



WHITEHALL CHOIR

Draft minutes of an Annual General Meeting
held at St Stephen's Church, Rochester Row, London SW1
on Tuesday 12th July 2005 at 6.30 pm

- 1 The Chairman opened the meeting at 6.35 pm.

Apologies

- 2 Apologies were received from: Michel Kallipetis, William Longland

Minutes of 2004 AGM

- 3 The minutes of the 2004 AGM were adopted without amendment (proposed Katherine Herzberg, seconded Kate Goulden) carried with one abstention. The meeting put forward the view that the committee should consider how it might facilitate more general consideration/discussion on how the choir wants to develop and specifically involving Paul Spicer.

Secretary's Report

- 4 The Secretary delivered his report on the 2004–05 season (Annex A). There were no matters arising.

Conductor's Report

- 5 The Conductor delivered his report on the 2004–05 season (Annex B).

A lively discussion followed: Andrew Hunt: could the Christmas Concert programme be moderated with some easier carols. Jen Brzozowska: it is difficult to get to the small number of rehearsals for the Christmas Concert. Katherine Herzberg: as an auditioned choir we should not dumb down the programme too much and we should be challenged. Monica Darnbrough: could we do a stock take through the part reps near to the concert of sections where members feel less secure. Michael Growcott: is it the majority feeling that we want to move forward. Liz Walton: more challenging music can be more challenging also when it comes to ticket sales. Moira Purkiss: we should have a discussion with Paul Spicer about issues which came up in the questionnaire. Overall, choir members were concerned to explore the direction in which the choir saw itself developing, commitment and the tension between this and the demands of people's jobs.

On the rescheduling of the Summer Concert, unavoidably postponed due to terrorist action in London on the day of the concert:

Possible dates: Friday 2 September - this is too late for Cadogan Hall's advertising; Tuesday 27 September (access after 3 pm). Issues: downscaled concert or full rescheduled one? There would be loyalty for a rescheduled one. Preferred date is 27 September and the committee will look at accommodating the rehearsal schedule.

Treasurer's Report

- 6 The Treasurer delivered his report (Annex C) on the 2004–05 season, elaborating upon the financial projections circulated to the Choir (a provisional overall income/expenditure account and a provisional concert income/expenditure account, attached at Annex C).

The season's figures are necessarily more of an approximation than usual this year: not only are we not yet at the end of the financial year, but we have just had to cancel our biggest concert of the season and the financial implications of this are still being assessed; the draft accounts have been produced as if the concert had taken place.

With the exception of the Handel Samson concert, all ticket sales have been under budget. This year we are likely to incur a £1,300 deficit; by coincidence, this was approximately the cost of putting on the reception and concert for the Juventus choir. The total income generated, per member, was £252 and the expenditure £268, meaning that £16 per member will be taken from the reserves.

The Treasurer thanked several members who have made a particular contribution, throughout the season, to helping us raise money to subsidise our music-making.

Financial resolutions

- 7 A motion that Choir subscriptions should be increased to £190 for the 2005–06 season was put to the meeting. (proposed by the committee, seconded Chris Gotto), passed unanimously.

It was agreed that the choir wanted to retain the 30% discount for new members in their first season, but also to continue monitoring the effectiveness of this as a recruitment/retention tool (a suggestion was made that we should ask last year's new people how much of an incentive it had been for them).

Jubilee Fund

- 8 The following were elected Trustees of the Jubilee Fund for the year 2005-06 (proposed Keith Long, seconded Jacky Erwteman): Passed unanimously.

Ian Williamson, Ken Holmes, Elsie Broadbent

Election of Officers and Committee

- 9 No other nominations for posts having been received, the following officers of the Choir were elected unopposed for the 2005–06 season:

Chairman: Samantha Foley
Treasurer: Ken Holmes (Michael Hope & David Wedmore at the meeting)
Secretary: Jonathan Williams

Passed with one abstention

- 10 No other nominations having been received, the following Committee members were elected for the 2005–06 season:

Assistant Secretary:	Anne Dickinson
Publicity Secretary:	Martin Humphreys & Ruth Eastman
Business Managers:	Miranda Douce
Librarian:	Laurie Grace & Rose Chandler
Part Reps:	Anne Dickinson (soprano) Moira Purkiss(alto) David Pite (tenor) Andrew Hyde (bass)

Passed unanimously

- 11 No other nominations having been received, the following were re-elected to their offices for the 2005-06 season:

DTI Liaison:	Jen Brzozowska
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Any Other Business

- 12 Katherine Herzberg has volunteered to organise a choir trip to Toulouse. Choir members were asked to consider the length and cost of a trip they would favour.
- 13 A vote of thanks to Heather Atkinson as retiring Chairman and to the committee for their services to the choir was made.
- 14 As incoming Chairman, Samantha Foley said that she was looking forward to serving the choir in this role and to working with the committee on the effective running of the choir.

