



Post-concert feedback, Songs of Love, 1st July 2023

This report sets out the results of the online survey of members immediately following the performance of *Songs of Love* on 1st July 2023 at St Mary and St Giles, Stony Stratford. An audience of approximately 130 attended the performance.

48 members who sang in the concert were asked to provide feedback on the rehearsals for the concert, the performance itself, the venue, and the practical organisation of the concert. Any other general comments were also invited.

40 members who did not sing in the concert received a separate questionnaire asking them whether they had attended any rehearsals for the concert, what their reasons were for not singing, and the most important of those reasons. If they were in the audience at the concert, they were invited to provide feedback on the performance.

Both questionnaires were anonymous and were open for responses until July 16th.

MEMBERS WHO SANG IN THE CONCERT

The overall response rate to the survey of members who sang in the concert was 78%. The response rate by voice section is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Response rate by voice section

	Singers	Responses	Response rate
Soprano	18	13	72%
Alto	16	12	75%
Tenor	6	3	50%
Bass	8	7	88%
Total	48	35	73%

REHEARSALS AND THE PERFORMANCE

Members were asked to respond to eight statements about the rehearsals for the concert and the concert itself, on a five-point scale. The results reported in Table 2 combine 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' responses into a single 'Disagree' category. Likewise, 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' responses are combined into a single 'Agree' category. As a benchmark, the table also shows the weighted average of the percentage who agreed with these statements for the previous five concerts (*Messiah, Fauré and Dale, Jubilee, Counterpoint by Candlelight, St John Passion*). The statement about the overall success of the concert is not included in the benchmark data, since this was only the second time this question had been included in the survey.

Table 2 Summary feedback on rehearsals and the performance

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Weighted average % agree, previous five concerts
Overall, I liked the music for this concert	2	6	27	91%
	6%	17%	77%	
When rehearsals started, the part felt within my ability	1	6	28	76%
	3%	17%	80%	
By the performance, I felt confident with my part	0	3	32	92%
	0%	9%	91%	
Overall, I enjoyed rehearsing for this concert	4	5	26	88%
	11%	14%	74%	
Overall, I enjoyed performing on the day	1	3	31	95%
	3%	9%	89%	
Overall, this concert was a success	0	2	33	
	0%	6%	94%	
As well as knowing the notes and rhythms, I felt able to put detail into my performance	2	3	30	90%
	6%	9%	86%	
Rehearsing and singing in this concert helped me extend my musical skills	1	7	27	80%
	3%	20%	77%	

It is noteworthy that the percentage of singers who said they liked the music for this concert and who enjoyed rehearsing for it is well below the benchmark. The scores for these two items were the lowest of the previous six concerts. This was clearly not the result of a perceived difficulty in the music, since the two 'confidence' ratings were close to the benchmark.

Members were also invited to offer any comments they wished to on their own performance. 15 (43%) did so. Comments covered a range of themes, including the challenges of singing in German and performing *Five Hebrew Love Songs*, the impact of personal circumstances, the effect of practice at home, and having to stand all the time in the concert:

My German pronunciation is still iffy.

Concerns about pronunciation were a distraction throughout rehearsals. I was just about there by the concert but would really like a break from German.

Only missed one entry so very pleased

Least confident on certain entries than any other concert: 2 in particular

I spent a long time practising at home so was annoyed/frustrated the opening of Whitacre was less secure.

Less confident with two small sections of the Hebrew Love Songs! Was on my own too with tenors next to me. Really enjoyed everything else and found I could sing a fair bit off by heart. I had put in a lot more home practice than usual due to having to miss some rehearsals which really helped.

I found the timing in the Whitacre more difficult than hitherto on the day, I suspect partly because I was not alone in that.

I felt I did it to the best of my current ability when considering the state of my health. I aim to improve as my health improves.

My own performance was not up to my usual standard. I missed 4 rehearsals and although some of the pieces were fine, I never felt ready to perform the Brahms satisfactorily. I didn't feel it was a good choice for the summer.

Overall very happy with it. However, I'm aware I made a few silly mistakes due to anxiety.

My enjoyment came out in my singing.

Not the best concert I have ever done

The pre-concert rehearsal was great and gave me confidence but by the second half of the concert I felt tired and I felt I was starting to lose concentration. I did feel unprepared for the concert this term due to my own personal distractions so I did better than I expected on the day. Will try harder!

