

summer newsletter 2002

Wimbledon Choral Society

A Romp with Rossini and a Blast with Brahms

My Soul, There Is A Choir

Once again we performed a wide variety of music during the season ranging from a large scale work to small motet gems. It started with our return for the second successive year to the Royal Albert Hall to participate in the Royal British Legion's annual Festival of Remembrance. The RBL had been very pleased with the contribution made by Croydon Philharmonic Choir and Wimbledon Choral Society to the whole event in 2000 and had decided to repeat the format in 2001. As before, we did a fantastic job and, as a result, we have been invited back for November 2002. However, don't get too used to it! It is Royal British Legion policy to change the format and music content on a regular basis and they have indicated that probably this will be our last time - but you never know.



A few weeks after this we had a right romp with Rossini with his wonderful *Petite Messe Solennelle* in St. John's Church, Waterloo. This concert had sheer delight written all over it and the performance just flew along. With superb accompaniment from Tim Sutton and Norman Harper on the piano and harmonium, nothing was going to stop us from enjoying

ourselves from start to finish and it shone through with the recording that was made. For all its little frustrations, St. John's still remains a good venue for us and we shall continue to use it in the future.

One slightly annoying thing with the last concert was the last minute non-appearance of any refreshments and I think if we wish to provide refreshments in the future then we should be prepared to manage that ourselves.

The Christmas concert in December 2001 found us in a new venue, St. Paul's Church in Southfields. We had been unable to secure a viable date at our previous venue St. Matthew's, Raynes Park. As it turned out, the new location proved to be excellent with the main exception of parking which was a real nightmare but there was nothing we could do about that. It did, not, however detract from an outstanding concert that resulted in a high number of compliments from the audience. Star moments in the evening included, of course, the beautiful singing of WCS's President, Ian Partridge CBE. What a delight. Many choir members asked if we could return to St. Paul's because they preferred it to St. Matthew's. Well, you asked, so we are returning there for Christmas this year.



We have been involved in past seasons in several concerts that were part of the fund-raising activities for charities. The previous successful one had been in March 1998 and had raised several thousand pounds for Cruse Bereavement Care. The Wimbledon Guild is a **WG** local charity that had welcomed the opportunity to use a WCS concert for a similar promotion. In this kind of event, it is usual for the charity concerned to take on all the costs of staging and producing the concert and then to take all the revenue from the actual performance, the onus being on the charity to promote the concert and sell the tickets to ensure that they end up with a net gain on the event which goes to their funds. The big plus for us is that our expenses for producing the concert are near enough zero.

Of course, the reverse is that we get zero income as well. However, seeing as most of our concerts leave us with a loss of several thousands of pounds (see previous annual accounts for examples), it does mean that we don't suffer such large losses and we end up, financially, far better off - see the financial section later on.

For their own reasons, the Wimbledon Guild sought for this concert only to promote the name and activities of the charity rather than to make money on the event. Unfortunately, this ended up with us singing to a smaller than hoped for audience which was a little disappointing.



MARK THIS DATE

**New season starts on
Monday 2nd September
@ 7:30pm**

Proms in the Garden

Saturday 14 Sept 2002
Gates open 5.30pm for 7.30pm

35 The Warren
Carshalton Beeches
Surrey

Bring a picnic!
Bring some friends!
Bring your voice!

Tickets £10 (kids free)



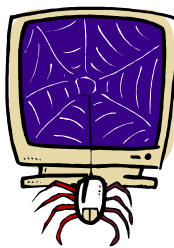
Nonetheless, we delivered what was asked of us - an outstanding performance of Brahms's *A German Requiem* in the Fairfield Halls, Croydon with the splendid New Queen's Hall Orchestra.

Joining us in the performance were some members from other choirs who had taken up our invitation to sing with us for this event. A pre-requisite for this was attendance at a workshop, which took place at Dulwich College in mid-March. It wasn't just a Brahms day though and a sizeable part of the time was spent looking at other music and running some sessions on voice techniques and tips on sight-reading. Our thanks to Michael, Tim and guest tutor Greg Beardsell for their excellent contribution on that day. A large number of you commented very favourably on the format of this workshop, in particular the inclusion of these extra sessions, and we will try to retain these ideas in future workshops.



