

We've had a very exciting year, with some ambitious programmes which the choir has risen to brilliantly.

We started with the challenge of Howells' stunning Requiem, alongside other music that reflected the texts chosen by Howells in his work. We continue to strive to include underrepresented composers which means we often discover hidden gems in the repertoire. For example, this concert included super music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and Becky McGlade. This was a moving concert, with challenging music tackled well.

It's worth saying on programming, there are a huge number of factors involved and I spend days and days researching and putting together programmes. There's a balance to be had between choosing music that will be the right level but giving extra challenge from time to time; programming music within budget in terms of extra players or soloists; trying to include music where scores are available cheaply or for free; music that will work on a particular element for the choir's development; diversity in terms of representation, era of time, text, style, and so many other factors. It's hard to please everyone every term. I'm aware of mutterings when people don't like this or that piece and I think it's important to realise that for someone around as you do this it might be their favourite piece and actually one or two people being negative can really affect a choir. Just occasionally people need to have a more open mind - the choir is a diverse group of people and everyone will have different options so it won't always be your favourite style but this is about team work - not pulling out of a concert because it might not be your own favourite music.

We moved on to a happy, well attended Christmas concert, and I'm pleased that with little tweaks in terms of amount of rehearsal time we've been able to raise the standard of this yearly event.

The spring brought our big Cadogan Hall Baroque concert, alongside Constanza Chorus. This was a hugely successful event, selling out Cadogan Hall, and the standard of singing was exceptional. It was good to have a bit more time to rehearse this programme and really get some detail in the preparation.

Finally, we challenged ourselves with an ambitious concert last week where we rose spectacularly to the challenge of Dove's 'The Passing of the Year'. It was great to have a premiere performance which was given great praise by the composer Russell Hepplewhite and publishers Stainer and Bell.

It was good to include another Saturday session this term to bring along the repertoire in a short term and have a lovely social opportunity too.

The summer concert wasn't as well attended as we'd have liked and actually this may have related to the fact that 25% of the choir didn't perform in the concert. It would be worth considering as a choir whether the June concert works for enough people. Do we try to do too many concerts a year? Should we be looking at a different structure? Perhaps things to discuss.

I mentioned this time last year that it does worry me that there is a high proportion of singers missing each concert, and my sense is that in general attendance for rehearsals and

concerts has been better overall this year, as we finally see less of the Covid affect, but this term was particularly low numbers for the concert, proportionally.

Ensuring high attendance across the year is clearly one way we can continue to develop standards.

The standard of singing at the last couple of concerts has been seriously good - where else do we go from here to keep developing?

We are now in a position that we are just about full in terms of number we can fit in our rehearsal space so the standard of singers joining us is extremely high as it's harder to pass an audition.

We will have reauditions coming up in February, and this is another way we can develop- as usual I'll make sure everyone receives feedback with something personal to work on in their singing.

Next term's programme will include an opportunity to sing one piece each in a small group and again this should help develop members' skills.

Our amazing committee are not only brilliant at the day to day running of the choir but also at helping me to think strategically about what we do over the next few years. It's so important that choirs can be ambitious and continue to develop - after all, the choirs that go into decline are the ones that fail to evolve. But there seems to be no danger of that with the current strong membership and desire to keep developing. We are so lucky to have such a brilliant team of highly capable and thoughtful volunteers at the helm to help make that happen, led by Philip, who is always so kind in thanking everyone else but rarely gets thanked himself.

As ever a huge thanks to my awesome colleague Ian Tindale, whose brilliance was shown off in the repertoire chosen last week.

And to this brilliant choir who have not only astonished me with how they are continuing to improve but are also just such a warm and lovely group to be around, huge thanks for another great year.