

# August 2005 Newsletter

Dear Members and Patrons,

## Chairman's Notes



### A late summer

I write these thoughts a week or so after our summer concert in the Princess Hall, Cheltenham Ladies' College, with our guests from Göttingen. It was a most enjoyable experience to sing with the choir from the St Jacobikirche and to have another chance to perform John's composition, *In Praise of Earth's Beauty*. An encouragingly large number of you took part in the concert, and judging by the feedback I have received, I was not the only one who thoroughly enjoyed the occasion!

I am however beginning to develop some sympathy for professional footballers who, having finished one season in April (or May if they are involved in the Cup Final!), have to begin pre-season training again in August!

### A successful year...

The choir has enjoyed another successful year, staging the two showpiece concerts in May and November, the Carol Concert and the Summer Concert already mentioned above. John will be touching on these performances and future plans in a little more detail.

The membership of the choir remains well above 100, and we remain in a satisfactory financial position. The introduction of voice tests for new members has passed off without any adverse effects and is a useful control on the quality of singers now joining the choir.

### ... punctuated with sadness

It has also been a sad year, with the deaths firstly of Alan Blenkin's wife, Sheila, while on holiday, then of John Todman who had been one of our Vice-Presidents since 1999, then of Alan Franklin, a former Chairman who had been a dedicated member and supporter of the choir from its foundation.

### Vice-Presidents

Our other Vice-President, Tony Jeans, notified the committee in the spring of his resignation after six years in the role. We are greatly indebted to Tony for his support over the years and are delighted

that he will continue to be a Patron and that we will therefore continue to enjoy his company at forthcoming concerts.

As for the future, we are very fortunate indeed that Diggory Seacome has agreed to take up the position as Vice-President. Diggory's knowledge and experience of the local music scene and council matters will be of great value to the choir as we plan our future direction.

### Committee Matters

After three years as Chairman and three as librarian I have decided to resign from the committee at this year's AGM. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with the committee on your behalf. Our aim has always been to provide a musical experience that is challenging but achievable and enjoyable for all, in a friendly and supportive social context. Whilst it's impossible to please all of the people all of the time, I hope we've pleased most of you most of the time!

Ann Hookey has also decided to resign from the committee at the AGM. Ann has been a committee member on and off (mostly 'on') for the best part of 30 years! She has played an enormous part in the running of the choir and in its development over the years. We all owe her a great debt of gratitude for the effort and energy she has so willingly contributed.

Both Tom Pearson and Catherine Stuart have also decided to resign; Tom because of the pressure of other commitments and Cath because there's no more room in her house for any more music!

All other members of this year's committee have decided to stand for re-election (at the time of writing!).

This means we will need at least two and no more than four new committee members for the new season.

### Young blood

I have been encouraged lately to see an increase in the number of younger new members. All choirs benefit through a degree of regeneration from time to time and it is good to see this happening at CKCS. It would also be beneficial if some younger members were to involve themselves on the committee and in the fund raising group.

### Fund Raising

Fund raising has always been important to the choir and Helen Wilby has, with the support of the committee, put in a huge effort this year to help boost our income. All the events have been well supported

and I know that Helen is extremely grateful to those people who have so ably supported them. Her 'strawberry fest' was a particularly nice touch which raised a useful sum and was a great treat for us all. Many thanks to Helen, and to all the Fund Raising Team.

### Cost of Venues

The latest schedule for the Pittville Pump Room indicates a cost of £1,500 - £2,000 for a Saturday if one wishes to use the facility through the afternoon and evening. This is well beyond our means for all but the most special of occasions. The committee is concerned that the Council's policy on charging for the Pump Room and the Town Hall has effectively put them beyond the reach of local societies such as ourselves, and that this cannot be right. The new committee will be considering this situation and may well approach the Council formally on the matter.

### John and Peter

At times, we tend to take the professional input from John and Peter for granted. However, we should never underestimate the knowledge and experience they bring with them each time they run a rehearsal. It is a privilege to work with them and they should know that we do indeed value the enormous contribution they have made and continue to make to the society.

Ron Medland



## Diary Dates

(concerts in **bold**)

### 2005

- Wed 7 Sep First rehearsal  
Wed 21 Sep AGM  
(after rehearsal break)  
Sat 15 Oct Autumn Market  
(Stanton Room)  
**Sat 5 Nov**  
**Mendelssohn Hymn of Praise**  
(All Saints')  
**Sat 17 Dec Carol Concert**  
(St Mary's)

### 2006

- Wed 11 Jan Resume rehearsals  
**Sat 20 May Durufle Requiem**  
**Dvorak Mass in D**  
(Holy Apostles)

## From the conductor



Writing this after the concert with St Jacobi Kantorei, which was immediately followed by a holiday in Austria, I feel soaked in Germanic culture! We had a very successful concert with the Germans on August 3<sup>rd</sup> (the Gloucestershire Echo thought so too!) and I know that our efforts will have gone down extremely well with all those in Cheltenham Borough Council responsible for town twinning. Haydn's "Maria Theresa" Mass was an ideal work for singing together and the large number of singers taking part made the performance feel very secure and relaxed. One of our tenors wrote to me afterwards commenting on how accurate the Göttingen tenors were! In the end we managed to agree on most of the differences between editions and pronunciations, and there was a tremendous spirit of friendship between the two choirs. Time spent with St Jacobi choir away from the concert hall, listening to their rendering of *Ein kleiner, grüner Kaktus*, complete with choreography for both choir and conductor, has convinced me that we too need a few light-hearted party pieces that we can switch to at a moment's notice – at parties, on coach journeys etc. A big thankyou to all those who provided accommodation for German guests. The demands on your time were considerable and the hours sometimes unsociable, but I hope that you all had a good time together.

