

Whitehall Choir
Minutes of the Committee Meeting, 26 April 2018, 6.30pm,
Park Room, Royal Over-Seas League, Over-Seas House, Park Place,
St James's Street, London SW1A 1LR

Present: Jonathan Williams (Chair), Joanna Tomlinson (Music Director), Patrick Houghton (Treasurer), Ruth Eastman (Secretary), Kate Goulden (Soprano Rep), Jane Mackay (Alto Rep), Daniel Lambauer (Bass Rep), Alison Williams (Librarian), Martin Humphreys (Publicity Manager), Richard Grafen (Webmaster)

Apology: Philip Pratley (Tenor Rep) – called away at last minute for work, hence change of venue, kindly and swiftly organised by him. Thank you, Philip!

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action
Minutes of last meeting, actions, and matters arising not covered elsewhere	<p>1 Minutes One amendment from MH in the Competitive Review. In the sentence starting 'Of the 13 choirs, five had patrons' this should have been three not five (there were two named presidents and they got put together with patrons somehow in the original report. Noted and amended.</p> <p>2 Actions None outstanding.</p>	
Update on membership	<p>We have 5 new members: 1 sop, 2 altos, 1 tenor and 1 bass, so a good spread, says JT. The choir is up to 67. The ideal maximum used to be 70 but we can push that up to 75 (65 used to be a problem at St John's Smith Square but it's not any more). We are, though, pretty much at our limit for altos. (There had been 2 new sops but one of them can no longer commit because of a change in family circumstances.)</p>	
Financial update for 2017-18 season, forward financial plan	<p>PH circulated figures in advance and reported on the current state.</p> <p>Concerts & Events 2017-18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We've paid all the bills for the Brahms concert at St James's Piccadilly, leaving just a small deficit. The figures differ from our budget because we hadn't foreseen professional soloists including an extra pianist. Although we didn't make the small return forecast we <i>did</i> sell significantly more tickets than anticipated: 117 via the choir, 48 online and 41 on the door – and in percentage terms more high-priced tickets were sold on the door. • If we sell well at St Peter's in June we should be able to make a decent return. What isn't in that budget is the party so we'll need to ask for donations. <p>Cash flow 2017-18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The projected surplus of £4,000 on the Income and Expenditure is helped by the insurance claim from the Vienna tour (as a result of two unavoidable cancellations). That figure (£4,000) is therefore a little high because it's bringing forward money written off last year so. Our aim is to achieve an actual surplus of £2,500 this season; we probably won't achieve that quite but we shouldn't be far off. In terms of cash, based on returns from our last concert and the insurance payment, we won't have to ask the Jubilee Fund for cash towards our next concert and we would also be able to pay them back around £2,000. 	

	<p>PH was thanked for his work on the insurance because it had been slightly complicated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For our June concert it's not enough to beat the budget because our expenses will be higher than anticipated, so we need both a slightly increased audience and income. • Our £240 subscription fee can remain unchanged. <p>PH will recommend this at the AGM with the committee's agreement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the Creation concert he recommends top ticket price of £35. The feeling was people would pay that price there but it's important to have mid-range seats as well – along with the third-tier seats. • In terms of budgeting PH would like a Come & Sing or a workshop. Either event should be paid for specifically and should therefore be self-financing with minimum effect on the overall financial results. • MH asked about the £375 for publicity for the Bernstein concert; it's for a mention in This is London, printing of flyers and Concert Diary. • The two soloists for the Brahms were £400 each (both professionals). This compares with the net £200 cost of a Josephine Baker Trust-backed RAM soloist: £350 less £150 grant. The JBT now supports one concert per year. 	
<p>Review of St James's Piccadilly concert, 22 March 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JT has already given feedback to the choir in rehearsal. She added: 'It's all going in the right direction but there are things to work on.' • Lis Warren was in the audience and said lots more people were looking but asked why so few people smiled during the applause clapping, which her husband had commented on in the past ('Music is theatre'); she also commented that different heights look odd, particularly at the front. Tenors sounded better than ever! • MH was in the audience and said sops sounded flat in the first Brahms piece but that didn't continue and by the end were sounding 'superb, absolutely superb'. He expected to see more people looking and noticed one tenor who emoted visibly. • JT agreed some people never look up despite all the work we do, but doing something from memory this term might help that! • PH said the student recording (on the members' page) might flag up weak spots, e.g. jagged starts and ends of phrases in the men's piece. The only flatness in the recording, said JT, which didn't totally capture the what was going on in terms of harmonics and everything else, was in the 7th movement of the Brahms. • KG reported that her brother's comment was: 'The Whitehall Choir has arrived.' He also noticed better discipline of walking on and a more professional presentation. A lot more people were watching, not everybody. He loved the sound, loved the tuning. • DL's audience included some professional musicians who absolutely loved the Brahms but weren't sure the best singers were in front in certain sections. • A bass told JW that his audience felt a whole concert of German music was quite difficult because they have to read the translation. The same person said the choir seemed to take a disproportionate amount of time to learn the pronunciation. JT agrees it was a serious programme 	

