

RBCS Chair's Report February 2013 AGM

2012 has been another good year for RBCS, thanks to the efforts and contributions of you all. In particular, heartfelt thanks go to Sue Heath Downey for her musical leadership and to members of the committee for all the work they do. I take great satisfaction from the way the committee rose to the challenges during the year.

...we're here to sing (and have fun)... performances

We performed our usual three concerts, and have done at least five other performances including carols at the new Albion Street Scandinavian Christmas market in Rotherhithe, and our first Royal Performance for the unveiling by Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex of the replacement Jubilee stone in Kings Stairs Garden. The choir has added musical ornament to several local church events including a Confirmation Service with the Bishop at the picturesque St Mary's, Rotherhithe and the carol service at St Paul's Deptford, a magnificent local Baroque church where Sue is Director of Music and organist.

Thinking of the music we make, the highlight just has to be Haydn's exuberant *Creation* with orchestra and soloists in the fabulous acoustic of St James church. It was a powerful performance and took our audience by storm. In the summer, we entered into the Olympic spirit and performed the specially commissioned Orlando Gough song *Put the Kettle On* (and enjoyed having the Welcome Singers perform it with us).

Our Christmas triumph was Handel's *Messiah* Part 1. We couldn't resist slipping the *Hallelujah Chorus* into the programme and our recording of that is now publicly available on YouTube. With the Nigerian carol, we have added a new language, Igbo, to our repertoire. Intriguingly, Sue has found several pieces of 'mood music' which showcase our ability to sing beautifully even if we can't always get every note and entry right. I'm thinking of course of the Paul Mealor Anthem *Ubi Caritas* (of Royal Wedding fame) and the Tavener *Christmas Proclamation*.

...we like people to have fun with us... audiences

Our last two concerts have each attracted well over 100 including Southwark Councillors, and for the *Creation*, the Lady Mayor of Southwark. Many of our audience are regulars, which is great. Interestingly, though audience numbers are up, box office takings are down slightly and we think this may reflect more people paying the concession rate for tickets, in

other words due to economic conditions beyond our control. Compared with other amateur performances, our concert tickets, at £5, continue to be a real bargain.

There is a social angle to the choir with a weekly after-rehearsal gathering in the Mayflower pub, and chatting over drinks after concerts, as well as the occasional party. Thank you to all who organise and participate.

...behind the scenes

This all takes money of course. There was support from United St Saviours Charity in the spring. The Bermondsey Square Community Fund agreed to fund our History of Bermondsey in Song project, and in the autumn, our new sponsor Prem Goyal JP OBE, entrepreneur and local resident, generously offered the choir financial support. Time & Talents helps with rehearsal space and fund-raising advice and St Mary's and St James churches provide excellent venues for our concerts. We are extremely grateful to all for their help.

Sadly, our publicity officer left the area during the year, and we were thankful that Lydia Beadsworth took up the reins. She has already updated our website and produced several striking poster designs. The most important publicity of course is by word of mouth where our singers have a really important part to play, and we appreciate all you do to bring audience members and singers to share our fun.

We are keeping up with good practice by including our diversity statement on the website and in our Welcome booklet, and make steady progress towards becoming a registered charity. The choir continues to be a member of the national association Making Music.

And what excitements and opportunities will 2013 bring? We have already referred to our History of Bermondsey in Song project. The aim is to pull together about half an hour of songs to represent the many aspects of Bermondsey through the ages. I hope there will also be further opportunities to sing with other local choirs.

Thank you once again to all, singers, committee members and supporters.

Clare Birks
RBCS Chair 2012-13