



WHITEHALL CHOIR

DRAFT MINUTES

Whitehall Choir AGM

11th July 2006, 6.30pm (St. Stephen's Church)

Meeting formally brought to order at 6.40pm by Samantha Foley (Chairperson).

1. Apologies for absence provided in advance

Philip Pratley
Jacky Erwteman
Laurie Grace
Lis Warren
Jean Orr
Caroline Price
Helen Audaer
Jonathan Williams
Penny Prior
Jackie Entwistle
Anne Dickenson
Sue Vincent

2. Ratification of AGM minutes 2005/06.

Colin Altman asked whether there had been any discussion on the way forward for the choir following the comments at the last AGM. Sam confirmed that while no formal discussions had taken place with the choir generally, the Committee had taken on board those comments and would continue to consider solutions as necessary.

Minutes agreed. (nominated by Miranda Douce, seconded by Colin Altman)

3. Secretary's report

In the absence of Jonathan Williams (Secretary) Rachel Salisbury (Assistant Secretary) read out his report.

The report

- The report discussed the concerts the choir had performed in the 2005/06 season. This began with the postponed Dvorak concert at Stabat Mater. The concert had been postponed due to the terrible acts of terrorism in July and through the hard work of Sam and Ken Holmes (Treasurer) and the rest of the Committee, we had been able to put on a successful concert at Cadagon Hall. We were delighted to see Liz Owen, injured in the attacks, in the audience and on the way to recovery.
- It was noted that Cadagon Hall have decided to limit the number of performers to 80 for future concerts so we are unlikely to be able to perform there again.
- After this came the Durufle/Martin concert at St Paul's Knightsbridge which is a regular and pleasing venue for us. The church has a fine organ, which was made the most of by Paul Plummer, our talented accompanist.
- Also that term we held out regular Christmas Concert at St Stephen's and sang at the Ritz.

- After Christmas we were very pleased to perform “The Deciduous Cross” by Paul Spicer at St John’s, Smith Square. We were able to benefit from the depth of understanding Paul has for choral music and the concert was an opportunity for us to learn from one of his own compositions. The performance was complemented by a very fine performance of Dvorak’s Serenade for Wind and Bruckner’s Mass in E Minor.
- Also that term we performed Faure’s Requiem and Cantique for Jean Racine with the Brandenburg Sinfonia at St-Martin-in-the-Fields and we put together a very credible performance rewarded by some fine playing from the orchestra as well as a large and appreciative audience.
- The report was written before the Handel/Hayden concert to which it looked forward. Also to look forward to is the exciting trip, for many members, to Toulouse.

Discussion

A discussion of the possibility of using Cadogan Hall followed and it was suggested that we could perform an unaccompanied work, or a work requiring just an organ accompaniment in order to keep the number of performers down. It was noted that the number of venues in which to sing is limited and we are struggling to find venues. The Queen Elizabeth Hall was suggested but there have been a number of problems with this venue in the past. We will look again at the South Bank for the 2007/08 season.

4. Treasurer’s Report

The report

- Five days after final concert of season is not ideal time for Treasurer to report on season that doesn’t end, financially until 31 July – hence “provisional”. (An EGM in a few months’ time is the opportunity to consider “audited” accounts.)
- Choir has two funds – general fund and Jubilee (reserve) fund. Ken dealt first with the **General Fund**.
- Figures you have are simplified version of the budgets – concerts on one side, which feed into general on the other – that we started season with, and which are monitored by committee at each meeting as budgets gradually become reality.
- This time last year, we were coping with aftermath of the bombings and the cancellation of our July concert. Thanks to co-operation of many, financial implications of this were merely inconvenient, rather than disastrous: last season turned out to be only 3-concert season, this season 5 (or actually 6) concerts.
- We ended last season, therefore, with net income (surplus) of £6,700 (and a carry-over of £12,000, of which almost £9,000 was money in bank). This surplus disappeared in September with (planned) loss of £6,500 on the re-arranged concert – so effectively we inherited a break-even situation at start of this season (as originally planned).
- Concerts (promoted by ourselves): deficit on season £1,500 greater than planned – income £900 less than planned, costs £700 higher. Cadogan Hall (re-scheduled) concert and Bruckner/Spicer were difficult to call, but there is slightly worrying trend overall: ticket sales forecast for Handel/Haydn concert based on *Samson* two season’s ago, but we came in at 26% less. (*Note:* the St Martin’s Faure concert, not promoted by us, is shown as an expense – cost of rehearsals – on the general budget.)
- General situation: deficit of £3,550 c.£300 less than forecast, largely due to payment of insurance claim (and refund from Cadogan Hall) re postponed concert. Additionally, the website redevelopment has been achieved at very little cost to General fund, thanks to grant from Jubilee.
- We should end the season, therefore, with a General Fund balance comfortably in excess of the £5,000 (average big concert deficit) we believe it prudent to carry forward from one season to next.
- Ken **proposed** on behalf of the committee that we should *not* increase subs by inflation – which would happen unless the AGM agrees with our recommendation. (Subject to the final end-of-season figures, we should also go into next season with some slack to do one or two additional things – such as subsidise both the tour and the come-and-sing event planned for November. We suggest that any additional surplus next season should be put into the Jubilee Fund.)