The season finished back in St. John's, Waterloo, with a delightful mix of Bach, Stanford and Parry (pictured), and an opportunity to perform again that wonderful setting of four Blake songs by Tim Sutton which had been written for us. Unfortunately for me, I had lost my voice on the day of the concert so was unable to sing with you. On the other hand, it did give me the chance

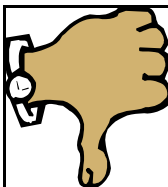
to listen to you in concert and I have to say you put on a fabulous performance - I felt really very proud to be a member of this choir. I know the Bach wasn't a particular favourite (especially singing it in German) but it came over surprisingly well. The items from Parry's *Songs of Farewell* were strong and confident and Stanford's *Beati Quorum Via* was very good indeed. What was disappointing, though, was the very large drop in numbers in members singing in this concert, but I'll touch on that later on.



Overall, then, a splendid season. It was very pleasing to see the choir's membership remain at a high level, indeed increase a little, and a significant number of new members found out about us via the internet and/or the choir's website. When compared to many other choirs of a similar nature we do have a very wide age range and an increasing proportion of members in their 20s or 30s. That's a great advertisement for the enduring appeal of choral music of all types for all ages. The choir, therefore, has to be prepared to evolve over time and find new challenges and ideas to avoid getting trapped in the three-concerts-in-November-March-and-May tradition in order to maintain its appeal.

Being elected Chairman of this choir is a real honour but I can only do my job with the help of a team of dedicated people. First, and foremost, I am really grateful for the assistance and support of the committee, both the full team and the smaller executive group. This choir just would not operate anywhere near as effectively without them. Secondly, we are so fortunate to have the excellent skills and musical leadership from Michael, Tim and Norman. These gentlemen always manage to guide us, an amateur choir, to reaching high quality professional performances and yet still retain that sense of fun.

The biggest thanks, though, go to you without whom the choir would not exist at all. Your hard work and effort pay off time after time. Thank you all and see you on **Monday 2nd September.**



LOST : Too many members for the June 2002 concert at St. John's.

LOST : Nearly £1000 having to hire chorus extras last season.

Ideas for Ticket Sales

- Sell to people other than your regular social friends and family
- Put concert flyers for every concert in churches, dentists and doctors surgeries, health clubs, local shop windows, even the shop check-out counters
- Put season brochures in every library
- Ask at your office if you can put up a poster (size A4 or A5)
- Keep spare brochures in your car or bag
- Include a brochure and/or flyer when writing to friends, local council offices, etc
- Get your friends to write the dates of the concerts at the start of the season - don't wait until the last minute - you know the dates so make sure they do as well
- Organise a meal or party or drinks or cheese & wine with friends after the concert but get them to come to the concert first!
- Be proud of the performances you are and will be involved in and tell everyone about them



Very Important People Needed

Vice-Chairman/Chair

The Constitution has always allowed for this position but, in the 5 years that I've been Chairman, I've not had anyone in this role with whom to share the directing of the choir's activities. We have undergone considerable change during this period in modernising the way that we manage, administer and publicise the choir and its concerts and we are close to getting it as it ought to be. Most of us are either working full-time or lead very busy lives outside of the choir and I've now got to the stage where I need to share the responsibility of leading the Society. Would you consider being Vice-Chairman?

In many cases this role would shadow those tasks that the Chairman does and to stand in as and when required but in others we would designate certain tasks or projects as being handled or supervised directly by the Vice-Chairman. It should not be seen as an onerous job but more a managing and responsibility role. There are several tasks that I do personally that arguably need not necessarily be done by me but that's a different topic. We really seek someone who has a real passion for the choir and what we do, who can communicate well at all levels and be prepared to take and make decisions in the absence of the Chairman. There are no limits on who could, should or ought to be a candidate for this role. It is equally open to ladies, gents, younger members, older members, recent members, long-standing members, committee members, non-committee members -- you don't have to be part of the current small team of volunteers who administer the choir to apply for the role.

Please see either Deborah Raymond or me if you'd like to discuss this possibility further or be registered as a candidate for election at the AGM. Thank you.

Treasurer

Most of you will know that Liz Holder has decided to stand down as the choir's Treasurer. In the time that she has been in this role she has transformed completely the management of our finances and provided high quality feedback to the committee throughout each season as well as keeping an eagle eye on our expenses, making sure we kept broadly within the budgets set and agreed. Liz, on behalf of everyone in the choir and especially the committee, we thank you most warmly for the outstanding job you have done. In particular, I would like to thank you publicly for the tireless support you have given me during this period. I will miss those regular "prod in the ribs" (usually by e-mail), making sure I did certain tasks!

