



Bedford Festival of Music, Speech and Drama 2023

Reflection from Mr Keating-Roberts, Director of Music

Bel Canto started their foray into the Festival Choral competitions in the Junior Choir categories. We saw fantastic performances from Greenacre Academy, North Bedfordshire Youth Choir and Nova Voce from Mark Rutherford all with their own unique styles and choices in repertoire. This is one of the joys of Festival competitions, the sharing of different ideas and providing a great learning experience for our students.

As our turn came we began with one of our most complex arrangements of 5 part harmony and piano accompaniment for 4 hands, in which Eva Ng provided the 1st piano part. The connection between all the performers of the choir was a joy to behold and received comment from the adjudicator such as 'radiant, beautifully controlled and very moving'. This set the tone for the remainder of the programme for this category in which we came 1st and were awarded the Bedfordshire Amateur Operatic Society Cup.

Our next two categories arrived later in the evening where we competed in the Acapella Class and for the coveted top choral prize of the Harding Memorial Bowl. In the Acapella class we enjoyed a vibrant performance from The Black Cat Harmony Chorus, an mixed voiced adult barbershop choir. This was superb for our students to experience this style of acapella music with complete re-imaginings of 'The Way you look tonight' and 'Somebody to Love'. The bar was set high for our students, with a strong performance of Kim Arnesen's 'Even when he is silent' a piece centred around lush and complex harmonies that were

handled extremely well. This was followed by a chance for two of our soloists to shine, Polly Taylor and Leila Kurtti who provided stunning, soaring soprano solos with the rest of the choir underpinning this with accompanying harmonies. The adjudicator was blown away by the quality of the sound produced and visibly moved. This round was finished by 'The birds' lullaby', a rhythmic piece that our students really enjoy performing. We progressed into the next competition with confidence having completed our most challenging class vocally, with fantastic solos starting us off from Olivia Deverill and Ella Bowis in our performance of 'Wayfarin' stranger', but the highlight for me was our final piece that ensured our victory in the Harding Memorial Bowl competition, 'Here in my heart, singing'. A very apt piece to finish the choral part of the Festival and provided the perfect cherry to top another superb year at the Bedfordshire Festival. Each category requires completely different repertoire and really pushed Bel Canto to push themselves across a wide range of styles and repertoire and I am very proud of what they have achieved both in the competition and as a choir. A huge congratulations to this remarkable choir and I hope you enjoyed your doughnuts and cakes!

Polly Taylor (Year 11) said: "It was so fun to perform at Bedford Festival with Bel Canto this year. After doing the festival with Bel Canto a couple of times now, it is fair to say that this year has been the most demanding, with learning nine songs in total and entering three categories. I am proud of how far Bel Canto has come over the past few years and cannot wait for future competitions!"

Tanvi Shukla (Year 10) said: "I think the Beds Festival was a brilliant opportunity for younger kids to use their voices and get comfortable performing in front of an audience. I also think it was extremely beneficial to my confidence and overall, I really enjoyed the experience."