

Speech given by Dr Marlow – July 1, 2006

Thank you, Master, for your kind words. It has been rather embarrassing to sit and listen to such generous praise. On the other hand, it has been utterly delightful to have one's failings ignored. Such eulogies are usually reserved for funerals!

It is characteristically generous of the Master to preside at our dinner tonight. His enthusiastic support for the choir, the chapel and for college music in general is something we all highly prize and warmly appreciate.

Apart from Lord Rees, we have another kind of president to thank tonight: our charismatic compère, Alexander Armstrong. It is quite nostalgic to hear his velvet tones resounding in this Hall once again.

My gratitude also goes to those responsible for inviting me, my family and other special guests to attend these festivities tonight. There are many who deserve mention for their prodigious efforts instigating, organizing and bringing to fruition this weekend's celebrations. In particular, the specially-formed Trinity College Choir Association committee has worked wonders, galvanized so efficiently by Nicholas Yates, Thames Ditton's answer to Pavarotti. Nicholas - ever courteous, sensitive, but tenaciously determined - even succeeded in persuading me to come to terms with this weekend and graciously to face the music.

He has been ably assisted in his untiring endeavours by Robert-Jan Temmink, Andrew Lamb and Gabriel Crouch. Gabriel enticed Julian Podger and his élite Trinity Baroque consort to lead us in tomorrow morning's Sung Eucharist in the chapel. He was also, I believe, responsible for bringing about, earlier this evening, the maiden flights of both dove and songthrush. Let me thank Jonathan at this juncture, for writing, and dedicating to me, such an atmospheric and imaginative setting of a favourite Hardy poem: I have been moved by his kindness and relieved to discover that my teaching some decades past appears in no way to have inhibited the flowering of his muse.

In spirit with the Hardy poem, I have been kept largely in the dark about the organization of this weekend, though my plume has been thereby becalmed rather than beruffled. Annette, unbeknown to me, has apparently fielded diplomatic questions about my likely views and preferences on this and that. In police jargon, I suppose we could say 'a woman has been helping the committee with its enquiries'. My thanks to that discreet witness, whose affection for the college and choir has, over the years, grown to be as deep as mine.

One of the chief claims to musical fame in Trinity of another lady helper, our treasurer, Kate May, was the recording in the ante-chapel, for a Decca-produced Italian opera, of an agonized shriek of assault.

Less melodramatic one trusts – but clearly, equally effective – has been the liaison between committee and college carried out by our chairman, the retiring Dean of Chapel, Arnold Browne. Choir and college community in general owe Arnold a considerable debt for his unstinting contribution during his time here – and we wish him and Caroline a happy and fulfilling future.

To our chapel secretary, Selene Webb, to our current Trinity-chorister representative, Alison Hill, and to all the remaining committee members – Marie-Claire Byrne, Jonathan Sampson, Rebecca Yates, Tom Herford and Rickman Godlee – I say a heartfelt 'thank you' for your devoted labours. Interestingly, three of those

officers just mentioned not only wed Trinity choir partners. They also perpetrated, to the best of my recollection, 'mixed' marriages: decani and cantoris!

In addition to the Choir Association committee and its many helpers, it is (as one used to pray) 'meet and right' that we acknowledge the help both the College Council and John Lonsdale and Corinne Lloyd of the Alumni Office, have given in support of this weekend's events. Nor can we let the occasion pass without expressing our appreciation to the Catering Manager, the chef and the kitchen staff for providing us with such excellent fare.

Without the co-operation of you all – dons, divines, friends, countertenors – without your co-operation, even the efforts of Nicholas and his stalwart colleagues would have been in vain. So, thank you all for coming to give the Trinity Choir Association such a buoyant lift-off and rkm25 such a memorable send-off. I do hope there will have been an opportunity during this weekend for me to meet and talk to you all, however frustratingly briefly. It is a wonderful chance for us all to meet again, in some cases after many, many years.

Looking around, it is touching to see so many old faces – including those veterans who have temporarily escaped their nursing homes. You have all taken time and trouble to come. Many of you have travelled at some inconvenience and some from lands afar – even from the Antipodes. Your presence here and your loyalty mean so much.