I am absolutely delighted (and so is Liz) that John Bright (bass) has stepped forward and offered to take over most of Liz's tasks for us. He and Liz have spent the past few months gradually handing over the accounts and associated documentation in preparation for the new season. There being no other candidate for this role I would ask that the choir members approve John's nomination for the role of Treasurer at the AGM on **Monday 23rd September 2002.**

Sponsorship Officer

For several years now, Ginny Learmond has succeeded in securing some limited amount of sponsorship income each year although it has become tougher to do so in recent times. Our biggest disadvantage is not having had a local performance home for over 10 years. However, I am immensely grateful for all that she has been able to obtain from local companies, particularly where sponsoring certain elements of the Christmas concerts. In addition to this, though, she played the major part in the start-up of the Friends scheme and this is probably the area on which to focus going forward. Ginny feels that someone else with new ideas and perhaps a fresher approach should have the opportunity to manage this area and to carry on the work started by her.

We need to expand the number of Friends and the content of the scheme to make it worthwhile being a Friend. For the Christmas concert this year, for example, it is proposed to have reserved seating for Friends buying tickets and to welcome them to a separate refreshment area with sponsors and special guests. Similarly, when the ticketing prices allow within a season, another possibility is to offer a reduced rate season ticket for all the concerts in that season. A third idea is that any choir member who introduces two new Friends will not be subject to the Society Rule on compulsory ticket purchase for the next concert that requires it.

Please do consider volunteering for this role as it is a key position in our relationship with our supporters and the potential route for obtaining additional valuable income for the choir. Under the Society's Constitution the choir's committee has co-opted the Sponsorship Officer as a member of the Executive team, such is the importance attached to this activity. We already have someone who manages the Friends database so it would just need you to focus on developing sponsorship opportunities and the Friends scheme. Please let Ginny or Deborah Raymond know if you are interested.

Social Secretary

Those of you who were at the annual Quiz Night at the end of last season will have participated in applauding June Gilmore for the fantastic social events (most of them fund-raising as well) that she has organised over many years. For the next year or so, June will be based on the Isle of Man so we need someone else to take on the organisation of social events during the season. However, for her popular Proms in the Garden (see front page) June will be coming back to organise and run that particular event. In the choir questionnaire 5 years ago, the majority of you indicated that some social events during the year are desired so here's your chance to do something about it. Please see Deborah Raymond if you'd like to have a go.

Ticket Secretary

Earlier this year, Gunny Lenz-Mulligan took on the responsibility of adopting two young babies. She knew at the time that this would limit her ability to attend any rehearsals in the early months and sensibly decided that she would have to stand down as Ticket Secretary.

Would you like to do this job? There are several people who will help you actually sell the tickets but the Ticket Secretary needs to manage this team and work with the other committee and administration positions. In the short time that Gunny was Ticket Secretary she was highly effective in the role and, on your behalf, I would like to thank her for doing it so well. The job's main components would be:

- * Co-ordinate production and/or delivery of tickets allocated for sale through the choir
- * Ensure tickets are available for sale 5-6 weeks before each concert
- * Arrange for tickets to be on sale before and during rehearsals
- * Keep a record of who buys tickets and how many
- * Allocate complementary tickets as directed by the Executive
- * Account for all tickets sold and ensure monies handed over to Treasurer
- * Liaise with voice representatives to ensure members fulfil their ticket purchase obligations as required

It is hoped at some point (maybe this year) to enable potential purchasers to enquire or order tickets via email and the website.

If there are any points about which you'd like clarification then please see me or a member of the ticket team but we really do need someone to take this on. Please let Deborah Raymond know if you are interested in doing this.

Membership Secretary

After countless years as Membership Secretary, Sheila Shaw has also decided that someone else ought to take on this role. Sheila is the smiling and welcoming face that new members see on their first arrival. She ensures that they are allocated a seat and get to meet Michael to arrange the initial audition. This is, though, only a part of her role and Sheila will be a difficult act to follow. In her typically unfussy manner she has managed her job quite superbly and has always been a wonderful sounding board for ideas and feedback. Thank you, Sheila, so much for the tremendous effort you have put into this role.

We are, therefore, looking for a choir member to take on this position and Sheila gave me the details below as a job description to help possible candidates. The Membership Secretary is a key role in the administration of the choir and is on the governing committee of the choir. Please consider taking this job on and let Deborah Raymond know if you'd like to be put forward as a candidate.

