

## DELVING INTO THE PAST

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My earliest recollections of hearing the "Festival Choir" as it was then called, was in December 1952. They were singing Handel's "Messiah" at the Technical College, Stoke Park, accompanied by the Guildford Municipal Philharmonic Orchestra, leader Tate Gilder, under the baton of Crossley Clitheroe - programme price 6d! How I enjoyed this experience and thought how lovely it would be to belong to such a choir.

During the next few years I went regularly to their performances; sometimes to the combined performances of the orchestra and the Bice Bellairs Ballet in the Tech; on other occasions to the Odeon Theatre at the top of the High Street for a programme by the Municipal Orchestra and Crossley Clitheroe with famous soloists. This always seemed quite a rush for a 2.30 start after morning Church and a substantial Sunday lunch!

In 1958, whilst carrying out my duties in our family business, I happened to come into conversation with Mr Clitheroe, who lived in our village. Kindly man as he was, he asked the question "Do you sing- why don't you come along to my Choir?". Before long I found myself 'going along' on a Monday evening, 7.15pm, to the Methodist Church hall at the junction of North Street and Woodbridge Road. Sitting reticently in the back row with the 'mighty' sopranos, I found to my joy that they were rehearsing the "Messiah" for the coming December. I might add that I was soon moved to sing 'alto', because of my voice, you understand! So I formed my lasting relationship with the Festival Choir.

This was followed in 1959 with Verdi's "Requiem", Delius' "Seadrift" and "Serenade to Music"- Vaughan Williams, and in 1960/61 Brahms' "Requiem" and Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius". We must not forget the annual Carol Concert in the Methodist Church. Some of the more established members will call to mind such singing companions as Ken and Barbara Lank, Joan and Jack Benson, Cynthia Pepler and Con Azzopardi, to name but a few. Naturally there were many more folks and lots of beautiful music to sing, too numerous to list here. During this time, the smaller, more 'select' Philharmonic Choir was also in existence and I remember singing on one occasion with them in much fear and trepidation!

The following year of 1962 brought about changes with the arrival of Vernon (Tod) Handley who was appointed Musical Director after the sad death of Crossley Clitheroe. The Festival Choir was renamed the Guildford Philharmonic Choir which gradually incorporated the small choir and the orchestra became Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra, with leader William Armon succeeding Tate Gilder. The new Civic Hall was completed and became the venue for our concerts. We, as a choir ventured into lesser known works under Tod Handley's baton and some recordings were subsequently made. I always found the rehearsals great fun, although it was hard work and I looked upon the altos in the front row as 'cream of the bunch'. Have times changed?!

A new choir appeared on the scene, consisting of a young group of singers calling themselves "Proteus", which I thought at the time to be most clever, as of course the numbers were always changing when some left for University or Careers. I guess that it was an exciting time under the new young conductor!

I feel I must mention two of my piano teachers who were very much part of the music scene at this time, namely, Kathleen Dunn-Davies and June Downham (nee Gulland) and not forgetting past accompanists, Mary Rivers, Linden Knight and Christopher Mabley

Of course there have been changes with the introduction of a choir committee, a stricter programme of auditioning, higher membership rates and biannual visits to our 'twin' town, Freiburg and those reciprocated visits.

We say Hats off to past Chorus Masters, Simon Halsey and Neville Creed and coats off to the future under Jeremy Backhouse' excellent guidance with Jeremy Filsall accompanying!

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Anne Philips