Some interesting figures

- 80 members paid subs during season, average of £171.25 each
- Giftaid tax claims added another £46.25 each on average – almost 96% of theoretical maximum
- Fundraising added another £46.25 a member

- Mgt & admin expenses have cost us all just £5 each (2.9% of subs)
- Rehearsals have cost us £86.25 each (or c.£2.40 a rehearsal)
- Concerts subsidies have cost £212 a member

Jubilee Fund (Trustees are Ian Williamson, Penny Prior, and Ken)

- After the grant of £2,700 for the website development, there is c.£21,500 in the Jubilee Fund, which is there to enable us to promote the long-term development of the Choir.

Finally, **thanks** to anyone who has either helped to raise money or to save it during season, including:

- Bill Gonzalez (former bass, who has handled the Gift Aid claims for many years, but is now too ill to continue; the rehearsal refreshment team (record £771 profit this year);
- Paul Spicer (who gets us good young soloists for very reasonable fees, and sometimes grants also);
- those members who manage to sell more than their “fair share” of concert tickets;
- all of you who sang at the Ritz (every night sung raised £22.50 per individual);
- nearly all of us, who enable Choir to claim tax on our subs through Giftaid;
- the committee, none of whom claim any expenses;
- St Stephen’s PCC, who allow us to use the church for a very reasonable donation.

Discussion

Ken was asked what the £690 cost of the Faure concert was. He confirmed that this was for professional fees for the extra rehearsals. We did not pay any other costs and did not receive any payment since we did not promote the concert. It was felt that the experience and opportunity to sing in St Martin’s was valuable nonetheless.

It was suggested that St Martin’s might be a good venue to try and make money. However, we noted that it has been difficult to get in so far since it is so small, the maximum number of singers accommodated only being around 40. Furthermore, the musical director has, in the past, insisted on choir’s auditioning in order to secure a performance spot.

Sam and the AGM thanked Ken for all his hard work and for explaining the finances so clearly.

Resolution on subs.

AGM voted not to increase subs this year in line with inflation. None against. No abstentions.

Adopt financial reports

Proposed by David Pite, seconded by Martin Humphreys. Adopted.

5. Conductor’s Report

- Paul was pleased to say this is a more positive report than past reports. The past season has been one of the best in recent memory and the fact that it has also been one of our busiest adds to the sense of purpose which is permeating the organisation.
- Thanked Sam for doing a very good job as Chairperson. Her good humour, her attention to detail, her determination for the choir to succeed, her excellent chairing of meetings and the way she has seen through the fine new website all point to the fact that we are very lucky to have her at the helm.
- We began the season with the replaced Dvorak Stabat Mater at the Cadogan Hall. This went very well indeed and Paul felt it the choir on very good form. He wasn’t so happy with the venue which was probably because the choir couldn’t be sufficiently raised at the back of the stage to carry over the orchestra. However, it was a good performance and he felt that the music suited the choir admirably.
- We then moved on to the Frank Martin Mass and the Durufle Requiem. This was a tough programme. The Martin, especially, was in the Rachmaninov Vespers league of complexity. However, the choir really rose to the challenge and gave a really good performance. However, Paul did comment that people still have a habit of not turning up to rehearsals, or being late. He made the point that In double choir music this matters. It matters

whatever the music. But in the end it worked. The Duruflé worked very well and we were lucky to have excellent soloists from within our own ranks: Sue Vincent and Michel Kalipetis proved their skills admirably. Paul Plummer also gave us a fine rendition of Duruflé's organ work *Veni Creator*. St Paul's Knightsbridge is a good venue for us and has a good organ.