- * Maintain the membership list by adding, amending, deleting records - this could be delegated to someone else if you are not PC-literate or it's a better arrangement.
- * Keep and renew voice attendance registers
- * Arrive at rehearsal at least by 19:15 to put out registers
- * Draw up other selected membership lists as required for other members like ticket sales, workshops, etc.
- * Obtain required personal information from new (potential) members on first arrival
- * Supply (and possibly maintain/update) Application Forms, New Member Welcome Sheets, etc for new members
- * Arrange getting music from Librarian, seating, meeting Musical Director and organising auditions for new members
- * Liaise with Treasurer, Subscription Officer and other committee or administration members as required
- * Respond to or redirect queries/questions from members at all times

- * Respond to calls/queries from potential members who may wish to find out more about the choir
- * Advise Musical Director of names of members who may not have been to sufficient rehearsals for participation in concerts and to inform members of the MD's decisions
- * Advise Concert Co-ordinator of member numbers and voice ratios for concerts
- * Get to know as many members as possible in liaison with the voice representatives
- * Maintain confidentiality at all times



FOUND : A black Laura Ashley concert skirt left at St. John's.

FOUND : A replacement for Liz as Treasurer.



For further details about the Proms in the Garden, please contact:

June Gilmore
Apt 6 Douglas Bay Apartments
Douglas
Isle of Man IM3 3AF
Tel: 01624 664252
email: jgilgunny@aol.com



Finance

You can see from the Annual Report and Accounts for the season 2001/2002 that we ended up with a substantial financial surplus compared with the original budget. There were several factors that contributed to this favourable position. The main one was as a result of a change in status of the mid-season concert of Brahms' *A German Requiem* after the budget had been set and agreed, the event now being promoted by the Wimbledon Guild for its own benefit rather than being promoted just by us. As noted in the opening section this change in status meant a significant reduction in our budgeted expenses, saving something in the order of £8,000!

Secondly, the various fund-raising activities that took place during the season produced an astonishing contribution of over £6,700 to the funds. Nearly £4,000 of this came from a highly successful evening of Auction of Promises organised by the ever-resourceful June Gilmore to whom we owe a mountain of thanks for such a tremendous result.

Thirdly, subscription income was a few thousand pounds higher than anticipated due to an increase in membership numbers. This in turn resulted in a larger refund from the Inland Revenue under the Gift Aid scheme - over £4,000. It is pleasing that a very high proportion of the choir have signed up for this. Have you? It costs you nothing. Please see Liz Holder or Sarah Hendry if you want to find out more.

The reporting requirements of the Charity Commission seem to have something added to them each year. In recent years Liz has ensured that we absorb and respond to these new requirements and her meticulous preparation of the annual accounts has meant that no submitted report has ever been questioned by them. So many thanks to Liz and also to Emma Grundy who is our Independent Examiner and effectively audits the accounts to satisfy the Charity Commission's requirements. Unfortunately for the choir (in particular the second altos!), Emma has now moved to St. Albans so will no longer be a regular singer with us although she would be welcome to visit at any time.

One of the latest additions to the Annual Report contents is a statement from the Society defining its policy on financial reserves. A copy of this is included in your copy of the Annual Report but if you have any questions on this then please either ask me at a rehearsal or email me at boss@wimbledon-choral.org.uk. The surplus from last season has boosted our reserves significantly but we will have to make sure going forward that we adhere to the policies that we have laid out.

However, given last season's positive financial finish, I'm sure you will not be surprised that next season's subscription rates will remain largely unchanged. Indeed, the only change will be as a result of listening to some comments raised at the last AGM regarding the zero rate for full time students. There was a feeling that there ought to be some rate even if it was only nominal. In subsequent

discussions and following a debate by the committee it was decided to assign an annual subscription rate of £10 for these members. Therefore the full list of subscription rates for the season 2002/2003 is as follows:

Type	Rate
Standard	£90.00
Aged 25 or Under	£50.00
Registered Unemployed	£50.00
Full-time students	£10.00

These rates are still significantly below the average for comparable choirs in the London area and, don't forget, do include the cost of running a workshop when organised within a season. What value!

Did you know that ...

- ◆ Income from Gift Aid refunds from the Inland Revenue was over £4,000 last season -- just from you filling in a few details on a piece of paper.
- ◆ It cost the choir nearly £1,000 to pay for chorus extras last season because of a fall in numbers in certain voices for one or two concerts.
- ◆ At a seminar in Leeds on *Choral Societies and their Survival* in early June 2002, Wimbledon Choral Society's website was singled out as a "superb example" of how to publicise and promote a choir's activities on the internet. Visit www.wimbledon-choral.org.uk
- ◆ The website gets an average of 20 visits per day.
- ◆ More and more new members are joining the choir as a result of having read about us on the internet.
- ◆ We still get requests trickling in from around the world (including the USA and Australia) asking for copies of our performance of Faure's Pavane, recorded for the BBC-TV World Cup 1998 broadcasts.
- ◆ The special version of Pavane with Des Lynam reading Kipling's "If" is to be used by a major food company for their internal training and promotional videos.



