

WIMBLEDON CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 1st October 2018 at St Mark's Church, St Mark's Place, Wimbledon

The meeting began at 19.30 with Sarah Hendry in the chair and approximately 125 members in attendance.

Briefing on the concert hall project by Anthony Wilkinson.

Anthony Wilkinson thanked the choir as they are very supportive of the hall and hoped that we will all be able to benefit as the hall would be the home of the Wimbledon International Music Festival and the choir.

Frank Gehry had been engaged as the architect – he designed the Guggenheim building in Bilbao, the building itself raises 4 billion euros for the area due to tourism so it is expected that a local building designed by Gehry would also raise money locally.

There are monthly meetings with the council. Major fundraisers are involved and John Gilhooly, Director of Wigmore Hall and David Jones from the London Jazz Festival are also advising.

The hall is hoped to open in September 2023 with an impressive programme.

Anthony invited members of the choir who had not already done so to sign a pledge of support.

Questions and answers included:

Will the Simon Rattle concert hall project impact on the Wimbledon hall? No: there is room for both as the Rattle building is at the Barbican and they will complement each other.

Will the hall have rehearsal space? The hall will have a second room for rehearsals.

As it is to have an educational purpose, will it have a teaching room? It can't be a teaching space as there is insufficient room. However, St Andrew's Church near the site wishes to become more involved in the community and could potentially be used for rehearsal opportunities.

The planned concert hall site will become available in 2019.

Sarah said that in the 2024 season we would bear the hall in mind and if Anthony needed help persuading councillors to support the project, then please contact us and we would help.

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 2nd October 2017

Approval of these minutes was proposed by Vicky Isaacs and seconded by Gillian Clarke. The meeting approved the minutes. The minutes were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

Matters Arising

Lighting in St Marks was an ongoing issue. The secretary would meet with St Marks to resolve the issue.

Music Director's Report

Neil thanked everyone for a superb year – there was tremendous energy every Monday and the standard of the choir was going up. He could tell that people were listening and acting on his feedback. He was really delighted with how the choir was performing.

Neil thanked the committee for their superb work as well as the voice reps, John Bright and Deborah Raymond who were stepping down, Vicky (Librarian) and Helen (concert manager). Neil also thanked Sarah Burston and Michael Higgins.

Neil noted that his BBC commitments (2 nights a week – every Friday and either Monday or Tuesday) meant that at times he could not be at Monday rehearsals. When WCS is preparing more challenging music, he aimed to prioritise his attendance.

Neil was looking forward to returning to the RFH during the season and the 500th anniversary of the death of Da Vinci should help generate a lot of publicity for the concert. Cadogan Hall was proving a good venue where we can put on medium sized oratorios.

In relation to the new concert hall, Neil warned that we would need to be ready artistically and maintain consistently high standards. We would have to justify securing performance opportunities artistically and not just because it was next door.

Chairman's Report

Sarah noted that the season that ended in June had been very enjoyable. The programme had been entirely new for the choir apart from the carols, which had been demanding but everyone had risen to the challenge.

Israel in Egypt had been enjoyed by all and the audience reception had been vociferous.

The summer choral jazz concert had also met with a very excited audience response. Sarah noted that some members of the choir had dropped out before this concert and had therefore missed a wonderful experience. She encouraged people not to lose confidence – sometimes unfamiliar music did not come together until the last few rehearsals but it always did in the end.

Unfortunately the Guildford concert had been less successful – the choir had performed brilliantly but the cathedral acoustic did not match the standard of the choir. The committee had therefore decided that we would not be singing again in Guildford. Cadogan Hall, Southwark and St Pauls will be our regular venues.

The Christmas concert was very good and we had enjoyed performing our second Christmas commission by Owain Park.

It was always valuable to receive feedback from audience members and examples were posted on the choir website. Sarah encouraged members to help us collect feedback.

Sarah thanked Neil, Michael and Sarah for making singing with the choir such a pleasure.

Looking ahead, Sarah noted that after several years in the planning, our Cecilia McDowall commission was nearly ready and we were already hoping to make a recording of it in the future.

Sarah also explained that the Merton Singfest had been set up and supported by WCS to help raise the profile of choral singing in the borough and to help support the case for the concert hall. She encouraged members to take part and have fun.

Sarah thanked the full and executive committee for what they did as well as the volunteers, including those who opened and closed the church each week and front of house.

