



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
MONDAY 14th September 2020 at 7.30pm
By video conference

MINUTES

Present: Kirsty Allan, Ken Allen, Amy Anderson, Pat Ashworth, Joyce Begg, Elizabeth Brander, Colin Cameron, Catherine Davidson-Carr, Mark Evans, Philip Gaskell, Victoria Glass-Davies, Madeleine Gorham, Richard Green, Iain Howie, Christine Hunter, Ian James, Mary Lawson, Jennifer Lunn, John MacDonald, Sheena McLean, Judith Neil, Bill Noblett, Carol Omand, Ann Parker, Maggie Price, Fiona Renfrew, Annette Rogers, Rosemary Series, Isobel Shaw, John Smith, Heather Smith, Ewing Wallace.

1) Apologies Julia Cross, Pamela Dymott, Moira McKendry, Hans Schutten, Molly Schutten, Max Taylor, Carole Young.

2) Minutes of AGM held 2nd September 2019

Adopted as correct. Proposed by Bill Noblett and seconded by Annette Rogers.

3) Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4) Chair's report

And it had all been going so well! Rehearsals for our Spring Concert 2020 – a celebration of Baltic music under the banner 'Northern Lights' – were in full swing when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, resulting in the cancellation of the concert planned for 29th March. While it was a huge disappointment for all it was the right, indeed inevitable, decision to make. The summer break came early for us all.

Before all that our activities started early in August when we held a very successful 'Come & Sing' in collaboration with Balfron High School. Preparations were disrupted by changes in personnel at BHS, but music teacher Cairi Edwards did a great job of taking over and contributing to the day. The event attracted a wide range of singers of varying ages and abilities. We had an eclectic selection of music to rehearse throughout the day and we put on an early-evening concert with some 50 singers comprising choir members, members of the public, and pupils from the school. The music was compiled into a booklet by Bill Noblett, and is now available to all choir

members to give us a basis of music for further public outreach events. Feedback from those taking part was overwhelmingly positive, and we signed up three new members as a result.

Christmas came next, with carol-singing at The Smiddy, and concerts in Gartmore and Killearn. The Smiddy was disappointing both as a venue and in audience and we shall look for alternative venues for the future. The concert programme featured Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, with soloists from Douglas Academy Music School, Rebekah Dean and Emily Kemp. Unfortunately the weather for the Gartmore concert was terrible which kept audience numbers low, but there was much to enjoy in both concerts.

Our annual Musical Coffee Morning was well-attended and well-supported by choir members. The musical programme included the first (and only?) performance from our newly-formed Barbershop Quintet.

Despite the strength of our public appearances, income has struggled compared with previous years as identified in the Financial Report. We are discussing a variety of ways in which this might be remedied, although the immediate outlook looks challenging.

With a number of changes to the Committee, at the last AGM we welcomed Sheena McLean as Librarian; Amy Anderson as Secretary; and Carol Omand as Soprano representative. The new-look Catering Committee of Julia Cross, Philip Gaskell, Christine Hunter, and John MacDonald maintained the standards of hospitality we have enjoyed across the years. The Friends of Strathendrick Singers is also under new management with Anne and Lock Parker picking up the baton from Alison Brown, who has retired from the choir after many years' service. We also said farewell to John Moreland. Both will be missed.

The biggest change in personnel was the departure of our long-term accompanist, Penny Watson, who left for a new job. She has been a wonderful support to both Mark and the choir over the years, and we wish her well for her future. In her absence we have been accompanied by both José Ucendo and Marianna Abrahamyan, but a decision on a full-time replacement has yet to be made. Our Music Director has yet again driven us to new levels of ambition and performance. We thank him for his continuing commitment and professionalism.

Who knows how the 20/21 report will read, but we look forward to keeping the flame of choral singing alive in the Strathendrick villages and beyond.

5) Treasurer's report

Bill had previously circulated the Financial Report to the choir members. Bill commented on the ongoing decline in audience numbers. The move of the Christmas concert from Friday to Sunday had not had the hoped-for impact of

boosting numbers. The income for the Gartmore concert was reduced because of weather which had an impact on the audience. Advertising was in line with previous years with thanks to Colin for organising. Christmas concert raffle income reflects the reduction in audience numbers. Thanks were given to all members for raffle prizes and for prizes for the coffee morning raffle.

Membership is down by a net figure of three from the previous year. With regard to subs, they are not quite straight because one member hadn't paid by last year and one had paid a little in advance. Tea and coffee break donation is also down partly because numbers are down. Bill urged members to donate more once we are back practising together.

Donations from Friends increased thanks to a request from Alison. The choir also received £110 from members and £63 from Amazon Smile and Easyfundraising. £36 was also raised from the sale of wine to Killearn Bridge Club.

Expenditure is mostly self-explanatory. Musician costs vary from year to year. Venue hire for the spring concert has been carried forward to next year. Rent for rehearsals last year was higher because of extra rehearsals for the Strathpeffer trip. We didn't have to pay royalties on The Creation. The £171 gift to Penny is also reflected in the donations/income figures.

A donation to Killearn Kirk has not been made because we did not have the concert in March but this will be discussed with the committee and a donation will be made.

Website admin expenses were higher last year because our new website was developed.

John Smith proposed the Treasurer's report and Philip Gaskell seconded it.

6) Musical Director's report

What a year we have had. Who could have predicted the past six months. Thankfully we were able to perform our Christmas concert, almost made it to our Easter concert(!) and I look forward so much to being back with you all together face to face to perform that repertoire which we had worked so hard on!