Close of meeting

- 15 The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

Jonathan Williams
Hon. Secretary

ANNEX A

Secretary's report, 2005 AGM

This year, for what are obvious reasons, I am going to review the season in reverse. This time last week, we were putting the finishing touches to Dvorak's Stabat Mater in preparation for our first appearance at Cadogan Hall. We felt on top of a relatively easy programme and were full of anticipation of performing in a new venue. But it was not to be. In common with all of Central London, our plans were overtaken by horrific and unforeseen acts of terrorism on Thursday morning. Heather and Ken (I was for the most part tied up in a meeting) had to make a quick decision on whether to postpone our event and through their and the part reps' actions, choir members and our audience were spared impossible travel journeys and much wasted effort. Later in this AGM we will discuss our options for rescheduling the event. Thankfully, there seems to be good will to do this on all sides.

For our spring concert we worked long and hard on Rachmaninov's Vespers for our performance at St Paul's Knightsbridge. In this work, the words were at least as challenging as the music and we are very grateful to Katherine Herzberg for her patient and expert tuition. The concert went down very well with our audience and two of my Russian colleagues from work were very enthusiastic. When I thanked them the next day for their support they insisted that the pleasure was all theirs – I quote "We thoroughly enjoyed the concert: excellent voices, spirited performance, and inspiring setting. The fact that the Russian church music is performed in London by a British choir in Russian made it even more special to us".

In December we made our now usual appearances at the Ritz and here at St Stephen's for our concert of Christmas music and readings. I was pleased to have a visitor from Washington in the audience (staying in the Sherlock Holmes Hotel in Baker Street – yes there is such a place). He said that it was the best event he had been to during his stay but commented that the tune to O Little Town of Bethlehem was not familiar to him. On returning home, he sent me the tune they have over there, which I have never seen, so it's not just the language that is different!

Finally I come to the start of the last season and our performance of Handel's Samson at St John's Smith Square. It is always a delight to put on a concert with the London baroque Sinfonia at St John's and this year was no exception. We enjoyed fantastic trumpet playing and splendid singing by the soloists, including our own Ben Byram-Wigfield without his key phrase "Samson is dead" the work would have had no plot!

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the work of the committee members. Running the Whitehall Choir really is a case of many hands make light work. This year Ruth and Martin took over the responsibility for publicity from Geof Webb, a hard act to follow and have produced some magnificent material. Laurie and Rose have supplied us with music with great efficiency, Miranda and Hazel with concert tickets. Ken has worked tirelessly on the figures as well as organising the orchestras and we should remember that the office of Treasurer has by far the largest workload. Finally, I wish to thank Heather, on her retirement as Chairman, for her professional coordination of the committee and her constant enthusiasm and support for choir events over many years in post.

Jonathan Williams

Secretary

12 July 2005

ANNEX B

AGM 2005 Conductor's Report

I am writing this having just had my own bi-annual review which takes place with the Chairman, Treasurer and Hon Sec of the choir. It's an opportunity for both sides to express our concerns over a wide range of issues. Having read last year's conductor's report I was sad to read that all the concerns I raised in that report were raised again in my review – so little if anything has changed in the past year. The major issues I raised were poor attendance at rehearsals, repertoire holidays taken by people who don't like a particular work – or an aspect of it, lateness for rehearsals, lack of 'catching up' when rehearsals are missed even when there is a full rehearsal schedule available, and crisis management when there is a sudden realisation that some voice parts do not know their notes at the final Tuesday rehearsal.

On the plus side, the Dvorak Stabat Mater which we have just been prevented from performing, has given me a real opportunity to work on tone quality and the piece was sounding very good indeed from all parts. I really hope we do get the chance to give this concert in September. The down side of this was that some members of the choir felt the music was easy and didn't need rehearsing for the number of weeks we had at our disposal and so opted out for several weeks. All of you who were here last Tuesday will remember that, despite the concern about 'easiness' of the music, we were still getting the last movement right at this last rehearsal. We do need all our rehearsal time.

