

CHESTER MUSIC SOCIETY

Minutes of the 74th Annual General Meeting held on 8th December 2020

Held on-line using the Zoom facility

1. Present (on home computers): David Woods (in the Chair), Mick Clarke, Berkeley Ranby, John Wishlade, David Taylor, Susan Taylor, John Ferrari, Jon Banks, Sue Russell, Becky Ford, Ray Pulsford, Mary Pulsford, Bernard Payne, Hilary Betney, Andrew Wright, David Parks-Smith.

2. Apologies received: Audrey Wooldridge, Penny Clarke, Penelope Fairclough, John Herson, Claire Hallett-Rorke

3. Minutes of the 73rd Annual General meeting held on 4/12/19

Proposed by Sue Russell, seconded by Mick Clarke, the minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising – none.

5. Chairman's Report

David Woods admitted that it had been a very challenging year for the Society, but it continues to flourish. Membership was maintained at 251 (vs 252 last year). The Society promoted 20 events, including the two on-line events streamed since the lockdown. There were 5 Showcase events, 3 Choir concerts, 6 Celebrity concerts, and 2 workshops in schools: a brass masterclass at Abbey Gate College, and flute and harp duo at St Thomas Bluecoat School. . In addition Choir held a Come-and-sing workshop and the Society ran a Young Musician competition. But because of the Covid pandemic, there was no choice but to cancel 2 Choir concerts, 2 Showcase concerts and the Gala concert, one school event and the annual Chamber Music Workshop. Not surprisingly audience numbers were considerably down at 2951 against 4484 last year, but the new initiative of streaming 2 virtual concerts on-line generated 541 views.

At the same time, valuable links with Cheshire West Voluntary Arts Network, and St Mary's User Group were maintained, and collating assistance given to "Music in Chester". Two £500 bursaries were awarded to young musicians to foster their education. Achieving a modest financial surplus ensured the Society could contribute to its charitable aims. The Risk Register has been reviewed to identify risks and take action to reduce them. Progress against the 3-year strategic plan devised in 2019 has been seriously affected by the pandemic, but will be pursued as circumstances permit.

The Society's main challenge is returning to normal activities following easing of restrictions. The immediate plan for this season is to include the following:

- ensure sufficient funds flow into the Society to cover fixed costs, and provision of on-line events
- sustain Choir membership through a series of on-line and social events
- engage performers to record or live-stream concerts for the Society's YouTube channel to support musicians and provide music for members and the public secure agreement with Chester Cathedral about the erection and storage of staging for future Choir concerts
- plan a safe return to rehearsals and concerts when guidance allows
- review the 75th Anniversary events which should have taken place in May 2021

Plans for the 21/22 season include:

- retain as many members as possible and attract new membership
- run the season of concerts and events deferred from 20/21 season
- ensure all events and rehearsals are clearly safe to give confidence to members/audience
- purchase staging for use in the cathedral to enable high quality concerts to continue

– maximise the use of local media and press to make the restart visible to the public
The Board owes its volunteers a large debt of thanks, and the Chairman wanted to pay tribute to the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm of many people who support the success of the organisation.

The report was accepted, proposed by David Parks-Smith, and seconded by Mick Clarke..

6. Section Reports

Showcase – Mick Clarke reported on a successful season until it was cut short by the pandemic. Audiences for the concerts were: Stewart Smith and friends 48; Heather Heighway 34; Young Musicians from the competition 67 (first rate performances); Chester Brass 46 (disappointing considering the number of participants); Jan Modelski orchestras 98. The Gala Concert had to be cancelled. Showcase decided to engage local performers to do two virtual concerts in July via Youtube, and Bethan Griffiths, and Heather Heighway have each attracted over 300 views cumulatively (the concerts are still available to view on the CMS website), with more concerts since. Mick Clarke mentioned that Gordon Linnell was retiring after many years of stalwart service on their committee, wished to register the Society's thanks.

The report was accepted, proposed by Jon Banks and seconded by Sue Russell.

Choir – the report was presented by John Ferrari, who has agreed to act as temporary Chairman after Clive Cooper had to resign because of family commitments. John paid tribute to Clive's dedicated leadership, and the unfortunate loss at the end of a difficult season. It started well with the audience for the November concert (Finzi and Karl Jenkins) only 2% down on the previous year, but the cathedral's unilateral decision to dispose of the usual choir staging and impose a contractor to put up inferior staging at considerably higher cost was a major blow. Cathedral revision of the seating layout seriously impacted the December Carol concerts, for which the audience was 24% down on 2018, plus the extra cost of the staging. The guest presenter Roger McGough however, contributed to good concerts. Having worked well at the challenging Beethoven Missa Solemnis for the March concert, it was disappointing to have to cancel it at the last minute because of the pandemic. The Choir Day in February was rewarding. John Ferrari referred to the key role in the strength of the choir played by conductor Graham Jordan Ellis and accompanist Graham Eccles. Progress has been made on the staging problem, thanks to the Board agreeing to provide funding for purchase of suitable staging, which will support Choir into the future. John Ferrari was grateful to the sub-committee and Connie Telford and David Willis for analysing the options and developing a practical plan. He also thanked their hard-working committee for producing ideas to maintain morale of choir members in the enforced interregnum.

