

Musical Director: Ian Ray



SEVENTY-SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEDNESDAY 23rd SEPTEMBER 2015 AT LION WALK CHURCH HALL

The meeting was opened by the President Gordon Kuphal who commented on the successful year that the choir had enjoyed. He said that the financial side had been particularly successful but warned against complacency as we have an expensive season ahead of us. Gordon also congratulated the sopranos who, he felt, had sung beautifully in the last concert.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from: Peter Roberts, Monica and Peter Douch, Janet Crees, Andrew Carpenter, Jane Morgan, Catherine Wood, Vicky Alderton, Heather Attwell-Davis, Giles Job, Urszula Miga, Lindsay Wilson, Peter Bartlett, Ginny Jarvis, Christine Crocker, Caroline Faiers, Dido Arthur, Sue Allen, Gail Collins, David Whyberd and Roger Ennals.

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-FIRST MEETING

The minutes were approved and there were no matters arising.

Proposed: Louise Brooks

Seconded: Mike Pluck

The motion was carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

My formal report and review of the year is included at page 2 of the Annual Report.

Ian will be giving his musical review of our concert performances, so I will only mention briefly what I thought was a brilliant *Messiah* with the London Purcell Orchestra in November, and the considerable linguistic challenges we had singing in Hebrew for the *Chichester Psalms* and in Norwegian for Grieg's *Fire Salmer*. It's a relief to be rehearsing in our natural language again – I mean Latin of course!

This year we were reminded again how many talented musicians we have in our choir, including those who sung challenging solo parts, and Catherine Wood who played such a wonderful flute solo in our Summer concert.

We have another great programme lined up for the coming season, including in November Beethoven's *Mass in C*, and an exciting performance of Verdi's *Requiem* in March. As you know, the Verdi concert will demand unusual resources, and we have therefore made a special fundraising effort, inviting sponsorship of individual soloists and musicians. We are very grateful for the generous response from choir members and friends, who have already donated over £3,000 (including the gift aid we can claim back from the tax man). Thank you very much to all those who have made a donation – and if you're still thinking about it, please be enthused and encouraged!

I would like to thank Jane for taking over as Treasurer this year at a particularly demanding time, which she has done with great professionalism and goodwill – thank you Jane. Jill Hill has mentioned that she would like to hand over the job of music librarian as soon as we can find a replacement, and I would also like to thank her in particular for the tremendous work she has done for many years sourcing and distributing our musical scores, collecting money for hire and purchase, and getting the copies back from members, who always seem to misplacing or forgetting them – something I never do of course! Thank you Jill.

The Society wouldn't be what it is, of course, without Ian, who is not just a gifted musician and performer, but also such an inspirational and energetic teacher and director - thank you Ian. Thank you too to all the members of the Committee, to many other choir members, too many to mention by name, who help with vital tasks for the Society - and to all of you, the singing members, who make such wonderful music.

My final task is to recognise and congratulate two members who celebrate a significant anniversary with the Choir. One is our President Gordon, who has now been a member for 50 years. And Gordon is pipped to the post by Angela, who I think joined one or two years before him. Congratulations to you both. And to new members – take courage and stick with us – the time will seem to fly by!

The Chairman made presentations to Gordon Kuphal and Angela Ennals who have both been singing members of the choir for 50 years.

The President replied that he had come to Colchester in 1965 as Assistant Librarian at the new Essex University. His time in the choir has been a wonderful experience with a charismatic predecessor as Musical Director and subsequently wonderful teaching from Ian. In that time he had sung 11 Messiahs and finally managed the Amen chorus without getting lost! Other achievements had been Beethoven's Missa Solemnis and Bach's B Minor Mass. Gordon re-called a time when he had landed back in England at 6am, kept going all day and attended rehearsal in the evening only to fall asleep. He was woken by Mark Cole who never let him forget it! Gordon feels that it was an amazing achievement to fall asleep in a rehearsal taken by Ian.

Angela replied with typical modesty: 'just to say that we will have another raffle in a few weeks time'.

Gordon thanked Nigel for his report. The motion to accept the report was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Heather Smith

Seconded: Pauline Heselden

TREASURER'S REPORT

This is my first report to the Society's AGM as Treasurer, and I have some big shoes to fill. I became Treasurer this Spring so I can't take the glory but I have the pleasure of reporting that we made a small surplus for the 2014/15 financial year of £458. We achieved a more-or-less full house for Handel's Messiah last November and saved on soloist fees by utilising our own excellent singers for both the March and June concerts. We've also had an increase in our fundraising income from 2013/14, and I would like to thank everyone who has helped organise or contribute to the choir's fundraising activities during the year, including the raffles, barbeque, coffee breaks and bring and buy sales. Moving from a paid bar at our concerts to a 'suggested donation' has had two benefits: removing the cost of a licence and increasing the money we take.

Despite these positives we sold fewer tickets for the December, March and June concerts than we were expecting and as previous Treasurers have done before I must stress that the society can only stay afloat and perform such a varied repertoire by selling tickets, recruiting new members and raising its profile in the town and beyond.

Many thanks once again to Ian for his hard work behind the scenes in finding orchestral players and soloists while keeping to a budget, to those within the choir who have taken on solo parts in the concerts, to Lindsay for producing high quality publicity material, to Paula and Wendy for building up the Friends and for Steph for taking over this year, and to all those who give their time and effort to the Society free of charge.

We start 2015-16 in a reasonably healthy financial position, but with an ambitious programme which inevitably comes with associated costs. The Verdi Requiem in March will require a full orchestra and four soloists at a cost of over £10,000. To put this into perspective, the cost of orchestras and soloists for all the concerts in 2014/15 was £11,440. We have already planned to reduce costs throughout the rest of this year by utilising our own soloists in the December and June concerts however as you are

aware we are appealing for donations towards the orchestra and soloist costs for Verdi. We have already received some incredibly generous donations from members and friends of the choir, for which we are immensely grateful. There is still a fair way to go so any donations, however small, will be very gratefully received.

We also need to keep up our efforts to sell tickets and bring in good audiences for all of our concerts throughout the year, and to continue to support our fundraising events.

The subscriptions were last raised in 2012/13 and we're not proposing any change to the subs this year, so they will remain at £105 (standard), £75 (over 60) and £35 (under 25 and Friends). Although you can pay in termly instalments, we do ask that you pay the full annual amount even if you can't sing with us every term. If anyone has difficulty finding the money please have a word with me in confidence and we can agree a schedule for payment.

If you're a UK taxpayer, please check with me to make sure you're signed up for Gift Aid – it brings in extra income for the Society at no cost to you (over £900 last year). And please let me know if you change your address or cease to be a taxpayer. There are more details in my article in Choral Notes.

You have the Financial Statements for the year to 30 June 2015, which were approved by the Committee on 7 September and signed by the Independent Examiner, Tim O'Connor of Scrutton Bland.

Gordon thanked Jane for her report.

The motion to approve the financial statements to June 2015 was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Ian Hunter

Seconded: Louise Brooks

APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Tim O'Connor of Scrutton Bland has agreed to be appointed as Independent Examiner for 2015-16. He does this free of charge in memory of David Foster who was a partner in Scrutton Bland.

Proposed: Mike Pluck

Seconded: Angela Ennals

The approval was unanimous.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Current officers and committee members had all given their consent to stand again. Caroline Faiers and David Whyberd had offered to stand as committee members.

It was proposed to re-elect the current committee with these new members en bloc.

Proposed: Stephanie Say

Seconded: Susie Ray

The approval was unanimous.

