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Choir finds its voice in the digital world

Bearsden Choir aims to spread a little joy at the end of a difficult year with its first ever digital performance. **Ann Wallace** speaks to conductor Andrew Nunn about the peculiar challenges of preparing an event when singing in public is banned

UPLIFTING and positive choruses from a rousing Mendelssohn classic mark Bearsden Choir's first ever digital performance.

Conductor Andrew Nunn has been working online with the singers since coronavirus restrictions halted face-to-face rehearsals at the start of lockdown in March.

"I am extremely proud of our members for persevering through many difficult months, and the technical challenges, to make this happen," he says.

"Singing in public is still not allowed under the current restrictions, which is a huge blow to choirs across the country – so I'm delighted this online performance will give Bearsden Choir a chance to shine."

Bearsden Choir was formed in 1968 and has grown to become one of Scotland's finest, regularly invited to perform at prestigious events such as the opening of the refurbished Kelvingrove Museum and the Glasgow celebrations of Bach's 250th anniversary.

More than 90 of its 130-plus members are taking part in the virtual winter celebration, which comprises two choruses from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* – 'He, watching over Israel' and 'He that shall endure to the end.' This was the oratorio the choir

had intended to perform at its May concerts before Covid-19 brought its season to an abrupt halt.

"We wanted to perform something from *Elijah*, because it seemed apt to pick up from where we left off," says Andrew.

"Our last rehearsal was March 11 and I think at that time, we naively thought it would just be a couple of weeks until things picked up again – we have not seen each other since."

"We plan to broadcast the videos on our YouTube channel – it will certainly be a very different performance from anything we have done before, but we are delighted to have been able to do it all."

Preparing a virtual performance with around 90 people, of mixed ages and varying levels of technical confidence, was a challenge, admits Andrew.

"My role has very much been one of motivator as well as conductor," he says, smiling. "It has involved backing tracks, videos, multiple devices for watching and recording and of course, many hours of editing to put it all together."

"But it has been really lovely to see everyone, and to be able to work together again."

"We would normally have stopped for the summer, but instead, we have managed to keep rehearsals going and it's a real testament to



Conductor Andrew Nunn will lead the choir in the online winter celebration

our members and their tenacity and support for the choir that so many have turned up week after week on a Wednesday night to join in."

The choir holds a special place in the hearts of its members, who include men and women of all ages, from all walks of life.

"There is a strong youth membership, with a number of

singers in their teens and twenties.

"People join us for many reasons – to relax because they have busy or stressful professional lives; to overcome isolation; to meet like-minded people and build new friendships," says Andrew.

"This year, more than ever, we have wanted to keep going, to keep bringing people together at our Wednesday evening rehearsals at a time when none of us could get together in person."

"The choir has been our community."

Christmas is a time of hope, says Andrew, and Bearsden Choir's virtual performances aim to spread a little joy at the end of what has been a difficult year for everyone.

He adds: "The pieces are well-known and very beautiful, and we hope they will bring some joy to our audience. We want to remind everyone that Bearsden Choir is still here, and still going strong."



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Coming soon

'He That Shall Endure to the End' by Felix Mendelssohn

A virtual performance exclusive to **HeraldScotland.com** by Bearsden Choir and produced during Covid-19 lockdown

The Herald

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