

PHOENIX SINGERS – Music Director REPORT FOR AGM (2021-22)

I've found a report that I wrote for the AGM in Oct 2020 that explained how things came to halt in March 2020 but contains my appraisal of the "St.Nicolas" concert in Dec 2019 (remember that?). All written at a time when we were unsure what the future would hold for us all. Here we are, 12 months further on and determined that Phoenix WILL rise from the ashes but this season is assailed by protocols, H&S and a certain amount of doubt. We MUST be optimistic though!

Isn't it wonderful to start singing again and for us to be together making music after such a long break? Vocally, we are going to have to take things easy and make progress gently but steadily. But as well as strengthening our vocal cords, we will need to revive our stamina – not just in singing but in concentration. After such a long lay-off, we have lost so much that we had taken for granted. Whereas rehearsals for two hours were relatively easy, we are all feeling the effects of working hard, concentrating intensely and fighting to keep fatigue at bay! It WILL return, we just need to keep practising and DOING IT!!

This season is exciting and concert programmes have been arranged with many things in mind: beginning to sing again requires an initial concert of music that is familiar and not too challenging. So, Christmas begins with our first concert of this season in Fram College chapel with the spiritual Mozart work "Laudate Dominum" for choir and soprano soloist plus the Christmas portion of Messiah, both with Kingfisher Orchestra. I am delighted that the Sir Robert Hitcham children's choirs will also be joining us for the first half.

The Spring Term builds to a climax with our concert (with Beccles Choral Society & Lambeth Orchestra) at Snape on 23rd April in an all-Elgar programme. 'Cockaigne Overture' for orchestra, 'Sea Pictures' with Diana Moore (Mezzo) and 'Music Makers' for choir & Mezzo soloists. A positive Elgarian feast!

Finally, to round off our season as we return to full concerts and full audiences (we hope!), with Kingfisher we will perform 'Creation'. A work full of wonderful music, some great choruses and some real Haydn "twinkles". It will announce that we are BACK in full voice and confident of our future.

Can I just add further that I have been mortified at the number of young soloists that we have had to "let go" because of the cancellation of our concerts? I have kept in touch with them and although many are still singing, some have had to leave the profession for financial reasons. Over the next few years, I am hoping to re-employ them all if I can.

Consequently, we have a season where the contracts for our singers will be a novelty. We are offering them a fee, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, offering them a cancellation fee. For the Snape concert, one of those young singers has been given a paid contract to act as "cover" (or reserve singer) for Diana Moore. For this fee, Chloe Pardoe will learn both works (but likely will not be singing them at Snape) but will have a rehearsal with Lambeth Orchestra in London. I think this gesture, by Phoenix, must be unprecedented in their history and I am so pleased that we are able to offer these young musicians such assistance in these continuing challenging times.

Thank you for your continuing support and friendship. That so many of you have felt able to return - and we have been able to welcome new singers into our midst – is not just heart-warming but says much for the future of Phoenix Singers.

Geoff Lavery (September 2021)