The past year was dominated, for me, by composing and performing my new work *In Praise of Earth's Beauty*. Thank you for putting so much hard work into performing it on both occasions, and for your kind and appreciative comments about the music. It meant a lot to me to be able to offer you something new and substantial which was, I hope, tailor-made to the choir's strengths. Sir Thomas Beecham, commenting on the notorious echo in the Royal Albert Hall before the acoustic 'flying saucers' were installed once said that it was the only place where many of today's composers could be guaranteed a second hearing of their works! I count myself fortunate indeed that you were keen to request a second performance.

It has seemed like a long summer of Haydn, and our performance of *The Creation* back in May was a fine one, backed up as usual by the orchestra and the excellent Guildhall soloists. In spite

of the last minute change of venue the atmosphere for this work seemed just right and it was clear that the audience enjoyed it.

Our next challenge, on November 5<sup>th</sup> in All Saints' Church, is Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise*, a bright and optimistic work with lots of bold (but not over-difficult) choral singing. The early date of this concert will give us more time to devote to the Christmas carol concert, and allow us to be a little more adventurous.

Next May we switch to Holy Apostles' Church to perform two fine works with organ accompaniment only: Dvorak's *Mass in D* and Duruflé's *Requiem*. The Duruflé is demanding in places, but we will have plenty of weeks to prepare them to a high standard.

Looking further ahead, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CKCS (2007) is fast approaching and the occasion needs to be marked in style! Plans are still in the pipeline for the exact nature of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert in May of that year. Other possibilities that present themselves are perhaps a return trip to Göttingen to sing in the St Jacobikirche (there is a Big Party visit from Cheltenham that summer), and also some sort of commemorative booklet about the choir. I envisage this being in the form of short contributions from a good number of people writing about their experiences with the choir (those that are printable!) together with photographs from over the years. Please start to put your minds to this and search out old photographs. I am willing to write my own contribution, of course, but I am hoping that someone else will volunteer to take on the task of collating and editing. Please let Ron or myself know if you would like to take this on.

Thank you all for your continuing enthusiasm for the choir and for all the hard work over the past year. I believe we are in a very healthy state, with numbers high, and an undiminished desire to accept new challenges!

John Wright

## And finally...

### MY FRIEND THE SPELL CHECKER

Do you remember when we used to sit down with paper and pen or a typewriter and write correctly-spelt words without the aid of a spell checker? Seems incredible doesn't it! Recently, however, I discovered just how dull life was without this wonder of the modern age.

Checking spelling is only a small part of its job; far more important is its talent to amuse, as Coward put it. Being of a rather methodical disposition, I decided to put on computer details of all the works I have sung in concerts over the past, since I first joined a choir! My passion for keeping records meant that I had programmes for all these concerts from the University Choir in Belfast to CKCS, Prestbury, Camerata and various one-off scratch or charity concerts. So I began to enter the details meticulously, date, works performed, conductor, venue. After a while I decided to check for typographical errors. It soon became obvious that my spell checker was not particularly well-versed in musical terminology and that it had certainly missed school on the day they were teaching composers' names. However, not to be defeated, it made the most helpful suggestions as to what I really wanted to say. I never realised that I had sung works by Parcel, Pergolas, Hoist, Albanian, Mailer, Rotter and Wanton!

Did Bach really write about a Whacked auk? Was Handel's heart inciting? I was sure that in my list there had been no sign of Zodiac the Priest! Then moving on from Handel to Haydn, it came up triumphantly with Einstein eat vain curate, expecting fulsome praise for its ingenuity. Praise? I told it in no uncertain terms that any spell checker worth its salt would at least have studied Latin at evening classes! But it ignored me and simply prattled on about motels called Uni Carrots and Tantrum Ergo.

But I got my own back. I showed it who was boss! "Try these", I said as my fingers flew over the keys. Belshazzar Rachmaninov Budavari Liebeslieder Sweelinck Paukenmesse Honneger Harmoniemesse SZYMANOWSKI...

The spell checker went quiet. The suggestions box on screen remained blank. Try as it might it could not come up with a single alternative. I had won! But revenge is not always sweet and I began to feel sorry for what I had done. I had destroyed its confidence. I had taken away its fun, its reason for living. I felt I had to make amends but I was in a quandary. Should I point out its mistakes, teach it some new words and encourage it to be a better spell checker in future? But then I realised that to do so would be to deny it its only enjoyment in life; a life that from then on would be mere drudgery with no light relief to brighten the days. So I left it in its ignorance. And there it sits, ready and willing to do its job to the best of its ability and still with the facility to amuse another user another day.

Jill Smith