



Ashford Choral Society

A tradition of choral singing since 1857

Conductor: Paul Young Deputy Conductor and Accompanist: Matthew Raisbeck

Chairman: Alan Paterson Secretary: Virginia Brown

Emeritus Conductor: Mark Deller

Newsletter – April 2020

Looking forward

In the long history of Ashford Choral Society since 1857 there have been several periods when the activities of the choir have been suspended due to "force majeure" – sometimes for a considerable time (for example May 1940 to December 1941) – and thereafter "normal service" has been resumed.

We thought it was important to let all members know that since the cancellation of the Wye concert of March 21st the committee has been actively sorting out our obligations and securing the future of the Society, so that when we can meet again, we will be in good shape to go forward.

The Wye concert had to be cancelled at short notice as the church needed to close, following the positive testing of two members of the congregation for Covid 19. Of course, events thereafter moved very swiftly and the May concert at the Gulbenkian also had to be cancelled.

The committee felt it was important to do the right thing towards the people involved in both concerts and to honour our contractual obligations to soloists, musicians, providers of staging, seats, scores and printing, to preserve future goodwill. In addition, we offered to reimburse 100 per cent of the ticket price to those who wished it.

The committee were guided by the Musician's Union guidelines, which suggests a 50% payment once a singer/player is engaged. The committee has thus responded positively both to behave honourably and to retain goodwill for future concerts.

We would like to assure members that, despite these disbursements, the Society is in a stable economic position, ready for the future.

Of course, the Society will follow the guidance of the Government and Public Health England since the safety of all members and our audience is paramount. It is therefore difficult at present to plan with any certainty. However, as soon as it is possible, a programme for 2020/2021 will be prepared and sent out to members.

June Workshop

A full-day choral workshop had been planned as a recruitment drive for choir members and this was to take place on Saturday June 5th at Spring Grove School. This too has had to be cancelled, but we hope the event will be able to go ahead at a future date.

Black-tie Dinner at London Beach Hotel – October 24th

A reservation was made in February (which seems like a lifetime ago!) for a black-tie fundraising dinner. It is very much hoped that we will be able to proceed with this event – which will mark the retirement of Alan Paterson, our chairman of 20 years, whilst raising funds for the Society.

The evening would commence at 7pm in the bar for drinks prior to dinner at 7.30pm in our exclusive dining room. Our guest speaker will be Dr David Flood, who is currently Master of the Cathedral Choristers and the Cathedral Organist, and as such has been responsible for every aspect of the Cathedral's music programme since 1988. Our Conductor Emeritus, Dr Mark Deller and our Vice President, the Rt. Hon. Damian Green MP, and his wife Alicia, have already confirmed their attendance.

Those who came to the dinner in 2017 will know they can expect good food and a lively, sociable and enjoyable evening.

Tickets for the event are £40 per person and a booking form, with menu details, is available from Julia Blackwell (juliablackwell38@gmail.com). Julia would also be grateful to hear of any raffle prizes you can offer.

Until we meet again

You might like to contemplate this lovely image of a singer from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York by Lerolle, a friend and collector of such artists as Degas, Denis, and Vuillard.

Set in the choir loft of the church of Saint-François-Xavier in Paris, it features members of Lerolle's intimate circle, including his wife (bare-headed) and her sisters, in fashionable matching hats; his brother-in-law, the composer Ernest Chausson, is playing the organ. The painter himself gazes outward at left.

Shown at the Salon of 1885, this picture triumphed the next year in New York, in the first major Impressionism exhibition in America. One critic recalled, "**spectators spoke low before it, as if waiting for the voice of the singer to be heard.**"

