

CHOIR REPORTS FOR EADCA MEETING: 6.2.21

Bexhill Choral Society	<p>BCS thought about a return to in-person rehearsals in the autumn, and we got as far as a survey and draft risk assessment and finding a venue. However by the time we'd done this, we noted case numbers starting to rise again - we are further east than other EADCA choirs, and our conductor lives in Kent! – and reluctantly felt it wasn't a good idea. In mid-October 2 members (married couple) contracted Covid, which had we been rehearsing would have meant everyone isolating and wondering whether to blame rehearsals, so in one way it's turned out for the best.</p> <p>We therefore continued with Zoom, with some music we hope to do in Autumn 2021 including the Fauré <i>Requiem</i>, and Christmas carols from the Green Carols for Choirs in November and December. From January we have continued with the Fauré, and some choruses from Messiah – people either had their own scores or were able to borrow from non-Zooming members. We usually finish with a couple of songs from musicals, which we'd been rehearsing a year ago. Numbers Zooming had fallen to around 20 before Christmas but are now back up to around 30 each week. We are paying our MD 50% of his usual fee for this.</p> <p>We used 6 tracks from the recording of our Christmas 2019 concert to create a small 'concert' of Christmas Carols & Music on YouTube. Creating this was a steep learning curve for me, but it was well publicised in the local press and has had over 300 views, and we feel has helped to maintain a continuing presence for the choir. We had thought of a small outdoor carol singing event, but even before the end of the national lockdown and Rother's subsequent meteoric rise up the tiers - Tier 2/Tier 3/Tier 4 within a week! - this was starting to look dubious, and in the event we couldn't have held it anyway.</p> <p>Our big May 2020 concert of Great Choral Classics at the De La Warr Pavilion was postponed until May 2021. This clearly isn't going to happen, because we can't see rehearsals being possible in March, which our MD felt was the latest to enable a large concert. We haven't actually cancelled and may postpone yet again to May 2021. We have provisionally booked concert dates in October and December 2021 at St Barnabas church, but who knows!</p> <p>Only four or five members have resigned: one who is 'in her 90th year' and felt this was the right time to stop, while the others had only just joined last January, but may well re-join when we start again. We do have a new member who joined in August, and is attending Zoom rehearsals and hoping to meet us all some time! I continue to send weekly emails and we are doing a 'ring round' of members at the moment, starting with those we haven't heard from for some time. A number have had their first vaccine, reflecting the age of many of our members!</p> <p>I recently attended a Making Music online event on <i>Covid-19: what does the medical evidence mean for your group?</i> with about 124 choirs from all over the UK asking questions and commenting. I can circulate notes if people are interested.</p> <p>Jenny Meteyard</p>
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<p>Concentus</p>	<p>Although resultant Covid-19 restrictions still heavily impact upon us all, Concentus has continued to remain positive and productive in all quarters of singing activities.</p> <p>In September last year following much hard work in making applications, Concentus was extremely fortunate to receive significant grant funding from Tesco Bags of Help, Sussex Community Foundation and HM Govt/National Lottery Community Fund. The purpose was to fund our initiative to create an online community singing project to support those in the community who were experiencing loneliness, or feeling low in themselves due to the loss of usual activities caused by the effects of lockdown and the continuing Covid restrictions.</p> <p>Concentus has long recognised and promoted the power and benefits of singing in increasing the senses of well-being, health and an increased 'feel-good' factor. More importantly though, for an individual to achieve something never dreamed possible before i.e. singing with a choir but in the safety of their own homes, this in itself is a great way to lift the spirits and experience a real sense of achievement!</p> <p>Having set up an IT support team, our 'techies' worked individually with prospective new members in downloading Zoom onto their devices, then talking them through the process leading towards being confident in its use. This included setting up many individual meetings, then our techies talking to them on their phones whilst monitoring their activity on screen. Following this, music and word sheets were sent out along with mp3 SATB training tracks, so enabling singers to hear what their individual lines sounded like.</p> <p>At the same time large roadside banners were erected around the town to advertise our project. This very quickly attracted media attention with many publications and radio interview interviews being gained as a result.</p> <p>The new group was entitled the 'Singing From Home Choir' (SFHC) and immediately started to attract a good number of people, many of who had never sung before and certainly had never sung with a choir!</p> <p>Zoom sessions take place bi-weekly with Concentus main choir rehearsals being bi-weekly alternate. SFHC rehearsals are designed to cater for those moving at the slower pace and involve singing coaching, breathing, finding your voice and voice production, then singing in unison to eventually moving towards parted singing. Inevitably some new members already have considerable singing experience and if the SFCH choir is too slow in pace for their ability, they are given the option to join in with our main choir rehearsals. A good number have chosen to do this, some from the outset, with some opting to sing in both rehearsals too! More importantly, some members have started in the SFHC then as their confidence increased, they moved into main choir rehearsals, so this in itself is a great achievement for them.</p> <p>As the weeks passed the project continued to grow with more people becoming aware and joining in.</p>
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Although the project is only funded to run for 6 months, Concentus (and the SFHC members too) are so pleased with the results that we have decided to continue with this project until such times as Covid allows us all to return to the freedom of unrestricted 'normality' (whatever that might be?). This will ensure we can continue to offer the same level of support that has been gratefully received by those who need it most.

