

Royal Tunbridge Wells
CHORAL
SOCIETY

Start of Season Newsletter: 2020/2021

Usually at this time of year I dust off the preceding year's newsletter to plagiarise as a template for the coming season. New circumstances, however, demand new prose so here we go - but still with a huge welcome to our 2020/2021 season.

The extraordinary times we're experiencing at present seem set to continue for the time being, with music making proving to be especially vulnerable to the current situation and regulations. Our main concert venue, the Tunbridge Wells Assembly Hall Theatre, has recently contacted us to announce that they will not be reopening until April 2021 at the earliest. And although plans are underway at St John's for them to reopen on a limited basis from the end of the month their hall will not be available for us to hold rehearsals for some time yet.

We're obviously committed to resuming our physical rehearsals as soon as possible and safe to do and we continue to closely monitor developments to this end. Rather than wait, though, we've decided for planning purposes to consider this as a season of two halves.

Building on the success of the virtual rehearsals held over the summer, the first tranche will be a thirteen-week series of on-line Zoom sessions (with a half term break at the end of October) and we have chosen to study Vivaldi's Gloria. There will be no Remembrance Sunday concert nor probably, at this stage, our usual Carol Concert.

Provisional plans for the second half of the season for the time being assume that we'll be able to return to more normal rehearsals in the New Year. On this basis we intend to reinstate our 2020 abandoned programme by working towards a performance of Verdi's Requiem in April and a summer concert of Living Composers. Unfortunately, only the passage of time will tell whether or not this will come to fruition so it's very much a wait and see with crossed fingers.

The first rehearsal will be on Monday, September 7th and we are looking forward to welcoming all existing and new members to another exciting season.

Message from our Chairman
Michael Selway

Each summer I reflect that we've just completed an extraordinary year of choral singing, and look forward to next year's programme of wonderful concerts, superb music and happy week after week singing with friends and fellow choir members. This summer is like no other, of course. I've missed sitting there in the basses surrounded by the genius of Verdi or Beethoven. I've missed putting on the black tie and putting my all into a concert

performance. And I miss singing with others so much. But our on-line rehearsals have been a revelation: it's been lovely to chatter and joke on-line with so many familiar faces before and after each rehearsal. And I've enjoyed the music we've been exploring — from Finzi to Lloyd-Webber — I've learned more pieces and yet again added to my meagre musical knowledge. Not to mention the rich repertoire of jokes from my kids about Dad crooning along in his study every Monday to unheard orchestras in my earphones.

And so welcome to our 117th season! We'll rehearse in St John's church hall and hold normal concerts just as soon as we can: when the government advice is clear that it's OK to do so. But none of us think that will happen soon. So meanwhile we will continue with our on-line rehearsals. We'll begin the term studying Vivaldi's Gloria, a lovely piece of music which I'm looking forward to exploring again. We also have some new things we're introducing this term which will make our on-line rehearsals even better, notably the fantastic news that our wonderful accompanist Craig will be working with Robyn to give us sectional rehearsals so that we're singing and learning more each week. And we'll also have a spot each week where we find out something about our different musical tastes and favourites. And remember, in an on-line rehearsal, you can sing along with any voice part, you can sing when normally you're not supposed to, and you can bring your cup of tea (or your G+T) and a couple of biscuits along to rehearsals - no-one will bat an eyelid!

I look forward to seeing you all on 7th September. If you have any friends who fancy coming along, do encourage them to try us out. Unusually, of course, it doesn't matter where they live — friends or former members who live on the other side of the world can come along just as easily as any of us!

**Message from our Musical Director
Robyn Sevastos**

Well, what a season!

Firstly, two lovely, successful concerts. Then something that none of us were expecting - with the long lasting consequences it continues to bring. Cue technology to the rescue. We are fortunate to have in Michael a chairman with the technical knowhow and the willingness to give of his time and talent.

Enter zoom rehearsals.

Since the beginning of May we have had lovely weekly sings, continuing fortnightly during the summer. It has been a time to explore some new repertoire, enjoy the familiar, and sing along with some world leading artists.

