

WIMBLEDON CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 30 September 2019 at St Mark's Church, St Mark's Place, Wimbledon

The meeting began at 19.30 with Sarah Hendry in the chair and approximately 128 members in attendance.

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 1 October 2018

Amendments were proposed to the Treasurer's report. In paragraph 4, there was a typo and it should read £30,000 not £80,000. Also the reserves were not down to a legacy but due to the careful stewardship and management of funds. These amendments were to be noted in the minutes.

Approval of these minutes was proposed by John Paramore and seconded by John Bright. The meeting approved the minutes.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Music Director's Report

Neil Ferris thanked the choir for their superb effort and performance in a consistent season. The main focus was the Da Vinci Requiem and the choir performed at that level throughout the year. He was utterly delighted with the choir and the fact that the choir looks like they enjoy performing.

Neil thanked the team who supports him – the committee. They had been very active this year with extra projects. Neil thanked his musical team of Michael and Sarah. Neil then thanked Vicky for her relentless and wonderful work. Neil thanked Laura and said that there was no-one better at welcoming new choir members. Neil thanked Paula for the fantastic programmes that she produces.

The last year's focus had been on the commissioned piece which started three years ago. It was hugely successful and enjoyable and was a positive experience. We had had time to learn the piece and there was amazing work behind the scenes. The reaction of other choirs and conductors was also very positive.

There was lots of work going on behind the scenes for the recording. It is a 35 minute piece which is not long enough for a CD so we are also going to record '70 degrees below zero' on the other side. It is another piece by Cecilia McDowell but not yet recorded and it will add interest to the CD. It is based on diaries of Scott of the Antarctic and weaves in poems and text so it links with our piece. It is 20 minutes so it will complete the programme.

Next year we would be back in Fairfield Halls and we would monitor how it feels for us and the audience. Feedback would be very helpful as that could be our major venue. We will continue to rotate between Cadogan Hall and Southwark Cathedral.

The next proposed tour was in 2021 and would be a choral festival competing in County Mayo in Ireland. We are researching this. Neil has adjudicated there and we can do our repertoire pieces there.

The Da Vinci Requiem had established our reputation and Neil said that he was enormously grateful for that and that his spirits lifted when he walked into the room, and he thanked everyone in the choir.

Chair's Report

Sarah Hendry said that Neil constantly challenged the choir and as we rose to each challenge we developed greater faith in ourselves. Sarah thanked Neil and asked the choir to show their appreciation.

Last season had been so exciting. It had started with the B minor mass in November at Cadogan Hall. One audience member called the performance "Enthralling, exhilarating and magnificent". We sang in a well-filled hall which was brilliant. Cadogan continued to feel like a good place for us to perform and the staff were very pleasant and professional to deal with.

The Christmas concert was also successful – again a full house at St Pauls. Our carol concert marks the start of Christmas for many people who come along. Neil's programming of a mixture of the latest new carols from talented composers with traditional favourites works very well indeed. The only issue was that, despite not selling outside the choir, we ran out of tickets before everyone could get them. We had responded to that by scheduling two performances this year.

Our summer concert Clouds of Dreams was a beautiful end to the season – a complete contrast to the rest of our programme and again a chance to expand our repertoire and comfort zone with a rich mixture of contemporary and traditional themes. And it was lovely to perform our second world premiere of the season with Michael's Appalachian Songs.

But it was the Da Vinci Requiem which dominated the season. It had been four years in the planning from the start of the commissioning process in late 2015 to the stage at the Festival Hall on 7 May 2019. Sarah asked how many amateur choirs get a whole feature on the Today programme at prime time!

Sarah complimented the choir for being brilliant and unflagging. She said that she rarely relaxed and enjoyed the lead up to a big concert but this one had been a delight – truly a once in a lifetime experience.

We had had a heartfelt reception from friends, family and critics. Reading such hugely complimentary phrases about us was extraordinary.

One of the most rewarding things was seeing such a warm relationship develop between choir and composer. Cecilia McDowall was clearly overwhelmed by the rapport with us at our workshop. Sarah expressed pride in the impression that the choir created then and throughout.

The Da Vinci premiere had created a rich legacy and the committee wanted to build on it. We now had a firm reputation as a major choir that commissions bold new works. Another important result is our own confidence that we can deliver a top notch performance and get rave professional reviews.

That also means that choir members have no reason to be shy about persuading people to buy tickets – they will have a top quality experience.

We have learned how to market ourselves and will continue to make sure that we can tell an interesting story about each concert programme.

We had also learned that with the right story and the product, we can attract more sponsors and advertisers.

We have confidence that we can fill a large concert venue. It took a lot of work but we surpassed our expectations. We can do it again, and on a regular basis at smaller venues.

We have a financial legacy. Thanks to the generosity of many sponsors and healthy tickets sales, we are in a healthy financial position for the future.

Sarah said that the committee were amazing and had achieved an extraordinary feat this year. Sarah thanked the two new committee members, Tracy Sherman and John Gale for building on the work by Deborah Raymond and John.

Bright. Sarah thanked the whole committee, executive and full, and asked the choir to show their appreciation.

Sarah thanked Christine Evans who had been vice chair for over 16 years; both Neil Dennis when chairman, and Sarah had relied on her implicitly. She organised two fabulous tours and led the commissioning process for the Da Vinci Requiem, as well as helping with constant behind the scenes activity doing all kinds of things for the choir. Christine was then presented with flowers and a collection from the choir.

