

## **ELTHAM CHORAL SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2022 TO AUGUST 2023 Report by the Chair**

The year to September 2023 has been an exciting one with lots of changes. Along with many other choral societies, our numbers - and our income - had dropped significantly during and immediately after the Covid pandemic.

This time last year, the new committee agreed we urgently needed to improve the choir's financial position, viability and sustainability, by recruiting more members, generating more income and improving members' experience of ECS as an enjoyable social organisation and I'm really pleased to report that thanks to the committee's hard work and your support we have made good progress on each of these priorities. Thanks to a recruitment drive – seeking out community events, leafleting, advertising, we are slowly beginning to increase our membership and it's great to welcome new faces – and voices! However, recruitment remains a priority for us this coming year.

One of the biggest changes last year was moving to our new rehearsal venue here at the United Reformed Church. Not only were we able to negotiate a much cheaper rent than at our previous rehearsal venue but being here means we are able to carry out various fundraising events such as our monthly raffles and Bring and Buys. Thank you to all who have contributed to these events, especially William Sterling whose tours of the British Museum have proved really popular. Our fundraising events have meant we were able finally to dispose of our old staging and buy some new, more modern portable staging.

For the first time since pre-pandemic days, we performed four concerts last year. Our first Come and Sing of the year was a performance of Fauré's Requiem and in spite of not charging for audience tickets we actually made some money through sales of refreshments! Many of you will remember our Christmas Concert at the Parish Church of St. John's Eltham, which, in spite of atrocious weather, a seasonal flu bug and England playing in the World Cup still drew in a large, highly appreciative audience who thoroughly enjoyed singing carols with us. It was really good to have the children from Deansfield Chamber choir with us. Our Easter concert of the Handel 'Coronation Anthems' along with Bob Chilcott's 'Aesop's Fables' timed beautifully with the coronation. For me the highlight of the year was our summer concert which featured some fantastic opera choruses as well as songs from the shows. We were lucky to have some amazing soloists – and it was a really enjoyable evening. We have also included a "sing along" for the audience at each of our concerts and this has proved very popular.

After the social distancing days of Covid it seemed really important to develop the social side of Eltham Choral Society; we held a Christmas jumper day in December, celebrated St David's day with Jill's Welsh cakes and those of us who were able to attend thoroughly enjoyed the Christmas and Summer parties -thanks to Sue Mack and Jill Pollock respectively for hosting those.

An important project we committed to last year was the commissioning of a new choral work by Esther Bersweden. We are grateful to our anonymous benefactor who continues to contribute to this project. Esther has assured me she is on track to

have the work completed by February and we will perform 'Greenwich - A Journey Through Time', in the summer of 2024.

Huge thanks go to Max and Andrew, our Musical Director and Accompanist. We are really fortunate to have musicians of such high calibre working with us -it's been a delight to work with them both and I have really appreciated their willingness to work with us, by, for example, cutting down on costs for concerts over the past year without compromising on quality. Max has an amazing ability to get the very best out of us as well as sourcing wonderful soloists which add so much to our concerts and Andrew's keyboard skills are legendary!

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the committee who have worked so hard and who have committed time and effort to their roles, to the section reps who do such a good job in welcoming new members and being responsive to any queries and also to other members of the choir who whilst not being on the committee contribute so much. We have achieved a lot over this last year and this has been very much a joint effort. As you know, after over 20 years on the committee, Fiona Gardiner, our Vice Chair and Secretary, has decided to stand down at the AGM, and my personal thanks and those of the committee go to her for her work over many years. (Presentation)

That concludes my report; the coming year has a really exciting programme with ambitious concerts planned and I very much look forward to us all working and singing together!

Sue Quirk - Chair October 2023