



## **Start of Season Newsletter: 2015/16**

**To all of our Members, friends and supporters**

Through this *Start of the Season Newsletter* we would like to welcome all Members, Patrons, Friends and well-wishers to yet another year of music and fellowship.

As always, we report on both changes that have already taken place, as well as those still ahead of us, all of which your Officers and Committee Members will devote their energies to embracing positively, whilst seeking to bring renewed success for our Society in the year ahead.

### **Message from our Chairman Alan Spencer**

Dear fellow Members,

A new season is nearly upon us and I look forward to seeing you all again at our opening rehearsal on September 7<sup>th</sup>. A particular welcome to some new members who will be joining us for what promises to be another challenging and enjoyable season of music-making. For some of us the Mozart *Requiem* and Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* are well known but I imagine that for many this will not be the case and I can assure you that you will find the experience of learning these works immensely satisfying. On a personal note I am particularly looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with the *Sea Symphony*, a work I first sang with my college choir many years ago! Vaughan Williams is a composer with whom our past President Roy Douglas, who died a few months ago, was especially associated. Roy was a great supporter of the Choral Society and we shall be dedicating our concert next April to him.

This past season has been a particularly satisfying one not least for the uplifting experience we all shared in the performance in April of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. That it proved such a success is a testimony to the enthusiasm and hard work of our Musical Director, Rebecca, who provides so much inspiration to our singing. I am pleased that she remains so committed to the Choral Society and look forward to continuing to work with her during the coming season.

Whilst it is satisfying to continue performing great works of music, it is important to remember that they are extremely expensive to perform particularly in a venue such as the Assembly Hall and whenever large orchestral and professional soloist support is required. It is imperative that we all make the maximum effort to sell as many tickets as possible to our friends and families. Please make this a personal commitment for the coming season. Your help and support in organising and supporting special fund-raising activities will also be very much appreciated.

Since taking over as Chairman last November I realise the importance and challenge of the job I have taken on, and just how much we owe to Roy Dunstall for being in the driving seat for so many years. Now one of our Vice-Presidents, Roy keeps in touch with the Society's activities and I very much value his continuing interest and support.

Unfortunately we shall be losing our good friend at the piano as Anthony has reluctantly had to offer his resignation due to a new full time appointment he is taking up this September. Anthony has been our accompanist for the past ten years and we have all benefited from his wonderful musicianship at the keyboard and his friendliness and sense of humour. We wish him well in his new appointment. Work on finding Anthony's successor is already under way.

## Message from our Musical Director Rebecca Miller

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

At this time of year I always take the time to reflect on the year behind us and look towards our next season. I would like to begin by thanking all of you for a wonderful 2014-15 season and for all your hard work in your singing and to all those who put in countless extra hours helping to run the choir and all its activity.

This past season was quite extraordinary - two giant choral masterpieces, performed with passion, energy, and terrific commitment from all of you. Our performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* now seems years ago, but I felt was a great achievement of the choir. It was a wonderful chance for us to further explore our connection with Elgar, where I started my journey with RTWCS, and what an intense and important work it is. 2015 began with our long and intense relationship with the *St Matthew Passion*, a journey that at least took me, and hopefully some of you as well, to extraordinary places - dark and light - and forced us, as Bach so often does, to question the very meaning of life, essence of being, and our role as human beings. I thank you all for your courage in believing in the vastly different stage layout, which I think made all the difference not only to our audience's experience of the work, but to ours in performing it. I know that many of you were affected by the extraordinary music making of the *London Handel Orchestra*, and the proximity to them and to each other in our antiphonal set-up made it as near to a perfect rendition as I thought we could get (save it being in German!). And of course my enormous thanks go out to Jane, Sheila, Jane, Alan and Trevor for their extraordinary contributions to this aspect of the concert - Sheila for hours of drawing and redrawing the stage plans and meeting with the AHTheatre staff; Jane for rallying the Section Leaders in very last-minute re-organisation; and Alan and Trevor for their time spent on the project and particularly their midnight-madness presence in the set-up itself.

In looking forward to next season, I have yet again to be thankful for being able to be a part of bringing to life some great works of art - Mozart's *Requiem* has been a piece I've known, sung, played, and loved all my life. However, this will be my first chance to actually conduct it, and I relish the opportunity to do so. It is a piece of such exquisite beauty and power, it's no wonder that it seems to have infinite endurance, despite precious little of it being by dear Mozart!

