

Musical Director: Ian Ray



**SEVENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEDNESDAY 9TH OCTOBER 2019
IN THE LION WALK CHURCH HALL**

The meeting was opened by our President Gordon Kuphal who welcomed everyone. He said that the Society could not function without the volunteers and that the meeting is an opportunity to acknowledge their work. Gordon said that he feels it a privilege to be the President of a Society that contributes so richly to the cultural life of the town.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Catherine Wood, Helen Spicer, Sue Almond, Lindsay Wilson, Jonathan Palmer, Ray Wilson and Elisabetta Valdani.

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-FIFTH MEETING

The minutes were approved and there were no matters arising.

Proposed: Heather Attwell-Davies

Seconded: Monica Douch

The motion was carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2018 – 2019

I would like to begin my Annual Review with a couple of short observations.

Firstly, you will be pleased to know that I do actually have the Report with me this year and will not be making it up as we go along. More importantly though, I would like to say how honoured I am and what a privilege it is to be Chairman of Colchester Choral Society.

This is the 76th season for the Society and I believe it has been a most successful year.

Having worked so hard in June 2018 to record Images of Peace, commissioned by the Society from Alan Bullard, it was a joy to then give the inaugural performance at our November Concert. To take part in a World Premiere is something which we can all be proud of, and not likely to repeat too often in our lifetimes. As well as giving a wonderful performance on the day, with Alan describing the performance as having “verve, colour & pace – very exciting”, you will have seen in the accounts that sales of the CD have also made a very useful contribution to our accounts. Of equal interest I’m sure to many members though is the opportunity to listen to the Choir which we are unable to do most of the time. In addition to Images of Peace, to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the ending of the First World War, we also performed the sad and disturbingly melancholic Dona Nobis Pacem and the more uplifting and hopeful Benedicite, both by Vaughan Williams.

Our Moot Hall Concert was again a great success, one where I always feel inspired by the simple joy of the children, and note their ability to perform without music, thus enabling them to look at their conductor!

It was also pleasing that unlike the previous year, neither of these two concerts was affected by inclement weather, which helped maintain the audience numbers.

March saw the choir take on the massive choral work that is Elgar's Dream of Gerontius. This epic and demanding piece was performed with considerable enthusiasm and skill resulting in many fine compliments from our soloists and professional musicians, described variously as "uplifting, compelling & very satisfying, with the Demons' Chorus being particularly convincing and a special thanks to the semi-chorus". Ian's words.

As we moved towards the end of the Choir's year we decided to try a different approach to the June Concert, one that would in some ways combine the final concert with an end of year celebration, rather than previously ending the year with a BBQ.

To that end Ian chose a lighter concert, as is traditional, for our Summer Serenade, with music from Purcell's King Arthur, with light accompaniment from Peter Holman and a few instrumentalists. This was combined with a buffet enabling a more relaxed informal atmosphere to be achieved in the very elegant Assembly Rooms at Dedham and a very good end to our year. Special mention goes to all the choir members who stepped out of their comfort zones to take on the many solos – some doing so for the first time. It was a wonderful evening of enjoyable music making.

As well as our major concerts much effort is made by the members of the choir to maintain our financial health, which cannot be achieved simply by our audiences and subscriptions. I would therefore like to express my thanks on behalf of the Society for all the fund raising efforts made by so many members – these have included Wine Tasting, the Quiz, many raffles, donations, work by the Friends, our Corporate sponsors and so many people who give up their time to make this Society the success that it is.

There are so many of you that contribute so much that naming all of you will be difficult and I'm likely to forget some I shouldn't: but I would like to thank Ian for his persistent inspiring cajoling leadership, for the work by the Committee to keep everything in order, especially Judy & our Treasurer Jane: to Angela, to Mike, who for years has provided his skills at the BBQ & Louise for hosting, and looking after the staging.

And finally I would like to just pause for a moment and consider how fortunate we are to be sharing the legacy which has been passed down to us. Colchester Choral Society has continued to be strong, successful and of a high quality in part due to the efforts of those that have gone before us. Every year we lose some members: they retire, they move away, or sadly they are no longer with us, and we think particularly about Mary who we lost last year.

