

SOTTO VOCE

The Ross-on-Wye Choral Society Newsletter

August 2015

Editorial

We find ourselves in something of a watershed following some happenings which will necessitate some rethinking about how our society runs. The first thing we must confront is Dennis's well-earned retirement as Concert Manager, after fifteen years of dedicated service. In this time, over and above making all the arrangements for every concert, Dennis has managed the disposal of the old staging and the acquisition of the new; the weekly opening-up and closing of our rehearsal premises and supervision of security every week in term-time; finding and initiating new storage facilities for our staging and library as well as being a wise and regular member of the committee. It will be difficult to find someone within our membership who can keep things running so smoothly, who is prepared to put in the time, but if we are going to continue to function as an active performing choir, we must find someone, or a team, who will take over from Dennis. Dennis himself will no doubt give all the advice needed to ensure a seamless transition, so please let us hear from someone willing to take on this role which, it would not be an exaggeration to say is fundamental to our existence.

Last Season

The Autumn Concert was held in St Mary's on 8th November, up to four weeks earlier than usual, but although this meant less rehearsal time, the standard achieved was acknowledged to be good. The two

major works were Schubert's **Mass in G Major** and Haydn's **St Nicholas Mass**. Each half was preceded by delightful short pieces, **Te Deum** by Haydn and the second half with the little gem **Das Neugeborne Kindelein** by Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707). This latter piece was suggested by Lesley Conning and was the first time in ten years and possibly longer that we have sung anything by this baroque composer who was so admired by the young Johann Sebastian Bach.

The carols at Ross Baptist Church, accompanied by Roger Judd on the organ were well-attended and the copious tea provided by members was much enjoyed..

The Spring Concert, with the Musical and Amicable Society Orchestra and soloists Jennifer Walker soprano, Helen Stanley mezzo, Ruari Bowen tenor and William Burn bass. Jennifer and William are old friends of Ross Choral Society, having been performing with us for at least ten years. Helen and Ruari are both newcomers, but all agreed that they gave excellent performances. The main work was Mozart's **Requiem** which is a wonderful sing of mostly choruses, so we needed to find something to go with it which would enable us to get our money's worth from the soloists. There is always another problem with the **Requiem** with its unique orchestration which calls for two bass horn and 3 French horns. The nearest to it, if

the basset horn players could be persuaded to lay down their basset horns and take up their clarinets, and the horn players could be persuaded to go home, was the wonderful **Maria Theresa Mass** by Franz Joseph Haydn, which happily has much more work for all four soloists, including some wonderful ensembles.

At the end of March, there was good attendance for Mary Walton's Quiz Night at The Red Lion, Peterstow, a thoroughly convivial evening which raised over £300.

We returned to The Larruperz Centre for our Summer Concert, with a programme of Gilbert and Sullivan arias and choruses, with two excellent young soloists from Royal Northern College, Philip Clieve and Isabella Gage. Once again, the hall was laid out with tables and nibbles and the bar was open. This formula works well, but it would have been nice to have seen another 40 or 50 which would have nearly halved the deficit of £1,245 on this concert. There were a few hairy moments when it was found that one of the choruses had not been rehearsed and had to be learnt on the day.

In the interval, tickets were drawn for the great May Draw, so impressively put together and run by Julie Tyler. With a first prize of £200, half of which was sponsored by the NFU, tickets were sold at a number of locations, including a stall at the May Fair, Pengethley Garden Centre and outside Sainsburys. Although Julie did more than her fair share of ticket selling, she was pleased with the support of the many members who came to help. 2,153 tickets were sold, which with the NFU's £100 gave proceeds of £2,253 less expenses of £325, a net profit of £1,928. This was a splendid result which has more than

doubled our reserve carried forward to next season.

Next Season

The 2015/16 Season will begin as usual with the Annual General Meeting at Brampton Abbots School at 7.30pm on Thursday 10th September, which will be followed by wine and renewing friendship in the break, followed by a sing-through of one of the concert pieces. The principal work is the **Requiem** by John Rutter, which we last performed ten years ago in January 2005. This has a reduced orchestration which we shall be using, which includes flute, oboe, cello, harp, glockenspiel, timps and organ. The soprano soloist for this concert is Roseanna Harris whose grandmother Carol Malim used to sing with us but now prefers to stick to golf and bridge. Other works in this concert are Britten's **Ceremony of Carols** and Vaughan Williams **Fantasia on Christmas Carols**. Roseanna has just finished her Master's at Royal Northern College and is now seeking auditions with opera companies, having had a successful season in the chorus at Holland Park Opera.. These pieces together total about 70 minutes, so we shall ask Roseanna to sing something else to make up a full programme. We have been able to hire copies from Gloucester Three Choirs for the Rutter and the Vaughan Williams but members will need to buy their own copies of Britten's **Ceremony of Carols** at £6.99.

The Carol Concert at Ross Baptist Church is only a week later at 3 o'clock on Saturday 12th December, so we shall be putting together the programme from familiar carols the Thursday before and on the day. The splendid tea we produced last year went down very well so it seems we should repeat the

formula, and promote the event in all the local retirement homes.

The Spring concert on 19th March is to be **Carmina burana** by the German composer Carl Orff (1895-1982), which we have not done before, certainly not in the past 17 years. We shall be joined by the Gloucester Cathedral Junior Choir and SATB soloists. The full version has a huge orchestra which includes five percussionists, so we shall have to have a more modest accompaniment, this being the year of *reculer pour mieux sauter* in our anniversary year, with two pianos and percussion.

We have booked the Larruperz Centre again for our summer concert, but the committee were concerned that the loss was so high this year, so we need to think of ways of selling more tickets and members' ideas would be welcome.

Fiftieth Anniversary

We were founded in 1967 so our fiftieth anniversary is 2017, and we must put on a very special concert in celebration. J S Bach's great **Mass in B Minor** would be something to aim for, but we must be confident that we can afford to do it. We last did it in the year 2000, with our Patron **Dame Felicity Lott** singing the soprano solo, but costs have risen since then and we have many fewer members so we shall need to raise funds to make it possible. We have a quote of £6,000 for the orchestra and four excellent soloists will be £500 each. With staging and other costs of around £1,000 with between £2- and £3,000 to be expected from ticket sales and perhaps a grant, we are looking at a cost to the Society of between £5- and £6,000. To ensure that our finances are in a fit state to pay for this wonderful work, we must continue to raise funds over and above our normal activities. Would

someone volunteer to organise another May Draw, to be drawn at the concert? Also, Chris Cheadle has told us about easyfundraising.com whereby a small percentage of any online purchases can be collected for the Society, without adding to the cost. If all of us did this, it could build up to a very well worthwhile amount. Full details will be made available at the AGM.

We must never forget that the reason we have been able to perform with professional orchestras and soloists for so long is because of the wonderful support of our President Jane Gibson and the Gibson Trust. Last season they gave us a magnificent £4,200 and for this we are truly grateful.

and finally...

At the AGM we shall ask for some minor adjustments to be agreed to our Constitution, arising from the reduced number of members from our early days. When there were 100 members it was felt necessary to have at least 10 members of the committee, not including the officers. With our current membership of around 50, the change proposed is for there to be not less than 5, including the officers. Having said that, we really would like to see more members taking part in the management of the Society, so please let us have some volunteers. Chris Renfield has resigned as Librarian because she is going to be away for much of the year, so we would like to hear from someone who would be prepared to take on this important job. But most important of all, we must repeat the urgent request for someone to take over Dennis's role as Concert Manager - the future as we have known it depends on it!