In the spring, the committee and I have decided to make a change from the originally slated Bernstein *Chichester Psalms*. Fear not - this magnificent work will be rescheduled again very soon, but I am delighted to announce that we will be presenting Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* and will be joined by the fantastic and well-renowned *Salomon Orchestra* from London. Named after Johann Peter Salomon, the famous commissioner and premiere performer of Haydn's '*London Symphonies*', this extraordinary amateur orchestra will join us for the performance, and is able to offer us the added bonus of an extra orchestral rehearsal in London outside of the concert day, which I believe will enhance our collective musical experience exponentially. This has now been fixed for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April from 11.00am to 2.00pm: travel arrangements for the choir will be announced later

In a change to the format we have had for the past years, I have decided, with the Committee's approval, to appoint an assistant conductor. The idea of this is twofold - the demands on my time are increasing, but I remain completely committed to the choir - I hope that appointing an assistant conductor will help provide consistency of rehearsal technique for any rehearsals that I cannot attend. In addition, it will provide an opportunity for a young budding choral conductor to gain valuable rehearsal and choral conducting experience and help spread the word of the wonderful work of the RTWCS outside of Tunbridge Wells itself. The Committee asked that I personally appoint someone as opposed to it being a long and time-consuming process of advertising and auditioning, and I have decided to appoint James Kealey, who is the Senior Organ Scholar at *Royal Holloway*

*University*. James is an incredibly dedicated, hard-working, and talented musician, whose dedication to the post is shown by the fact that he will be commuting from Egham for his share of the rehearsals. I will be working closely with James on his rehearsal planning, and monitoring his work carefully.

This two-tiered system of musical leadership is well-known in amateur orchestras and choirs and provided that it is well-organized and supervised (which I assure it will be), it should not adversely affect the rehearsal process (and hopefully will even enhance it). The timing and number of rehearsals taken by James will be a matter of flexibility and trial/error, and I will be continually assessing the situation, and asking for your feedback at various points during the process. I ask for your open-mindedness and flexibility in adjusting to what will be a significant change to the rehearsal process, but again assure you that my interests are in the choir's success as a whole. James has sent a message of his own in this newsletter, and I trust that you will enjoy working with him.

Finally - my hopes for the coming season are that we continue our work on rehearsal discipline (promptness, attendance, limit to chatting in rehearsal), and to further push ourselves to do more work outside of rehearsals, so that the experience of rehearsals themselves becomes more about music-making, phrasing, sound production, blending, dynamics, intonation, and less about learning the notes/words.

I am greatly looking forward to another season of terrific musical experiences, and wish you all the best until I see you next.

### **Message from our new Assistant Conductor James Kealey**

I'm writing to introduce myself to you all, and to say how honoured and excited I am to be joining the RTWCS as Assistant Conductor.

For as long as I can remember, I have had a keen interest in particular in choral and organ music and I am looking forward to bringing my passion for this repertoire to you throughout the 2015-16 season. Currently, I am the Senior Organ Scholar at *Royal Holloway, University of London* where I am the principal accompanist to the renowned *Choir of Royal Holloway*. In this capacity, I also play for the choir on broadcasts (recently BBC R3), recordings and tours, and on several occasions have been able to conduct this choir too.

Before this, I was Organ Scholar at Blackburn Cathedral, playing for/singing with and conducting nine different choirs. I have been very fortunate to have worked with professional choirs, amateur choirs, children choirs, and I am very excited to be working with a choral society of such high distinction and calibre as your own.

Running alongside my new role at RTWCS, the organ scholarship and the Finals year of my undergraduate degree, I will also be the Director of the *Founder's Choir at Royal Holloway*.

Working with Rebecca over the past year and a half at *Royal Holloway* has truly inspired me as a musician, and I'm very much looking forward to working with all of you from September, beginning with Mozart's emotional and powerful '*Requiem*'!

## CALENDAR of KEY DATES: Season 2015- 2016

- **Our FIRST rehearsal will be on September 7th 2015**
  - Rehearsals will be held every Monday evening at St John's Church Hall [*Grosvenor*], Amherst Road, Tunbridge Wells:
    - however, please note that owing to Church activities, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month rehearsals will take place in the CHURCH itself, rather than in *Grosvenor* as usual.
  - For those who wish to purchase their own copies of the score of the Mozart *Requiem*, our Librarian Diana Blower asks you to note that we shall be using the *Barenreiter* Edition
  - Diana will have copies **for hire** on September 7<sup>th</sup>, for which there will be a charge of £2.00 per score – and Diana will be very grateful if Members could please bring the correct change on the night.
  - Please remember to bring a soft-leaded pencil and eraser to rehearsals, to annotate your scores with the directions of the Musical Director!
  - **Normal** Monday rehearsal times are from 7:30 to 9:30pm [with a 10 minute break mid-way].
- **AGM: Monday November 2nd:** 9.15pm to approx 9.45pm in St John's Church Hall: following a slightly foreshortened rehearsal
  - The formal *Convening Notice and Agenda* will be circulated well ahead of the date of the AGM
- **Sunday November 15<sup>th</sup> at 3.00pm in the Assembly Hall Theatre:**
  - Autumn Concert
  - Programme:
    - **Mozart's Requiem**
    - **Mozart's Symphony in E Flat [1<sup>st</sup> and last movements]**
    - **Beethoven's concert aria Ah, perfido**
- **Sunday December 13<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm: St Mary's Church Goudhurst**
  - Traditional Christmas Concert.
- Other smaller fund-raising events in the pre-Christmas run-up are likely be announced during the autumn

