

(Draft) Minutes
of the 2016/17 Annual General Meeting of the Whitehall Choir
held at St Peter's Eaton Square
Tuesday 19 July 2016

Apologies: Jane Mackay, Jean Orr, Helen Ward, Katherine Howes, Imogen Davies, Sarah McTavish

The Minutes of the 2014/15 AGM were accepted as a true record. Proposed: Daniel Lambauer; Seconded: Martin Humphreys

Treasurer: Patrick Haighton regretted that it had not been possible to circulate the papers to everyone yet but he would circulate them to the committee and put them onto the website. The main points were:

- the Income and Expenditure document showed that we were heading for £2,000 deficit. The profile of income was subscriptions (and Gift Aid), concert tickets receipts and fund raising.
- Subscriptions paid for rehearsals and also subsidised concerts. This season we subsidised every concert: there had been a deficit for each concert.
- Our subscription rates were already quite high and he did not want to raise them further. Other means to raise income must be used. Subscriptions were fixed. Concert revenue was NOT fixed and more income must be generated from concerts.
- He made a proposal to offer lower rates for younger singers and special auditions for free one year places (see below).
- Many choirs expect a certain number of tickets to be sold per choir member - say 4. We currently generate 2 per choir member and rely on the fact that 20% of members bring in 80% of the audience. We had to do better.
- Fundraising from rehearsal teas, Hyperion CDs, and Amazon commissions helped. He would circulate a document on how to raise money through online purchases.
- Workshops, Come & Sings, Tours and Music should be self-supporting (though they had not been this year)
- The Jubilee Fund had not been repaid following the recording.

Paul Spicer's Report See Annex A for full report. Paul reviewed all the concerts and events of the year and spoke of the problem of poor standards, poor recruitment and the rehearsal room. The situation needed to turn around. He planned to re-audition the whole choir next term, hoped to discuss bursary places and reduced fees for younger singers and wanted to move to a new rehearsal venue. We should be prepared to take a hit number-wise initially.

Chairman's Report: Jonathan Williams, had been unable to sing at the July concert but had attended and gave a very positive review both of the music and of the choir's presentation (with thanks to Philip Pratley). He summarised our current position with reference to the priorities for action outlined in the 2015 Strategy Document and Focus Group Summary:

Annual Workshop: a good start had been made on 11th June. A good turnout.

Come & Sing: one planned for 8th October 2016

Trips: Vienna trip completed. Need to start planning the next tour.

Repertoire planning: we had a 3 year plan but matching repertoire to ability had caused some problems.

Rehearsal schedule for each term: production had been patchy. Patrick worked hard to produce midi files.

Audience development: less productive on this. Facebook profile had grown steadily. Box Offices and venues that help sell tickets: some of our venues offer this eg. St James's. Martin had worked with the French community for latest concert with positive results.

Focus Groups Document:

Subscription discounts for students to be discussed.

Organ/piano music promotion: this had been done where suitable

Company intranets: Martin Humphreys: accessing government staff intranets had not been very successful but he thought we could still pursue this in the private sector - he asked members to come back to him about how the intranet worked in their particular organisation. At COI for instance, there was a strong staff intranet for business information and also a social element.

Choosing repertoire: Paul did not think a sub group would help. Questionnaires could be devised for the choir. More work to do.

Collaboration with other choirs: Did this on Vienna tour with great success. They want to come here and sing with us. Need people in choir to do this work as it takes a lot of work to pull it off.

Feeling that the committee is hidden: please talk to the committee whenever you want and read the minutes which go onto the member's page asap after meetings.

Competitive analysis with other choirs: Gesa and others were working on this.

In answer to some questions from Katherine Herzberg for this meeting:

Social events: we haven't asked about use of St Peter's but can do so.

Recruitment from universities: there had been a good response from King's College, but none as yet from Royal Holloway Direct approach is best.

Le Manoir Carols: we could approach them again. Jean Orr had tried many other Christmas venues and nearly found one, but they only wanted a quartet.

Tours: strategy and UK/out of town/foreign. To be discussed.

Jonathan said that more volunteers were needed. Currently more work was being done by fewer people.

He thanked William Longland for his fantastic work on programmes over the years: William had produced his last programme for the April concert.

Secretary's Report: Joanna Tomlinson gave a further report on the 11th June Workshop; reported that a number of people liked the new rehearsal venue and that the church could be used at least twice a term; thanked the many people who helped with such things as refreshments, door keeping, programmes, the web pages along with, of course, Jonathan, Patrick, Paul and Ian. She gave additional thanks to St Matthew's Westminster who had given last minute rehearsal space on numerous occasions and to Helen Smee for regularly standing in for Paul. Joanna was stepping down from the role of secretary as she was leaving the choir.