These are serious issues. It is so frustrating for those loyal members of the choir who turn up every week on time and take it all seriously. I DO know that many of you have big responsible jobs and that you sometimes cannot get to choir at all let alone on time. But I am cynical enough to know that this is also exploited and people are often late or missing when they don't have to be.

I bang on and on on this particular drum because I know that if people really did make the effort it would make a huge difference to the speed at which we could work and also in people's attitude overall. It all boils down to your feelings and if you really want the choir to be as good as it could be. For that to happen everybody needs to be a leader and not just a passenger.

We have had a happy term learning Dvorak mostly because the demands of the music were less than other recent programmes. This meant that I could relax more and enjoy the building blocks more than normal. It is very much a case of 'watch this space' next term as we return to another demanding programme. Beautiful music which should inspire everyone, but how much of that learning curve will be spoiled by poor attendance which will mean endless re-learning? Perhaps this is the moment for a real change of heart and attitude? These pleas are made as much on behalf of those members of the choir who are always here on time and all those who do the background work – including those famous Croydon sing-throughs!

The season just past has been a good one in many ways. Handel's Samson started us off. A marvellous work which was, like the Dvorak, well within the choir's capabilities and when the concert came you were confident and the performance really shone. The London Baroque Sinfonia played magnificently as always with real colour and a sense of commitment. The soloists, too, were great, especially Rob Murray as Samson and Sophie Bevan as Dalila. Notable, too, was Dawid Kimberg, who stood in at very short notice as Harapha. It was good to do a less well-known Handel work at St. John's.

This was followed, as usual, by our Christmas concert given with only two weeks of rehearsal. It was a very creditable effort and I still maintain that it is a very good concert for us to give as it helps the choir in its speed of learning and assimilating new music, or revision. This is very good for the choir's collective ears. I do deplore the fact that a number of singers absent themselves from the event. Especially for this kind of concert, everyone should be there and pulling with the whole team.

The following term brought the preparation for the Rachmaninov Vespers. A really tough programme which stretched everyone to the limits. It was seriously unfortunate that in the middle of preparing this programme I had an unprecedented period of absence. I always try to avoid taking any work on Tuesdays (or Mondays or Wednesdays!) but sometimes something happens which makes it unavoidable. Whilst I have been asked to return to do the same job again next year I have organised it with the administrators that there are no Tuesdays involved. I am keenly aware that it sends all the wrong messages to you when I bang on about your attendance.

The Rachmaninov started very well but soon exhibited all the usual problems – which hampered the learning process. When I returned from the job I had been doing with only two weeks to go to the performance I was seriously distressed by the state of preparedness and it was at this stage that extra tenor and bass sectional rehearsals were hastily organised. This crisis management shouldn't have to happen. We normally have a perfectly adequate rehearsal period. However, when the concert day came along you rose to the challenge, and whilst there were moments of acute anxiety along the way, basically it all came together and it was a very creditable, if not relaxed, performance. The audience seemed to enjoy it.

Then came Dvorak, and the one concert which I was looking forward to doing with you more than any other for a long time, was a casualty of the terrorist bombs on July 7th. A tragedy for London and a great sadness for us.

In making a lot of rather disparaging comments about the choir I am aware that there will be a feeling that I am unhappy and that I do almost nothing but whinge. It is perfectly true that I often come to a rehearsal and feel unconfident about the outcome. I feel sure that there will only be half the choir there at 6.30 and that there will be frequent interruptions and door bell ringing often until well into the second half of the rehearsal. When there has been a good rehearsal the previous week I worry that the number of people missing at that session will slow the progress in the current week. So, altogether, it is not the pure unalloyed joy I wish it could be. BUT, we are making progress if Samson and Dvorak are anything to go by. We also have the prospect of an exciting foreign tour to look forward to which always helps the esprit de corps and the general standard of singing.

Maybe we should try to be more realistic about repertoire and not be so ambitious so that we can all go on enjoying the rays of general sunshine which a Dvorak-type work casts over the choir (and me).

Auditions were another casualty of the season as my plane back from a job in Cornwall was cancelled and I had to bussed back to London which got me there as the workshop was finishing. A real nuisance for everyone concerned as I know how difficult many of you find the prospect of auditioning. We have a new date in the diary and I hope we will manage to dispatch the job speedily over a period of about three weeks.

To sum up, the choir is in very good voice. There was some outstanding choral singing going on in the Dvorak which I was so looking forward to hearing in context. I really hope that this technical aspect of the choir's work will continue on and transfer into the new music we are doing next term.