On Saturday 19 Dec Concentus performed 'live' in singing carols within the car parks of Tesco and Langney Shopping Centre. Due to our need to ensure strict safety measures in protection to both members and shoppers alike, we only took a limited number of singers. However the 'buzz' this created was well worth the effort and it was great to actually be 'out there' for the very first time in the year doing what we all enjoy doing most! The shoppers applauded our efforts, commenting on how nice it was to witness the rarity of live singing again and especially during the festive period. Accordingly they generously lined our collection buckets for the benefit of JPK, being the charity we continue to support.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty surrounding the Covid situation, we are still looking ahead in positive fashion in planning the performance of our June concerts, so we actively continue with our Zoom rehearsals. We recognise Zoom has its limitations and is not for everyone, be that due to unfamiliarity and/or 'fear' of the unknown, lack of effective equipment, or simply not wanting to participate? However our weekly attendance is in excess of 50 members and those involved all say how much they enjoy it, as they do in maintaining their bond with fellow members.

Come June and if being unable to perform our concerts in our usual venue, then we have a number of contingency plans at hand which we hope will allow us to perform in one guise or another!

Throughout the year the committee has continued to maintain regular contact with every member to ensure their welfare remains supported in the best way that we can achieve.

Although a small touch but believed a crucial one, for the very first time we designed our own choir Christmas card which was signed by all committee members, then sent to every member and close choir associates, simply to show that they always remained in our thoughts.

Who knows what lays ahead of us, but whatever it is we will continue to work positively as a team in finding ways to achieve our goals, so ensuring the focus and unity of the choir (and its individual members) in readiness for when we all come out on the other side!

Adrian White

<p>Downland Singers</p>	<p>I ran a 4 week “Christmas Zoom” leading up to Christmas and roughly half of the choir attended at some point. This consisted of a mixture of new music, popular Christmas songs together with some fun elements. The most positive outcome was that 3 new singers joined in and all enjoyed themselves and would like to return to Zoom with the possibility of joining the choir in the future.</p> <p>Having tentatively made plans to resume some sort of “live” rehearsals in February, we find ourselves in lockdown 3 with no indication as to when such activities can resume and so plans need to be adapted.</p> <p>Some of the Committee have met on Zoom (some are reluctant to try) and it would seem that the choir has two alternatives – to maintain an on-line presence and encourage more members to attend Zoom sessions or to put the choir “on hold” until such time as we are able to meet together.</p> <p>We are hoping that most members will embrace the first option and so plan to hold a Spring (and possibly Summer) Zoom session, but before firm plans are made, we have approached them to ascertain their views to see if it is viable. While a few are enthusiastic and others are willing to “give it a go”, there are still some who either are not confident about using technology or feel that this is “not choir” because they don’t like singing on their own. We are trying to promote Zoom as the only possible alternative at the moment, giving us the opportunity to socialise and to keep the voice in trim. As I write, we await the results of a questionnaire to determine the way forward.</p> <p>Contact has been maintained with members through phone calls, emails, social media and newsletters. Sadly, our numbers have dropped with resignations all due to valid reasons (age, health, moving etc) and so we will need to establish a recruitment drive.</p> <p>On a more positive note, we have booked a date for our Christmas Gala this year - let’s hope we will be able to end the year with a bit of festive cheer!</p> <p>Jennie Macfadyen</p>
<p>Eastbourne Choral Society</p>	<p>After an initial reluctance to take part in Zoom sessions in the summer, members of ECS have been having regular Zoom rehearsals since September. Only about a third of the choir take part, but those involved all enjoy the sessions for a variety of reasons: seeing friendly faces, taking part in a musical activity with others, albeit in a strange situation, and feeling part of the lovely choir community that we all miss so much. Last term we sang Vivaldi Gloria, Choruses from Part One of Messiah, a few extracts from Bach Christmas Oratorio and of course carols. We had nine sessions in all, the last one being a “free to all” Christmas Celebration with carols and fun Christmas songs, wine and Christmas headgear. More ECS members and friends joined us for this session and it certainly did help to spread a little Christmas Cheer!</p> <p>This term we have eight Zoom sessions planned and these have started well, again with similar numbers of choir members as last term. We are singing two contrasting pieces – Rutter Sprig of Thyme and Easter music from Messiah. We plan to include some Bach St John Passion later in the term, as we all still have the copies that we hired for our concert, which was postponed, last</p>

