**Wetherby Choral Society AGM 21 October 2024 : Chairman’s Report**

During our 23-24 season we celebrated our 50th anniversary with four great concerts, and many delightful fundraising and social events. I’m sure John will give an in depth review of our concerts, but I’d like to chip in to say that our performance of Vaughan Williams’ *Sea Symphony* was monumental! Huge thanks to John for his herculean effort in directing the choir, orchestra and soloists to achieve a magnificent and memorable performance of this tricky but wonderful piece of music. Our collaborative working with the RNLI in celebration of their 200th anniversary also added a poignancy to the concert as we reflected on the sea in all its power and mystery. Following on from this success, we were honoured to be asked by the music charity *Making Music* to write a blog for their website, plus an article for their magazine, in celebration of our work with another charity – a great way to promote our choir to a wider audience!

Our fundraising and social events have helped us to bond as a choir, and make our choir community not only a fun place to be, but also to support those having tough times. Naturally, we want to continue with this over the 24-25 season. We have plans to continue the success of the Autumn Produce event with a mini festive social gathering of wine and mince pies at the end of our rehearsal on Tuesday 16th December, together with the BIG Christmas raffle. Anne Sweet and her team’s famous Quiz will be as popular as ever in the Spring term, and a repeat of the enjoyable sponsored walk will be led by Graham Reed and his team in the Summer term. A very special evening farewell dinner has also been arranged for Monday 23rd June at Wetherby Golf Club, and we hope as many of you as possible will come to give John a great send-off!

So, what has the Committee been up to during the last season? Well, we have continued to support John through the many and significant facets of being our Music Director – which involves planning rehearsals, organising publicity, preparing for and delivering concerts of high quality. We continue to have a good relationship with St James’ Church, and in November I was delighted to represent the choir at the inauguration of the new vicar, the Reverend Canon Matthew Peat. We have also been busy with the appointment of several accompanists over 2024, and share your delight that we now benefit from the musical prowess of William Campbell. Our efforts to modernise have continued, and a small dedicated team have been beavering away all year to develop a new website. I do hope you have managed to look at this because it’s terrific! The website has been written for the benefit of three audiences. It provides information for current members, offers potential new members a background to who we are and what we do, and provides easy access to those wishing to purchase tickets online. Part of the process of modernising the website has involved the appointment of a graphic designer to create posters, flyers and concert programme covers, I hope you agree that her designs are stunning! I’d like to thank Chris Bishop in recognition of his kindness and expertise in running our website through the past, present and future. On your behalf I’d also like to applaud everyone on the Committee for making a willing and happy team which has achieved so much.

Every single one of us is reliant on someone else doing their bit to help run the choir. There are so many of you involved, so please can I extend a huge thanks to each one of you. You really are wonderful, and very much appreciated! We now need new members on the Committee to keep the show going, and would love to welcome you into the team. In particular, both myself and Kathy Hart are retiring from the Committee in October 2025. Both of these are key roles, and as such it makes sense for interested new members to have a year to ‘shadow’ the activities carried out. Please step up – we need you!

Looking forward to our 24-25 season brings mixed feelings. I am sure that we are all very much looking forward to our concerts, culminating in what should be a memorable joint concert with Ripon Choral Society in Ripon Cathedral. However, I daresay that, like me, you are gutted by the news of John’s impending retirement in Summer 2025. He has been our Music Director for an extraordinary period of 32 years! Throughout this time, we have enjoyed his fantastic vocal tuition and the spine-tingling thrill of being part of numerous amazing concerts with quality orchestras and soloists competently led by John. We should all take immense pride that a small town like Wetherby is able to enjoy listening to four concerts a year with orchestra and soloists, and this is down to John’s remarkable abilities and willingness to do a lot of background work for us in organising orchestral players, adapting orchestral scores together with seeking out and promoting soloists in their career. His leadership of our choir community represents an incredible legacy for which we will always be grateful, AND the high standards he has set means that whoever takes on the role of our new Music Director is going to need ‘big boots’! To this end, the Committee are focusing on the process of finding a successor worthy of the prestigious choir which John has moulded. Please also be reassured that we will do our absolute best to involve you in the process, and will be seeking your feedback throughout. I’ve worked on the committee for about a decade now, and its opened my eyes to the myriad other roles which John has willingly carried out on our behalf. So the Committee are extremely grateful that John has offered to support and advise us through the process of finding a suitable successor.

We are moving into a new era with the appointment of a new Music Director, so your continuing involvement and support is vital for us to maintain and develop John’s legacy with Wetherby Choral Society. Onwards and upwards!

Heather Marsh