Sarah then mentioned Simon Wood who died earlier this summer, who was a stalwart of the tenor section. He was a deeply modest and self-deprecating man with an impish sense of humour and a passion for requiems. He launched the magnificent 'Requiem to Cancer' charity fundraiser involving singing four requiems in twenty-four hours. Even though he was in convalescence from treatment, he masterminded the whole thing twice. A Remembrance event was set for Friday 13 March 2020 it was hoped a good number of choir friends would be able to be there as WCS was very dear to Simon's heart.

A minute's silence was held for Simon Wood.

Treasurer's Report

John Gale presented the year's accounts in one document which was prepared on a receipts and payments basis. He explained that large charities (over £250,000) prepare accrual accounts which is what we used to do. The Charity Commission has another way for smaller charities which is easier to understand.

John noted that the third column on page 7 should be 2019 and not 2018.

Whereas normally the choir ended the season with a planned deficit, we made a profit of over £2000 at the Festival Hall instead of the budgeted loss of £8000. This will help fund the recording.

John noted that there is a legal requirement to show unrestricted and restricted monies in the accounts. Restricted funds are those collected or given for a specific purpose eg the Appalachian songs commission was covered by two very generous donations by choir members.

This could create a problem if we were successful in raising more funds toward the recording than required. The executive committee had therefore decided that any surplus could be used towards a future commission.

John reported that the bank balance had increased by £8000 and we had £80,000 funds at the end of June 2019.

Current reserves were adequate to cover necessary advance payments (eg concert venue deposits) but the objective was to build our reserves further to enable the choir to undertake new projects in the future,

A question was asked if Cecilia McDowell had been fully paid – the answer was yes.

The adoption of the accounts was proposed by Colleen Spalding and seconded by Fiona Wickens. It was carried unanimously.

John explained that the proposed subscription rates were for an increase in the standard rate by £12 to £150, a £2 increase in the unemployed rate to £70 and for the student and under 26 years rate to remain the same at £25.

He explained that this reflected the increase in running costs as rehearsals were now 15 minutes longer and sectional rehearsals mean two venues to be paid for. Annual auditions were an additional cost. Programmes and the venues had gone upmarket. The proposed standard subscription was less than £4 a week. It was proposed that the subscription rates would be fixed for two years.

The proposal for the subscription rates was proposed by Deborah Raymond and seconded by June Gilmore. It was passed unanimously.

In response to a question John explained that the large cost of the recording was largely due to the cost of the musicians. The choir would be there for 6-7 hours but the orchestra would spend longer and have the second piece to record. The cost of the musicians was £38,000, of which £31,000 was for the orchestra which, if you divide the number of musicians and the hours is £40 per hour.

The recording company need four hours before and three hours after the recording which is 14 hours and we need to hire the venue for that. The second recording needs ten hours. The cost of the recording itself and the recording equipment and the mastering costs (the cost of making the master) was £9,000.

In response to a question, John said that the choir would get income from the recording in two ways. We will buy CDs and sell them and we will make £5 per disc. We have a Royalty recording contract which will generate income on other sales worldwide.

A question was raised about whether the choir should approve the season budget for the following year. It was explained that it is the role of the full committee to set the budget and ensure that it is balanced. The budget was however not a secret, and anyone who wished to see could ask to do so.

Election of Executive Group and Officers

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

Sarah Hendry	Chairman	Isla Smith	Vice Chairman
Tracy Sherman	General Secretary	John Gale	Treasurer
Anna Lemmon	Publicity Officer		

These elections were proposed by John Bright and seconded by Mary Coggins and carried unanimously.

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

Vicky Isaacs	Librarian	Laura Stewart	Membership Secretary
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These elections were proposed by Clare Jamieson, seconded by Amanda Moore and carried unanimously.

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

Gwen Clayton (Sop 1)	Sarah Harris (Alto 2)
	Peter Hickson (Bass 1)

These elections were proposed by Richard Pelly seconded by Alex Youel and carried unanimously.

Any Other Business

1. The secretary explained that for the fourth year running, members had been asked to submit nominations for the charity that would benefit from a collection at the end of the 2019 Christmas concert. As there would be two concerts, it was decided that one charity can collect per concert. Four nominations were received and members voted for Linden Lodge and Faith in Action.

Recording Experience

Michael Higgins and Sean O'Connell briefed the choir on what to expect when recording the Da Vinci Requiem. Michael explained that recording was a long day and the work would not be sung in order. Often you sing all the way through and then focus on some aspects. If the choir enjoyed the recording as much as at the actual concert, then it would come across in the recording. The recordists would use the best bits and if anyone made a mistake, we should keep on singing. Managing the time would be important as professional musicians have strange rules about breaks etc. The choir might need to sing parts of it again, and again!

Sean said that it was important to wear comfy clothes and no jangly jewellery. There will be orchestral takes and the choir would need to be quiet and not talk during those. Microphones are uber-sensitive. Try to enjoy the day although it can feel frustrating at times. The end goal is a fantastic recording. It is an organic process and most takes are on entry and timing. If these are not sharp, you really notice. There is an open talk back from the recordists so singers must listen and be quiet but not be put off if the feedback is blunt and direct at times. Some things are recorded quickly, others take time - there is an ebb and flow to the day.

There was a question about whether a live recording is better. The answer was that it is not as good – in recording you aim to perfect the piece.

Sarah thanked Michael and Sean for their helpful explanation.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20.50.