

BEDFORD CHORAL SOCIETY **REPORT of the GENERAL SECRETARY 2016-2017**

The 2016-17 season was a very special one for Bedford Choral Society, being its 150th Anniversary! Only six other choral societies in the country have been in existence longer. We decided to include the whole 2017 calendar year to this purpose. This means that both our forthcoming November and Christmas concerts will also fall within our celebratory year.

For our November concert we welcomed back Michael Rose, our Principal Guest Conductor. More detail will come from our Musical Conductor, Ian Smith. I would, however, like to mention that, although our concerts are primarily choral, it did make a refreshing change to have an excellent young instrumental soloist in Neil Martin, playing Kabalevsky's *Ist Cello Concerto*. This complemented the Mozart *Regina Coeli* and *Kyrie in D minor*. Our four vocal soloists, Bethany Seymour, Kitty Whately, Joel Williams and Philip Tebb, all favourites of ours, did not disappoint.

On to the event of the season – our 150th Anniversary Concert, conducted by Ian Smith and with a speech from our President, Sir Sam Whitbread. Everyone's hard work paid off, and what a memorable concert this was! Both the Mendelssohn *Lauda Sion* and, of course, Tim Grant-Jones' commissioned work, an appropriate setting of *Psalm 150*, had to be learnt from scratch. Our familiar and popular soloists were Rebecca Bottone, Jeanette Ager, Simon Berridge and Quentin Hayes. They joined us within the choir to sing the Hallelujah Chorus from memory – an unexpected encore. The audience rose spontaneously to its feet. I, personally, will never forget that – I found it quite overwhelming. Our thanks go to the whole 150 team for their hard work leading up to this. We had 135 members singing in our 150th Anniversary concert – not quite reaching our 150 target.

Our June concert included amongst others a work unknown to most: Hurd's *Shepherd's Calendar*. This work was suggested by tenor Roger Barnard, who had sung in the first performance, conducted by the composer himself. We rose to the challenge and enjoyed the work. It is just a shame that the number of singers always decreases considerably for the summer concert – whatever the programme. Excellent bass-baritone Benjamin Bevan was the only soloist required. We do need to explore modern works and cater for singers and audiences of all ages and musical tastes.

In this respect, we have revamped our concert dress, at least for the ladies. The concert dress survey undertaken resulted in a clear majority for a sleek, all-black look. We have received very positive comments from audience members. A thank-you to those who evaluated the responses.

Our most recent performance was at the Proms in the Park. Steven Bell conducted us in a selection of audience favourites and once again we were blessed with good weather. Sadly, once again there was barely a mention of us in the local press. Thanks yet again to Paula Grayson for all her hard work with negotiating our fee and selling tickets. This event is our major earner and helps to keep our subscriptions as low as possible. Please continue to support by singing and/or by selling tickets.

Regular fortnightly refreshments during the rehearsal break allow us to sample excellent homemade cakes and cookies for a mere 50p. Thanks to all helpers. Jane Leslie built this up and now wishes to stand down. Many thanks, Jane, and especially for compiling an excellent book of recipes provided by choir members and illustrated with humour. Please keep adding your names to the rota!

Peter and Anne Schuetz are retiring after some years as librarians. Many thanks for your tireless work. Ruth Braybrook is taking over, so please support her by returning your scores promptly.

There is considerable work involved in running Bedford Choral Society effectively. Apart from the Officers, 14 members serve on the General Committee under the terms stipulated by Bedford Choral Society Constitution. Others volunteer in other ways:

Librarians:	Peter / Anne Schuetz - retiring (Ruth Braybrook taking over)
Chamber Choir:	Hilary Faill
Proms in the Park liaison:	Paula Grayson
Webmaster:	Chris Knell
Poster and Programme production:	David Moore
Corn Exchange:	Peter Thomas
Voice Reps:	Kate Smith (S1), Rosie Stanbridge (S2), Julia Lockwood (A1), Daphne Wheaton (A2), Alan Dickinson (T), David Butler (B)
Archivist:	Mike Benson
Programme notes:	George Davidson
Making Music Rep:	Nigel Haughton
Easy fundraising:	Julia Lockwood
Refreshments:	Jane Leslie – retiring

Diana Shooter has enjoyed a successful second year as Chairman. Thank-you to Diana, especially for the extra work involved in the run-up to the 150th Anniversary, and for her calm and efficient organisation. Also, a thank-you for organising an excellent summer party!

Our Vice Chairman, Roger Barnard, is predominantly responsible for marketing and sponsorship and had considerable success in gaining sponsors for our 150th Anniversary season. These included local ironmongers Goldings, who are likewise celebrating 150 years in 2017, and the Harpur Trust. Our appreciation is extended Roger, Cathy Wood and all the 150 team for their hard work.

Front of House – Liz Wickins continues efficiently in this somewhat challenging role. Please do your best to sell tickets and secondly to pay promptly or return unsold tickets in good time.

Secretary to the Friends – Margaret Christopher undertakes this valuable role. The Friends comprise former choir members and friends / relatives who regularly support our concerts and pay a subscription. Another reception at St. Andrews with excellent refreshments was appreciated this spring. Our thanks are extended to our three stalwart Vice Presidents, John Handley, John Watson and Deirdre Knight, who attend General Committee and/or Programme Planning meetings.

Last, but not least, a very appreciative thank-you once again to our Musical Director, Ian Smith and our Accompanist and Assistant Chorus Master, Tim Grant-Jones. They continue to serve Bedford Choral Society with enthusiasm, expertise and patience.