



**Minutes of the 2017 Annual General Meeting of Cleveland Philharmonic Choir,
held during the rehearsal on Tuesday 17 October 2017 at St Barnabas Church, Middlesbrough.**

Approximately 79 members attended.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Dorothy Ainsworth, Judith Arber, Dorothy Bolam, Joyce Dixon, Ann Finney, Tim and Doreen Ollier, Elsa Taylor, Trevor Turner.

2. Minutes of AGM held on 4 October 2016 had been circulated. The motion that the minutes were a true record was proposed by Vivienne Flynn, seconded by Martin King and agreed.

3. Matters Arising None.

4. Chairman's Report – Martin Brooks

Two weeks ago, Jo and I went to a performance of Rossini's Stabat Mater in Chartres Cathedral and you might find it interesting to hear of something of the way they did things in France.

As part of a three-concert festival, it was a fully professional performance, with prices to match, front seats were 50 Euros! It was billed as an 8.45pm start but people were still arriving at 8.55. At 9pm the 'Rector' of the Cathedral and then the Artistic Director took the microphone. After greetings and thanking the dignitaries, the politicians present and the many sponsors she embarked on a lecture on the music in the festival. It was a full 25 minutes before we at last got some music and finally at 9.45 the Stabat Mater began.

The choir of 43 voices had 16 microphones, and every instrument in the large orchestra also had its own microphone. The sound system included four speaker stacks, two mixing desks and a time delay to ensure the rearmost speakers matched the echo.

The interior of the Cathedral's stonework had recently been cleaned and, not content with all the electronics for sound, there was an extensive coloured LED system to illuminate each stone column in the nave, adding considerably to the atmosphere.

The results were surprisingly good and of high quality, the music making was top notch and the building looked magnificent.

There is clearly more we could do with our own Choir performances if only we had the resources of their sponsors, most of them supported in one way or another by the French State.

Now to continue backwards in time.

The most recent concert from the Cleveland Phil Choir was a new venture in a new venue that produced unexpected and surprisingly good results. The Cathedral at Coulby Newham lived up to its reputation for a good acoustic even though the Choir had to adopt a convex rather than the preferred concave shape. It was most enjoyable, particularly for the audience reaction, and with a large number of paying customers the event returned a profit.

There has been a good deal of discussion on where the extra 120 or so members of the audience came from. Lord Leverhulme of Lever Bros is reported to have said that half the money he spent on advertising soap powder was wasted – but he didn't know which half. In our case it was clear that more of our advertising had been effective and we still don't know for sure which part worked and why, but it seems likely that word of mouth also played its

part. Hopefully the second event at the Cathedral next summer will hang onto this new audience and enable us to fill in some of these gaps in our knowledge.

The preceding concert in April was aimed at helping John Forsyth to celebrate his notable birthday. It was also the first time the Choir had performed in the Princess Alexandra Auditorium at Yarm School. The house was practically full and everyone experienced and enjoyed the stunning location on the bank of the river Tees and a fitting concert of fine music.

The auditorium has developed a prior reputation as a difficult space acoustically for classical music. The lack of acoustic feedback and poor lighting was felt by the Choir and the orchestra members, but this inconvenience was largely overcome by the performers and generally un-noticed by the paying public.

Towards the end of each calendar year there are now two established events for members of the Choir to celebrate and anticipate the Christmas season; The Linthorpe Community Primary School Carol Service and our Family Christmas Carol Concert. The former is carried out with many eager parents and grandparents straining to see their children perform on this stage. The latter, once again, gave all those attending the pleasure of hearing the high class Fishburn Brass Band excel.

Going further back to November '16 brings us to the second visit the Choir has made to the Sage Gateshead, this time to perform that great operatic work – Verdi's Requiem. So far I have used up many words like success, stunning and enjoyable and this concert requires them all.

It gave the senior Choir from Egglecliffe School a great experience and also gave us a second opportunity to learn more of the method of working of the Sage operations team, and to iron out a few more wrinkles, in preparation for our return there next year.

There is a phrase used in financial circles when considering future outlay – would you bet the company – ie if the venture fails will the organisation survive? Coming up to the planned performance of the War Requiem, where the Choir is the sole promoter, this is a real consideration since the forecast outlay for the event, if it were a total failure, could consume more than 80% of our financial reserves – so would this risk break the Choir?