REPORT BY THE MUSICAL DIRECTOR

Last season began with our performance of the most popular oratorio of all time, Handel's Messiah sung on this occasion with the added delight of the players from the London Purcell Orchestra. This was the first time for several years that we had the chance to sing a concert using historically authentic instruments and enjoy the pleasure of hearing instrumentalists who have made a particular study of the techniques used in the 17/18th centuries. The result was very enthusiastically received by the audience and the choir and soloists were helped to achieve that extra clarity and lightness of tone that using authentic instruments brings. There was much to be proud of in the choral singing and the lighter style of singing that the baroque instruments encouraged improved the blend. A successful Wassail concert followed with an excellent performance of Alan Bullard's festive "A

Feast for Christmas". The only disappointment was the number of empty seats in a hall that only seats just over 200. We have done some hard thinking about the Christmas Concert and we are hoping that the new title for this concert: "Here comes Christmas" along with a reduction in ticket prices will help us to sell the tickets more successfully this year. Let's make a real effort with this in December.

Last March we explored Dvorak's magnificent but largely neglected Mass in D major which we performed with Ashley Grote and Craig Meager giving us an atmospheric accompaniment on the Organ and Timps respectively. How proud and grateful we are to the soloists, all of whom came from our own singing members and all of whom sang expressively and securely the beautiful lyrical lines of Dvorak's beautiful music. In the second half of the concert the choir sang the choruses from "The Lark" with impressive musical security and conviction despite the initial misgivings of several of our members when we started working on Bernstein's demanding songs. Following this we heard a very different side to the genius of Dvorak in the dramatic contrasts of mood in the Dumky Piano Trio and the concert finished with another expressive performance of Bernstein's best known choral work the Chichester Psalms. Again the excellent soloists were from within the choir. Aren't we fortunate to have these musical and vocally accomplished singers within our membership!

Summer saw us enjoying a programme of English Folksongs arranged by John Rutter, now in his 70th year. Catherine Wood impressed us all with her accomplished flute playing in Rutter's Suite Antique for Flute, Harpsichord and Strings. The concert finished with the choir singing Grieg's very last composition, the Four Psalms which we sang in Norwegian and this was preceded by a chance to hear Oliver Ray and his proud dad perform the Grieg Cello Sonata. So in one season the choir sang convincingly in English, Latin, Hebrew, French and Norwegian – an achievement that any choir could be really proud of. However if I had to identify the most outstanding single achievement in our choral singing from last season's programme I would without hesitation identify the improvement in blend and purity of tone that was demonstrated in the summer concert particularly by the Sopranos in their singing of the Rutter Folksongs. It really was very beautiful and I am hoping that as the lyrics of the song from "South Pacific" say we can manage to "once you have found it, never let it go".

This summer we said goodbye to our conscientious and efficient treasurer Mike and Jill's retirement as librarian reminds us that we owe a huge debt to all the members who faithfully do the many jobs which need to be done in order for us to continue our activities. Whether it is serving on the committee, fundraising, putting out the chairs, producing all the publicity and programmes, running the raffles, we all owe these folk a huge thankyou and let's just hope that we can continue to find people who are prepared to give of themselves so generously because let's make no mistake about recognising that without them the choir would cease to exist. Perhaps we shall be able to find someone who can take on publicity to support and enhance the wonderful work that Lindsay does with the outstanding posters and flyers she consistently produces. I often think that with all the many ways we busy ourselves with fund raising, the single biggest thing that every one of us can do to help keep the choir afloat financially and musically successful is to improve the size of our audiences so let's make a new season resolution to sell more tickets. The atmosphere of a live concert is always so much better when the hall is full. All the composers for our concerts this year I think we can safely describe as mainstream: Haydn, Beethoven, Verdi and Purcell. Surely it should not be too difficult to persuade friends, relatives and neighbours to join us for this season's music making? Thank you all for another year of music making made possible by the loyalty and commitment to the music of every one of our members and friends.

Gordon thanked Ian on behalf of us all for his belief in our ability to 'carry it off', saying that his leadership was a constant stimulation.

The motion to accept the Musical Director's report was carried unanimously.
Proposed: Louise Brooks

Seconded: Theresa Chapman

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business

Gordon closed the meeting with thanks to the committee and all those who help in other ways with especial thanks to our retiring Librarian Jill Hill. He commented that she was always gentle but warned those who hang on to music to beware!

The meeting closed at 20.03