Now we look forward to the new season with Duruflé's Requiem & Bernstein's Chichester Psalms in the Autumn, and the wonderful Creation by Haydn in the Spring.

I am proud to be part of this choir and I would sincerely like to express my personal thanks and those of the Committee to all of you who with commitment, dedication and musical ability perform to such a very high standard at every concert, and maintain the excellent reputation of the Society.

Peter Bartlett

Nigel thanked Peter for being an excellent Chairman. Gordon re-iterated our thanks to Mike Pluck and said that there would be a more tangible appreciation of our thanks the following week.

The Chairman's report was approved

Proposed: Louise Brooks

Seconded: Geoffrey Whittaker

The approval was unanimous.

TREASURER'S REPORT

This is my fifth report to the Society's AGM as Treasurer.

We have had a relatively stable financial year, and our reserves have increased by £2,131 from £9,097 to £11,228. Total ticket and programme sales for the year were £7,887, which is an improvement from last year's sales of £6.5k however the ticket sale for two of our concerts in 2018 were adversely impacted by snow.

We were very grateful to receive donations of £500 from the RVW Trust and £250 from the Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust towards the costs of our November concert where we performed Images of Peace and Vaughan Williams' Dona Nobis Pacem. We were also supported by very generous donations of £1,092 from choir members and friends towards the costs of our performance of Elgar's Dream of Gerontius in March.

However, even after including these donations the financial statements show that our concert activities (which is ticket and programme sales less the costs of putting on our concerts) made a deficit of £9,673 which was not covered by our subscriptions income of £7,380.

The remaining income that we generate comes largely from donations and fundraising events, and we are immensely grateful for all choir members and friends who have donated to the choir and helped organise and contribute to the choir's fundraising activities during the year, including the raffles, the wine tasting, the quiz night, the coffee breaks and the bring and buy sale. The generosity of our members is 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. The CD sales of Images of Peace also generated a welcome additional £1,481.

Many thanks go to Ian for his hard work behind the scenes in finding orchestral players and soloists while keeping to 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 Jane and Jackie for their fantastic work in looking after the Friends scheme and for further increasing the Friends membership numbers, and to all those who have give their time and effort to the various fundraising events Society free of charge.

As I mentioned earlier, we have received 'exceptional' donations of eighteen hundred pounds towards the November and March concerts this year as well as CD sales income of fifteen hundred pounds. Without these, we would have made a loss this year of twelve hundred pounds and I would be presenting a much less positive report.

Although you can pay in termly instalments, you are required to pay the full annual subscription even if you can't sing with us every term. If anyone has difficulty finding the money to pay their subscriptions, please speak to 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 nearly £1,300 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.

Managing the finances of a choir which relies so heavily on 'exceptional' fundraising to keep afloat is risky and creates uncertainties that make budgeting difficult. As Ian has mentioned in earlier rehearsals the Committee have considered the choir's subscription rates in conjunction with the 2019/20 budget and have researched the subscription rates at similar choral societies across the UK. We are proposing an increase to the subscription rates this year to £120 for all members over 25, and to £40 for those 25 and under. When compared with other choral societies this remains very good value for money.

You have the Financial Statements for the year to 30 June 2019, which were approved by the Committee on 2 October and signed by the Independent Examiner on 4 October.

Gordon thanked Jane for all her hard work.

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

Proposed: Ian Hunter

Seconded: Geoffrey Kinder

APPROVAL OF AN INCREASE IN SUBSCRIPTIONS

Jane asked for approval of a motion to increase the rate of subscriptions to £120 per year for all except those under 25 where the rate would be £40.

Proposed: Mike Pluck

Seconded: Andrew Carpenter

The motion was carried unanimously.

APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Jane said that Tim O'Connor of Scrutton Bland had agreed to be appointed Independent Examiner for 2019/20. He does this free of charge in memory of David Foster, a past Treasurer and Chairman of the Society, who was a partner in Scrutton Bland.

