

CROYDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

Croydon Philharmonic Choir is the largest and longest-established classical choir in Croydon. It was founded during the first world war by a devoted amateur musician named Alan Kirby and its first performance, Handel's *Messiah*, was staged to raise money for Belgian refugees. When the war ended, Kirby arranged a further series of concerts on themes of peace to celebrate the end of hostilities. The choir was originally called the Croydon Sacred Heart Harmonic Society, but Kirby renamed it to reflect its broadening repertoire.

The choir soon came to occupy a position at the heart of the Croydon community and also built a strong national reputation for excellence. Alan Kirby was a friend of Sir Edward Elgar, and the choir became renowned for its performances of Sir Edward's work. In 1935 it organised an Elgar festival in Croydon which staged four concerts in a week. The seat price ranged from half a crown (12½p) to ten shillings (50p). Kirby knew other giants of British contemporary music among them Ralph Vaughan Williams who lived nearby and wrote a piece for the choir, *A Choral Flourish*. Vaughan Williams' widow, Ursula, was a vice president of the choir for many years.

The choir continued under Alan Kirby's leadership to 1959. Since then, it has had just three more music directors. David Gibson took over in 1999. Over the years the choir has taken part in no fewer than 23 BBC prom concerts and has recorded for the BBC at its Maida Vale studios. It appeared at a Royal Command Concert in 1955 and in 1976 reached its peak membership of 220.

Today the choir has around 70 members. We perform in venues in the Croydon area, including the prestigious Fairfield Halls with its excellent acoustic. The choir's president is the world-renowned trumpeter Crispian Steele-Perkins and it has two vice-presidents, the brilliant soprano Erica Eloff and its distinguished pianist Ian le Grice.

We seek to be an open and friendly mixed voice choir, which achieves high standards of performance while remaining accessible to singers with a wide range of musical experience. We have a wide repertoire, selecting a range of classical works from different periods, interspersed with pieces by living composers such as Bob Chilcott, Karl Jenkins, Moren Lauridsen and Will Todd. We have a firmly rooted policy and practice of welcoming people of all backgrounds, who are keen to learn and improve their musical ability.

Prospective new members are given a voice consultation with our Music Director, rather than a more formal audition. They are expected to have a basic knowledge of musical notation as we work from music scores but are not required to be able to sight-read, although this is an advantage. The choir offers support to help develop musical ability, including access to practice files.

We rehearse at St Matthew's Church, Croydon most Tuesday evenings between September and early July, with rehearsals scheduled from 7.15 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. Once a month we have a longer social break in the middle of the rehearsal and the evening finishes at 9.30 p.m.

Croydon Philharmonic Society is a Registered Charity (No. 213084) led by up to eleven trustees, who constitute its Committee.

Further information about the choir can be found on our website:

<https://www.croydonphilharmonic.org>