	<p>Easter. We had hoped to perform the Bach this Easter instead, but obviously have had to postpone again until next year</p> <p>The choice of repertoire for Zoom sessions is somewhat guided by what scores people might have at home, what can be found on CPDL or what I can scan in to send out. although we did recommend purchasing Sprigg of Thyme as we thought we could use it in a future concert. John often finds rolling scores to put on the screen but it is easier to have paper copies when we are learning things.</p> <p>We are very grateful to our MD, John Hancorn, whose Zoom account we use for our sessions. He, like many MD's I'm sure, has become expert at running Zoom sessions. He manages it all, letting us in early for a chat, leading vocal exercises and part learning from the keyboard, and playing You tube choruses for us to sing along to so we are not singing "solo" all the time. He has now decided to introduce a little musical quiz each week! We are all very amused when he assures us that we are sounding "great" although we are all "muted" of course!!</p> <p>I keep in touch with all ECS members by email and phone and I know there are many friendship groups within the choir community. We do wish more folk would join us on Zoom, but respect the fact that in some cases its just another Zoom session too far, especially when people have been working in front of a screen all day, and it is the only means of seeing family and friends too.</p> <p>As for the future – who knows? We have just postponed the Zoom committee meeting that we had planned for early February and will wait to see what, if anything, changes with Government announcements later in the month. In view of the present situation, I think it is likely that we will still be Zooming after Easter. We have kept our summer concert booking in place in July.....??</p> <p>In the meantime, on behalf of ECS, I wish EADCA members and their choirs all the very best for 2021. Keep well and safe and let's hope we can all be singing together again with our respective choirs soon.</p> <p>Liz Barker</p>
<p>Eastbourne Symphony Chorus</p>	<p>We are basically an orchestra and have only one choral concert a year (cancelled in Spring 2020). We do appreciate being part of the EADCA as it helps inform our plans. The ESO has a meeting on 13 Feb when we hope (!) to be able to formulate plans for the rest of our 42nd season and also for next year...</p> <p>John Thornley</p>
<p>Hailsham Choral</p>	<p>Online rehearsals have continued and have been much appreciated by over half the choir. We have a loyal core group of some 30 members with a few more dipping in and out. We are learning new material, which we had already purchased for our Summer concert last year. Rosie spends a lot of time creating rehearsal tracks, which she produces with the help of our accompanist Will Hancox and her father, who sings the lower parts. Broadband stability can be an issue, but on the whole it works well, and we</p>

	<p>sing for about an hour with the opportunity to chat in smaller groups afterwards.</p> <p>We hoped to sing carols outside in Hailsham town centre, socially distanced and had initially been granted permission to do this, but then of course the infection numbers started to rise and restrictions meant this had to be cancelled. We opened up rehearsals for Christmas carols to the general public and a handful of people (all ladies!) joined us, which was nice.</p> <p>These rehearsals are free of charge, although we did decide to invite donations last year and again this year, as some members wanted to do this. We are lucky to have a healthy bank balance, although we must look to the future and maintain some reserves as we don't expect normal audience numbers to be returning soon.</p> <p>We are celebrating our 60th anniversary this year, but planning for a special event has inevitably been hampered by the lockdown. We still hope to sing Messiah at some point, but it all depends on government rules as vaccinations take effect.</p> <p>We keep in touch with our members through emails and phone calls and are planning a series of newsletters to celebrate the 6 decades we have been in existence!</p> <p>Milly Clark</p>
<p>Heathfield Choral Society</p>	<p>With the start of the New Year, Heathfield CS has returned to Zoom for weekly rehearsals. We have a regular attendance of between 40 and 50% of the choir, although it tends to be the same people each week - people either are prepared to sing using Zoom or are not! As was the case last term, we have charged a nominal sub for the half year, although should in-person rehearsals resume we may charge a supplement. We have also pushed our usual concert date back a month to give us more flexibility if it looks possible for events to resume after Easter.</p> <p>Seb, our MD, is working us through the Mozart Requiem, chosen as it's a piece most are familiar with and therefore could sing even if there are only a small number of "proper" rehearsals before a concert. However, we're not just note bashing each session - we are taking our time and Seb is spending lots of time teaching us about the piece, comparing it with other Requiems, and also listening to different interpretations of the same movement. All of which is fascinating, and something you don't normally get the chance to do when you're focussing on getting the notes right for a performance! So although no-one would chose to be on Zoom, each week is different, and by no means unenjoyable - there's usually lots of chances to chat in breakout rooms as well. We are monitoring the guidance from Making Music and DCMS closely regarding group activities post vaccination, and like everyone are very much looking forward to resuming something close to normality when the guidelines allow.</p> <p>Chris Thompson</p>

