

SOTTO VOCE

The Ross-on-Wye Choral Society Newsletter

August 2014

Editorial

Interesting to look back at last year's *Sotto Voce* to see that we were 'basking in a barbecue summer'.

All I can remember now was a steady downpour from September to April, but this summer has been just what we are always hoping for, glorious sunny days and long warm evenings, with languorous picnics in concert intervals. It's just under a month now before we get together again for our **2014/5 season**. The **Annual General Meeting** will as usual be at **7.30pm at Brampton Abbotts Primary School on Thurs 4th September**. Having finished the business we shall have a convivial reunion with a glass of wine before repairing to our seats to sing through one of the numbers we have chosen for our **Winter Concert** which will be in Saint Mary's on Saturday 8th November. At the AGM **Clare** will take us through the accounts for the year

ended 11th July 2014 and these will show a marked reduction in cash held since the previous year. Then we had a cash reserve of approximately £6,500, but this was earmarked for purchasing outright the staging which we had been hiring from the Y-Zone, which had been acquired by our friends the **Ross Baptist Church**. In the event, **Dennis** negotiated a highly favourable price and the staging is now ours. We had always found that the 1m wide panels took us too far into the nave which was fine for concerts accompanied by organ or piano or small ensemble, but left far too little room for an orchestra of more than about twelve, plus up to four soloists. We therefore arranged a part-exchange with CPS Staging and to buy the necessary legs and rails to halve the width of the front three rows, thereby gaining 1.5m of space to our front. When it

came to staging **Haydn's Creation** in our Spring concert, the sixteen-strong orchestra, including timps and fortepiano, had plenty of room, together with three soloists and **Russell** conducting. The staging, which is now stored together with our library on the Chase Industrial Estate in Ross will stand us in good stead for years to come.

The **Open Rehearsal** will be the week after the AGM, **on Thursday 11th September**. It will be publicised, but please ask as many musical friends as you can think of.

In Memory

On 10th September last year, soprano **Alison Taylor** died and we provided a small choir to sing **Mendelssohn's Lift thine eyes to the mountain from Elijah** at her funeral. Alison, a PhD, was a medical writer and a strong and knowledgeable

soprano who had been planning to retire to an island off the west coast of her native Scotland, but this was sadly not to be. She died quite suddenly, far too young and we shall miss her fine voice and relaxed charm.

On the night of 2nd August, **Elizabeth Price** died in St Michael's Hospice, after a return of the cancer which we had all thought she had beaten some years ago. Elizabeth, while undergoing the most debilitating courses of chemotherapy, insisted on attending rehearsals for as long as she could, and even attended the quiz night in March. She had so wanted to sing in **The Creation** and she attended the afternoon rehearsal, but found she was just too weak to sing in the performance. Elizabeth was a dynamic personality who, it will be remembered organised the successful raffle in 2012, at a time when our finances were under pressure, which raised over £1,500, thus enabling us to start the new season with a healthy credit balance.

With Alison's and Elizabeth's passing we lose two of our brightest stars.

Last Season

We finished the season with an experiment, which was to return to **The Larruperz Centre** after a gap of many years, with **A Night at the Opera**. Having been advised about the deadening effect of curtains and flies when singing without microphones from anywhere upstage of the proscenium we placed the sopranos and altos on the front of the stage using elements of our staging. With tenors and basses placed in front of the stage, soloists **Jennifer Walker** and **Peter Wilman** stood to sing on Ivor's boxes, and **John Merrick** accompanied all on the piano, with pages ably turned by **Alison Stafford**. The hall was laid out 'cabaret style' with tables and the bar was open. It was gratifying to see new faces in the audience and the enthusiasm with which they applauded was evidence enough to suggest that the experiment had been a success which would be worth repeating. What should not be forgotten was the hard work by **Dennis** and **Julie** and their helpers, in first of all working out how it should all be set up

and not least in the carrying of the grand piano up the back staircase.

For the first time for many years, we decided to dispense with a carol concert, bearing in mind the number of such events crowding December, and the need to start rehearsing **Haydn's Creation** for performance on 8th March. In the event this turned out to be a triumph, with entries all spot-on and dynamics well controlled. The soloists, **Lucy Bowen soprano**, **Peter Wilman tenor** and **Jimmy Holliday bass**, all gave superb performances in the solos and ensembles which are such a feature of this wonderful work.

The week after **The Creation**, **Mary Walton** organised a successful and convivial **Quiz Night** at **The Red Lion Peterstow**, which, together with the concert raffles raised **over £900**. An overheard remark suggested that it would have been even more convivial had it not been held in Lent.

Next Season

This will be **Russell's** third season as our conductor and musical director, and

now we know each so well, we can look forward to a very rewarding season. The first concert will be in **St Mary's on Saturday 8th November** (three weeks earlier than last season's) and will be with organ accompaniment. The works to be performed are **two Te Deums**, one by **Haydn** and the other by **John Sanders (1933-2003)** who was organist and **director of music at Gloucester Cathedral from 1997 to 1994**. The two main works are **Schubert's Mass in G major** lasting about 25 minutes, with soprano, tenor and bass soloists. The other longer work is the **St Nicholas Mass by Haydn Hob XXII:6** As well as these works we have something rather special: **Das neugeborne Kindelein** by the Danish-born **Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707)**. It is all chorus and we should be singing it in German (which we are so good at!). **Buxtehude** was much admired by the young **Johann Sebastian Bach** who travelled 260 miles to **Lübeck** to hear the seventy-year-old **Buxtehude** playing the organ and to listen to his compositions. The soloists are **Gemma**

King soprano, Helen Stanley mezzo and bass and tenor lay-clerks to be found by **Russell**.

We are reinstating the **Carol Concert** to be held in **Ross Baptist Church** again, on **Saturday 6th December at 3pm**, followed by tea. The committee have decided not to make this a fund-raiser for a local charity, because to make a worthwhile donation would mean a straight loss on the concert. Being so early in December, we may well be first in the town and being in the first week of Advent, we can perhaps include some Advent carols.

Our **Spring concert** will be on **Saturday 14th March in St Mary's**, where we shall be joined by our friends **the Musical and Amicable Society** and soloists **Jennifer Walker, Helen Stanley, Paul Badley and William Burn**. **Mezzo Helen** is the only one who hasn't sung with us before, (although we shall have heard her in the **St Nicholas Mass** in November) but some of us heard her sing **Dorabella** in **Pop-up Opera's Cosi fan Tutte**, and she will be excellent. The concert will consist of two

substantial works, both masses: **Theresienmesse by Franz Joseph Haydn Hob XXII: 12** followed after the interval by **Mozart's Requiem**. The **Requiem** was **Mozart's** last work before he died in poverty in 1792 at the age of 36, leaving it incomplete, but one of his pupils, **Franz Süssmayer (1766-1803)** completed **The Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei** from sketches left by **Mozart**. Since then, others, including **Duncan Druce (1992, New Novello edition)** have brought new scholarship to bear.

Following the success of **A Night at the Opera** at **The Larruperz Centre**, the committee decided that it would be worth repeating with a similar but not identical programme of well-known arias and choruses. There is a huge daily foot-fall at **The Larruperz**, of people of all ages and a wide range of tastes, and it must be the way to show off our **Choral Society** to people who would hesitate to attend an event in church, or who think the music we perform is elitist or uncool and not for them. Let us show them that great music is accessible and there for all to enjoy.