I really ask everyone to take individual responsibility and not to devolve that team-element to others. The choir IS a team and everyone who has auditioned fulfils a function within the group. Each one of you is important. I won't bore you with the usual sporting analogies, but they do speak for themselves...

Finally, I want to thank Heather for all the work she has done as the choir's chairman over all these years. She has been an indefatigable worker on all our behalfs, has steered it through rough times and has always been diplomatic as well as challenging when necessary. I have greatly valued her support since I arrived, as well as her understanding of the difficulties I face in living where I do in relation to London. In particular recently when she has had Ned and a temporarily disabled husband to cope with she has always maintained her good humour and has never let anything get in the way of the good management of the choir. We all owe her a great debt of gratitude. I am particularly sorry that she is leaving us altogether and I hope that finds she misses it and wants to return to us in due course. We look forward to seeing her at our concerts selling programmes etc!

In the meantime I now look forward to Sam's chairmanship and the new emphases she will bring to the job. I wish her well and thank her for her commitment to the choir and for wanting to help steer it through the coming years. We look forward very much to seeing what her style of leadership brings.

Thanks, too, to Ken Holmes for all his wonderfully caring and careful work as treasurer. Last week's terrorism has given him a huge extra task to manage which he is doing with all his customary thoroughness. We know we are in safe hands financially with Ken at the helm, and whoever takes over the reins either tonight or in the future when someone can be found, will find the best possible precedents set by Ken and the choir's finances as carefully managed as they have ever been. Thank you so much Ken.

So, here's to a wonderful season coming up and thanks to you all for everything you have brought for good in the last season.

Have a good summer.

ANNEX C

Treasurer's Report

TREASURER'S REPORT TO AGM – 12 July 2005

1. It's difficult to produce end-of-season figures three weeks before end of season and five days after major concert of season – particularly when major concert didn't happen!
2. In order not to distort seasonal comparisons, I have assumed (for reporting purposes only) that concert will take place – and that we'll extend the season (for that purpose only) until it does.
3. For the past three seasons we have produced a modest (but reducing) surplus; this season we are likely to incur a £1,300 deficit – not a problem, in view of past surpluses, but something I will come back to later.
4. I always like to answer the question: “where does all that money go?”
 - *First, where does it come from:* 83 members have paid subs and been active in the Choir for at least part of this season; the average subscription paid has been £156; average tax refund will be £45; fundraising equates to £44 for each member; external donations and interest equate to £9 for each member. That gives an average **total income per member of £252** (for a direct input of only £156).
 - *Where has it all gone?:* £159 on subsidising concerts; £80 on rehearsal costs; £13 on ‘international relations’; £10 on two workshops; £6 on general administration. That gives **total expenditure of £268 per member**.
 - *How do we fund the deficit of £16 per member?* Answer: from reserves. In effect, therefore, we funded the Juventus reception at the FCO, and the subsequent concert, from our reserves.
5. I draw attention to the figure of fundraising equivalent to £44 per member – a total, net figure of £3,650. If you sang at the Ritz last Christmas (£2,250), if you've ever bought a drink or a biscuit in the rehearsal break, if you helped at the Covent Garden, May Fayre – you've contributed to this total. You'll have an idea how much, but I would like to mention, once again, several people who have made a special contribution: Anne Dickinson, Ian Williamson, Jean Robinson, Heather Atkinson, Keith Long – who've made it possible for the rest of us to contribute.
6. I was charged at last year's AGM with reporting on the effect of the decision to reduce by 30% the first-year subscriptions of new members. We have had 15 new members during the season, and the cost of their 30% discount was £538. On the other hand, 15 is about 50% more than our usual total of new members, so that gained us c.£590. All in all, therefore, almost a neutral effect – but we can't say anything about cause, except by asking those concerned. I suggest the success of the idea must be judged in terms of how many of our new colleagues stay with us.
7. *Subscriptions.* At the AGM of 2001, it was decided that the full subscription rate should be £180.00/season and that, unless subsequent AGMs should decide otherwise, subs should rise each year in line with inflation. If that had happened each year, subs would have been £195 for this present season and would be rising to £201 for next season. Committee has been able to recommend for three years now, however, that subs should be frozen – and AGM has agreed!

Based on my projection of a deficit this season, however, the committee decided that subscriptions could no longer be held down and that, for the coming season the full rate should be - not £201 - but £190 (with pro-rata increases for other rates). For Standing Order payers we suggest that, rather than go through the hassle of writing new mandates, it would make more sense to ask you to pay the additional £10 at the beginning of the season.

That was all before we cancelled the concert, however!

KH