<p>Phoenix</p>	<p>There's very little to report from Phoenix again. We reviewed the success of our Zoom sessions in December and tweaked the format a little. Zoom rehearsals really illustrated the crux of what a choir is about – connecting, singing and learning with and from each other. Many felt that to learn Bach's B Minor Mass on Zoom was very difficult and not very satisfactory or enjoyable. Pitching and timing were particularly difficult. We have shelved the Bach until such time as we can meet again properly. Instead we have turned to Vivaldi (Gloria). We have also welcomed back our accompanist. It's still early days but we are aiming to have some warming up and 'note bashing' with him for the beginning of our rehearsal before Michael takes over with pre-recorded backing tracks.</p> <p>As with many, everyone is finding it harder to manage this lockdown and we all enjoyed having half a session of pure conversation after New Year just to connect. There were some who weren't properly acquainted even though they have sung in Phoenix for a long time. We all enjoyed a Christmas carolling Zoom and are meeting this Saturday to mark the concert 'that isn't' with a glass of something and a few Bach highlights.</p> <p>On a global issue it is encouraging that the topic of the 'Europe-wide Visa-free work permit for Touring professionals and Artists' is on the agenda again in parliament although it's anyone's guess about what the outcome will be.</p> <p>Onwards and hopefully upwards to better, brighter times.</p> <p>Fiona Evans</p>
<p>Seaford Choral Society</p>	<p>A core of members has been participating in Zoom rehearsals, quizzes etc - including our Big Christmas Quiz. We have become increasingly competent with Zoom and the big quiz benefitted from one of our members having a paid account so it could be longer than 40 minutes. We have restarted sectional (30 - 40 minute) rehearsals and they are proving popular. We have well over 30 people with Sops and Alts doing particularly well. Colin (MD) and John (Accompanist) are running the rehearsals between them. Feedback good.</p> <p>During the last term we rehearsed a few carols and had a go at recording on SoundTrap. A pretty unmitigated disaster. It has produced nothing that we could use yet. We are hoping for better results with Faure's Requiem this term. We have chosen this because it is one that most of us know and sometimes sing on Good Friday but never get a chance to practise for long.</p> <p>One or two members have been jabbed but we are not really considering getting together again until September at the earliest. Things change pretty quickly though at the moment so who knows?</p> <p>We are planning a big come-back concert towards Christmas. We had a shock to find that our usual Christmas date at our usual venue had been booked by another choir for a rehearsal but we have managed to book the parish church instead. The next stage is to improve our collaboration. We are considering talking to other musical societies who perform in Seaford to provide joint marketing and making sure we complement each other. May be naive but we think it's worth a try. We are starting by leaving Christmas to other choirs and</p>

	<p>focusing our Autumn concert instead on saying goodbye to Covid. The first half will be a requiem for the victims (Fauré) and the second half rejoicing that it's gone (Vivaldi Gloria). It may mean that audiences will go to two concerts instead of having to choose where they want to go and hear/sing Christmas. Of course, we do not know if people will feel confident to sit in a church together by this time but it's worth working towards anyway.</p> <p>We have managed to keep paying our musicians and members have been generous however we can't keep this up for much longer.</p> <p>Steve Machan</p>
Spencer Freeman (Methodist church)	<p>Thank you for keeping me in touch with the Association. Unfortunately I have nothing to report or contribute except to say that our new church building has now commenced and we hope that it will be completed around Easter 2022. I'll keep in touch. Meantime regards to everyone.</p> <p>Spencer Freeman</p>