

*Musical Director: Ian Ray*



## **SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEDNESDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER 2018 IN THE LION WALK CHURCH HALL**

The meeting was opened by our President Gordon Kuphal who said that he would put his foot on the accelerator to ensure that our rehearsal could start on time.

Gordon said that the past year had been special for him as he particularly enjoys the Missa Solemnis and we had also had the enjoyment of recording our commission from Alan Bullard. Gordon thanked all those who have contributed to fundraising efforts, also the committee and others who help in various ways. He extended special thanks to Jane Hargreaves and Jackie Wallace for taking on the role of Friends' Secretary from Steph Say.

Gordon thanked Ian for coping in a difficult year and offered his good wishes for good health in the future.

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence had been received from Beverley Tofts, Louise Brooks, Heather Attwell-Davies, Carol Pearson, Rachel von Staveren, Diana Jones, Ginny Jarvis, Kate Schaller, Mary and Duncan Dormor, Nigel Humphreys, Jill Hill, Geoff Whittaker, Lindsay Wilson, Elisabetta Valdani, Giles Job, Birgitta Amos, Helen Spicer and Pat Bloss.

### **MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-FOURTH MEETING**

The minutes were approved and there were no matters arising.

Proposed: Malcolm Cross

Seconded: Jim Hill

The motion was carried unanimously.

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017-2018**

I was tempted to give my Annual report by reading last year's report and seeing if anyone actually noticed. But I'm sure though, many of you will have reminded yourselves of what was said by reading through the minutes kindly produced by Judy.

On refreshing my failing memory I have two main comments to make.

Firstly, you will have noticed that this was our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the Founding of the Society and I would like to take this opportunity to read you part of the Constitution on which we are based. The "Object" of the Society as declared in the Articles of Constitution is "to promote, improve, develop & maintain public education in and appreciation of the art and science of music, and in particular of choral music, by the presentation of public concerts and recitals".

I would like to congratulate ALL members of the Society, over many years, to be led and inspired by this objective, and to produce choral concerts of a consistently high standard throughout this time.

This does not happen by accident and is a remarkable achievement based on the inspirational leadership and musicianship provided by Ian, by the members' response to that prompting, encouragement and occasional cajoling, and by all the hard work of all the members of the choir, and their families and supporters.

The concerts we have performed this year, Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in November, the Carol concert in the Moot Hall, and the Fauré & Poulenc, were wonderful in their variety, musicality and emotional commitment required from the Choir, and each was delivered with excitement and passion to appreciative audiences. Sadly both the Christmas concert and the March concert were adversely affected by the weather reducing the numbers who bravely ventured out to hear us.

Secondly, this summer we moved into unfamiliar territory with the first recording of a newly commissioned work by Alan Bullard, Images of Peace, made possible by a generous legacy by former choir member Richard Daniel. I think we would all admit that this process was extremely demanding but we wait with anticipation for the finished results. (Lots of Christmas presents here!)

Again I would like to thank all the members of the choir who work tirelessly for the benefit of us all, in so many different ways. Our thanks as a Choir go out to the members of the Committee, to Judy for ensuring we function effectively, to Jane for ensuring we have the means to continue to remain solvent, which is quite challenging; I would express thanks on behalf of us all to so many members who organise the hall, the staging, the coffee rota, the publicity, the music, the fund-raising. There are so many people who contribute, who share the work and make all this possible, and all done with enthusiasm and energy.

We sadly had to say goodbye this year to Steph and Martin who have managed the Friends & Front of House for a number of years but at the BBQ we were able to make a small presentation and thank them for all their efforts. We wish them well in future.

We now look forward to the next 75 years commencing with the first public performance of Images of Peace, VW's Donna Pacem Nobis & Benedicite, all appropriately chosen for the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. We look forward to our Christmas Concert with better weather, and the excitement of Elgar's masterpiece, The Dream of Gerontius.

We look forward with enthusiasm to presenting choral music for many years to come, for the appreciation of the art & science of music, and the performance of high quality works, working together with commitment and passion as shown by our predecessors over the last 75 years.

Peter Bartlett

Gordon thanked Peter for his report.

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

This is my fourth report to the Society's AGM as Treasurer and it was an eventful and snowy year.

Following the receipt of a very generous legacy of £10,000 from the late Richard Daniel during 2017 we started the year in a healthy financial position with £15,645 in reserve. During the year we have spent this legacy on commissioning Images of Peace and undertaking the recording in June, and these costs are shown separately in the annual accounts as designated activities.

The financial results of the last financial year were unexpectedly and negatively affected by the weather, with snow having a significant impact on our audience numbers at both Here Comes Christmas in December and also our Fauré and Poulenc concert in March. Overall there was a

deficit on concert activities excluding the recording of £7,975 for the year, and total ticket and programme sales for the year were £6,486, a reduction of £1,841 from the prior year.

We are immensely grateful for all choir members and friends who have helped organise and contribute to the choir's fundraising activities during the year, including the raffles, the barbeque, quiz night, the coffee breaks and the bring and buy sales. The generosity of our members are vital to the continued financial stability of the choir and total donations and fundraising income in the year was over £3,500 which is a fantastic achievement. We also have seven corporate patrons whose annual contributions to the Society total £840.

Many thanks once again to Ian for his hard work behind the scenes in finding orchestral players and soloists while keeping to, and below, a tight budget; to Judy and the rest of the Committee for negotiating hard to keep our cost base as low as possible; to Lindsay for producing high quality publicity material; to Steph for her fantastic work in further increasing the Friends membership numbers and Jane and Jackie for taking over the Friends Secretary role, and to all those who have given their time and effort for the various fundraising events Society free of charge.