Celebrity Concerts – David Woods reported that membership was down slightly (94 vs 98 last year) for various reasons, and the number of friends also down a bit to 41. The average audience for the 6 fine concerts declined to 125 (from 149) although the emerging pandemic reduced audiences for the last concerts. Fortunately, the concert with Ben Goldscheider (French horn) was held just before the lockdown. The decision was taken in March to postpone the entire 20/21 season, and it now looks right. David Woods was pleased to confirm that the 20/21 programme will be carried over to 2021/22, with all booked artists agreeing to the postponement. Meanwhile some celebrity artists will be featured in virtual concerts alongside Showcase. The Society is very grateful for numerous additional donations in support of Celebrity Concerts, and in particular the anonymous gift which enables engagement of top-notch performers, without raising ticket prices. The report was accepted, proposed by John Wislade and seconded by Mick Clarke.

7. Treasurer's Report and Presentation of Accounts for 2019/20209

David Taylor thanked his wife Susan Taylor for great help in preparing the accounts, making it a joint effort, and he thanked Jon Penn, and Penny Clarke for contributing necessary Section Data. The Independent Examiner Peter Hurst was very happy with the Accounts. Pages 1 - 4 of the

statutory Trustees Annual Report record the highlights, and an important statement of achievements and plans for the future, already mentioned in the Chairman's report. The Financial Review on page 3 shows a positive movement of funds of £1,383 compared with £10,725 for last season. The investments have recovered since the small unrealised loss which applied in July. The unrestricted reserves now stand at £88,971 compared with £86,597 last year. There are designated funds of £11,062 set aside for future stability of Showcase Section, and two designated funds: £15,000 to support events to celebrate the Society's 75th anniversary in 2021, and £914 for use in activities in memory of Geoff and Lila Hallett. David Taylor commented that the main impact on the Society's financial position this year had not been the Covid pandemic, but the choir staging problem, and the cancelled concerts afforded some compensation. Fortunately, the Financial Review indicated sufficient reserves to allow purchase of staging for the future. David Taylor referred to the Management accounts, which do not go to Companies House, and usefully show the outcome for each Section with a detailed breakdown of income and expenditure. Celebrity Concerts ended with a deficit of £2,166, compared with last year's surplus because ticket sales were down and hall costs higher. David Woods noted that the large gift is used to cover the loss from engaging more expensive artists. Choir made a smaller surplus of £4022 compared with a surplus of £6,070 last year. Lower ticket revenue was offset by reduced costs for the cancelled concerts, and subscriptions had been increased. Higher hall hire costs included the substantial extra staging cost. Sue Taylor commented that cathedral waywardness on PRS payments had led to significant write-offs last year. The reason for the Showcase deficit of £350 after its surplus of £1085 last year was lower ticket revenue, and especially the cancellation of the normally profitable Gala concert. The Society account ended with a deficit of £1,621 compared with a surplus of £1168 last year, mainly because the costs of the Young Musician competition were incurred this time, and donations were down. The Chairman was pleased that the Society remained in remarkably good health. He gave a big thank you to David and Sue Taylor for their efforts on the big and complicated Treasury job. The meeting accepted the Accounts, proposed by Jon Banks and seconded by John Ferrari. No formal motion was required since they had been approved by the Board earlier.

8. Election of Officers and Committee

The three Trustees standing down at this AGM under Rule 12 are David Woods, David Parks-Smith and John Herson. All are eligible for re-election and are willing to continue in their roles. There were no other nominations. David Woods proposed they be elected en bloc, subject to any dissenting voices. There were none from those at the meeting.

Therefore the Officers and Committee members for 2020/2021 are:

Chairman – D Woods

Vice Chairman – M Clarke

Hon. Secretary - D G Parks-Smith

Hon. Treasurer – D Taylor

Hon. Assistant Treasurer – S M Taylor

Hon. Publicity Officer - vacant

Board Members - J Herson, E B Ranby, S Russell

9. Any Other Business - none

10. Next meeting – expected to be held in early December 2021.

Without further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.25 p m

