, we held the concert with a large number of absentees, and pulled off a lovely event knowing it was likely to be the last time we met for a while.

As lockdown took hold, it became clear gradually throughout the summer term that our hopes for an in-person meet-up before the summer holiday would not be possible. Charlie, Graham and I worked hard throughout the term to make plans for future concerts, choose and find new repertoire, put together a recruitment plan and video and design and create future brochures and flyers which will all be really useful for when things start to return to 'normal'.

Now we have reached October half term and are facing a second lockdown, I am even more delighted that we made the decision to start live rehearsals again in September at the very beginning of term. We were desperate to get back to rehearsals and thanks to the hard work of the trustees and choir managers, we came up with a plan to hold 'covid-secure' rehearsals which have been successful and well-attended.

Membership has decreased since January (around the same numbers as this time last year) as so many families are still not feeling ready to return, but with the government restricting numbers at 15, this is no bad thing. Nothing beats normal rehearsals with breaks and social contact, but the choirs are making music, learning and meeting regularly which is something to be proud of.

So we feel for now that our priority is to keep the choirs going as best we can until we can recruit in schools, sing without social distancing and hold longer rehearsals with more singers. We are so grateful for the support and understanding of the Cantate families who continue to support the choirs through these challenging times. As a second lockdown begins, we turn now to zoom rehearsals which will be a new venture for members, and we hope that these are a good substitute for being able to meet in person, or at least better than nothing! Things are so uncertain and it so hard to look into the future, but what remains is the joy of singing, the importance of music education and the strength of the Cantate community. Thank you to Graham, Charlie, the trustees, choir managers, volunteers, parents and members for your on-going support and I look forward to a more musical and joyful 2021!