Tonight we celebrate the inauguration of the Trinity College Choir Association. An inauguration is a beginning – and yet, in a way, tonight's celebration is a continuation, a re-affirming of the past. Choristers, of different shapes and sizes, have been involved with music and liturgy in this place for the past 460 years – nearly 700 years if one includes the early 14th-century musical establishment of The King's Hall from which Trinity descends.

It is a great privilege for me to have been part of this ancient and distinguished tradition. In such a context my 38 years as Director of Music are, in the psalmist's words, 'but a span long', 'even as nothing'. Yet I did calculate, rather disconcertingly, the other day, while gazing at an Armitage Shanks logo in a Little Chef ante-room, that this period of nearly four decades does, nevertheless, constitute approximately one-twelfth of Trinity's four and a half centuries of existence!

This period also happens to have coincided with probably some of the most significant changes and exciting opportunities, musically speaking, in the College's history:

- the chance to replace the ageing, worn-out organ, returning the magnificent Baroque cases – and thereby the chapel itself - to their former glory and proportions;
- the introduction of female sopranos and altos to the choir;
- the association, via David Barnard, with Conifer Records, whose former artistic director, John Kehoe, we are so pleased to welcome tonight;
- the building of the music block and the practice rooms;
- the acquisition of new keyboard instruments – harpsichords, chamber organ, grand pianos as well as uprights;
- the increase in the number of choral awards to no fewer than thirty;
- the regular financial provision of vocal and organ tuition.

The College's growing awareness of, and pride in its distinctive musical heritage represents perhaps another important development .

Of inestimable benefit have been the generous bequests made to the choir in memory of two distinguished and much-loved former fellows. We are delighted that Robert Robson's sister and brother-in-law, Jean and Derek Smiles, and Hans Lissmann's widow, Corinne, who made these valuable and much-valued donations, are able to be with us tonight.

Looking back, I realize how fortunate I have been: in the right place at the right time. Developments at Trinity were inevitable; I was helpless to prevent them. Even before the advent of female singers – which eventuality I postponed as long as I dared - we had during the 70s some fine, richly-sonorous all-male choirs. Not infrequently since the early 80s we have boasted some mixed-voice ensembles that were tolerable too. As time has passed, we have in general managed to attract an ever greater number of promising applicants, singers and organists alike. We have broadcast regularly since 1983, produced some four dozen commercial recordings and undertaken more than fifty foreign tours. These have included visits to such far-flung, exotic venues as Japan, Namibia, India and Peru.

But we remember with special affection those regular tours closer to home which have been organized by two people who have travelled from abroad to be present tonight. Our several visits to Switzerland have been masterminded by a distinguished former chorister, Reiner Schneider-Waterberg, who abandoned Rhodes, Oxford, then St John's next door to join us at Trinity. And our almost biennial pilgrimages to Germany since the late 80s have taken place under the auspices of our Schütz-Engel, Pejo Stefes.

Our organ and choral scholars have customarily given themselves to their duties with mostly admirable devotion, including those irksome routine chores you will all remember so well - turning up for a lunchtime choir practice or getting up early on a frosty, 'spectre-gray' Sunday morning in February to sing Jacob Handl or Messiaen.

But they have, one hopes, reaped benefits as well – not just the tours, the recordings and some wonderful music-making, but those other lasting, perhaps less immediately obvious joys: I refer, of course, to

- the choristers' ingrained familiarity with that most versatile of clefs, the C-clef;
- their readiness – and facility - to transpose;
- their awareness that staggering is not only alcohol-related;
- their finesse at phrasing and fashioning female endings;
- their heightened perception of the subjunctive, not forgetting the double negative;
- their acquired taste for exquisite clarets and ports provided for them by the buttery staff at the conclusion of feasts.

Nowadays the choir regularly enjoys several courses of the feast itself, albeit beforehand in the rather claustrophobic surroundings of the Staff Canteen. Members of the all-male choirs of yesteryear will recall that at college feasts they had to make do with a glass of flat beer together with a stale, dry cold sausage sandwich.

