Norwich Philharmonic Society Chairman’s Report June 2017

It’s always interesting in preparing for this meeting to reflect back on the past year of Norwich Phil activities. After all of the excitement of the 175th anniversary year in 2015/16, it was always going to be a difficult season to follow but I’m pleased to report that the Phil has had another very successful year.

Kate will go through the finances and attendance figures as usual, but I just wanted to note some of the highlights of the season.

We opened with a performance of Sibelius’s En Saga – for which the orchestra was praised by Christopher Smith in the EDP for ‘rising boldly to the thrill of the heroic outbursts, particularly striking in the way which they contrasted with the disciplined, quieter passages.’ The second half of the concert saw the choir join the orchestra and soloists – soprano, Susannah Fairbairn and baritone, Quentin Hayes for a rousing performance of Vaughan Williams’ Sea Symphony.

The early December orchestral concert was well-supported particularly considering that it was not an especially well-known programme. The brilliant violinist Zoe Beyers joined us for a marvellous performance of Korngold’s Violin Concerto, the programme also featured Sarka from Smetana’s Ma Vlast, less well-known than Vltava but fully deserving to be better known. The second half was a performance of Dvorak’s 5th symphony, which was very well received.

The Christmas concert was again very popular and included the orchestra and Drayton Junior Church of England School Choir conducted by Katy Leigh with Tim ‘fingers’ Patient on the organ. The collection was in support of the Big C cancer charity to mark their 35th anniversary.

The February concert again saw the orchestra perform some lesser known works, with Rachmaninov’s early piece Caprice Bohemien opening the programme. The centre-piece of the concert was Aaron Copland’s striking Clarinet Concerto where distinguished clarinettist, Matthew Hunt joined the orchestra. The final piece was, appropriately, Shostakovich’s 12 Symphony titled ‘The Year 1917’, not one of his best-known pieces but the performance captured the music’s drama.

The final concert in the season was a performance of Haydn’s The Seasons. Nothing like as well-known as The Creation and much more rarely performed (not many of the Phil had performed it before) this is partly because it is a long piece, although it was edited somewhat for this performance. The soloists were Cecilia Osmond, Mark Dobell and Jonathan Brown. We were pleased that Hans-Peter Kreuz from the Musik Institut in Koblenz came to join us in the choir for this special occasion. (Oh, I wrote that last year as well!) He was joined by Professor Matthias Breitschaft the conductor of the choir of the Musik Institut in Koblenz. At the end of April, almost 40 members of the choir plus supporters visited Koblenz to sing the piece again in the Rhein Mosel Halle with our twin choir and the Rheinische Philharmonie. Particular thanks to Pat Stephenson for acting as the choir’s co-ordinator. We were blessed with good weather and, despite a fairly punishing rehearsal schedule on the first day, managed to fit in quite a bit of sightseeing and socialising. As part of the project, we invited Norbert Mayn, a specialist German choral coach to give us a workshop on the pronunciation. Our German friends were suitably impressed!

Since the end of the season, David, with Sally’s support, has auditioned all of the choir members who have sung with us for over 3 years. It was a mammoth exercise but important to ensure that the choral singing standards are maintained. A few members decided to stand down and I particularly wanted to mention Audrey Laycock who had served the sopranos for over 30 years and Martin Miller who stepped down from the tenors after 19 years having celebrated his 90th birthday.

We are also pleased to confirm that Elizabeth Marjoram has taken over as the leader of the orchestra. Dominic Hopkins, who was the much-loved leader for many years, had to step back due to other commitments and we have been fortunate to have others, such as David Randall, who have been prepared to step in in the interim.

Kate will report, that the Society is in a strong place financially from the past season and this contribution will obviously help for the season ahead. This means that we can look forwards with confidence to planning for future years. I mentioned last year that I was particularly keen to see how we could encourage more younger people to take up or carry on singing. We have started some discussions with Norfolk Music Hub around this and hope to be able to develop some activities over the next year.

The Society thrives and much of this is down to the great team of people which is involved the music making and administration.

At the end of the season, we celebrated David’s 20th anniversary as our choral conductor, we are so lucky to have such a wonderful musician who makes everyone want to perform to their best and makes the rehearsals such fun. Thank you, David.

We are also fortunate in having a committed and adventurous orchestral conductor in Matt Andrews.

Rob and Sally keep the orchestra and choir in order, Caroline Furniss and Christine Gillham are our valiant and patient librarians.

Sue Mitchell is a brilliant secretary who does so many jobs behind the scenes and Kate is an ideal treasurer.

Sue Prutton is the assiduous front of house manager and our link with the hall stewards.

Judy Tryggvason does a great job with the website and newsletters as well as being deputy chairman of the Society.

Ron Jackson organises the staging arrangements and Mike Nutt is a very active chairman of the Orchestra sub-committee.

We also need to thank our rehearsal pianist Tim Patient and Moira Eagling who puts all of our publicity material together.

Peter Callf steps down from the committee having completed another term and been a great help in obtaining season sponsorships.

And thanks to all of the other members of the committee and society who give their time so freely.

We are delighted that Hansells will continue as our Season sponsors.

Paul and Stephanie Allen ran yet another successful quiz – an event to put in your diaries for next year Friday, 26th January. They say it will be their last one, so it would be great to make it an extra special one.

Another date for your diaries is 7 July 2018 when the Phil chorus has been invited to join Cambridge Phil in Ely Cathedral again for a performance of Mahler 8.

I cannot finish without mentioned the tremendous service we have had from Andrew Cane and his team at Prelude Records for so many years in looking after our box office. We marked this publically at the last concert of the season and Andrew was very touched and overwhelmed by this recognition. The box office will now be handled at St Georges Music Shop by Chris and Anne Duarte and we are pleased to be working with another local musical business in this way. I saw Andrew the other day and he has just started working with Adrian James Acoustics and seems very happy.

Thanks to all of you for continuing to support the society. I hope that you enjoy the programme for the forthcoming season – do come along and bring your friends too.