More importantly it has kept us singing and connected. We may even have learnt the names of some choir members that we didn't know beforehand! I sincerely thank Michael and all those who participated. It really was special to see those faces every week.

Looking forward, in order to keep everyone safe, we propose to continue with online rehearsals. We want to give the choir a happy and rewarding singing experience. No, I appreciate it is not the same as the feeling you get when we all sing together and you have the other voices around you supporting you (or putting you off?!). You do not sing alone, however, and in fact during this period we want to make sure that indeed "You'll never walk alone"...(sorry, I couldn't resist!).

For those who are hesitant and think they cannot technically manage it, it is actually quite easy. I am a technophobe with no laptop, computer with a microphone etc. I do it all on my

little phone, and once you have joined Zoom, Michael does the rest. Heavens, this is beginning to sound a bit like a sales pitch!

The bottom line is that we still have the opportunity to see one another, get a sense of the RTWCS family and most importantly to KEEP SINGING.

I look forward to seeing you all in September.

Robyn x

Calendar of key events 2020-2021 season

Monday, September 7th 7.30pm – first rehearsal.

Joining instructions and the appropriate computer link are as per the covering email and each session will last approximately an hour. We're still finessing the formats but with both Robyn and Craig in attendance we hope to be able to run break out sessions to enable more in depth voice part learning.

Music - We shall be using the Oxford University Press edition of Vivaldi's Gloria. As we are not meeting in person, I'm sure you appreciate that distribution of hire copies was not really an option. You may wish to consider sourcing your own copy as it is widely available from various on line retailers. Alternatively, Robyn has kindly sourced the two PDF versions attached to the covering email, one full version, one chorus parts only, that you can download and print out for yourself. There's only one most important feature to bear in mind for whatever version you use - it must have bar numbers otherwise following rehearsal cues will be a nightmare for you!

And of course, even if we are meeting across the ether, don't forget your pencil and eraser for all score annotations and conductor notes.

No rehearsal on Monday, October 26th - half term break.

Monday, December 7th - last rehearsal before Christmas break.

Details of future rehearsals into the New Year and beyond will be circulated at the end of December, once we have a better idea of what we're able to offer.

Subscriptions

The baseline subscription rate for 2020/2021 is unaltered from last year. In recognition of the current circumstances and shortened format, however, the Committee has adopted the Treasurer's suggestion that the first instalment be reduced by half to £35. The annual subscription for students and under-25s will remain at £25.

If you are happy to pay by online transfer this would be very much appreciated.

Account name RTWCS
Sort Code: 40-52-40
Account no: 00017884

Please use your name as the "reference" and email our Treasurer, Ailsa McMahon (treasurer@rtwcs.org.uk) to let her know.

Obviously this year we're unable to collect payments in person at rehearsals but if you prefer to pay by cheque (made payable to RTWCS) we'd be grateful if this could be posted directly to Ailsa at home.

As a charity we are also able to claim tax back on donations and part of the subscription under the Gift Aid scheme and received over £2,000 last year. If you are in a position to sign a Gift Aid form, please will you check that we have one from you?

And finally ...

As Michael mentioned above we thought it might be nice to introduce a new section to our rehearsals, to create an opportunity to get to know each other a little better and perhaps to discover music that we've never considered before. Each week there'll be a short spot, no more than five minutes in total, where a choir member will introduce us to one of their favourite pieces of music - a Private Passion or Desert Island Disc if you like - sharing with us what it is they like about it and why it's special to them. We'll also be able to listen to an excerpt.

Committee members Stephen Pollard and Catherine Whitelock have kindly agreed to lead this initiative and be our first guest speakers. We're now looking for volunteers for the following weeks.

So, if you have a particular piece of music that you would be prepared to share with us please get in touch, we'd love to hear from you. It doesn't have to be limited to choral music - it could be classical, jazz, modern or pop - all it has to be is special to you!

Janet Noble
General Secretary
September 1, 2020