

Chair's Report February 2021

Well what a year, one certainly not like any other! I thought in my report this year I'd list all the different things we've done with choir.

We started the year, on a high, just before our last AGM with the Gospel Concert at the Barbican. And what an experience that was. Certainly not to be missed. Many of us made a weekend of it, staying near the Barbican while others got the coach back and forth, both days. It was fantastic to be involved in such an exciting event with the London Symphony Orchestra and so many other choirs. What a day! Words cannot really describe the buzz of singing such fantastic music, in such a fabulous venue, with so many top-class musicians and us MKCC!

The next weekend we sang at the MK Music Festival where we won our class! The talk then was all about whether we would be able to continue meeting face to face as we were becoming aware of the pandemic which was just starting to become very real.

And within a week we were locked down. So how could we continue to meet?

Craig of course immediately found a way. He invited the steering group to meet with him on this new-fangled thing called Zoom, for the first time, to try it out before our first choir session. I think a lot of us were a bit afraid of the technology at the beginning and found it hard to get on to start with, but now it has become like second nature, to a lot of us, as the pandemic continues. It is a whole new way of life and it is great that Craig, through a lot of hard work, has found innovative ways to keep us singing and connecting with each other. Not only do we have the opportunity to sing every week, but very importantly, for many of us, is the chance to have a chat beforehand and interact together.

We still miss some of our choir members who feel that Zoom isn't for them, or who are unable to access the technology, and look forward to brighter days when we can all meet again in person.

Because of Craig we were one of the first choirs to start sessions on Zoom and were featured briefly on Good Morning Britain in April. Fame at last!!!

Next came our 26 Melody Marathon when we sang 26 songs on what would have been the London Marathon day and raised a lot of money for our individual charities. It was great fun singing all our old familiar songs, watched by many friends and family, on Facebook Live.

On 9th June MKCC were planning to sing at Stony Live which obviously wasn't to be. So instead, Craig turned it into an online MKCC Acapella Lockdown Smackdown Rockdown Extravaganza with special guests popping in and recordings of previous Vaults Acapella sessions to sing along to as a choir. It was of course quite different to how we'd imagined it would be, but it was a great opportunity to enjoy joining in with traditional shanties and songs. Another fantastic evening.

Next was our concert with Electric Umbrella for MKDAD (Milton Keynes Disability Awareness Day) on Tuesday 14th July where we were joined by a variety of other charities with links to MKDAD, raising money while having fun. It was lovely to hear more about all the good work they do to help people within the community. It was a lot of fun learning new songs to sing with the Electric Umbrella guys and we are hoping, once the pandemic is over to share a concert with them again, but this time a live concert.

In the meantime we have another online concert with them, with The Big Yellow Choir, at the end of March this year. Can't wait!

Our next concert on Zoom was our 'Sing to Remember' concert on 13th November. We were joined by 8 other choirs to sing and listen to songs of remembrance, focusing on and remembering the impact of war. We were raising money for The British Legion Poppy Appeal, who like so many charities this year, missed out on a lot of their fundraising activities. It was a very moving evening and lovely to have so many other choirs join us, as well as our friends and families on Facebook.

On Saturday 12th December many of us took part in a 2-hour workshop with Abi Gilchrist. Her workshop consisted of an online vocal technique session including breathing techniques, and she even had some of us lying on the floor as part of a warmup! Everyone who attended really seemed to enjoy the morning. She helped us develop a new and deeper understanding of our voice and how to improve our sound over the full range of the voice.

The Christmas concert was the first time we had invited our audience to join us on Zoom, another good idea of Craig's. We also were able to sell tickets which helped cover the cost of the concert and the continued running of the choir.

Having our audience on Zoom dancing and singing along and interacting with us nearly made it feel like they were actually in the room with us. The concert was a huge success and we again raised a lot of money for charity, this time for St Marks Meals, whilst having fun.

On Christmas day teatime some choir members joined Craig for a fun quiz which everybody really enjoyed, particularly when so many of us were spending Christmas alone, due to lockdown.

And so, into the new year still in lockdown.

On January 31st we had the opportunity to join in a whole day of workshops, with Virtual Choir Lab, one of which Craig was running. The good thing about this day was that we can use the workshops at any time, not just on the actual day, so particularly good value. There was such a wide range of workshops from gospel to classical to popular music. It was a very well organised day, and in the breaks, we were entertained by choirs singing for us and found out about other choirs from their choir leaders.

The other thing that we have done since our last AGM is change our email account to Mailchimp as Yahoo was closing down. Wendy spent a lot of time researching which email account we should use and after a few teething problems we are now very confident in using it. Thanks to you all for putting up with our numerous test emails so patiently!

All in all a very strange year, but one in which the choir have been able to support each other, with Craig's help, through some difficult times. It has been fantastic to keep singing together. It has also been lovely to listen to Ian playing every week and it really lifts our spirits.

So, thank you Craig and Ian for all the hard work you have put in to give us something to look forward to each Tuesday night.

When you look back it's hard to believe how many things MKCC have done this year.

Thanks to all our choir members who join us on Zoom each week but also to those who aren't able to, but still keep in contact and support the choir.

Brighter days are coming, and we are starting to plan for a concert at The Ridgeway this Christmas when all being well, we can all sing together again face to face.

Here's looking forward to the future then, when things start to get back to a new normal and we can all meet up together again.

Can't wait!

Moira Roskilly Chair