

VOICES ACROSS THE HUMBER

ARTISTIC VISION

In deciding what to perform during Hull's City of Culture year, Hull Choral Union thought about both the four themes and choral works that would suit them. The involvement of other choirs was crucial if we were to be aspirational and perform a big piece. The Grimsby choirs were happy to take part and agreed with our proposal of a sea-themed repertoire which would fit in with the Routes and Roots season. The Sea Symphony opens with the words "Behold, the sea itself" which is very appropriate to our area and heritage. The people of both Grimsby and Hull are very aware of both the beauty and the danger of the seas that lie so close to them. This is emphasised each year through the Lost Trawlermen's Day and in 2016 through the unveiling of the mural of Lilian Bilocca and the "headscarf revolutionaries", with plans to produce a film about Hull's lost trawlers.

The second piece features the Humber Bridge, linking communities on both sides of the estuary and commissioned by J.H. Fenner and S.Hainsworth to celebrate its completion. Hull Choral Union performed this piece, written by the composer Anthony Hedges and the poet Philip Larkin, both formerly of the University of Hull, in 1981. The music uses the words of A Bridge For the Living, in which Larkin saw the bridge connecting lives. Words from this poem are on two of the roundels near the poet's statue at Paragon Station. The ice-cruised ships carry "a lighted memory no miles eclipse, a harbour for the heart against distress and we are told "Always it is by bridges that we live".

The Sea Symphony evokes the immensity of the sea, with vessels on its 'limitless heaving breast' and a lament for those who have lost their lives at sea. Larkin describes Hull as an 'isolate city' which becomes united through the bridge route. The Humber estuary is the gateway to Europe and beyond and the river with its 'filigree of wharfs and wires' evoked in the poem still plays an important role in the life of the area today through the renewables industry.

The project then began to take on a new dimension, as we imagined transforming the City Hall into a sea world, with images projected on a large screen above the performers, and floating material hanging from balconies, lit up and providing a sensation of the waves. There will be silences and dark moments too, allowing the music or voices to take over.

The final addition was to add young people, both to sing and to take photographs to be shown in the performance. Their participation is vital, as we hope to further their love of music and inspire them to continue singing into later life.