

ADVERTISING FEATURE **BEARSDEN CHOIR**

ON Saturday, December 4, 118 members of Bearsden Choir gathered at Kingsborough Sanctuary in Glasgow. It was the first time in almost two years that the members could let their voices soar.

It was an emotional day. The choir has taken gradual and careful steps back to live singing, and even on that day they were not joined by their additional member – a live audience.

However, Bearsden Choir's Countdown to Christmas, five short pieces of Christmas music, has been filmed.

These five performances will be available for us all to enjoy online, one a day at 1pm, starting on December 21 and running through to Christmas Day.

Bearsden Choir is known and critically acclaimed for its performances of large-scale works at the City Halls in Glasgow. With its usual home unavailable this year, Director of Music Andrew Nunn and Chairman John Wotton secured the glorious Kingsborough Sanctuary for this performance.

The building, the former Hyndland Parish Church, offers not only superb acoustic properties, but also the space required to allow members to sing together safely and accommodate the musicians and technical crew required for the filming.

For the programme Andrew has chosen what he describes as five "beautiful, uplifting pieces", each by a living composer and with four new to the choir.

The choir will perform John Rutter's "wonderful and comforting" Christmas Lullaby and Philip Stopford's A Christmas Blessing. There will be two pieces from Alan Bullard, Love Came Down At Christmas and The Scots Nativity, which Andrew describes as having a genuine Scottish flavour.

The fifth, Gaudete, set by Cecilia McDowall, is the only piece that the choir has performed previously.

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Main image, although Bearsden Choir's more familiar home of City Halls in Glasgow was unavailable this year, the stunning surrounds of the former Hyndland Parish Church proved just as magical as a venue

Andrew says that these contemporary settings "inhabit a slightly different harmonic world and require the choir to sing with a wide variety of different colours.

"They also show how talented and flexible our singers are. It shows the choir can do many things.

"Even though each piece is no more than five minutes, they have also provided a lovely challenge to our singers."

He also points out how difficult it can be for so many voices to sing as softly as required at points in the pieces. "To have 118 voices sing in that soft yet warm and beautiful way is a real challenge and one that the choir met beautifully."

The needs of the audience were also at the forefront of Andrew's mind when selecting the pieces.

The last Christmas choir concerts were in

2019 and he wanted Bearsden Choir to offer us the emotional and inspiring lift that Christmas music can bring.

Aside from the choice of music, there's no doubt that the emotion felt by the singers, performing together for the first time in so long, will be palpable and heighten the performance.

"This time of year is always magical for choirs," says Chairman John Wotton, "but this year is much more meaningful.

"We saw one another gradually, following Zoom rehearsals, virtual performances, then live rehearsals where the choir needed to arrive in two shifts to comply with social distancing guidelines. All our rehearsals were done in masks. Our performance day was the first that we did unmasked, as safely as we possibly could."

The Countdown to Christmas is something of a culmination on the road back to live singing, but the next step, performing in front of a live audience is highly anticipated. Bearsden Choir plans to return to the City Halls in Glasgow in May, this time with an audience.

"We hope these performances will add to that anticipation of Christmas and people will tune in each day," adds Andrew. "I think we have created something quite special."

■ Bearsden Choir's Countdown to Christmas will be broadcast online from December 21 to 25. Watch at Bearsden Choir's own website bearsdenchoir.com, its YouTube channel or its Facebook page as well as The Herald's website and Facebook page