

WIMBLEDON CHORAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday 7 September 2020 online via Zoom

The meeting began at 19.30 with Sarah Hendry in the chair and approximately 119 members online and 7 apologies.

The Chair said that we were making history this evening as in the 105-year history of WCS the AGM has never previously been held online. The AGM will be run slightly differently to normal and that we are hoping to record the meeting for those who can't be here in person. Recording will only be available to any choir member who asks to look at it – and will be password protected. The meeting was told that if you don't want your face to appear on the recording you can switch off the video and to note that private chat comments can sometimes be seen on a recording.

The Chair asked everyone to be on mute until you are asked/ need to speak. Re-mute after you've finished speaking. The Chair will invite questions or comments at the end of each report or introduction to item. If you wish to speak and haven't notified Tracy already, please type Request to speak in the chat function. The Chair will invite those who have asked to speak in advance or via chat to speak first; then the Chair will check if anyone else wants to speak at that point please say so – we may not see you if you wave your hand.

For votes:

The Chair will ask for a nominator: please say your name to do this

The Chair will ask for a seconder: again someone needs to say their name.

The Chair will then ask all in favour to raise their hand. Please raise your hand and keep it up until the Chair say it's ok to stop: that's because we need to scroll the screen to see everyone.

Then the Chair will ask anyone not in favour to raise their hand, and we will do the same.

Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 30 September 2019.

Approval of these minutes was proposed by Neil Dennis and seconded by Sean O'Connell. The meeting approved the minutes.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Music Director's Report

Concerts:

Cadogan Hall – November 2019

A great event, and Neil felt very proud that as an organisation we hosted an excellent evening of high-class music making. Farnham Youth Choir in the first half were on great form and in the 2nd half we put on a superb performance of Carmina Burana. Excellent soloists too alongside Ensemble Bash and wonderful hands at the piano.

Christmas 2019:

We trialled a two-concert format for the first time and overall, it was a very successful adaptation. Musically Neil was happy, and although it made for a tiring day, it did mean that we were able to accommodate our audience without people being disappointed at missing out.

COVID 19:

Neil would like to thank the committee for their calm reassurance when lockdown struck. We all had to get used to a multitude of new ways of working and the way in which the committee put the musical staff anxieties at potential loss of earnings was very welcome and hugely appreciated. As we all adapted to the new ways of working and the disappointments of cancelled concerts and not being able to meet in person, we found purpose in a sense of community that Neil has always found very strong in this organisation, and a few online projects to occupy our time. Neil is very grateful to Michael for his expertise in setting up two very rewarding virtual choir videos, and to Neil Dennis as we relied on his IT skills particularly in this period.

This current term:

We are investigating the possibilities of returning to St Mark's and if so, how it can be done safely. This will still mean that we can only do this in smaller groups, and we will look at the most sensible and fair way of doing that. In the meantime, we will still meet each Monday online with a mix of Messiah background information, some guest speakers, some vocal exercises, some singing along to recordings, and maybe a small amount of rehearsing. The current plan is for Michael and Neil to be in the same room so that the sound coming from us is coordinated, and this will alleviate at least one of the issues about rehearsing online.

Alongside some work on Messiah, later in the term we will head towards a hybrid Christmas event that will take place either online or in St Paul's in December. We have commissioned Michael to write a medley of Christmas carols that can

be performed either as a sequence or separate items and Neil hopes to rehearse small groups later this term to work towards performing or videoing sections of it in time for Christmas. A 'SingFest' for Christmas if you like. It is worth saying here that any live rehearsals we do with limited capacity we will hope to record for anyone not present at that rehearsal to watch online afterwards.

Future planning:

We are having to be VERY flexible, but Neil is hoping that with a bit of creativity that we won't lose any of our lost programmes - the Rachmaninov Vespers and Mozart C minor mass. It all depends on how 2021 pans out, but Neil doesn't want our work on those pieces, or the excitement at the prospect of performing them to be lost.

With any luck, the rest of 2021 will be Messiah in March, and Jonathan Dove *There was a child* in June, alongside the recording of Da Vinci Requiem in April. Neil hopes to include enough extra rehearsals in the Spring of DVR to enable all current members to take part if they wish. Do look out on the schedule for those extra rehearsals if you didn't perform the piece with us in 2019 and would like to take part in the recording.

