

# Musical Director's Report 2022–2023

## REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The 2022/3 season saw MK Chorale re-establish its pre-Covid feeling as things returned to normal. We have had several hugely successful performances, both musically and, importantly, financially (see the Treasurer's Report).

## COUNTERPOINT BY CANDLELIGHT

Following several requests from members to sing some early music—specifically the music of Tallis and Byrd— I devised a concert that weaved together some of the greatest pieces of English Renaissance music, with other music on the theme of counterpoint, and an overarching historical narrative to create a semi-immersive experience for our audience.

This concert was a resounding success, and it was great to see the church almost full. On-the-day feedback from audience to me highlighted the huge appreciation that most of them had for the explanations of what to listen out for in the music and the placing into historical context—for many it made the music come alive.

Thanks must go to Alex for his wonderful performance of Mendelssohn on the organ.

## CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Following the cancellation of our Christmas Concert in 2021, we were delighted to be able to perform in a new venue of St Peter & St Paul, Olney (Stony Stratford being unavailable). It proved a great success and gave Lily her final performance with the choir.

## ST JOHN PASSION

We had originally planned to perform *St John Passion* back in Spring 2021, but of course this was one of the performances that had to be cancelled due to our extended Covid break. There are valid arguments to be made for singing the work in either German or English, but I made the decision to stick with Bach's original language, especially as we would be performing with a period instrument orchestra. This enabled us to give a performance that allowed us to experience what the early performances would have sounded like.

We were joined by six Josephine Baker Trust soloists, and what wonderful soloists they were too. We were also joined by the Musical and Amicable Society, members of which I have worked with in the past in other orchestras. They were a fantastic period orchestra, who really added to our performance.

The concert was a resounding success, and it was also a real pleasure to perform in Cornerstone, arguably our 'home'. Everyone really came together for a performance that had all the emotion and passion that Bach's music requires.

## MK CHOIRS FESTIVAL

For several years now, Craig McLeish has organised the MK Choirs Festival in Campbell Park and a small number of us were delighted to be able to perform a selection of pieces from our Songs of Love concert to yet another different audience, together with the opportunity to hear what other choirs in the MK area do. It was a hugely enjoyable evening and one we hope to repeat. Plans are already being made for a different set of repertoire to be used in next year's festival, subject to enough singers being available as we were only just a viable group for this performance.

## SONGS OF LOVE

Our final concert of the season, Songs of Love, included a wide variety of music from a wide range of composers centred around the theme of love. The addition of a violin made necessary by the inclusion of Whitacre's *Hebrew Love Songs*, added an extra dimension to the concert, and I am hugely grateful to Anna and Alex for working so hard on the Franck Violin Sonata.

The concert also marked the first performance where the choir were led by Felix and that too was a great success. Thanks also to Stephen Meakins for providing additional accompaniment on the piano. Stephen is rapidly becoming part of the MKC family!

Summer concerts are always difficult to programme, with the knowledge that many singers often don't sing in this concert, and trying to find music that should feel 'lighter' [why is there that expectation?]. The *Liebeslieder Waltzes* are a staple of summer choir concerts up and down the country, so it was good to be able to programme it with other suitable music.

The concert finished with Lauridsen's *Sure on This Shining Night*, and I can say that without a doubt, this was the best performance of any piece that Chorale has done in my time with the choir. It had real shape and poise and was exceptionally musical. It was a fitting end to what had been a fantastic season.

## CONDUCTING SCHOLAR

During the course of the year, we said goodbye to our second Conducting Scholar, Lily Platts and welcomed our [newly-named] Conducting Fellow, Felix Dickenson.

I'm grateful to everyone for the welcome and support our scholarship/fellowship scheme has received. When the scheme was envisaged, it was to give young conductors at varying stages of their careers, opportunities to work with a larger-scale chorus and the experiences they gain with MK Chorale are immensely

valuable. We are one of only a handful of choirs doing this, and it's a scheme of which we are rightfully proud.

## LOOKING FORWARD

There is a very eclectic mix of music planned for the 2023–2024 season, and there really should be something for everybody; New music, different genres, classic repertoire, orchestral/piano/organ/wine glass accompaniment, serious pieces, fun pieces – the list could go on!

Applications will soon open for our next Conducting Fellow.

Musical plans for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season are well under way—they are necessarily slightly changed from those already publicised. [Please note that published programme plans are always subject to change for any number of reasons].

By the time of this AGM we will have mostly completed our programme of voice appraisals. This will prove immeasurably useful to inform me of the overall quality of the choir.

## IN CONCLUSION

Once again, I can report that we've had an excellent season musically; with some real musical highs—St John Passion was a particular highlight of my musical career to date. MK Chorale is in a really good place musically and I'm looking forward to the progress we can continue to make as we approach our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary milestone.

MJ

1/10/23