

Minutes of the 2016/17 Annual General Meeting of the Whitehall Choir held at St Peter's Eaton Square, Tuesday, 11 July 2017, 6.30pm

The Minutes of the previous season's AGM were unanimously accepted as a true record.

Secretary's report

Breaking with choir tradition of reporting on the season's activities, Ruth Eastman concentrated on the major event of 2016/17, namely Paul Spicer's last with us as Music Director and the recruitment and appointment of his successor, Joanna Tomlinson, whom she welcomed on behalf of the choir. She thanked Jonathan and Patrick for the hard work that went into recruiting Paul's successor, while tending to the day-to-day running of the choir, and praised Paul for the inspiration and musical wisdom he provided us during his 17 years with us. Thanks were also extended to Martin Humphreys for co-ordinating the redesign of our website and to Patrick's wife, Jacky, and grand-daughter, Olivia, for voluntarily catering Paul's farewell party. As the author of these minutes, may I also, after the event, thank Jacky Erwteman for taking the minutes so clearly and efficiently during the period from September to May when there was no Choir Secretary and for the most recent committee meeting when yours truly was unable to attend. Apologies, Jacky, and thanks!

The Secretary's full report is attached as a PDF. No comments arose.

Treasurer's report

Patrick Houghton gave a succinct and thought-provoking account of where we are financially. To quote from his report, '**The good news is** we are not a choir without resources. We have £20,000 in the Jubilee Fund, we have appointed a new Music Director, we can afford to invest in a new website and public presence. **The bad news is** this year has been challenging financially. We will show a deficit of about £3,000 and we had to have the Jubilee Fund underwrite the website development. **Why?** There are too few active members so subscription income is down £4,000, but an emphasis on cost containment has helped. **Specifically:** The SJSS concert had too small an audience – we should have promoted the Mozart rather than the Blackford. Our St Martin-in-

the Fields concert in January cost an extra £2,000. The Come & Sing [last October] ran a small deficit. The Carols did, too, with a small paying audience of 51. **Implications:** With numbers of members and audiences up, the financial model works. Subscriptions should stay the same. We need to attract new members, and more audience – please think creatively about how best we might do so. Please help with fundraising – tea, Amazon, Hyperion CDs, Easyfundraising. Please think how we might best generate new funds for the Jubilee Fund.’

Patrick added that a **detailed financial report would follow** and if anyone wanted a specific aspect to be covered they were asked let him know. **He finished by saying, ‘I formally propose that the full rate should be £240, unchanged,** and that the existing subscription categories for reduced subscriptions remain as they are.’ Lesley Raymond seconded. The proposal was accepted unanimously. ‘A vote for Christmas,’ quipped Paul.

The Treasurer’s full report is attached as a PDF. No comments arose. Action PH, who, post-meeting, notes: A more detailed financial report will follow, and some analyses will be presented to the September committee meeting. As soon as the year’s financial transactions are concluded, probably after the bank statement in mid-September that follows the 31 August finish of the year, the accounts will be finalised and the annual report drafted. It will be circulated to the choir for review, before being submitted to our independent auditor. Once the auditor has concluded his examination and any adjustments are made, the finished version will be submitted to the choir at a Special General Meeting, to approve its submission to the Charity Commission, as our public record.

Music Director’s report

Paul described his last season with us as ‘a good one with lots of variety and some excellent singing’ but he could still see some ‘weaknesses and the need for new recruits in all voice parts’. He said how well we sang Richard Blackford’s *Mirror of Perfection* and how thrilled the composer was with our performance. The Bach concert at St Martin-in-the-Fields was a ‘voyage of real discovery’ and ‘truly memorable’, while The Lenten concert at St Margaret’s Westminster, including the Duruflé *Requiem*, which we ‘sang with passion’, and John Sanders’ *Reproaches*, showed weaknesses ‘in blend and balance of parts despite being essentially a successful evening’. The year finished on a high note with Paul’s farewell concert and fulsome thanks were given to the various chairmen of the choir with whom he had worked – Heather Atkinson,

Sam Foley, Graham Hand and Jonathan Williams – as well as wonderful treasurers – Ken Holmes and Patrick Haighton – excellent secretaries [ahem] and the many others who help the choir. Finally he thanked the accompanists during his music directorship, citing Ian Tindale as ‘best of all’. His final words? ‘Go forth and prosper – and multiply!’

The Music Director’s full report is attached as a PDF.

Motions from choir members

Ian Williamson proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee. He also acknowledged the extra work this season that the Choir Officers had to carry out in selecting a new Music Director.

Mark Graver proposed a vote of thanks to Jacky Erwtaman for volunteering in the absence of the Secretary and keeping accurate minutes (see also Secretary’s report, above).

Election of the Committee and new Jubilee Fund Signatories

The election of the Committee was taken as two blocks. Positions in both were unanimously accepted.