Ian has carefully selected our repertoire for the current year to ensure that orchestra and soloist costs are low which should enable us to retain our accumulated funds position. Cutting costs can only go so far however, and in order to stay afloat and perform such a varied repertoire we need to ensure that we sell as many tickets to our concerts as possible, as well as recruiting new members and raising the Society's profile in the town and beyond.

We are not proposing an increase to the subscription rates this year. The subscription rate for all members other than those under 25 is therefore £105. 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 to pay their subscriptions, please have a word with me in confidence as we do not wish any member to be obstructed by the financial cost of membership.

As a registered charity we are able to claim gift aid on a proportion of our membership subscriptions. This brings in extra income for the Society at no extra cost to yourselves and we were able to claim over £1,000 last year. If you have not filled in a gift aid form in the past and are eligible please ask me for one at the next rehearsal.

However, as costs continue to rise the Committee will be considering an increase to the subscription rate for the next financial year when we undertake the budgeting process during 2019.

You have the Financial Statements for the year to 30 June 2018, which were approved by the Committee on 20 September and signed by the Independent Examiner on 21 September.

Jane Askew

Geoffrey Kinder asked if we were using a reduced orchestration for Gerontius to which Ian replied that it would be anathema. However, he felt that the work would bring a good audience which would help offset the cost of the orchestra.

The motion to approve the Treasurer's report was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Ian Hunter

Seconded: Geoffrey Kinder

## **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER**

Tim O'Connor of Scrutton Bland has agreed to be appointed as Independent Examiner for 2018-19. He does this free of charge in memory of David Foster who was a partner in Scrutton Bland.

The motion to approve the appointment of the Independent Examiner was carried unanimously;

Proposed: Angela Lawrence

Seconded: Malcolm Cross

## **ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The proposal to elect current officers and committee members 'en bloc' was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Jackie Wallace

Seconded: Mike Pluck

## **MUSICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Last season's programme began with a very successful performance of the ultimate challenge for any mixed voice choir – Beethoven's massive Missa Solemnis. The challenge was elegantly met and gave us all an inspiring if occasionally intimidating start to the season. Christmas in the Moot Hall followed on three weeks later and once again I was impressed by the way the choir dismissed the challenges that the snow sent us and no less than 40 of our members assembled to sing one of our best Christmas concerts yet. We did massively better than the staging which never made it! Incredibly, Lindsay walked all the way in from her home on the other side of Colchester Zoo. Now that, I think we can all agree, is an inspirational example of dedication and determination.

Hopefully we shall have an easier time this year. Our March concert followed with a chance to enjoy the familiar delights of the Fauré Requiem alongside the challenging a cappella Penetential Motets of Poulenc which received a secure and expressive performance. Never a choir to rest on our laurels we proceeded to learn our newly commissioned 'Images of Peace' by Alan Bullard in preparation for our very first recording in June. I do hope that you all recognise how much you have to be proud of in what you achieved in June. To concentrate for three 3 hour sessions making a total of 9 hours of recording is a huge achievement and I was impressed by your patience and good humour and incredibly grateful for your loyalty and support at a time when I was unfortunately a bit challenged healthwise. Our reward will be available very soon now. I seem to remember that our aim for last season was to improve our blend as a choir and when you hear the CD I am confident that you will be impressed by your efforts.

This next paragraph repeats one from last year's report but I think it is worth repeating as a focus for our music-making:

Since 1976 when I became only the second Musical Director the Society has ever had I have continued the tradition established by the choir's founder, the great W.H. Swinburne OBE whose guiding principle was to stimulate projects which allowed the choir to get inside the music by working steadily at the repertoire over a number of weeks of regular rehearsals, and then to gather together the relevant resources – in most cases an orchestra and professional soloists capable of inspiring the choir to bring to life the musical vision of whatever composer we perform. My particular objective has been to develop a friendly choir that folk are proud to be part of which sings with the same level of finesse and musical intelligence as a chamber choir whilst avoiding the cliquish, or preciousness which can sometimes afflict the small choir world.

We sing a wide variety of repertoire, some of it very challenging. Could we take an easier and less demanding path? Most certainly. Attempting only music that we find easy to sing and limiting ourselves to the familiar and predictable, rehearsing in less depth without bothering about the finer points of accuracy and style, dynamics and phrasing would definitely be more relaxing (is that a synonym for less stimulating?). Would we feel the same sense of satisfaction and pride when we achieved our objectives with a varied repertoire exploring a wide range of styles? I doubt it.

Having said that, I must apologise for the fact that this year's programme is less varied than usual.

In Vaughan Williams and Elgar, we shall be singing the music of two English composers from the early years of the 20th century. One of the reasons for that is that I felt we should mark the centenary of the signing of the Armistice with a programme acknowledging our common yearning for peace whilst at the same time several members of our choir and regular members of our audience were telling me that they wished we could sing Elgar's Dream of Gerontius again. We will return to our customary more varied programme next season.

A conductor with no choir would achieve nothing, so a huge Thank you to each and every one of you for your loyalty and commitment, and special thanks to those who have served through the years and are currently serving as officers and committee as well as to all those members doing all the many jobs that are vital to the continued life of the choir. I close by quoting as I did last year the words of the 18thC American scientist, printer and writer Benjamin Franklin when he commented 'A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle'. One of the exciting things about singing in a choir such as ours, which enjoys the fun of always striving for perfection, is that we can enjoy being part of a big bundle and achieving together so much more than we would if we simply sang on our own.

Ian Ray

The motion to approve the Musical Director's report was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Heather Smith

Seconded: Pauline Heselden

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Judy said that there has been a request from Helen Spicer for anyone with experience of Wordpress to contact her in order to improve our website.

**The meeting closed at 8.07pm.**