Treasurer's Report

John Bright started by noting that after 15 years he is stepping down from the Treasurer role. He introduced the accounts and highlighted that they reflected a net loss for the season overall.

The budget for the season had included an expected loss of £9000 on the concert programme. However, two disappointing concerts (with the Royal British Legion at G Live and Elgar/Dvorak at Guildford Cathedral) had increased that to £15,000. Local ticket sales had been very poor at the cathedral (only sold 2 tickets from the box office), possibly because the local audience had already found out about the bad acoustics. Sarah added that returning to Guildford Cathedral after its refurbishment with an ambitious programme had been an experiment, both to see if we could regain our local audience there and to try out the acoustic.

John explained that it is rare that we make a profit from the concert programme. Subscriptions cover both regular costs such as rehearsals and also the deficits we expect to make on most concerts.

A question was raised about how we account for the Cecilia McDowell commission. John explained that £18,000 had previously been set aside for the commission: and the commission was nothing to do with this year's loss.

A question was raised about the reserves policy going forward. John explained that the reserves policy was to be able to cover the cost of two concerts without any income.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by John Paramore and seconded by Neil Dennis

John reported that we now have over 200 subscription paying members which generates over £30,000 income. He also noted that the choir had £40,000 reserves when John started but now has around £90,000 due to careful stewardship and management of funds. Having strong reserves allows the choir to put on ambitious concerts. He encouraged choir members to think of leaving the choir a legacy in their will!

The standard subscription was proposed to increase to £138 per person (£69 for unemployed and under 25s) for the 2018-19 season

The proposed subscription rates were proposed by John Gale and seconded by Gillian Clarke. The meeting approved the increase.

Promoting and Marketing WCS

Damian O'Malley had apologised for being unable to attend the AGM and Sarah summarised the marketing plan for the coming season on his behalf.

Choir efforts to sell tickets is very important. We are heavily dependent on our Friends and supporters to buy tickets. However, to sing to a full house in larger venues, we need to attract a wider audience. For the foreseeable future, Cadogan Hall will be our principal "home" venue outside the Borough. Performing there regularly offered us the opportunity to build up a local following and we would be leafletting the local area to the Hall to achieve that for the November concert.

We need to sell 2000 tickets for the Da Vinci concert to make the hall feel full. We already have a promotional video and we have written to a dozen companies who might wish to sponsor us.

Damian had approached University College London Psychology Department about an experiment on singing for which we might need some volunteers. If this materialised, it would raise publicity.

Sarah recorded particular thanks to those who regularly helped with marketing activity: Paula Stone for the brochure and programmes, Alan Evans for the graphic design, and Tilly Richardson, Alexandra Kedward and Linda West for their help.

Election of Executive Group and Officers

The following officers were proposed for election to the Executive Group of the Committee: -

Sarah Hendry	Chairman	Christine Evans	Vice Chairman
Tracy Sherman	General Secretary	John Gale	Treasurer
Damian O'Malley	Publicity Officer		

These elections were proposed by Alison Hughes, seconded by Amanda Moore and carried unanimously.

The following officers were proposed for election to the Committee: -

Vicky Isaacs	Librarian	Laura Stewart	Membership Secretary
--------------	-----------	---------------	----------------------

These elections were proposed by Tilly Richardson, seconded by Meg Arnott and carried unanimously.

The following Voice Representatives were proposed for election for a two-year term: -

Sharon Smith (Sop 2)	Izas Ozerin (Alto 1)
Andrew Oliver (Tenor)	Jeremy Collis (Bass 2)

These elections were proposed by Diana Tsung, seconded by Laura Stewart and carried unanimously.

Sarah thanked Diana for having been an excellent voice rep for a very long time.

Sarah then recognised the combined committee service of 35 years by John Bright and Deborah Raymond as Treasurer and Secretary. She said that everything the choir had achieved would not have been possible without them. The choir owed them a huge debt of gratitude and there was great regard in the choir for what they had done for the choir. Gifts were then presented to John and Deborah.

Any Other Business

1. For the third year running, members had been asked to submit nominations for the charity which would benefit from a collection at the end of the 2018 Christmas concert. 2 nominations were received and members voted for Carers' Support Merton.
2. A member highlighted that for those who found it hard to find people to come to the concert, an option was to donate the 2 tickets to the staff at the local hospital.
3. It was raised that members talking to each other during rehearsal can make it very hard for other members to hear Neil and Sarah. Members were asked please to refrain from chatting during rehearsals bearing in mind the impacts upon those around them.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20.45.