We started with a new venture – a Come and Sing – in Balfron High School, in September. This was a thoroughly enjoyable day with a respectable number in attendance, mixing current choir members and guests. I love these days as there is no expectation around the performance at the end of the day and folks can simply have a good day making music together. We managed to get through a considerable amount of repertoire in the day with a handful of family and friends turning up to witness the results. Great fun, and I would very much like to repeat this in the future

for the benefit of current choir members and possibly recruiting others but also as a means to try to reach out to the local community.

I always thank all the singers for your hard work and this time is no different. Last autumn you did indeed work very hard on our Christmas programme, the meat of which was Britten's Ceremony of Carols. This SATB version works very well, however, not without its challenges. The arrangement calls for a range of styles of singing from the choir: The procession/ recession movements called for the ladies to sing in a plainsong style which was perhaps unfamiliar to many, for example the very wordy *This Little Babe* was very exciting with everyone working exceptionally hard on the text; In *Freezing Winter Night* required very sustained singing with some tricky harmonic shifts; *Spring Carol* provided rhythmic challenges. The *Deo Gracias* was most impressive as was the opening *Wolcum!* There were lots here to be extremely happy with. A colleague of mine who plays in Scottish Opera Orchestra had not heard the SATB version before and said it was a very exciting performance.

The performance of the Britten at Gartmore did not go as well as the Killlearn concert. My impression was that people were slightly nervous about it and the question of the Gartmore concert as a dress rehearsal for Killlearn comes into question again. It is, but should not really be, as we still have a paying audience (albeit slightly reduced this time due to the weather). I still like the hall at Gartmore and the intimacy of the concert is lovely and it would be good to keep that relationship.

My thanks to the two soloists, Emily and Rebekah, for their wonderful contribution to the Britten.

The rest of the concert was a mix of smaller items, which I thoroughly enjoyed, especially *Away in a Manger*. This is my favourite setting of this carol and I thought the choir sang it really beautifully – and from memory. This shows we can sing both from memory and tackle a cappella repertoire when chosen carefully. Matthew Owens' setting of *Lullay, my Liking* was another highlight of the smaller pieces in which the choir was able to sing with a real sense of phrase and expression. This worked well with the string quartet too.

We Wish you a Merry Christmas was marvellously ridiculous. A very difficult arrangement which the choir really embraced and whilst perhaps not every single note of every chord was sung, the overall effect was entertaining and certainly enjoyed by the audiences!

My thanks as ever to Joyce for entertaining us, yet again, with her Christmas Message. Thanks also to José for the terms rehearsals, as well as Marianna who filled in when he was not free. Thanks also to Marianna for the term of rehearsal with us from January.

January saw us launch into rehearsals for our March concert with a beautiful programme and so much hard work from the singers for what I believe would have been a great concert, together with musicians from McOpera. Our hope is that we

can revisit this concert programme in 2021 and have the opportunity to perform it then.

In the meantime, the plan for this term as you know is to meet online, start with a usual, perhaps slightly extended warm up, have some sectional rehearsals to keep repertoire ticking over and to also have other activities. So far Ola Gjeilo and the Ayoub sisters, Sarah and Laura, have agreed to join us on a Zoom meeting. We will hopefully have some other events along the way.

Zoom is not about recreating a normal Monday evening and I think it is important to say that. Anyone who has been involved in such rehearsals will know that. Rather, it is more about keeping the connection and community which we all value so much, whilst doing what music we can. Who knows, we may even be able to produce some kind of virtual choir of our own.

I am really looking forward to this term as I have missed the connection, even more so this year. Perhaps the best way to approach the online sessions is to come with no preconceived ideas and an open mind.

As ever my thanks to the committee who work hard on your behalf in the background. Also to Sheena for help with music and Ewing as ever for programmes and tickets.

Let's have a good term together and look forward to the time we can see everyone face to face again.

7) Committee: Re-election of office bearers

As no office bearers were due to be changed, Colin asked if there were any objections to them continuing in their posts. There were none stated.

8) The way ahead

a) Rehearsals and future public performances: So far, only events for this month have been diarised but these will continue through October. We do not yet have any idea when we will be able to get back together in person. We are assuming not for Christmas, and possibly not for spring. Colin said that we will try and keep a good programme of work coming up. Mark said that he would investigate speakers' availability for 28th September. Colin flagged up possible issues with time zone with Ola Gjeilo. Mark had spoken to Amanda McLeod about someone from The Sixteen doing a workshop with us. Colin reminded that next week there would be a sectional rehearsal for the Sopranos following a general warm-up and that sectional rehearsals for everybody would be fitted in during the term.

b) Musical Director's salary increase: The Committee has made the decision to raise Mark's salary this year because he is due it and because of the commitment he gives to the choir. Bill added that there had been no discussion with him since 2016 in Skipton. Bill will discuss details with Mark later. Bill added that he had

had an enquiry about the choir's insurance policy and he had sent the policy to the member to check.

c) **Proposal to increase subs to £100pa:** Subs have not been increased for four years. The increase would contribute to the loss of revenue from tea and coffee at rehearsals and also the increase in Mark's salary. Colin opened the proposal to the floor. John Smith asked about a reduced subscription for students. Colin confirmed that the subscription for students is £15 and there had been discussion as to whether this should change but is largely insignificant with one student member currently. Philip Gaskell commented that many golf clubs had reduced subscriptions for years 1 and 2 to attract new members and Colin commented that anyone having difficulty with the subscription could discuss this with Bill and something could be sorted out. A vote was taken and the proposal to increase the subscription was carried.

9) Any other business

Judith Neil asked how and when we pay the new subscription and Bill answered that we carry on as usual. It could be paid in two tranches and could be paid directly or by cheque.

John Smith proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair and others joined in as well as thanking Mark.

Mark noted that some people weren't here and asked that Colin followed up as to whether they had technical problems or whether there were other issues.

The meeting finished with everyone unmuting and saying a quick hello to each other.