Volunteers needed to design and write a members' feedback questionnaire and to collate and interpret the results



Looking Ahead

What we would like to do, going forward, is to have some element of the season that is different from those before. We certainly need your input and ideas on this. This coming season sees the second of our joint ventures with Croydon Philharmonic Choir (CPC) and the New Queen's Hall Orchestra (NQHO), such was the triumph of the first such concert last year. This year is the centenary of the birth of Sir William Walton so we will be performing his magnificent *Belshazzar's Feast* in the Fairfield Halls on **Saturday 16th November 2002**. In the same programme will be Mendelssohn's terrific choral *Symphony No. 2 "Hymn of Praise"* (the whole work) and Walton's *Crown Imperial*. Start getting this date into the diaries of your friends, family and neighbours. It promises to be a fabulous concert. Further details on the composers and the music to be performed can be found on the website.

The concert on **Saturday 5th April 2003** sees us trying out a new venue for the choir, the concert hall of the Royal College of Music just behind the Royal Albert Hall. The audience capacity here is 470, a hundred more than St. John's Church, Waterloo, but it does allow us to use an orchestra as well. Puccini's delightful *Messa di Gloria* and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* deserve another airing so they will get their chance this season in this concert. Note the date now and publicise it.

There is an exciting finish to the season in May/June 2003 with two, probably three, concerts with the NQHO in various venues in London and the South East. John Boyden, Artistic Director of the NQHO, has invited WCS and CPC to participate in these, the first in a series of concerts across the country of Coronation Music celebrating the Golden Jubilee of HM The Queen's Coronation in 1953. For sure, the launch concert will be in the Fairfield Halls on **Saturday 17th May 2003** but the others are potentially going to be in Guildford and Canterbury Cathedrals at the time of writing.

Looking further ahead, we are pencilling in Verdi's mighty *Requiem* for November 2003 at Fairfield and probably one of Bach's *Passions* in Guildford Cathedral on **Saturday 27th March 2004** (two weeks before Easter).

We have also discussed more about taking a long weekend for a concert, performing it away from the London area. Initial feedback from you was very positive when this was first mentioned a while back but it would be useful to know how many people would really consider doing this. Our initial thoughts are to do such an event in the UK first, potentially York Minster in May/June 2004, before possibly spreading our wings abroad. Whichever way, we need to have this possibility explored, investigated and costed to determine its feasibility. Many other choirs do it so why not WCS? Would you like to go? Would you prefer Friday-Sunday or Friday-Monday? Let your voice representative know. You can find out who this is by looking on the website or in the Annual Report.

OTHER STUFF

The recently implemented new Constitution & Rules and Reserves Policy statement can be found on the choir's website

Introduce two new people to the Friends scheme and be exempt from the minimum ticket purchase obligation for the next concert

Members of the Friends scheme will benefit from reserved seating at the Christmas concert

Once again, Goldsmiths Choral Union have invited members of WCS to join them in singing the Messiah in the Royal Albert Hall on Friday 20th December 2002 - details will be published later on the website and on Monday night rehearsals

A HUGE vote of thanks and congratulations to Tilly and her team leading the Concert Hall Campaign - it achieved its objective of raising public awareness of this topic and continues to prod at Merton Council - Well Done!

And finally

We asked Isabel & Nick Bathurst, who joined us at the beginning of last season, what their initial impressions of the choir were after a year. Isabel wrote:

"Nick and I entered the Community Centre hall in trepidation last September for our first visit to Wimbledon Choral Society. As we were clearly new faces we were soon introduced to various people and were seated where we thought we might best be suited. Nick had never been in a choir before but had recently had some singing lessons. That meant that when it came to being auditioned he swanned in quite jovially and sailed through. As for me, I lost the plot completely, forgot why I was there, quaked in my boots and squeaked out a few notes. Michael was very gracious as he asked if I played an instrument. I was not sure if he was referring to my ability to read music or the resemblance of my voice to something other than the human voice. Nevertheless, Nick and I both passed our auditions and were invited into the choir, Nick initially as a tenor then later as a first bass and me as a second soprano. Our highlight over the last year was certainly singing at the Royal Albert Hall. As Nick explained afterwards, singing the National Anthem whilst looking the Queen in the eye is quite an experience! We enjoyed all the concerts we were able to attend, particularly the Rossini in the Autumn and have passed on the CD to many friends and family who have all thoroughly enjoyed listening to it. We hope to continue next year in what is a very professional and enjoyable choir."

What do you think about the choir?

www.wimbledon-choral.org.uk