 Whitehall Choir	St Stephen's Rochester Row	14 July 2015
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		Jonathan Williams Chairman

2015 AGM - Whitehall Choir strategy

This document consists of four sections (i) an analysis of the choir's position, carried out by the committee in March this year; (ii) four priorities for action as presented in the Spring newsletter to members; (iii) a summary of the focus groups held during rehearsal breaks in June/July; (iv) a repeat of the choir's views gathered for the 2014 AGM for reference.

1. Current position

Who are we? A medium size amateur choir producing performances on the London stage at an above average standard for amateurs.

What are our strengths?

- We are an auditioned choir in a central London location
- We perform in prestigious venues with professional orchestras and soloists
- We perform a varied programme of music to a high standard
- We are a friendly group of committed singers
- We benefit from a top ranking choral conductor supported by leading accompanists

What opportunities do we have?


- There is a resurgence of interest in choral singing
- We have a specialism in English choral music
- We can put on extra concerts, workshops and other events, go on tour and make recordings
- We can perform at other venues including private concerts

What weaknesses do we have?

- We perform well but to a restricted audience
- We spend a large part of our rehearsal time on note learning rather than music making
- We lack a coordinated approach to recruitment
- We have a limited external profile

What threats do we face?


- Competition from other London choirs in terms of members and audience

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- Increasing cost of operating a London choir including rehearsal and concert venues
- Increasing subscriptions to subsidise concerts becoming too high

2. Four priorities for action

- For **choir development** including technique, recruitment and fundraising, we will plan for three development activities for each season:
 1. A workshop for choir members only to cover activities such as sight reading, vocal technique (with breakout groups) and to develop some standard repertoire for special concerts. It is expected that all choir members should attend
 2. A come and sing day positioned to make some money and advertise the choir to potential new members
 3. A trip which could be anything from a single day out, through a UK weekend away up to a foreign tour
- For **repertoire planning**, we will aim to have a forward programme covering venues and music for at least a year ahead at any given time. This will include a minimum of one orchestra concert. We will also develop repertoire for performance at occasional concerts, such as with the Brandenburg Sinfonia, that can be produced with a minimum of rehearsal time.
- For **rehearsal development**, we will publish a rehearsal schedule each term and follow it up with weekly post-rehearsal emails detailing material covered and difficult passages for private study. We will also produce a document setting out our expectation of members covering weekly and termly attendance, conduct at rehearsals, expectations regarding note learning, a list of standard repertoire and copies of music that all members should have.
- For **audience development**, we need to maintain an active network of supporters, who are kept informed of our programme of events. We plan to set up a database of contacts so that they can receive regular updates on our concerts and other activities. We ask every member of the choir to provide email addresses for this database.

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3. Summary of focus group discussions, June 2015

Audience development


- Subscriptions discount for students
- An audience database
- Promote organ music more as part of concert (some audience come just for the organ music). Offer performance opportunities to other Organists/pianists for solos in concerts.
- Should always use Paul for Come and Sing/recruitment events. Paul is a big reason people want to join the choir.
- Use of intranet to promote concerts.
- Choose venues that are prepared to help promote and sell tickets.

Choir development

- A party once a year... ask members for suitable venues
- How are repertoire suggestions debated and agreed by the committee? Would a sub-group to work with Paul on repertoire be advantageous? Need a two year schedule of music and concert dates to improve planning, check clashes with other choirs
- More collaborations with other choirs.
- A feeling that committee's activities are hidden away from the rest of the choir. More opportunity for choir to feed back their thoughts ideas. Channelling through voice rep doesn't necessarily work, would a regular choir survey be beneficial?
- A clear division between 'sight reading' and 'non-sight reading' category members of the choir, perhaps made at auditions. Extra sessions (eg weekend) made available for members who sight-read less well.
- Outreach programme to bring in audience from the Whitehall community. Would provide greater opportunity for Sponsorship, Fund raising etc.


General

- A 'competitive analysis' of other choirs.
- Fund raising. Art Council Grants etc.

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4. Summary of choir feedback on programme choice and rehearsal planning for 2014 AGM (verbatim repeat of last year's notes)

1. Challenging music is generally welcomed and a range of repertoire and introduction to less well known music is liked. Several members said that this is what brought them to / keeps them in the choir. There's a lot of classical choral concerts in London and we need to differentiate ourselves.
2. However, there needs to be a balance between "difficult" and "easy" music:
 1. (When we are not performing a single work), a balance between easier and more well known music and harder less well known repertoire in a concert is easier to prepare and to sell tickets for
 2. It's harder to keep the motivation and sell tickets when we have a difficult programme - but there's a sense of achievement when we manage it!
 3. Double choir music is more challenging, especially with limited forces in some voice parts at present, so we should not do too much of this in a programme
 4. Unaccompanied works are generally harder to perform to a good standard so we should include accompanied music in a programme as well
 5. Programmes with a large range of pieces (eg the recording programme) are the most difficult to prepare
3. Regarding rehearsals
 1. "Modern" pieces need more rehearsal time than our standard run of Tuesday evenings, as evidenced by the need for extra Monday rehearsals recently
 2. Extra rehearsals, if necessary, should be scheduled at the start of term, other weekday nights are difficult for some, considerable support for a Saturday workshop instead to concentrate on note learning / sectional rehearsing / also vocal technique. Have to accept that most members will miss a couple of Tuesday evenings in a term so we have to allow for this in our planning
 3. Where possible, our rehearsal plan should match what we need to learn the pieces and be set at the start of a term, or even season, so that we don't have to have emergency rehearsals at short notice

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4. Singing through complete pieces/movements earlier in the term, even with mistakes, gives a shape to the works and an understanding of what's to come and what's hard to sing
4. Regarding private study
 1. Midi files are found to be useful and should be available as early as practical
 2. A list of recordings should be available in advance of every term
5. Regarding recruitment
 1. In common with many choirs, we are short of tenors and basses.
 2. A forward plan of concerts and venues spanning 1-2 years helps with attracting new members
6. Regarding next season specifically
 1. Many members would be disappointed if we didn't do the MacMillan planned for Maundy Thursday and propose that it be postponed to a later season
 2. It's recognised that it's been a tough year for the choir and we should take some time to recover and strengthen our forces through recruitment before tackling another substantial modern work