

## Music Director's Report Jubilate Singers for the year ending 31 January 2021.

It is with great pleasure that I present my second report as Music Director of Jubilate Singers. Despite the curse of Covid and the general shuttering of society from 25 March 2020 through to 8 June 2020, the year was a productive one for the choir, with successful presentation of two major concerts and a 'magical musical tour' of the former Canterbury University College, now the Arts Centre of Christchurch. This tour took place on the afternoon of 1 March 2020, beginning in the clock tower and tracing a path through the stairs and hallways of Worcester Boulevard and Rolleston Avenue buildings. The audience, limited to fifty at a time, followed the singers into a selection of performance spaces, all of them atmospheric in different ways. Philip Aldridge, Director of the Arts Centre, read poems appropriate to each space, and the choir sang similarly themed compositions, mainly by former staff and students of the university. Historical facts and architectural features were highlighted during the tour. Two performances, each approximately 1 hour, were given.

A major concert – *God Save the Queens* – had been scheduled for the evening of 23 May 2020, but with the onset of Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdown, this had to be postponed, firstly to June 2020, then later, when the severity of the pandemic became apparent, to May 2021.

An outbreak of Covid in Auckland in August to September almost forced the last minute cancellation of *Dido and the Pleasure Garden* – a double-header concert of Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* and the Christchurch premiere of *The Pleasure Garden* – a short one-act opera with a libretto by A. K. Grant, I wrote in the late 1990s. The presentation was in conjunction with soloists from The Opera Club of Christchurch, and accompanied by an ad hoc string quintet of players from the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra. The two performances at The Piano went ahead, but with a maximum permitted audience only of 100. Through good fortune, a video recording by Chris Watson of the Centre for New Zealand Music (SOUNZ), audio by Thom O'Connor, proved possible and can be accessed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPD\\_wAC7XIU&ab\\_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPD_wAC7XIU&ab_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic)

Other clips from the concert include 'Art is our Cause' and 'I heard a Thrush'

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k72U1V3u4p4&ab\\_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k72U1V3u4p4&ab_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtOi2Rt7FUg&ab\\_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtOi2Rt7FUg&ab_channel=SOUNZCentreforNZMusic)

The end of the *annus horribilis* was celebrated with a return of our 'Jubilate Swingers' branding, with two successful performances, matinee and evening, of *Fooling Around!* – 'more hot choral jazz from cool classical dudes'. This was held, as with the previous year's *Swingers!* concerts, in the Rolling Stone Restaurant & Bar.

The final event of the year was the annual carol singing at the hospital, conducted by our very own carol king, deputy musical director Denis Guyan.

That Jubilate Singers is in such good heart is testimony to the strength of the choir's administration, and in particular the tireless work this year of president Stephen French, treasurer Nina Koele, and secretary Vivien Hicks. Committee members have also contributed greatly, especially Thomas Caspari with his significant bolstering, in conjunction with Nathan Mehrtons, of the choir's online presence, and Rachael Hawkey for her compilation and editing of our printed programmes

My task as musical director is made considerable easier by the keyboard skills of Denis Guyan and Rosemary Allison, both of whom have contributed greatly to the smooth running of our rehearsals by willingly assisting as accompanists. My appreciation also goes to Felicity Ward O'Brien, Rachael Hawkey and Denis Guyon for their skilled assistance in coaching.

An especially big thank you as always goes to our music librarian Steph Gilks, without whom we would be singing by ear. Hers is a task to rival Sisyphus, but unlike that Corinthian miscreant, her boulders reach the top. We are very lucky to have such a patient, methodical and enterprising person in charge of this essential service.

Recently re-recruited tenor Peter Hewson (a Jubilate Singer from ancient times) also deserves special

thanks for his stage dressing of the *Dido and the Pleasure Garden*. His props, including a hand-made Grecian helmet, a pedestal supporting the bust of Frances Hodgkins and a life-sized reproduction of 'The Pleasure Garden' painting helped our presentation come alive visually.

We were very well served by various soloists and instrumentalists, in particular the many soloists featured in *Dido and the Pleasure Garden*, especially Samantha Warhurst, Fernand Kenel, Sarah-Jane Rennie, Eleanor Sim, Rachel Doig and Peter Hind, and the accompanying keyboard and string quintet ensemble led by Amandine Guerin. Amandine also featured in the band for *Fooling Around*, along with Ted Meager drums and Brad Grainger acoustic bass.

Musical highlights were many and for me include the singing of the University of Canterbury College song while processing through the North-West Quad in *Echoes of Yesterday*; the dignity and discipline of the singing in the *Dido and Aeneas* finale and the opening 'The Thrush' of *The Pleasure Garden*. There was also the sheer exhilaration of Piazzolla's *Libertango* and J. S. Bach fugue BWV 578, both sung a la Swingle Singers. The natural affinity for reggae shown by singers Johan Dalkie, Kim Morgan and Peter Hewson in *Don't Worry, Be Happy* was a revelation, as was Gillian van Voorthuizen facility for jazz vocalese (scat).

In planning for the future, I am continuing to keep the following points in mind.

1. That we need to broaden our audience base
2. That we need to continue to attract and encourage young singers
3. That we need to increase core membership particularly of light, high sopranos
4. That we need to continue to be a choir known for its delivery of high-quality performances.

My overall compass continues to be the Jubilate motto of 'Joy in Singing' – joy for the audiences as well as the performers. Joy comes in many forms including having music that is pleasurable to sing and that challenges us (but not to the point of frustration). Joy is having a great time in rehearsals but also in the savouring of improvement at each turn. Joy is in the friendship that membership of the choir can bring. Joy is also experiencing the magical choral moments when our whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

- Philip Norman, Music Director, Jubilate Singers, 24 May 2021