Initially it seems that the remaining reserves should be sufficient to keep operating for at least one year. However, there are several actions in place to mitigate this risk.

Firstly, the partnership with Newcastle Choral Society will underwrite some of the costs in the form of guaranteed sale of 300 tickets.

Secondly NCS will publicise and promote the concert in their usual way

Thirdly sponsorship – the first is already in place

Fourth dedicated fund raising by members of the Choir

Fifth ticket sales

This reinforces the importance of ticket revenue; if it were possible to completely fill the Sage with paying customers (about 1250) we would expect to come close to break even.

Now the committee has not had a sole focus on planning for the Britten performance – other major tasks have included the necessary bureaucracy such as the Health & Safety policy and a written procedure for the recruitment of another Musical Director once John decides it is time to retire.

One of the strengths of this Choir is the willingness of people to volunteer and even take over various tasks that suit their talents. A good example of this is the Children's choir. In addition to Joan who is always in the background organising and supporting, Anne Barberi, Graham Hinton, and Judith Arber now continue to look after the children whilst John Forsyth supplies the musical training and inspiration.

In addition to all these musical achievements there are four positive outcomes from the last year:

We managed to reverse the trend of reducing audience numbers – whilst the reasons for this are not fully understood, performing at two new venues clearly played its part.

The finances continue to be in good shape, ready to support next year's programme.

The initial introduction to the War Requiem in the form of John's special lecture.

The continued support from every member of the Choir, notwithstanding the key contributions from Andrew and John.

Now to end with a quote from the recent Roderick Williams radio programme "Singing in four parts is an experience that has no equivalent, it speaks to every part of our nature"

This, I suppose, is why we are here and partly explains why we sing.

5. Treasurer's Report - Jane Neal

The Profit and Loss Account and Balance Sheet have been emailed or handed out to all members of the Choir along with an analysis of the concerts given during the last season. The accounts have been checked by our independent examiner, David Mitchell, and I am very grateful to him for his hard work.

The P and L account shows a surplus for the year of £26 as against a deficit of £4,179 last year. Our income has increased this year due to the Sage concert ticket sales and sponsorship. Subscriptions have remained the same. The rehearsal expenditure has remained the same. The general day to day expenditure has increased due to an extra training day, and increased photocopying charges.

As I have said each year, the concerts usually make a loss, but the size of the loss is dependent on the number of soloists we have, whether we have an orchestra or not and how many tickets we sell. As detailed on the concert analysis sheet, the concerts made a loss for the season which was expected. The Italian concert made a good profit of £2,673 which was the correct result for the Summer concert, bearing in mind we do try and keep the costs low on that one, and indeed £903 on the Christmas concert which has low costs. The concert analysis sheet shows details of income and expenditure for each concert. Usually, we primarily rely on subscriptions to underwrite the activities of the choir. This year the concerts made a net loss of £9,459 compared to £12,258 last year and £994 the year before.

The Balance sheet shows a healthy position, about the same as last year, we had £53,813 in the bank accounts compared to £51,924 the previous year; of this total £14,379 was in a current account and the rest was on deposit. This includes the remainder of the Truran Bequest of £4,000 which was earmarked for the Sage concert and which we never touched, and the £20,000 Dorn Bequest.

Overall the choir is showing a very healthy financial position with Reserves of £55,184 compared to £55,320 last year and £56,202 the year before. There is a figure in Debtors of £7,211 which is expenditure for the current year's concerts paid in advance to Sage.

One really good way to support the choir and doing your shopping at the same time is to access the Amazon website from the Choir website, thereby earning us commission on all your Amazon purchases. We receive about £300 from Amazon, for just doing some shopping. With Christmas fast approaching, there is a really good time to get on with your online shopping and support the choir at the same time!

Can I conclude my report to the choir by giving my usual thanks all those who support me in my role – the voice reps, the committee members, the box office staff, and last but not least yourselves. Thank you

The motion that the accounts be accepted was proposed by Alex Nicholson, seconded by Denis Rigg, and agreed.