Such recollections are a timely reminder that, for all its continuity and tradition – and notwithstanding our motto 'semper eadem' - some things do indeed change.

The 1883 requirements for admission to the choir stipulated not only 'prepared solos and sight-reading', but the translation of passages from Vergil and questions on Greek and Latin grammar. As if that weren't enough, candidates were also set an examination involving algebra, quadratic equations and Euclid Books 1, 2 and 3.

Were such demanding, wide-ranging requirements still in force today, we would have no choir. Come to think of it, Trinity would have no undergraduates!

Thank goodness we do! Working with them makes the post of Director of Music at Trinity an even more privileged and attractive position, if a trifle trying at times. It is not particularly surprising that I am only the fourth holder of the post since 1893. Somewhat fortuitously, I became a fellow in my late twenties and, through laziness, lack of worldly ambition and an ever-growing affection for Trinity, I have remained put since then, becoming the longest-serving Organist and Director of Music in the history of the College.

For all that – perhaps because of that - I am fully aware that my 'best-before' date occurred more than a decade ago and that even my 'use-by' date is already past. It is time for Trinity and for RKM to move on, time for change, time for renewal and a 'plume-beruffling blast' of fresh air.

During my time here there have been six masters, all of whom, with their wives, have been wonderfully supportive of choir and chapel. There have been five admissions tutors – all of whom were, fortunately, on the choral front, at times recklessly courageous.

There have been four deans of chapel, fifteen chaplains, 24 organ scholars and well over 350 choral scholars and volunteers.

During that time there have, needless to say, been many ups and downs. I cherished and admired the earlier TTBB choir, but the repertoire was restricted and there is no denying that, with the advent of the mixed choir in 1982, Trinity's choral horizons expanded considerably. My aim became to try and recover for Trinity something of the reputation for choral excellence that it had once enjoyed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and especially during the nineteenth century when Walmisley and Stanford were incumbent and Trinity reigned supreme in Cambridge.

To some extent that ambition may have been achieved. But it has also been frustratingly thwarted during the latter part of my tenure by unwelcome obstacles and disappointments. Since the halcyon days of Conifer Records, our recording companies – no fewer than three of them - have promised much but let us badly down. And then English Heritage refused for many years to allow a fire escape to be built at the east end of the chapel, thereby reducing potential concert-audience numbers drastically. This prevented us financing and promoting regular choir concerts with professional orchestras in our own chapel, the best acoustically in Cambridge. I had so wanted each generation of Trinity choristers to sing a three-year cycle of the two Bach Passions and the B minor Mass.

But perhaps that and similar adventurous projects can now begin to happen. I am delighted to say that not only is there a fire escape in chapel at last, but that the College has recently agreed to help sponsor high-

profile Trinity Choir concerts here and elsewhere, to provide the new Director of Music with full administrative assistance, and to install permanent recording facilities in the chapel.

For all this and for so much else, we have cause to be immensely grateful. Moreover, in appointing as my successor such an able and distinguished musician and choir-trainer as Stephen Layton, the College has clearly announced its concern for the future well-being of the choir and its intention to enhance the choir's reputation.

It remains to reiterate thanks, particularly to Nicholas for setting up the Choir Association and this inaugural celebration. It must have absorbed so much of his and his family's time. I am reminded of the story of the notice in the foyer of an English-speaking hotel on the continent which advised the residents: 'the lift will be out of action this weekend. During that time we regret you will be unbearable.' Rebecca assures me that, despite the inevitable anxieties and frustrations of the past several months, Nicholas has remained remarkably civil and stable. His achievement has been considerable. It was fitting that at evensong tonight we sang the double descant I wrote specially for his and Rebecca's wedding.

I wish the Choir Association, as I wish Stephen and future Trinity choirs, every success in their endeavours. I can now quietly withdraw - feeling grateful that you have tolerated so graciously decades of Marlow and Marlovians, and feeling privileged to have been associated with you all as part of the distinguished musical tradition of this great College. Thank you all.