Standing for a long time all afternoon and then again for the concert was exhausting.

I would have preferred less standing or more opportunities to sit down

VENUE AND ORGANISATION

Members were asked to respond to statements about the venue for the concert, the practical organisation of the concert and the final rehearsal on concert day, the layout and staging for the concert and the choir's entrances and exits. The results are reported below in Table 3, with the same merging of responses as in Table 2 above. As above, the table also shows the weighted average of the percentage who agreed with these statements for previous concerts, as a benchmark. However, we only have data for all five previous concerts listed earlier for two of the statements. The number of concerts on which each average is based is shown in the table.

Table 3 Feedback on the venue and practical organisation of the concert

	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Weighted average % agree, of previous concerts
Overall, the venue worked well for this concert.	1	6	28	
	3%	17%	80%	83% (5 concerts)
Overall, the practical organisation of the concert and the rehearsal on the concert day was effective.	0	2	33	
	0%	6%	94%	86% (5 concerts)
Overall, I was satisfied with the choir layout and staging used for this concert.	0	7	28	
	0%	20%	80%	89% (2 concerts)
Overall, I was satisfied with the choir's entrances to and exits to the performance area.	0	1	34	
	0%	3%	97%	86% (St John Passion)

It is worth noting that satisfaction with the organisation of the concert is high, as is satisfaction with the choir's entrances and exits from the performance area – an issue of some concern at the performance of the St John Passion. The lower than benchmark score for layout and staging is likely to be due to the impossibility of seating the whole choir at St Mary and St Giles, Stony Stratford.

16 members offered written comments on the venue and the organisation of the concert. Seven of these were concerned with the limited space in the performance area, for example:

It's a very tight and cramped space

Whilst the location is very convenient for me, I would generally prefer venues with more space, and therefore seating, for the choir.

We were squashed together. Music had to be held too close and at the wrong angle. It was difficult to see Mark. We were standing for too long in the rehearsal, not so bad in the concert itself.

Other comments expressed general satisfaction with the venue ...

Churches are rarely suited for performance, but this one works better than most.

So much better than the venue in Olney, particularly for the parking and location

... appreciation for the clarity of guidance from the Concert Manager ...

Very clear instructions in the email from Concert Manager

The instructions re entrances/exits were much better, clear instructions re applause etc was good and appreciated - just think we 'look' better, a more 'disciplined' choir - important with large numbers of people.

As always efficient but please tell people how to hold folders. The opening of folders etc was better but a couple of people 'missed the memo!!'. Also I don't know what you do about people that say they are 'a rebel' and didn't wear black on their feet and short dress!! Not fair on rest of us with overall look.

... and one comment on how best to allow for members who are busy before the concert on allotted tasks:

I would have preferred to go to sit at the side at about 7:20 and not go into the small room for Mark's "pep" talk. This would have allowed those who were outside in the church doing the raffle, wine etc. to have calmly slipped into their seats at the last moment.

One member asked why the gallery at St Mary and St Giles isn't used any more. In fact, it is now available, but was not needed given the audience size. It was closed for a period due to a risk from falling stonework, which has now been resolved.

Finally, one other comment:

There's always a small problem or two, we are adults - can sort out!

OTHER COMMENTS

15 members offered other written comments on the concert. These are given below, grouped by theme.

THE PROGRAMME

A lovely way to end off the season! Thank you, Mark and Alex. Very much enjoyed listening to the Franck - a superlative experience.

The Franck was a real treat, congrats to Alex.

Brilliantly put together programme. Violin piece fab.

The superbly played violin was a wonderful addition to the concert.

Perhaps after singing the St John in German, it would have been better to have more English texts in this concert.

I didn't really enjoy the Brahms, and I do find singing in German difficult

I didn't think the choice of the Brahms and Whitacre pieces was appropriate for a summer concert. Therefore I wasn't able to 'sell' it to anyone as a concert to enjoy. A small selection of the Brahms pieces might have worked, together with some other, more light-hearted pieces on the same Songs of Love theme. The Ireland, Daley & Lauridsen pieces were lovely, but I feel a summer concert needs some fun!