Elections to the Committee for the 2016/17 Season

Chairman: *Jonathan Williams*

Proposer: Lesley Raymond **Second:** Laurie Grace

Treasurer: *Patrick Haighton*

Proposer: Jacky Erwtaman **Second:** William Longland

Secretary: *Ruth Eastman*

Proposer: Graham Hand **Second:** Sue Forrest

Business Manager: *tbc*

Librarian: *Alison Williams*

Proposer: Mark Graver **Second:** Jacky Erwtaman

Publicity: Martin Humphreys

Proposer: Mark Graver **Second:** Laurie Grace

Webmaster: Richard Grafen

Proposer: Malcolm Todd **Seconder:** William Longland

Ex-DTI/BIS now BEIS or DIT Rep: *tbc*, noting that Secretary for International Trade is also President of the Board of Trade

Soprano Rep: *Kate Goulden*

Proposer: Gill Carruthers **Seconder:** Deb Dowdall

Alto Rep: *Jane Mackay*

Proposer: Julie Dyg **Seconder:** Helen Audaer

Tenor Rep: *Philip Pratley*

Proposer: Alastair Tolley **Seconder:** Graham Hand

Bass Rep: *Daniel Lambauer*

Proposer: William Longland **Seconder:** Jack Joseph

Jubilee Signatories: *Ian Williamson, Jacky Erwteman, Mark Graver*

Joint Proposer: Penny Prior **Joint Seconder:** Helen Audaer

Jonathan thanked Philip Pratley for his work as Returning Officer.

Jubilee Fund

Ian Williamson spoke about its history and continuing importance. It was founded at a time when finances were tough, during our Golden Jubilee in 1993, hence the name. To help replenish the coffers members of the choir got together and organised auctioned promises and sponsored walks, and £20,000 was raised! This money was just the financial cushion needed and would mean we would not 'go to the wall' in the event of a bad audience; increased financial security would enable us to take more risks. The Jubilee Fund also would, and does, provide funds for development. The Signatories have to ensure that any significant use of the Fund is supported by the members. Philip Pratley proposed a vote of thanks to Ken Holmes and Penny Prior. Jacky Erwteman seconded.

A word from the Chairman

Jonathan began by thanking Philip Pratley for his work as Returning Officer. He then gave notice, very sadly, that this is his last year as Chairman. He added that Patrick Houghton might not want to remain in post as Treasurer 'for ever either – maybe he will do another one or two

years'. We will need to think about his successor and, more urgently, he is looking for volunteers to create programme and flyers because as chairman he should not have to do be responsible for them.

Any other business

- **Jo Tomlinson** said our last concert was 'a notch higher' than the one she attended in March and described our singing as 'classy'. Alluding to her new position as Music Director, she said that twelve years ago she sang with Paul as a student at the Royal College of Music Chamber Choir. Little did she think that one day she would be filling his shoes! She was very honoured to be succeeding Paul.

Looking to the future, she said that the **Brahms Requiem**, which we will be performing in March 2018, will help us work on balance. Next summer we shall be exploring American music, including Bernstein's **Chichester Psalms**. As to the 2018/2019 season, Jo doesn't want to plan that until she 'gets the measure of us'. She's considering a rhythmical piece and welcomes ideas.

In terms of **membership** we do need to look at this. Just 25 more people, Jo said, would make a huge difference – 'that's just half a person each!' Some members from her other choir might join us, too. She urges every Whitehall Choir member to ask people to sing.

- Jonathan urged everyone to put the **Open Rehearsal on 12 September** in our diaries. The rehearsal will be at St Peter's Eaton Square as usual but in the church not the parish hall, with wine and refreshments afterwards upstairs in the hall. **Jo added** that it will be a sociable occasion so people can get to know each other. Ian Williamson suggested name badges would be a good idea. Action RE

We also need to put the **Voice Check** in our diaries, Saturday 23 September, at The Music Studios in Marylebone Lane, <http://themusicstudios.co.uk>. Kate Goulden will be organising a rota when we return in September and more information will follow. Jo pointed out that this is not an audition. She wants to find out whether people are in the right voice part and to identify possible soloists. She'll be looking at the quality of colour and range and maybe she can give technical tips. She suggests an online sign-up. (JW subsequently offered to do the rota and one has since been circulated.)

- **Recruitment video featuring Jo.** This is on our website and Facebook and Twitter platforms. In it Jo urges people to come to the Open Rehearsal and join the choir! Jonathan thanked Martin for organising the video.

- **New website.** Jonathan thanked Martin for all hard his work on co-ordinating this. (Went live in early August. News of it posted on our Facebook and Twitter platforms.)

- **Recruitment flyer.** Jonathan is producing this and says it will be distributed when the new website goes live. (Flyers have been printed and distributed, and the eflyer was posted on our social media platforms in August.)

- **Recruitment plan.** Martin plans to post printed flyers to Morley College for summer music courses and Westminster Music Library who will also put up a poster free. He plans to email contacts in London's music colleges and to continue targeting websites including Making Music, British Choirs on the Net, Gerontius, National Association of Choirs and Singers in London. He also suggests mentioning our reduced subscription rates for younger members, full-time students of music colleges and leavers of music colleges. (All has happened or, in the case of emails, is happening. RE will plug reduced rates on our social media platforms.)