2021-22

Again, hopefully to include
Rachmaninov Vespers
Mozart C minor mass
Tour to Ireland

2022-23

A Triptych of Passions:
Will Todd/Bach St John/Gabriel Jackson

Survey results:

Always good to be given ideas – and always good to be prompted towards pieces Neil may not have thought that people would like to perform. It is worth remembering that the highest number of requests for any one piece was 7 (Haydn Creation) so there is no particular clamour for one piece above any other, nevertheless Neil will endeavour to keep some of the more popular choices in mind when programming from 2023 onwards (those being Creation, Elijah, Gerontius, War Requiem).

This also gives Neil an opportunity to lay out my programming principle that when looking at repertoire to be chosen Neil always looks one year in advance and one year behind whichever season Neil is on at that time. The intention is that over a 3 cycle you should have a mix of all the types of music that we enjoy singing – large oratorios, shorter accompanied pieces, unaccompanied, baroque, classical, romantic, contemporary, jazz etc.

Neil finished by thanking his wonderful music staff colleagues, Michael Higgins and Sarah Burston, with thanks again to all the committee for the excellent work they do behind the scenes. Thank you to all the members of Wimbledon Choral Society for your dedication and your obvious joy and love of singing – we will be back together soon!

Answering questions from the meeting, Neil said that it is the intention that Messiah will be our first concert in March and that everyone is welcome to come to rehearsals for Da Vinci Requiem whether or not they sang in the concert. The rehearsals will be designed for those who did not sing it but all are welcome. In relation to voice tests, we do not know when they can take place but Neill will suggest a small list of suggested pieces that can be used if you wish.

Chair's Report

The Chair mentioned our 105-year history earlier: good opportunity to give a plug to the interesting historical content that Neil D has researched and put on the website – about choir's early origins pre-1914 (see About Us/History). Also catalogue of concerts going back to 1979-80 season. Do have a browse.

We've not only made history by holding AGM online – also the first season for at least 40 years when we haven't put on 3 concerts. Unprecedented circumstances.

Important not to overlook the fantastic concerts we did put on – as Neil mentioned. Was going to be hard to beat previous season but Carmina Burana was a triumphant romp. Rachmaninov Vespers was all set to be tremendous, we hung on as long as we could in the hope we could perform it – but Covid beat us by a week.

When lockdown struck, the Chair certainly didn't foresee that we would still be unable to sing together 6 months later. But it soon became clear that we were in for a long haul. We had to decide quickly how to react.

Isla, our vice-chair puts it very well. As an organisation you have to focus on your core assets at a time like this – the things that are essential to survival. Our most valuable assets are our professional musical team – Neil and Michael – and our members – you.

We were acutely conscious of the financial impact of lockdown on all professional musicians and so it was very important to us to support them as far as we could. One way was to pay appropriate cancellation fees in respect of our cancelled concerts, or part fees for preparation where we expected to reschedule.

And although we couldn't sing together and hold our usual Monday rehearsals, we were able with Neil and Michael's help to maintain a sense of community for the whole choir for the rest of the season. It's not easy running online sessions and keeping up the energy for an hour or more – Neil made it look as effortless as he does rehearsals (but of course neither is effortless at all!)

The Chair thinks that we were the first choir out of the starting blocks when it came to making a virtual WCS recording. Well done to the brave people who overcame technical and personal phobias to record themselves singing Bogoroditse Djevo. The Chair heard of people doing it 14 times!!!

It sounded amazing – how lucky are we to have Michael’s skills to put it together. And his arranging talents too – so it was lovely to be able to record his *Bright Morning Stars* for our second virtual WCS. With Roddy Williams!! Together we donated over £1000 to Help Musicians UK – another small way to help professional musicians hit by lockdown.

Normally the Chair would ask you to show your appreciation of our professional musicians Neil, Michael - and Sarah – by clapping. Won’t be the same online so the Chair will simply say on your behalf that you are superstars and we are hugely grateful for what you do for WCS.

The Chair also wants to thank all of you – choir members – who stayed so engaged throughout this difficult period. The choir members – our community – this is our other core asset. It would have been easy to drop away, lose interest until we could do “real singing” again. The Chair thinks we would have lost something very valuable if that had happened and it could have been very hard to re-energise the choir when we were able to sing again. Thank you for keeping the faith. Also want to say a huge thank you to all of our committee – obviously for what they did to make our normal activities possible – but during these last impossible 6 months for how they have responded to an unprecedented situation – thinking things through, making difficult decisions and – voice reps in particular – staying in touch with everyone in the different sections. Something of a baptism of fire for the new committee members!