- We then moved on to the concert with the Bruckner E minor Mass and Paul's *Deciduous Cross*. This was another challenging programme to which you all rose admirably. The two works presented very different challenges. The Bruckner's was tuning in those long unaccompanied passages. In Paul's work it was the unfamiliar idiom and the issue of putting across those marvellous words clearly enough. In the end, the Bruckner went well, but wasn't *quite* as good as Paul had hoped more from a tone point of view more than anything. The tuning was more-or-less perfect. No issues there. The building of a corporate tone in a choir is one of the most important things a conductor has to do. Paul commented that it's one of the most difficult things he has to teach his students, how to build your instrument. Everyone in the choir has to come with you. This is why the warm-ups are so important, as repetitious as they are.
- That said, Paul thought our performance of his work was outstanding and he couldn't have asked for better, or for a more committed performance. He thought that we, the choir, seemed really to enjoy it, and he was grateful for that. It was wonderful that we were able to have the additional full rehearsal as this made all the difference. It gave a huge added confidence when we got to St John's. Paul had spent a lot of time revising the work from its early performances and the changes were really effective, so was very pleased to have the opportunity to perform it again. He thanked us for that.
- After that, we quickly (immediately) got onto performing the Fauré Requiem and *Cantique* for the St Martin's concert. Paul really enjoyed this. Again, he thought the choir sang really well, and the concert was actually a joy from his point of view. An excellent orchestra, a lovely acoustic and an appreciative audience. Paul commented that he was reminded what a lovely work the Requiem is and how important it is that it is sung beautifully!
- And then, finally, to the concert we have just performed: Handel's *Dixit Dominus* and Haydn's Nelson Mass. This was a really fine performance all round. It was a huge pity that there was the big 'wobble' in the Credo of the Haydn. We probably rely on Paul too much as he tends to give us virtually all entries (a considerable luxury) and when, for some reason he doesn't we lose confidence. He said that his attention was drawn away by an orchestral detail and the entry didn't happen! Anyway, in the larger scheme of things it was a small matter, but it was important nevertheless.
- Paul was hugely impressed by the top sopranos in *Dixit*. This is a terribly cruel piece and the first sopranos all really threw themselves into it. The overall energy level in both these works was terrific and, despite the heat (which Paul found absolutely debilitating) the concert had real bubble and considerable musicality. We were lucky with the orchestra and a good, if slightly variable team of young soloists. Outstanding top soprano and bass solos, Paul thought.
- So, overall, a very good season.

Observations:

- We are a good size of choir now and that we should limit our intake to some degree so that we can fit into St John's with an orchestra. But we need always to be on the lookout for good male singers especially. The tenors do valiantly but we rarely have a full team and we really do need more for comfort. It would be good to get one or two more really strong basses –leaders who are good readers to help the learning process.
- The implications of this are that it limits our repertoire choices. Currently, we can really no longer do the big Elgar works or *Carmina*-type pieces as we simply haven't the manpower to sing against a big orchestra. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. The music we have done this season proves that we can excel in the smaller scale music like classical masses and really enjoy being an equal partner with the orchestra.
- We still need to search our consciences about punctuality and general attendance. Rehearsals are really only at their most useful when everyone who is singing in the concert is in attendance. When people are missing details are missed and there is always an element of re-learning because of it.
- We still have a distance to travel, but it is getting better all the time and Paul commented that as he relaxed more into the better standards so this communicates itself and we all grow more comfortably together.
- Paul is at the stage of his career when he is supposed to be at the top of his game. Therefore everything he does is scrutinisable from this point of view by the audience. He needs to be able to be proud of us as a reflection of my skills. People who don't come to rehearsals regularly enough, or are constantly late and therefore miss things are helping to let the side down. Audiences and critics should come and enjoy a choir which is amongst the best on

offer and be able to say 'and that's what we expected from this partnership'. An amateur choir has to behave professionally and have professional things expected of it. That is the way of the world these days if we set ourselves up as a high quality concert-giving organisation attracting audiences. And the better we get, the more high quality singers will hopefully come to join us.