Elections to the Committee for the 2016/17 Season:

Chairman: *Jonathan Williams*

Proposed: Monica Darnborough; Seconded: Hilary Davies

Secretary: Position unfilled (Joanna Tomlinson standing down)

Treasurer: *Patrick Haighton*

Proposed: Jack Joseph; Seconded: Jane Mackay

Business Manager: *Penny Prior*

Proposed: Helen Audaer; Seconded: William Longland

Librarian: *Mark Graver*

Proposed: Jacky Erwtaman; Seconded: Jane Mackay

Publicity: *Martin Humphreys*

Proposed: Rose Chandler; Seconded: Hilary Davies

Webmaster: *Richard Grafen*

Proposed: Ian Williamson; Seconded: Laurie Grace

Soprano Representative: *Kate Goulden*

Proposed: Jacky Erwtaman; Seconded: Hilary Davies

Alto Representative: *Julie Dyg*

Proposed: Helen Audaer; Seconded: Penny Prior

Tenor Representative: *Philip Pratley pro tem* (Alastair Tolley standing down)

Bass Representative: *Daniel Lambauer*

Proposed: William Longland; Seconded: Simon Lawson

Jubilee Signatories: *Ian Williamson, Ken Holmes and Penny Prior*

Proposed: Laurie Grace; Seconded: Sam Foley

Discussion:

Tours: Separate questionnaires had been sent out to those who had and had not been on the Vienna Tour with some helpful results. Most people had enjoyed the Vienna Tour. The balance of voices had been the main problem.

It took about 2 years to organise an overseas tour, a bit less for a UK tour. One suggestion was to repeat the Vienna Tour, in the same format, but with a new programme.

Re-auditions and standards: Paul's plan to re-audition the whole choir was welcomed by members. It was worth having a smaller choir to enjoy singing more; to reset the standard; a few voices affected enjoyment, recruitment and ticket sales; to get out of the habit of being a "last minute" choir. Some pointers at the beginning of next term would help people prepare for the auditions.

Repertoire: The Macmillan planned for Spring 2017 was no longer possible. In order to raise more from concerts it would be sensible to have one crowd pleasing concert a year at a cheaper venue, with each member selling a minimum of 4-6 tickets. Confidence was key for both enjoyment and to sell tickets. There was a suggestion to have a party piece for unexpected moments (as in the Tour) and for encores. From next year the choice of repertoire depended on where the choir stood following the re-auditions in the autumn term.

Rehearsals: Concern was expressed that rehearsals were not enjoyable at present. To retain singers, particularly younger ones, rehearsals had to be enjoyable. Adults did not want to be treated like children at the end of a hard day's work.

Rehearsal Venue: Paul and some others were unhappy with the venue. Others were content with it: it compared favourably with St Stephen's and St Matthew's. A suggestion was made to use St Peter's church for a change even if it is reverberant and has no chairs. Jo had looked at all the possibilities around Whitehall and beyond only a year ago. The only possible alternatives then were the Abbey Centre at 34 Great Smith Street and St Saviour's Parish Hall, Pimlico. Both had poor pianos and other drawbacks. All other venues were fully used on Tuesdays, and most other days, or would not accommodate a choir of our size. If the venue were too far from Whitehall people would leave. Did we still own a piano? - possibly, but we needed to find it! Work would be undertaken on this during the summer.

Recruitment: This tied in with subscriptions of course, but was underway with a new flier available which would be emailed around and contacts with universities being pursued. Please tell Jonathan of any useful contacts (Katherine Herzberg would contact Schola Cantorum of Oxford). Patrick's list from the competition could be used.

Subscriptions, Bursaries and Fundraising: Sam Foley asked how the extra costs of a new rehearsal venue/bursaries/smaller choir would be funded. There used to be a pool of 75 singers which had dropped to the 55 mark this year.

Patrick said that reduced or free subscriptions had no negative impact on finances as such, but that Bursary places would impact. A bursary place would have to be £500 at the very minimum.

Deb Dowdall cautioned against completely free places as that could lead to complacency and lack of commitment. Reduced subscriptions should be very clearly shown on the website. She thought the Bursary programme was a good idea: it would encourage music students and give them welcome extra funds, gave the choir tougher credibility and was a wonderful thing to refer to grant making trusts and outside funding. She would find the details of the Grosvenor Estate grant making trust.

It was agreed to ask the Jubilee Fund to underwrite the costs of a Bursary Programme and to ask for donations from both the choir and audiences (which could be Gift Aided)

for a trial period of one year. Patrick said that the Jubilee Fund could give £1,500 of support for the scheme.

Subscription Rates 2016/17: Ian Williamson proposed and Kate Hand seconded that the full subscription rate for 2016/17 remain at £240, with the other rates relating to that.

Other fundraising ideas:

- concerts in aid of a particular charity
- Sponsorship from the Plumber's Arms for example: organise a summer or Christmas event there (Jacky Chang happy to help) to aid this.
- Re the quartet for singing Christmas carols - we could easily provide that if that is what they wanted.
- Approach watering holes close to concert venues and offer them advertising in our programmes for say £25.

Any Other Business:

- Jonathan Williams thanked Jo Tomlinson for her work as secretary over the past 3 years and gave her a present from the choir [thank you everyone! Ed].
- Ian Williamson, on behalf of the refreshments team, was happy to take away rubbish at the end of rehearsals, but asked that it be dry rubbish: he'd prefer leftover drinks down the sink and not his trousers!
- Following the recent government changes BIS no longer existed. Our President, Sir Martin Donnelly, was now joint Permanent Secretary for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and acting Permanent Secretary at the Department for International Trade. We continue to have no representative in the choir from the BIS or indeed BEIS.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm

