

'I sing from the heart. It's glorious'

Bearsden Choir: Phil Malloch, tenor

AFTER 39 years as a Church of Scotland minister, Phil Malloch retired in 2009, moved with his wife to Torrance, joined the local church – and Bearsden Choir. He is looking forward to the relaxation of the ban on communal singing, for churches and choirs alike.

How did you begin singing, and be involved in Bearsden Choir?

“With musical parents, I have sung since infancy. No-one in our house could sing a melody without others adding the parts. In the school choir I sang treble in first year and moved through alto to bass as my voice broke, although I ended up singing tenor. I remember a fellow pupil inviting me to his home for tea once; his dad had sung with Glasgow Orpheus Choir, so I had a voice coaching as well!

“Piano lessons in youth meant I could read music, and at university I shared a room with a guitarist, who started me off playing that. Over the years I often sang with the guitar in worship, especially with young people. As a minister, singing meant hymns in church and carols at Christmas. I helped out in church choirs. In Killearn, the Strathendrick Singers met on Mondays, which was my day off. That widened my repertoire and gave me 15 years of delight.

“When I retired and moved, a friend in Bearsden Choir invited me to join. Knowing its high standard, I tentatively auditioned, and have enjoyed 12 years as a member of the tenor section.”

What has being in the choir meant to you in the pandemic?

“When everything stopped in March 2020, I lost choir, church services and my exercise class in one fell swoop. The gym had provided one hour of exercise each week and lockdown allowed us to walk for an hour a day. Without missing a Sunday, church started meeting on Zoom. At least watching from home we can sing along – communal singing spreads the virus.

“The Choir was a different kettle of fish. The time-lag with



Zoom means we cannot sing together – unison, let alone harmony, would be chaotic. It was a real loss, till the director Andrew Nunn gathered us on Zoom, to sing with our microphones muted. He is a great encourager: in normal practice, he picks up our errors, not to reprove but to improve. I am so grateful he still encourages, even though we're muted. He'll say, with a twinkle, 'That was great! I don't think I've ever heard you sing better!' We laugh – and keep going.”

What has been the choral highlight of your singing life?

“There are so many it is hard to choose. I once conducted Stirling Presbytery in Dunblane Cathedral, singing Psalm 24, 'Ye gates,' unaccompanied, facing each other in the choir stalls. Many knew the harmonies. The final, heartfelt Hallelujahs had me wondering if music in heaven would sound any better. I was so awe-struck I almost forgot to conduct.”

What has been the best part of your time with Bearsden Choir?

“Singing glorious music joined to words that express my own beliefs. We are a secular choir, but I can sing Vivaldi's 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace...' from the heart, and hope that shows in my face. Whatever our varying beliefs, knowing millions are anxious about illness or income, we all wish peace to the world today.”

The Bearsden Choir's "virtual choir" performance of Vivaldi's Gloria will be free-to-view online at 4pm on Sunday May 30. www.bearsdenchoir.com