



Andrew Nunn conducting the choir in Glasgow City Hall. Below: some members at its golden jubilee in 2018



and Wotton can see benefits in the way the pandemic has forced the choir to work and the challenges it has presented for members.

“We have had an opportunity to work on musicianship and vocal technique,” says Nunn. “Through the process of recording the virtual choir, everyone has to know their line inside out and there is no security in numbers.”

For the Elijah choruses, Nunn made a conducting guide for the piano accompanist, whose part was given to the singers. Each individual recorded voice was added on top of the track as the virtual choir was pieced together.

“With the wide age demographic in the choir,” says Wotton, “there are people who are at ease with IT and others for whom it is a challenge. You have to have two devices, one playing

the backing track and with Andrew’s conducting to watch, and then a separate device doing the audio and visual recording. Getting it all set up, with everyone in choir dress – from the waist up at least! – is all part of it.

“The challenge is that you are on your own and you don’t have the support of other voices around you. You strive to get something you think is acceptable but you will never get perfection, so you learn to keep one that you think is OK – and not listen back to it!”

THE Mendelssohn choruses were uploaded to YouTube before the choir embarked on the more ambitious project of working with a small orchestra on a complete performance of Vivaldi’s Gloria, which is being pieced together for unveiling at 4pm on May 30.

An octet of musicians from McOpera Ensemble were recorded in Glasgow’s Trades House, in the company of soprano and alto soloists Ellen Mawhinney and Penelope Cousland, who were joined by a tenor and a bass to provide “guide” vocals for the choir sections in the choruses.

That first phase of the Vivaldi was accomplished despite being attempted on March 7, when the city centre was rather less quiet than Nunn and his team had every right to expect it to be, thanks to the resolution that day of the Scottish Premiership.

Now the choir is in the process of adding its many contributions, each individual singing along to the backing track and watching their conductor. The correct pale background and acoustic is required.

One former member has rejoined, now that living in Cumbria no longer makes attending rehearsals a problem. Another member apparently favours standing in the bath, with sofa cushions and duvets deadening the acoustic.

When we speak, three choruses are “in the can”, so to speak, with the last deadline for choristers to upload their contribution scheduled for May 19. The final result will be free-to-view on YouTube, but the choir will be asking for donations from its viewers and listeners in the absence of its ticket income.

Becoming a virtual choir has not been inexpensive for Bearsden Choir to achieve, but it has remained a fit and healthy singing force as a result.

Meet some members of the choir in The Herald Magazine in the coming weeks, in the countdown to their performance on May 30.

www.bearsdenchoir.com

Review

FRANCESCA DEGO
Plays Paganini’s
Violin, *Il Cannone*
(Chandos)



ITALIAN American violinist Francesca DeGo has been a familiar soloist with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra recently, and has a project to record the violin concertos of Mozart with the orchestra, under the baton of historically informed performance veteran Sir Roger Norrington. She is also one of the few international soloists to have kept their date in Glasgow through the restrictions of the pandemic, albeit without the conductor, playing “The Turkish” No5 concerto at the RSNO Centre in December.

By comparison with that undertaking, her new album for Chandos (the label that is also behind the Mozart project) might risk looking a little gimmicky. Eschewing her usual instrument, a 17th-century Ruggeri on long loan to her, she went to Genoa to have the violin that was left to the city by Genoese composer and virtuoso Nicolo Paganini taken from its display case in the Palazzo Tursi so that she could play it.

Almost 50 years newer than the Ruggeri, this 1743 instrument is the work of Bartolomeo Giuseppe Guarneri, as great, if not quite as celebrated, a maker as Antonio Stradivari.

DeGo was in pole position for the honour, having become the first Italian female prize-winner at Genoa’s Paganini competition in 2008, but the decade or so that has passed since then has given the soloist the professional clout to call the shots on her repertoire.

It is the intelligence she brings to that selection, as well as her superlative playing, that makes this a recital disc well worth having, regardless of its value as memento of the sound of a historic instrument.

While it begins with a famous piece of Paganini, *La Clochette*, and continues with a party piece of 20th-century violin virtuoso Fritz Kreisler, DeGo then crosses the Atlantic to the other side of her parentage for John Corigliano’s *Red Violin Caprices* (derived from his score for the Francois Girard film).

Thereafter there is a lovely new commission from Carlo Boccadoro, *Come d’autunno*, and then his arrangement of a Paganini rarity before a home straight of Paganini dedications from the diverse pens of Rossini, Schnittke and Szymanowski. A global stylistic grand tour it is, even if *Il Cannone* itself was not allowed to cross the threshold of its temperature-controlled Genoa home in the making of it.

KEITH BRUCE