

SOTTO VOCE

The Ross-on-Wye Choral Society Newsletter

August 2016

Registered Charity No 507112

Editorial

There was a slight reduction in our numbers last season, but we still had more tenors than the Hereford Choral Society! The coming 2016/17 season is our fiftieth, and we must do all we can to attract good singers to join us in making some wonderful music, all described below. We were careful to husband our resources last season so that we can afford to have the excellent soloists and orchestra that are booked. More than ever, it will be a joy to sing with Ross-on-Wye Choral Society in our 50th season, but we must never forget the debt we owe to our President Jane Gibson and the Gibson Trust who again gave us a most generous grant of £4,000. This together with a grant of £500 from Ross-on-Wye Town Council, mean that we have been able to continue to stage concerts with excellent professional soloists and musicians.

Our patron, **Dame Felicity Lott**, has let us know that she would like to retire, but in view of the fact that we have had a new letterhead printed, proudly bearing her name, she is happy to continue to be on it until we run out of paper.

Last Season

The main work in the Advent Concert held in St Mary's on 5th December was a return, after ten years, to the **Requiem** by John Rutter. Martin Perkins and the Musical and Amicable Society supplied players for a reduced

orchestration which was perfect for the relatively intimate space in St Mary's. The soprano soloist, making her debut at Ross-on-Wye, was Rosanna Harris who brought a party of five, including her granny Carol Malim who had been a member of the Society. The concert started with two seasonal pieces (if somewhat early, season-wise) the **Ceremony of Carols** by Benjamin Britten and the **Carol Fantasia** by Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The carols in Ross Baptist Church the following Saturday were again well attended, not least on account of the growing reputation of the tea served afterwards. Being a regular event on the second Saturday in December will help to establish this event as a fixture in the Ross calendar. Christopher Boodle played the organ, and guest soprano Ginnie Mellor (Melanie's younger daughter) gave a lovely account of **O holy night** by Adolphe Adam.

The Spring Concert on 23rd April was two or three weeks later than usual. Having decided that it was time to do Orff's **Carmina burana**, we needed to find something to go with it which would form the first half of the concert, but wouldn't need more soloists or instruments. The Fauré **Requiem**, with which many of us were familiar, fitted the bill admirably. Mindful of the need to conserve resources, the full orchestra for Carmina was out of the question, but again, there is a

much reduced version consisting of two pianos and percussion. Seeing the various instruments and devices being set up was an interesting diversion. There were four timps, two glockenspiels, tubular bells, xylophone, tam-tam, tambourines, cymbals, triangles, snare drum and bass drum, all provided by Matthew Green's **Ritmatic Percussion Ensemble**. We welcomed the **Sine Nomine Junior Choir** to sing the *Veris leta facies* and join in the final *O Fortuna*. The soloists for both pieces were **Gemma King** soprano and bass-baritone **Alex Jones** who saved us money by singing not only the bass and baritone numbers, but the tenor and alto as well, all for one and a half times his normal fee!

We gave a good account of the Fauré, with organ accompaniment by Christopher Boodle, and it would not be overdoing it to say that, inspired no doubt by the brilliant percussion, the performance of the Carmina was something we shall all remember for a long time. The two pianos were played by **Christopher Boodle** and **John Merrick**.

Because the Spring Concert was so late, and a number of members wanted to call it a day for the season, we didn't have the time or resources to put on another public performance. Instead, we had a convivial Concert Party at our rehearsal venue. There were three Thursdays between the two dates, and we made use of these to work up some old favourites, including **Zadok, Jesu Joy of man's desiring, Now is the month of maying, and Le Cantique de Jean Racine**. Melanie Mellor, David Backhouse, Marion Mackie, Robin Symonds and Russell himself gave solo offerings, and we finished up with wine and members' excellent canapés. It was a friendly and convivial evening, attended by some of the patrons and members' spouses and

sweethearts. It may be a formula we can develop and use again.

Next Season

The dates for next season are:-

Thursday 8th September - AGM and first rehearsal

Thursday 15th September - Open rehearsal

Saturday 3rd December - Advent Concert in St Mary's

Saturday 10th December - Carols and tea at Ross Baptist Ch

Thursday 5th January - Start again

Saturday 1st April - Spring Concert in St Mary's.

