Our 2022-23 season was, as usual, busy, varied, musically challenging and exciting. We not only sang our usual four concerts, but added value to your subscriptions by tacking another three on at the end of the season. Perhaps the Mahler 3 at the beginning of September was technically part of the current season, but for me it seemed more like the climax to 22-23. The Poynton Festival lunchtime concert, the Belshazzar’s Feast at the Bridgewater Hall, the Mahler 3 also at the Bridgewater Hall, and I should also add our Christmas concert, all were excellent PR for the choir. They consolidated continuing and important partnerships with Poynton Church, Cheetham’s School, the European Doctors Orchestra, and Bradshaw Primary School. Add Slaithwaite Orchestra to the list and we can see that many organisations want to work with us: partnerships that broaden our boundaries, give us new opportunities and extend our audience.

All of which increased everybody’s workload! Pete had to prepare and accompany seven sets of rehearsals and concerts. Neil had to prepare us for seven concerts. Your committee had to make all the arrangements, and most importantly we all had to pull together to respond to the demand to rehearse and sing for all those concerts. Admittedly it was the sopranos and altos who had to take on all seven (and I want to particularly thank all those who took on the Mahler – rehearsing in May and June for a concert that took place in September was not ideal! The concert at the Bridgewater Hall was wonderful, and even with reduced numbers the choir sounded superb). The tenors and basses ‘only’ had to do six. Of course, not everyone was able to do every concert, but as a choir we delivered!

Of course, we ‘delivered’ so much more than the seven concerts. We, again, sang at Lyme Park for Christmas. We also had another successful Singing Day, still not quite up to the pre-Covid numbers, but climbing back gradually. Neil and Pete yet again delivered the goods musically, deservedly getting plaudits and applause on all sides. Gillian does the initial spadework for the Singing Day, but so many people work together both before and on the day, to make the Singing Day special. My thanks to you all. The Ethel Smyth Singing Day next January will be very special, and it would be good if we could all advertise it as widely as possible to make it a financial success as well!

Large numbers of us also went on a thoroughly enjoyable tour to Clifton, Bristol and Gloucester in May. Neil and Pete yet again did a wonderful job in giving us all the confidence to sing in such diverse settings with such a wide range of music. I particularly will never forget the delight of singing services in Bristol Cathedral, and the emotion of singing War’s Embers in Gloucester. I have news of our May ’24 tour later this evening.

Of course, all the enjoyment that we have had in singing, both in rehearsals and at concerts and at our other events, is very much down to the skill of Neil and Pete in getting the best out of us whilst ensuring we enjoy our music making. Thank you, Neil and Pete! (applause) It is also down to the dedication and hard work of a vast number of people. Concerts and seasons do not just happen by chance! Your committee puts more skill, insight, experience, persistence and hard work into running the choir than you could imagine, and we are indebted to them. Every week large numbers of the choir do all those jobs that make being a part of the choir both easier more enjoyable, from putting out the chairs and tables, to organizing and making the tea and washing up, running raffles, creating weekly email newsletters, distributing and collecting music with Gwyneth, organising re-auditions, running a monthly listening club, looking after our official ‘Friends’, being part of Mary’s publicity team, looking after our various Social Media accounts, and much more (my caveat against missing someone out). We know who you are! You make the choir what it is well known to be - a welcoming, sociable and well run choir! A round of applause please, for yourselves and each other.