## Important Notice: Fund-raising

As our Chairman underlines in his own Message, fund-raising Activities are essential to your Society's continued success, and to its ability to stage Concerts of the high standard that is necessary for our survival.

To illustrate this, here is a list of the fund-raising activities that were undertaken during the 2013 – 2014 Season, together with an indication of the sums raised by each activity:

- |                    |                                    |      |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|------|
| • Raffle tickets - | Jean Finch                         | £864 |
| • Summer Tea Party | Muriel Thatcher and Olivia Seaman: | £350 |
| • Home Baking -    | Margaret Butcher                   | £130 |
| • Garden Party -   | Elena Lewis Grey                   | £300 |

• Quiz Evening -	Guy Huntrods and Trevor Hurrell	£1250
• Carols at John Lewis -	Melissa Richards	£560
• Book Stall -	Muriel Thatcher and Eileen Phillips	£286
• Singing at 2 Weddings -	Group effort	£225
• <i>How Argo got it Wrong</i> -	Talk by Martin Williams	£790
• easyfundraising.org.uk -	Organised by Liz Ford	£123
	<b>Grand total:</b>	<b>£4,878</b>

This meant that through fund-raising we generated extra income equivalent to nearly 40% of our total income from subscriptions!

**HOWEVER** – we were much less successful in 2014 -2015, and raised only approximately **£3,200** – or a drop of 35% compared with the previous year.

A small number of Members are to be thanked warmly for the energy and time they devoted to various projects last Season [Jean and her colleagues in the Raffle each Monday; Muriel and Eileen for their Book Stall at rehearsals; Elena Lewis-Gray for the Quiz Evening and Summer Social; and all those who helped organise and take part in the Carols at Chartwell weekend.

But it can't always be the same small group of people and the same ideas: there are 80 or so more other Members whom we need to encourage to also step forward and play their part too, and we urge all Members to reflect upon what each of you can contribute – starting right now – to take up the slack and contribute to better fund-raising efforts in the year ahead. It needs not merely fresh ideas but ALSO a willingness to implement them.

To help Members' reflections in this area, it is worth pointing out that the 2 most "productive" fund-raisers in the past were those where we were able to draw in participants from OUTSIDE the Society:

- the QUIZ evening
- the ARGO Talk

.....if we limit our efforts only to events that can bring in contributions from Members themselves, in spite of people's generosity, eventually "donor fatigue" will set-in, and we will fall short of the targets we need to hit.

## Miscellaneous Notices to Members

### Message from Jane Walters – our Registrar:

#### Subscriptions:

The annual subscription for the 2015-2016 season is £135 (or 2 instalments of £70, payable in September and January.) The subscription for students and under-25s is £25.

The subscription income does not cover all the choir's costs and we are grateful to those who can afford to pay a little extra on top of the standard subscription. Last year we received £620 in donations from choir members in this way, which was a great help, and we would be delighted to top that this year!

Members can pay by cheque (payable to RTWCS) or cash at the first Monday evening rehearsal (September 7th) or send a cheque in advance to:

Jane Walters, 198 St John's Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 9XD

If you would like to pay by bank transfer the details are as follows:

Sort Code: 40-52-40

Account no: 00017884

Please use your name and voice part (S/A/T/B) as reference.

We do not want the subscription to be a barrier to those who would like to sing with us - if you have difficulty paying it please talk to me in confidence, as concessionary rates are available.

**Contact Details:**

All Members are also kindly asked to keep Jane - and their *Voice Section Leader* - up-to-date with any changes to their contact details [postal address/ e-address /telephone numbers]. We will of course continue to send important information by post to those Members who prefer not to use e-mail, but in the interests of saving costs of printing and postage, we would like to be able to use e-mail wherever possible to contact Members.

**Website:**

This is also a suitable moment to remind Members that our website <http://www.rtwcs.org.uk> is continually updated – and is the best easily-accessed source of information or news about any aspect of the Society’s affairs.