- We really look forward to next season and to some fine music making. Paul thanked Ken Holmes for his superb work as Treasurer. We couldn't be in better hands. Paul is enormously grateful for the careful and sensitive way in which he deals with the choir's finances.
- All the committee members were thanked.

Discussion

It was felt the balance in the choir is better now, and especially suited to a good variety of repertoire, but it may be nice to double up with another choir to do a large work on occasion, and the Committee already have this in mind.

Paul was asked whether he has any particular issues with our technique but he said he did not and that the exercises we do are meant to help improve this aspect. It was acknowledged that it would be helpful to have a warm-up on concert days.

It was suggested that we should learn something from the European Sacred Music book in case of the need to do an encore, especially in Toulouse.

The question of the audience paying for the Christmas concert was raised, but it was agreed that since it is a concert and not a service and that the money all goes to St Stephen's as a "thank you" then this practice should continue.

The Committee were asked whether anything is being done about lateness. Part reps are speaking to members in an effort to address and other arrangements may be put in place, including only opening the church door at set times after 6.30pm.

The need to attend at least 2/3rds of rehearsals in any one term remains and it is up to Paul's discretion as to whether individual members be allowed to sing in a concert.

It was suggested that we could do a lighter concert in St Stephens one season. However, we acknowledged that the toilet facilities may not be adequate. We believe that the health and safety requirements (insurance) are in place so it remains a possibility.

Colin observed that he was pleased to receive a positive report and believes that may be down to a good choice of repertoire. He asked whether we should move our 'big' concert from the summer term. Rose explained the historical reason for the current arrangements but Sam confirmed that we would look into this for the future.

Sam thanked Paul for his very positive report and for all of his hard work on behalf of the Choir over the Season.

6. Election of committee for 2006/07

Sam recorded thanks to the non-Committee members who work particularly hard for the Choir: Tamsin, Monica, Rose, Anne, Philip for their work on the website, church liaison, music, programmes and concert management respectively - and the different alto each week who has to keep opening the back door when the bell rings! Also thanks especially to those providing refreshments, who also provide a respectable sum back to choir funds.

Sam also thanked Andy H (ex Bass rep) and Jen B (ex DTI liaison) who are outgoing Committee members and also Katherine H and Anne D (both having been Soprano rep during the Season) who have stepped down during the year.

Thanks to the out-going committee in general was recorded and the committee was then dissolved.

Katherine Howes as returning officer confirmed her independence and impartiality. She explained the process the election would follow. She then officiated over the following elections:

Officer posts

- Secretary – Jonathan Williams (nominated Colin Altman, seconded David Pite). **Elected.** None against, 1 abstention.
- Treasurer – Ken Holmes (nominated Colin Altman, seconded Philip Pratley). **Elected.** None against, no abstentions.
- Chairperson – Samantha Foley (nominated Michael Growcott, seconded Kate Goulden). **Elected.** None against, no abstentions.

The other posts were voted en masse. **Elected.** None against, no abstentions. They are:

- Rachel Salisbury (Assistant Secretary)
- David Pite and Miranda Douce (Business Managers)
- Ruth Eastman and Martin Humphreys (Publicity Secretaries)
- Laurie Grace (Librarian)
- Kate Goulden (Sop rep)
- Moira Purkiss (Alto rep)
- David Pite (Tenor rep)
- Malcom Todd (Bass rep)
- Catherine Bakhasi (DTI Liaison)

Committee duly recorded for 2006/07.

Next committee meeting 7th September 2006.

7. AOB

Michael asked what arrangements there were to inform members without email. Part reps would make appropriate arrangements.

It was asked whether we might sing in Winchester next season. This is still up for discussion.

The meeting was closed at 8.10pm.

Rachel Salisbury, July 2006