- **Raising the choir profile**

- **Jo suggested we get our flyers up in music shops** such as Chimes and Chappells. (Martin has sent flyers to three branches of Chimes.)
- We need to remember the large **Whitehall/Civil Service presence** locally and **large organisations nearby** such as Google, but they will be moving. (Martin has since contacted Google, who said they will post our eflyer on their staff recruitment board.)
- Deb Dowdall said she will try to get our message out to a contact at the Arts Desk of **The Telegraph** [based in Victoria]. William Longland suggested **City Lit** (Martin says they don't take flyers). We should also look to recruiting from **local church choirs**. Gill Carruthers suggested the **Londonist** website (Martin has posted).
- Ian Williamson said he will put info on **event websites**.
- Patrick Houghton suggests that we put **tickets on Eventbrite**. This would streamline ticketing and also give us exposure, but it is not

an option when we sing at St John's Smith Square as they run their own box office.

- Other ideas were a mention on the **Radio 3 Breakfast Show**, getting Jo interviewed on the radio, perhaps on *In Tune* (maybe Ian Tindale has contacts there) or **The Choir**.

- **Auditions.** Kate Goulden asked if these would be the same under Jo. Ruth added that the very idea can scare prospective members and maybe Jo could outline the procedure so new members would know what to expect and not be frightened? Jo is going to talk to Kate to describe the audition process. Action JT/KG

- **Choir President.** Jonathan says our current one, Sir Martin Donnelly has now retired but remains our President until a new appointment is made. Historically our links with the Department of Trade (in its various incarnations) were cemented through the role of the Permanent Secretary as our President. In recent years, however, the support we receive from the Department (including printing services and rehearsal venue) has declined so having the Permanent Secretary as our President is not so pivotal. However, as the Whitehall Choir, we should not lose sight of our Government connections. Lesley Raymond asked what the **role of the choir President** actually is. 'Someone who can open doors,' Jo said. Sandy Jones suggested we have more than one. Paul said the President at his Birmingham Bach Choir is amazing. Very involved. Jonathan invites members to email him at chairman@whitehallchoir.co.uk with **possible ideas for a new choir President**. Jo pointed out that it can be easier to approach someone you know. There was a suggestion to ask Paul and maybe have Richard Blackford as a patron? There is no choir patron at the moment.

- **Choir tours.** What ideas do people have for future ones? Jo asked about costs. D-i-y booking is cheaper than using a tour company, JW said, but someone has to do it! The earliest opportunity for our next one would be 2019. (May is the usual month.) Sandy Jones suggested a show of hands for a tour. The majority was in favour. **Repertoire** to be decided, based on **Jo's 2-3 year plan** for the overall choir programme. (Typically, tour repertoires are based on the previous term's music.)

- **Amazon and EasyFundraising.** Kate Goulden asked Patrick if he could give us more information. He said he would send it round to Part Reps again. **Amazon**, he said, is a matter of telling everyone you know about it – (there's an Amazon link on our website which anyone can access, in or out of the choir, and buying through it generates a small

percentage commission to the choir!). There is a link to **EasyFundraising** on the SupportUs page of the website. (Online purchasing of a wide range of products including insurance, travel, beauty, entertainment and retail from a wealth of brands from BT, John Lewis/Waitrose and Selfridges to Made.com and TK Maxx attracts donations paid into the choir's account every time you shop. The amounts can be fairly significant. To use, explore the link and log on, selecting Whitehall Choir as your cause!)

- **Choir database and emailed newsletters.** Deb Dowdall said that it is possible that the invitation to choir members to give email addresses for our database could become a breach of the revised Data Protection Act if the recipients are unaware. For those whose email addresses we hold already, we need to make sure they're happy to receive emails from us. In future, people will have to opt in rather than opt out. Deb said she will help Patrick. On our website, we can have a join our email list button for people who want to opt in. (Following the meeting, Martin requested this from the website designer and there is a 'Subscribe' button on the home page. Deb and Patrick spoke post-meeting about the DPA.)

- **New Members' pack.** Gaby Molloy asked if we could have a New Members' pack to cover things like passwords, dress codes, concert protocol etc. Jo suggested there could be a standardised email to cover this. Action KG, who has subsequently prepared one in consultation with Jo and it will be discussed at the September 2017 committee meeting.

- **Come & Sing.** Gill Carruthers asked if we will have one soon. Jonathan replied not yet because they cost money and recently we showed a loss (see Treasurer's report). Jo says it's on her radar but not yet. January/February seems the best time.

- **Joshua score.** Gaby asked which edition we would be using. Jo said an email would come round soon and it did. (The Novello edition is being used and Alison has informed the choir via part reps that fresh copies will be available in September at £12 per copy, urging payment in advance online, preferably, or cash or cheque at rehearsal.)

The meeting closed at 8.15.