

Chairman's report for Whitehall Choir AGM on Tuesday 2 July 2019 – Philip Pratley

It's a great privilege as well as a genuine pleasure to be able to follow Jo Tomlinson this evening in reflecting on a remarkable season. Our performances have been memorable for entirely the right reasons. An email I received from one of our fellow members who is on holiday this week caught the mood perfectly. It says:

"I thought I'd pass on some comments from my guests last night. They were completely bowled over by our performance. They realised that some of the music must have been very difficult to learn and they said that our intonation and diction were outstanding – they could hear every word. We also looked like we were enjoying ourselves. That really is a triumph for Jo. Warm words also for Ian's playing. It was such an enjoyable evening. I am really very proud to have been a part of it."

I feel that too, and I hope you do.

This is also my opportunity to thank on behalf of us all those who make sure we are able to have such an ambitious and successful season as that we are now concluding, and give us the confidence to develop further in the seasons ahead. I won't run a complete list of individuals, but as I'm sure we all appreciate we rely on those who run our library, business management, our catering crew week by week and at our post-concert parties and open rehearsals here in St Peter's, the publicity we depend on and those working our on-line presence, the programmes designed and edited with such care, those who welcome our new members, and more recently those who introduced our 75 Club raffle. That isn't a comprehensive list, but I hope it gives you a feel for the spread of the work which goes into running our Choir.

We are incredibly fortunate in those on the committee and beyond who give so much of their time to all that goes into running our choir and giving us, for example, a season as

successful as this one has been. And it has been a genuine delight to welcome Antonia Romeo as our President.

In particular, I'd like to pay tribute, as Jo has done, to Ruth who is stepping down as our Secretary and to Patrick for his work as our Treasurer, as we today bring to the AGM the transition of handing over the Treasurer's post. They have given so much of their time to our Choir, each of them over an extensive period. And over the period of their appointments there have been a number of changes, which mean that our governance arrangements now have to incorporate, for example, the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) introduced last year, and of changes required by the Charity Commissioners, as well as some legal regulations under the aegis of the local authority.

At the same time, although unconnected with the legal changes, some of the requirements laid on us by the venues have changed. As those venues face increasing financial pressures, more of the management tasks for our concerts devolve on us, particularly in the detail of liaison in the weeks leading to a concert and management of the event on the day itself. Within our Choir, we have also been able to move to and take advantage of on-line banking, and we are now benefit from being able to sell tickets on Eventbrite.

All of this has been managed in such a way as to welcome new members in all parts, and by performing a series of wonderfully successful concerts. The concert with our friends from Vienna was logistically fiendish, musically demanding and a triumph.

It has, though, meant a great deal of additional work as both the Treasurer and Secretary roles have become more complicated than they were, the burden of which has been taken by Patrick and Ruth.

Given the very wide range of tasks that Patrick has taken as Treasurer, we have been fortunate that during his tenure we have not required more people from the membership to support the work of running our Choir.

However, this does inevitably make the handover more complex.

So this evening, as we begin the handover of the appointment of Treasurer, we set up a structure of Treasurer and Treasurer(Elect).

Our approach is therefore based on identifying the core role around which the incoming Treasurer's appointment will be structured, and at the same time identify the options for managing the other tasks. This is detail which the Committee will consider in arriving at the options and a recommendation. All of these tasks remain vital to the smooth running of our Choir. Our purpose will be to arrive at a balanced configuration across the Committee and beyond, ensuring an appropriate governance arrangement for all the tasks.

As part of that handover arrangement we ask the AGM today to adopt as Trustees during the transition: the Chair, the Treasurer and the Treasurer(Elect).

So, as we embark on the next stage, the Committee will be considering the options for configuring the posts in the way we manage the Choir. We also now have an opportunity of considering how we might adapt to ways in which newly available information sharing tools could assist us in running our Choir. We are not, at this stage, rewriting any of the current posts, nor of specifying new role profiles .

What we are doing now though is asking you as members to think about whether you can assist in the running of our Choir.

In particular we will be looking to a new Secretary, and as Jo has said, both she and I would be delighted to discuss this, maybe over coffee, maybe by phone. It's also becoming apparent that the increasing demands of event management leading up to and on our concert days is likely to feature in our thinking, so please do say if this is an area in which you may be able to help. My contact details are on the email with the agenda for this AGM.

We have already started this process. For those who like such things, the first pass analysis is on 3 flip charts with different coloured 'post-its'. The Committee will now be able to consider in detail and make its recommendation to the Choir.

Our thanks to Sarah Rollinson for accepting from the proposer and seconder the nomination for becoming Treasurer(Elect), on which we will be voting shortly. We haven't received any other nominations so I hope I am not pre-empting this by mentioning Sarah.

In short, the complexity of running the choir has been increased by the recent additional requirements, changes in processes, and event management demands.

We are grateful for all that Patrick and Ruth have contributed. We now take on the final part of the transition process whereby the core roles of Treasurer and Secretary can be handed over, while we also move to considering how most efficiently and effectively to run the Choir to deliver our obligations and to manage the logistics of our concerts, to realise the exciting future Jo described.

I hope you feel that we have arrived at a balanced approach in order to effect the handover of the key posts, and that we are making arrangements by which to hand over the burden of work Patrick and Ruth have carried out on our behalf.

I conclude particularly by offering our warmest thanks to Jo for all that she brings to us and for a season of such vibrant concerts. As I invite Ruth and Patrick to give their reports, I unashamedly return to the email with which I started, because it does summarise our exciting ambition to be a top London choir:

“It was such an enjoyable evening. I am really very proud to be a part of it.”

Thank you

(Ends)