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

Proposed: Geoffrey Whittaker

Seconded: Heather Smith

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The motion to elect current officers and Committee members 'en bloc' was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Anthony Percival

Seconded: Pauline Heselden

MUSICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last season's programme began with a challenging concert to mark the centenary of the end of the 1914/18 war. We sang an all English concert of Vaughan Williams 'Dona Nobis Pacem', the first public performance of our specially commissioned work 'Images of Peace' by Alan Bullard, and to end the concert on a happy note, Vaughan Williams radiant setting of the Benedicite. The choir sang with conviction and sensitivity and achieved a 'first' in its long history by having its own professional recording available on sale for members of the audience to purchase. Incidentally, there are still plenty of these for sale, so if you are looking for a Christmas gift do consider sending your friends or your enemies a copy - it contains some singing we can all be proud of! Less severe snow than we had experienced in 2017 allowed us to enjoy a much less stressful 'Here Comes Christmas' concert in December. In March we sang Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' - always a moving and inspiring experience and I was impressed by the wide range of dynamics and characterisation achieved by our relatively small choir despite some disappointment that audience was not as large as one might expect for such a popular piece. There was equal conviction whether we were singing as angels or demons and we all enjoyed the excellent contributions of our orchestra and soloists. Our Summer Serenade, for the first time migrated to The Dedham Assembly Rooms, where we presented a lively performance of Henry Purcell's delightful incidental music to 'King Arthur' with soloists all drawn from our own singing members. Well done everyone! Both Audience and Choir seemed to enjoy the more relaxed less formal ambiance of the evening so much that we have decided to return to the Dedham Assembly Rooms next summer when we shall be continuing our tradition of singing a more light-hearted programme with a concert performance of the Gilbert & Sullivan classic 'The Pirates of Penzance' which should give us a fun evening. Meanwhile our regular concert season includes, as usual, a wide variety of music including the Duruflé/Bernstein concert in a few weeks, our 'Here comes Christmas' concert in December in the Town Hall when we shall be joined by children from St John's Green School and Langham Primary School, and Haydn's radiant setting of the Creation story in March. Over the last few seasons, one of the really pleasing features of our development as a choir is that we are generally moving faster in our learning of the music which makes the rehearsing more enjoyable for singers and conductor, and the standard of our concert singing has never been higher, with notable improvements in blend and tone, helped in no small part by our preparation for the 'Images of Peace' recording. I want to end by just saying a brief word about the thinking behind the proposed visit in June to the Cracovia-Cantans Festival in Poland. Although the festival is described as a competition, the ethos of the event comes over as offering a chance for choirs to travel to one of Poland's great cities and enjoy listening to each other sing and receive helpful feedback from the adjudicators. Along with many of you, I have never been interested in competitions per se; but over the last few years, the cost of short tours abroad for choirs promoted by commercial tour operators has become prohibitive for many of us. The big advantage that the proposed involvement in the Cracovia-Cantans is that it offers us a chance to enjoy a singing trip abroad at a much more reasonable price. The competition is not the main aim - we are simply using the Cracovia-Cantans as a way of promoting an affordable way of travelling and singing together so I urge you all to consider getting involved in this venture which gives us a chance to introduce more variety to our programme of activities alongside

maintaining our usual concert programme. As a choir over the years we have enjoyed several successful trips abroad including visits to Rheims, Prague and Rouen; but it is some years now since we last travelled together as a choir. I would encourage you all to consider joining in the fun of this venture.

Many thanks to you all, singers and hardworking members of the Committee for all your loyal support and commitment to Colchester Choral Society, which is what allows us to continue achieving so much together.

Ian Ray

Geoffrey Kinder who had previously sung the Dream of Gerontius with Leeds Choral Society and a huge professional orchestra congratulated Ian on keeping the costs so low for an excellent orchestra to accompany our performance.

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

Proposed: Jackie Wallace

Seconded: Jim Hill

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There had been a request to consider starting rehearsals earlier. The point was made that starting any earlier would cause great difficulty to many members. Diana Jones pointed out that the traffic would also be much heavier. It was pointed out that there had been no mention of finishing earlier. Charles Clark wondered if at times special groups might start earlier. Ian Ray said that it would be totally impractical for working people who we are delighted to number among our members.

The motion to drop the proposal and maintain current rehearsal times was carried unanimously.

Proposed: Andrew Carpenter

Seconded: Caroline Faiers

Gordon closed the meeting saying that he was glad to see at least one Friend in attendance. Peter thanked Gordon for leading the AGM and for all he does marshalling us at concerts.

The meeting closed at 8.07 pm