In comments from the choir, attention was drawn to the fact that the cost of the orchestra for the concert on 1 April 2017 was very large. The Secretary explained that this was because the works for this event needed a variety of different instruments. It was also noted that Gift Aid payments had increased considerably from 2016. The Treasurer said that more members were registered for Gift Aid, but that the figure for 2017 did include Gift Aid on War Requiem donations.

6. Election of Officers and Committee One nomination had been received for each post, and the names had been circulated:

| <u>Post</u> | <u>Nominee</u> | <u>Proposer</u> | <u>Secunder</u> |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Chairman | Martin Brooks | John Gibson | Cath Boden |
| Secretary | Joan Carter | Dorothy Ainsworth | Jean Jones |
| Treasurer | Jane Neal | Joan Weighell | Janet Bigley |
| Soprano I Rep | Val Burns | Kate Pickover | Margaret Turham |
| Soprano II Rep | Vivienne Flynn | Jean Jones | Janet Webber |
| Alto I Rep | Julia Greenwood | Sue Jones | Michaela Carmichael |
| Alto II Rep | Lizanne Allen+ Jan Smith | Cathy King | Janet Bigley |
| Tenor Rep | Denis Rigg | Malcolm Donnelly | Martin Brooks |
| Bass Rep | Keith Robinson | Peter Litherland | John Gibson |
| Concert Manager | Steve Weighell | Michael McFarlane | Ricky Hallam |
| Librarian | Kathryn Beevers | Jane Neal | Alan Palmer |

The Chairman then spoke about Trevor Turner:

You will have noticed that Trevor Turner's name is absent from the list, since with his change in family circumstances he has asked to resign. He has been a member of the choir's committee for longer than I can remember and was always a source of wise counsel, drawn from his long business experience. He had always been our link to the Arts Council, firstly as our representative on their local committee and, when that was disbanded, as the channel of information from Making Music. He also has a great interest in early music.

He is to remain a member of the choir and we expect to see him again soon among the tenor ranks.

The motion that the above people be elected en bloc was proposed by Graham Hinton, seconded by Avril Partington and agreed.

The Secretary explained that:

- the Alto II rep post was being covered by a job share.
- John Forsyth is an ex officio member of the committee.
- Trevor Turner was the choir's Making Music Society Contact, and so an ex officio member. Now that he has retired, that responsibility has been taken on by Jane Neal.
- Harriet Bradshaw is a co-opted member of the committee, representing the younger singers.
- all the elected committee members are trustees of the Cleveland Philharmonic Choir charity

7. Subscriptions

The Treasurer spoke on this topic:

It is proposed that the Subscription for the 2017/2018 year increase to £144. The subs have been at £132 for 3 years now.

The necessity for this increase was questioned by one member of the choir.

Points made by choir members in support of the proposal were:

- The choir was growing in status, and it would be short-sighted not to think about its future financial security.
- £1 per month was a small rise.
- The experience of singing in the choir was greatly valued.
- The subscription was on a level with fees for adult education classes.

The motion that subscriptions for 2017-18 be increased to £144 was proposed by Anne Barberi and seconded by Vivienne Flynn. The motion was voted on by a show of hands. It was carried almost unanimously, with one vote against.

The Treasurer then spoke about payment methods:

As last year the methods of payment are made as flexible as possible to avoid any difficulties for members – either by internet banking, a single cheque, or by two cheques, or by monthly standing order. For those of you paying by standing order it will mean your monthly amount increases to £12. Can I please ask that all subs are paid over before the Christmas break; this gives you about 8 weeks to deal with it. If you wish to pay by two cheques of £72 each, please post date one for the 1 January 2018. If anyone would like to talk to me about their subs, they can do so and we can discuss options. Please also consider Gift Aid, if you have not already done so – this gives us approximately £2,500+ a year from HMRC. No-one will be refused membership of this choir for financial reasons.

8. The Choir's Golden Anniversary Season 2018-19

The Secretary introduced this topic. The choir already had a special concert planned for November 2018. Other choirs had celebrated with a commission from a composer, a tour or a dinner. She invited ideas from the choir for good ways of celebrating the anniversary.

9. Any other business. a) Fire drill. Steve Weighell, Health and Safety Officer, thanked members for their co-operation during the recent fire drill. The experience would form a basis for a conversation with representatives of St Barnabas Church, with the aim of working together to make improvements.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 19.30.

Joan Carter, Secretary.
18 October 2017