<p>Review of St James's Piccadilly concert (cont'd)</p>	<p>but if you sing this music you have to get the German right; hopefully when we sing Fanny Mendelssohn in November the work has been done now.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christopher Herrick [conductor before Paul Spicer] who was in the audience didn't think we pronounced the beginning of 'Im Herbst' correctly. • Asked what we still need to work on (mentioned earlier) JT said: 'Sound quality is improving but still has a way to go, watching and always being together. Crispness of text will keep improving, I'm sure. The German wasn't perfect, I like things to be perfect, but it was a good choice for the choir technically with lots of long lines to work on.' • JW was impressed by the afternoon rehearsal. Often it's devoted to picking up scratchy bits and struggling with the venue but this time it was very purposeful and enjoyable. A sense of really getting ourselves together for a concert. • JT said you could tell it was a good concert by the smiles on everybody's faces as they came off stage. 	
<p>American music concert, St Peter's Eaton Square, 28 June 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Porch party will have an American theme: popcorn, pretzels (no peanuts!!). JW will speak to Ian Williamson and tell him what the brief is. RE has a local shop which sells a variety of interesting nibbles, including blue corn crisps, and will take pictures and show to Ian; also offered to buy if necessary. Napkins in red, white & blue. MH has an American flag! PH will order wine from Majestic and bins and ice to cool the wine. Donations will be invited. • Rehearsal time: 2.45 for 3-6pm rehearsal and 20-minute break at 4.30. • Parking for harpist, percussionist, AW & PH to be arranged with the verger. • Concert finishes at roughly 8.50pm followed by party. 	<p>JW RE MH PH</p>
<p>Invitation to perform in Brandenburg Sinfonia series at St Martin-in-the-Fields</p>	<p>Bob Porter of the Brandenburg Sinfonia has invited us to take part in his series in the autumn and has suggested a repertoire of either the Vivaldi Gloria, Mozart Requiem or Fauré Requiem. The Mozart is JT's first choice. We'd have to pay the conductor's and accompanist's fees and for rehearsal time and music. Bob Porter would provide and pay for the venue, orchestra and publicity (although obviously we can still promote via social media). It would involve a Saturday rehearsal followed by a Tuesday. JT thinks we could allocate a normal term-time rehearsal, so there would be no extra cost if the Saturday rehearsal was a Come & Sing event. It's rare for the whole choir to participate in these events, so we'd need to know we had a balanced choir and to find out from Bob Porter if there's a number limit. We'd also need to find out if he books and pays for the soloists and available concert dates. It's a Tuesday taken out in a term of all-new repertoire so there are risks and there could be extra costs with a Come & Sing but the committee is broadly in favour of exploring the idea and going ahead with it, as it raises our profile and is a very nice thing to do. JT and PH will be in touch with Bob Porter.</p>	<p>JT/PH</p>

Update on fundraising, President/Patrons and Friends (cont'd)	<p>publicity, we'd have to check we're happy with their company ethos. Also, are we asking sponsorship for a whole season or a particular concert? The general view is to ask for sponsorship for one big concert and therefore to start with <i>The Creation</i>, with an option of first refusal for sponsorship in the future. That will be our recommendation to Lucilla and Bridget.</p> <p>2) President/Patrons MH reminded us that in the competitive review only three of the 13 choirs he looked at had patrons and just two had presidents; that's not to say we shouldn't be doing it. To define the difference, presidents are a figurehead, not directly involved in activity for the benefit of the choir but a terrific thing to have on the website and programmes and when we did our Young Composer Competition, for example, Sir Martin Donnelly presented the prize. Patrons have a more active involvement using their influence for the benefit of the choir; permission to sing in a cathedral, for example, from a bishop. From the competitive summary the patrons split into four main areas: music; media; local diocese and civics; politics. We could brainstorm in small groups, or an easier way might be to ask the choir if they know people as an approach from someone who has previous links to an individual is likely to work better. We shouldn't forget our Civil Service links (for the president). Jonathan will contact Sir Martin Donnelly to see if he would like to continue as president or to nominate a successor. Martin will ask choir to email suggestions for patrons.</p> <p>3) Friends The competitive study pointed out that very little income is generated by Friends schemes. There are still Friends at Whitehall Choir, however, and we need to revisit the structure and possibly the scheme itself.</p>	<p>JW</p> <p>JW</p> <p>JW</p>
Update on committee roles, AGM elections	<p>Members of the committee were asked if they are happy to stand again for election. DL has time pressure because of work so would step aside if someone else came along. KG might feel happier if someone else could look after new members; this doesn't have to be a committee member. RE has less time for social media, a volunteer will be sought. On the website front, Izas Ozerin, who works in the BBC digital department, is helping RG. Patrick is re-doing the committee job descriptions including the Business Manager role which remains vacant. JT expressed her appreciation and has enjoyed working with the committee.</p> <p>Update on chairman nominees Some people have expressed interest and some people have been nominated. No one so far seems desperate to take it on. JW is going to talk about what being the chairman has meant to him at the next rehearsal.</p>	<p>PH</p>
Concert dress	<p>Ladies' concert dress A member who owns no long black dress/skirt wonders if concert dress could be knee-length or longer and worn with black tights. JT repeats choir protocol that ladies need to wear a long black dress, skirt or smart trousers. Black dresses can be had cheaply at Primark. She will speak about it at the next rehearsal.</p>	
AOB	<p>Concessions for children? Not many children come to our concerts and the decision was no concessions.</p>	

<p>Future committee meetings this season and next (all in Committee Room, St Peter's Eaton Square, except for AGMs)</p>	<p>Remainder of this season: Wednesday 30 May 2018 AGM: Tuesday 3 July 2018 (Parish Hall) Next season: Thursday 13 September 2018 (to be rearranged) Friday 9 November 2018 Thursday 17 January 2019 Friday 15 March 2019 Thursday 9 May 2019 Thursday 6 June 2019 AGM: Tuesday 2 July 2019 (Parish Hall)</p>	
---	---	--

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.