

Minutes of the Chiltern Chamber Choir AGM

- 29 September 2022

Choir Manager Report

Marie's report is reproduced in full here:

It has been 3 years since we had our last AGM. So much for the concept of regular AGMs! Of course, the main culprit in all this has been the Covid pandemic.

The three years since the last AGM have been challenging and thanks must go to Adrian and the committee - Jane, Kate, Chris and, lately, Mary - for helping to keep the show on the road and also to you, the choir members, who have been understanding and co-operative with our efforts to sing as often as circumstances allowed.

In Adrian's absence I have incorporated comments from his report into this one.

Since our last AGM we had our trip to Lyon in November 2019. The trip was generally enjoyed by the choir and the concert was musically successful, but unfortunately ticket sales were lower than hoped. Working with the young French orchestra was interesting and the parents and organisers of the orchestra were very welcoming.

In December 2019 we had a successful concert with the Monteverdi Vespers. We had a good audience and the concert was well received and enjoyed by both choir and audience.

We continued to rehearse until the end of March 2020 when we were forced by the Covid situation to abandon rehearsals and our planned Rachmaninov vespers concert on Palm Sunday 2020.

We didn't meet again until Sept 2021 when we had a lovely Back to Singing Day in Eaton Bray Village Hall with Jeanette Ager (vocal coach), John Beswick (conductor) and Stephen Axford (piano accompaniment).

Adrian comments that this was an excellent day; much learnt, much enjoyed, well attended.

Given the need for social distancing, we tried out Hastoe Village Hall as a rehearsal venue. Although it was ideal in terms of space and facilities, some members of the choir were unhappy with the location.

Luckily our current venue, the Church Hall at the Sacred Heart church was available. This has proved to be a convenient and successful venue, although it is expensive. No doubt we shall all remember the cold rehearsals caused by the necessary Covid precautions.

We soldiered on and we were exceedingly disappointed to have to abandon our planned Bach Magnificat Concert last December due to the rapid increase in cases of the Omicron variant of Covid.

We returned to singing late January 2022, again almost freezing to death - but we were able to do our Palm Sunday concert. This was a performance of Joseph Jongen's Mass and motets by Maurice Durufle and Cesar Franck. Adrian's comments: The Jongen is a major work by a leading Belgian composer which is well worth performing. Jon Lee found it challenging on the organ, but found some very effective and exciting organ registrations. The choir warmed to the work as it progressed in rehearsals and produced a worthy performance, which was much appreciated by the audience in St Peter's church.

In the circumstances of returning to performing post Covid and given the situation in Ukraine, we decided not to sell tickets but to take a collection in aid of Ukraine. The audience were very generous and we were able to donate £760 to the Disaster Emergency Committee for Ukraine.

On May 1st (Mayday) the choir joined members of the Church Choir to sing Madrigals from St Peter's Church tower and Churchyard at 6.15 am. Adrian notes that the Choir was passing fair and the audience appreciative, if modest in numbers.

On June 19th we did a Concert of Sacred Music here at the Sacred Heart Church (a la tours style) - with Jon Lee (organ/piano), Beatrice and

Madeleine Murray (Violin and 'cello), and Daisy Groet (soprano). Adrian comments that we had a good audience. It was a fine performance by choir and soloists. Much enjoyed.

On June 25th 2022 we took part in the 800 year celebrations at St Peters as part of the 800 Festival Concert with the Bridgewater Sinfonia, performing Palestrina's 'Tu es Petrus', Parry's 'Blest Pair of Sirens' and 'I was glad'. Adrian comments that this was well sung, suiting the occasion admirably. It was his final appearance with the Bridgewater Sinfonia.

Several members chose not to sing during this tricky period but happily almost all have now returned to the choir. Adrian comments that the pandemic has played a significant part in reducing the number of rehearsals available over the past two years. Voices have suffered from lack of exercise and focus, with some singers opting to forego their membership of the choir. A few decided to opt out of singing a work which they decide they didn't like. This view was not shared by the vast majority of the CCC, who declared that the work in question (Jongen) was appreciated, even admired by many of them.

In addition to the Committee there are other members of the choir who provide essential help with keeping the choir running. David Brown does a great job as Webmaster. Jeremy Biddle and Peter McMunn organise the staging and lighting for our concerts. They are helped by some of you so thank you and please keep volunteering. Others help with ticket sales, preparing the programmes, front of house, organising parties, taking photographs and essential jobs like opening up here, putting out chairs and carting the keyboard to and fro. A big thank you to you all.

Covid highlighted the problems we could have with some parts of the management of the choir if some of the current position holders were taken ill. Deputies were sought and Margaret Cliffe offered to deputise for Chris Sanders, our Librarian, and Ian Aubry for Kate Goodwin, our Treasurer.

Having hopefully come through the challenges, we now face a new challenge which is to replace our esteemed Musical Director. As most of you know, Adrian started the choir 46 years ago and has been

instrumental in enhancing the musical life here in Berkhamsted both through the choir and the Bridgewater Sinfonia.

We have advertised the position on Social Media through our website and on the Association of British Choral Directors website, and by word of mouth. We have had 11 applications and we shall meet this weekend to choose the top two or three, who we will invite to an interview and to audition by taking a part of the rehearsal.

You will then be asked for your views and the Committee will then make a decision on who to appoint.

As you are probably aware Adrian has not been paid for his work as Musical Director, so appointing a new MD will inevitably influence the choir finances. We will discuss this later.

We also sadly (for us, though I think not for him, as he faces the challenge of a new job) have to report that Jon is also moving on at the end of this term. Of course we must thank him for his work as our accompanist and tonight for stepping in when Adrian is not available.

We've got lots to discuss tonight so we will move on now to the rest of the Agenda. Thank you.

Financial Report

Kate Goodwin presented the accounts, which were accepted by the meeting. In summary, we have approximately £10 000 in the choir bank account.

Ways to avoid concerts making a loss were discussed, though in general, taken on a yearly basis, concerts tend to more or less break even.

It was agreed that the priority was to appoint and establish a new conductor as the choir's current number one aim. As we will inevitably have to pay our new conductor, it was agreed that subs for 2022/23 should be raised to £180 per annum, ideally to be paid in advance for the whole year. Anyone for whom this might be a problem should speak to Kate

Goodwin - as no one should have to leave the choir through financial hardship.

Publicity Report

Jane Wilde outlined the various ways concerts are promoted - through posters, leaflets, emailing friends and the choir mailing list of approx 50, through posting the event on classical music websites and local events listings and through social media. In general, things were moving more and more towards digital/online. She thanked David Brown for his work in creating and maintaining the website. She stressed that individual members of the choir contacting their friends and families was the most important way to sell tickets.

Committee

There were no volunteers for any of the committee roles. Sally Dussek proposed that the existing committee be voted back in, and this was seconded by David Wilde.

Committee Members:

Chair - Marie Brewer

Finance - Kate Goodwin, (deputy Ian Aubry)

Librarian - Chris Sanders (deputy Margaret Cliffe)

Publicity - Jane Wilde

Venues/Front of House - Mary McCarthy Harris

Next Concert - 23 December

Some members of the choir felt that they would like to have an After Concert Party and Sally Dussek agreed to organise it with the help of Sue Davis.

Choir Party and Adrian's Farewell

This will be held on Saturday 21 January in the Court House. Jean Green is chief organiser.

Thanks

Patricia Bandle thanked the committee for their work.

Minutes taken by Jane Wilde