The lower numbers who 'traditionally' sing in the summer makes it difficult, in my opinion, in terms of programme choice - I was very anxious the Brahms was a challenge because of singing in German, (fewer singers means more 'exposure' for those singing; no place to hide?!) I am not confident with German, so I spent a very long time listing/practising at home because of the language, not the notes. While I like the Brahms, the lack of any 'secure' home key and lack of 'obvious' link from one short song to the next is a challenge. Can we not sing it for a number of years now - please! The Hebrew love songs was tricky for different reasons, but good for us to sing such pieces - challenge is good. The short pieces were beautiful.

I found some of the religious content less palatable than the secular love songs in this particular mixture although I happily sing the repertoire of "great " Christian works despite my lack of faith!

CHOIR MEMBER RESPONSIBILITY

Shame several people dropped out last week possible as they didn't feel confident. I feel people should commit earlier and practice.

My guests felt that there were at least 3 choir members miming. Their favourite piece was the Hebrew piece because it was so different.

CHOIR ETIQUETTE

I thought that it was a good idea to go through all the finer points of "looking professional" and knowing when to clap, how to move, what to wear etc. We forget that we have new members and cannot assume they know choir conventions!

We practiced the folder-opening but most people seemed to ignore this in the concert. Some of us were almost not ready to start because we were still waiting for Mark's signal. It would be a good idea to make it more formal with the introduction of this part of our performance. I guess some people are still learning!

LEADERSHIP

I feel very proud to have been a part of it and count myself fortunate to have the opportunity to sing under the guidance of Mark, Alex and Felix

Sincere thanks for all the hard work - really did pay off.

Thank you to everyone for a great season, all trustees, Mark and Alex, also Felix for his contributions.

MEMBERS WHO DID NOT SING IN THE CONCERT

The overall response rate to the survey of members who did not sing in the concert was 65%. The response rate by voice section is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Response rate by voice section

	Members	Responses	Response rate
Soprano	14	9	64%
Alto	15	12	80%
Tenor	6	3	50%
Bass	5	2	40%
Total	40	26	65%

REHEARSALS

19 (73%) of respondents attended some of the rehearsals for the concert. Respondents who attended any rehearsals were asked to rate their enjoyment of rehearsals on a five-point scale, from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. 14 members who attended any rehearsals agreed or strongly agreed that they had enjoyed them, one disagreed, and four were neutral.

REASONS FOR NOT SINGING

Respondents were given a list of nine pre-set reasons for not singing, and could also list any other reason. They were first asked to select all reasons that applied to them. The results for this item are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 All reasons for not singing

All reasons for not singing	N	%
I had another planned commitment on the concert day.	13	50%
A change of circumstances meant I had to pull out at short notice.	2	8%
I was not able to attend enough rehearsals.	10	38%
I found the music too difficult to sing.	1	4%
I didn't like the music.	2	8%
The venue did not work for me.	0	0%
I was unwell.	4	15%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at rehearsals	0	0%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at the performance	1	4%
Other	6	23%

The other reasons identified included family commitments, health issues during the rehearsal period, work pressures, and from one member: "I am increasingly frustrated by the lack of time actually singing in rehearsals."

Respondents were also asked to identify the single reason which was most important in them deciding not to sing in the concert. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Most important reason for not singing

Most important reason for not singing	N	%
I had another planned commitment on the concert day.	10	38%
A change of circumstances meant I had to pull out at short notice.	2	8%
I was not able to attend enough rehearsals.	4	15%
I found the music too difficult to sing.	1	4%
I didn't like the music.	1	4%
The venue did not work for me.	0	0%
I was unwell.	3	12%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at rehearsals	0	0%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at the performance	0	0%
Other	5	19%

Four respondents offered written comments on why they did not sing:

Loved the Lauridsen, Whitacre interesting, didn't like the Brahms.

Just number of pieces and found some difficult to give my best too.

Problem with my son's family meant I had to be in Wales looking after grandchildren.

Continuing to build up my health post surgery.

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS

Three respondents attended the concert as audience members and offered comments on the performance:

The choir sang well and were well balanced. Unfortunately there were a few weak entries from the sopranos. Diction was especially good in the Lauridsen.

Very enjoyable

I enjoyed the concert, particularly the Ireland (well done Felix), the second Brahms and the Lauridsen which came over as sung from the heart.