



With one voice

THE CITY of Bristol may be among the smaller counties, but what it lacks in size it makes up for in energy and creativity. Among its population of 450,000, 91 different languages are spoken, with all the richness of diverse cultures that brings.

My predecessors in office had described to me the unique opportunity which the role offers to bring influence to bear. As my wife and I are both singers, we set ourselves the challenge of bringing communities together through music.

For several years now the High Sheriff of Bristol has organised a concert in our cathedral, to raise money for Bristol Youth and Community Action, the charity which High Sheriffs traditionally support, and which helps to fund holiday programmes for disadvantaged young people. Our ambition was to achieve the same financial outcome but with diversity in content, performers and audience, and to use the transformative power of music as a bridge across communities.



This led us to form a partnership between three amateur choirs, Gospel, Youth and Classical Chamber, to perform a programme entitled *With One Voice*. Each choir would sing from its own repertoire, ranging from Thomas Tallis's 'Spem in Alium' to Quincy Jones's setting of Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus'. As the highlight, I commissioned a new work by Toby Young, 'As One', written specifically for the three choirs, to tell the story of our city, from its darker historic times through to the energetic and creative city of the present. This programme would deliver diversity in content and performers, but how were we to deliver the same in the audience?

Above: Exultate Singers, Renewal Gospel Choir and Bristol Youth Choir came together to sing 'As One' for The High Sheriff's concert

When the tickets went on sale, I invited those who were regular supporters of the event to buy an extra ticket, for someone who could not afford to come. This attracted a remarkable response, enabling me to give away a third of the seats. The next challenge was to ensure that the free tickets were taken up by people who would value the event and its message. I was very lucky to be assisted by leading members of the BME community, who identified whom I should invite. The end result was that we had more than 700 performers and audience members in the cathedral, with every seat sold well in advance. Among the audience I was honoured to welcome our Lord-Lieutenant, our Lord Mayor and High Sheriffs from six other counties.

Though I say it myself, it was a spectacular success, both musically, and in its aim of drawing communities together. It even raised more for BYCA and for Bristol Cathedral than I had hoped. I may be only halfway through my year, but I know that there will be no other experience to compare with the applause at the end of the concert, or the heart-warming feedback I have received since. There could be no better evidence of the power of the Office to influence and to draw communities together.



The High Sheriff, with Joanna Wyld, the Lord-Lieutenant Peaches Golding, and the Lord Mayor Jos Clark, and (back) the High Sheriffs of (L to R) Essex, Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset and Gloucestershire (hidden) at the High Sheriff's *With One Voice* Concert at Bristol Cathedral

Charles Wyld
High Sheriff of Bristol 2019-20