Our **Advent Concert** consists of two works, both new to us. The first half will be the **Hymn of Praise**, the cantata which is a large part of Felix Mendelssohn's **Second Symphony**, sung in English. There are five choral numbers, two of which are interwoven with beautiful soprano duets. The well-known **I waited for the Lord** from Psalm 40 is one of these, The soprano soloist is Hannah Davey and we shall hope to find the second soprano from among our members. The chorale **Now thank we all our God** will also be familiar to most of us. There is a tenor soloist and the organ accompaniment will be by our friend Christopher Boodle. The work lasts about forty minutes.

The second half is **Mass in Blue** by Will Todd (born 1970). This was premiered as a Jazz Mass when commissioned in 2003 by the Hertfordshire Chorus. It calls for a small ensemble consisting of piano, percussion, bass and some brass, and we shall be seeking these from the Birmingham Conservatoire which has a jazz faculty. Hannah Davey, equally at home in classical or jazz, will be singing in this work as well. Will Todd is a prolific composer, with two operas, cantatas and an oratorio to his name

together with concertos, choral works and numerous orchestral pieces. The Mass, which lasts a little under forty minutes, is in its usual form of Kyrie, Credo, Sanctus and so on, and is mostly chorus, with the soprano weaving in and out. It will be a great challenge, but a great sing if we can adapt ourselves to the genre.

The carols will again be in Ross Baptist Church on Saturday 10th December, starting at 3pm, followed by our usual excellent tea.

Our Fiftieth Anniversary Concert is **The Seasons** by Franz Joseph Haydn. The three soloists are Lucy Bowen soprano, her son Ruairi Bowen tenor and Edward Grint bass-baritone, all of whom have sung with us before. The original plan was to do the great **Mass in B Minor**, but we decided reluctantly against it because the resources required, both vocally and financially, were beyond us. **The Seasons** calls for a relatively small orchestra and three soloists. Each of the four seasons lasts about thirty-seven minutes, making a total of two hours twenty-six minutes, so we may be looking to cut some of the recitative. There are three or four choruses in each season, including a chorus of peasants, one of peasants and hunters and a joyful drinking chorus. There are some wonderful ensembles by the soloists, reminiscent of **The Creation**, and soloists join in several of the choruses. Starting on 5th January, we have twelve Thursdays to rehearse, so it is important that everyone works to learn it at home and misses a minimum number of rehearsals, to make sure that we give a truly memorable performance. For the first time, we shall be charging £20 for tickets, which is actually about the minimum anywhere for a work of

this scale, with professional orchestra and soloists.

The Future

The officers of the committee, Bridget secretary and Clare treasurer will not be seeking re-election after next season. Both have given amazing service for longer than anyone could have expected, and they must now be allowed to stand down. The chairman will be 80 at the end of the 2017/18 season, and will also be standing down, but will continue to serve on the committee (if wanted) until 2018. All three will wish to continue singing with the Society, although the chairman's voice may well have joined the ranks of the dear departed by then and he may be encouraged to retire to the audience. Both Tony librarian and Chris programmes and interval refreshments may be moving away from the area in the next year or so, so we have a very real problem of succession. We are a registered charity, and we must run our affairs in a proper manner, so to continue in being, we must appoint a competent new committee without delay. Many of the older members will have done their share, so it is to the more recent joiners that we must appeal.

...and finally

Brampton Abbots Primary School is having the playground resurfaced in a very special and expensive material which will mitigate the worst effects of grazed knees, but they have done a Risk Assessment which has adduced that cars can no longer be parked on it, in case it should be sullied by a drop of engine oil. So from now on, we may only park on the forecourt, with the overflow going on the road. In fact, the only damage to cars which has ever occurred was in the playground behind the school, and

cars parked in the road, under street lighting, are probably safer there.

A reminder about easyfundraising. Not many members have signed up for this but it is a painless way of raising money for the Society, every time you shop on line with one of the many participating retailers. The Society is already registered, so all you need to do is register your name with email address and password, and nominate the Society

as the beneficiary. Go to www.easyfundraising.com and follow the simple sequence. Then whenever you shop with one of the retailers in the scheme a little box will come up in the top right-hand corner which asks you if you want the transaction to contribute. It adds nothing to the price you pay, but a small percentage will go to the Society. If lots of us did it, it could produce a very worthwhile figure, so do please sign up.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Fiftieth Annual General Meeting of Ross-on-Wye Choral Society
will take place on Thursday 8th September 2016 at 7.30pm

at

Brampton Abbots Church of England Primary School

for the purpose of

1. Receiving the reports of the officers
2. Receiving and if appropriate approving the Financial Statements for the year ended 11th July 2016
3. Appointing members of the committee
4. Approving members' subscription for the 2016/17 Season
5. Conducting any other business