Ever the optimist, the Chair hopes that we are on the cusp of being able to resume some live singing again. The recent govt guidance to performing art organisations offers the possibility of running rehearsals for a smaller than usual number of people with suitable distancing measures.

First we need to survey St Marks to see how we can implement social distancing measures (2m apart, one way systems, hand sanitisers, ventilation etc) and assess how many people we could have at the same time. Assuming that is satisfactory, we could potentially run two one hour long sessions each Monday evening, for c40 people per session. That could mean everyone might be able to sing live every two or three weeks depending on numbers wishing to take part. We will look at whether we could film sessions for the other people to watch.

That will take a couple of weeks to organise. Meanwhile there will be online sessions. You will need a copy of the Messiah, Novello Watkins Shaw edition.

Obviously not a normal season – able to sing less than usual. John Gale will explain what we propose to do about subs. Remain ambitious though: Michael’s Christmas commission. Intend to “crowd fund” it from members and Friends – more about that by email but if you would like to contribute please let the Chair or John Gale know.

We also have the prospect of making our recording of the DVR next April. Thanks to John for sorting it all out again. We have Roddy Williams and Kate Royal as soloists but will be working with City of London Sinfonia instead of the Philharmonia. They did the premiere of Cecilia McDowall’s *Seventy Degrees Below Zero*, the other piece being recorded. It won’t be plain sailing. We’ll make the most of opportunities to sing together while we can – there may be periods when we have to stop that again. But let’s hope that the spring will see us well and truly back on track and resume our plans for more great music making.

Treasurer’s Report

John Gale said that in the report that there was a typo on page 2 – it is Mozart Mass in C minor and that on page 5 the independent examiners report is approved.

There has been a substantial increase in cash funds and this is mostly due to the recording not taking place. £25,000 was raised for the recording and there is a lot of Gift Aid still awaited. We hope to Crowdfund the remaining amount needed. The change of orchestra means that costs are reduced from £50,000 to £45,000. We anticipated a loss for the Carmina Burana concert but it did a lot better than expected.

Income from Easyfundraising is going up. It costs you nothing and you access the online website via the Easyfundraising website and a donation is made to WCS if you nominate it.

The only other asset we have is the M&G unit which has fallen in value.

The other amounts in the accounts are owed to the choir are invoices outstanding from other choirs re the hire of music.

In relation to the Rachmaninov and Mozart concert, neither venue charged us a cancellation fee.

There was a question about whether the surplus of £11,000 from cancelled concerts will go towards the recording – possibly but hopefully we will carry on raising enough money.

There was a question about the long term effect of Covid on our costs. John Gale said that we will match our income to our costs and so the financial impact is expected to be neutral.

Approval of the accounts was proposed by Fiona Wickens and seconded by Dominic Beecher. It was carried unanimously.

Subscriptions were fixed last year or 2 years. WCS is not putting on concerts and so we are not incurring costs. We have base costs and divided between the members, the price per member is £70. It is suggested that this year, there is a minimum subscription of £70 up to £150. Under 26 and the unemployed it is £30 and students £10 minimum subscriptions. People can pay any amount from the minimum up to the maximum. If we have a concert in June, we may have to revisit this.

The subscription rates were unanimously approved by the meeting. It was proposed by Tilly Richardson and seconded by Cheryl Richardson.

A question was raised about if extra money above £70 would go to the recording fund. Unless specified, all monies over £70 will go to the general fund.

There is enough in the budget for this year to pay for another online recording as it costs about £1000 a time and Michael spent a huge amount of time on it.

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 Sharon Smith and seconded by Su Lambert 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 Sharon Smith and seconded by Su Lambert and carried unanimously.

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

Sharon Smith (Sop 2)	Angela Wake (Alto)
Andrew Oliver (Tenor)	Jeremy Collis (Bass 2)

These elections were proposed by Diana Tsung seconded by Susanne Hallegard and carried unanimously.

Choir Survey Results

The Chair thanked Izas Ozerin for helping to design the survey and Neil Dennis for collating the results. All the choir will have received a summary of the results. These will be discussed at our next full committee meeting.

Any Other Business

Neil Dennis thanked the committee for their work and for making the AGM so upbeat.

The meeting closed at 20.57.