



Minutes Wareham Choral Society AGM 2019

Monday
30th Sept 2019
8:45pm at URC

1. Welcome

Welcome to: Eve Baker, Maggie Collett, Ann Colquhoun, Kathy Connor, Wendy Crees, Cathy Green, Marion Leggott, Jean Manning, Kim Moss, Joan Naylor, Judith Price, Elizabeth Read Wilson, Angela Salter, Lindy Ventham, Maureen Bayliss, Miriam Bell, Heather Cerullo, Georgia Clayton, Jane Freeman, Nancy Gibson, Jennifer Haworth, Yvonne Hunter, Janet Jones, Jean Stewart, Alyson Waugh, John Astley, Gideon Daly, David Edgington, Alan Green, Jack Haworth, Mark Lapper, Melvin Leggott, Bob Newnham, Sarah Welton, Brian Wilkins.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from David and Christine Kemp. Mary Norrish, and Mike Hampton.

3. Minutes – 1/10/2018

These were accepted as a true record.

4. Matters Arising

At the last AGM, a proposal to charge a reduced price for tickets bought from choir members, and to charge half-price to under-18s, had been adopted, to be implemented at the committee's discretion. We had implemented the reduced charges for under-18s (and free admission to accompanied children under 12) but had not chosen to implement the members' discount. Any feedback from members to the committee on this policy would be appreciated.

5. Chairman's Report

Judith Price reported as follows:

"In the autumn we organised a Come-and-Sing on the theme of Remembrance and Reconciliation. The wide-ranging programme of new works by the award-winning young Scottish composer Chris Hutchings (composed for his #choirsagainstracism campaign) and familiar favourites by Parry, Faure and Vaughan Williams attracted a good number of people who were equally keen to meet and work with our new MD. The event was much enjoyed, but did not result in new members and accrued a loss of £214.

I think we need to be clear about how we organise and make space for Come-and- events as the host choir. This was the third such event we had organised – following on from the two held in 2016 (Stainer's Crucifixion at Bere Regis church and Faure's Requiem at LSM).

It is generally felt that people attending such events do so because they know the work and wish to perform it again, or they wish to become familiar with it and perform it for the first time, but there should be no obligation on the host choir to use precious rehearsal time in learning and supporting the work. This needs discussion – the issue arose because it was felt that the Schutz was prejudiced by reduced rehearsal time.

The Christmas concert was a partial success. The harpist was much enjoyed and we should have made more space in the programme for her. We have a great advantage in having a conductor with Hazel's vocal experience and the anthems and carols impressed and were enjoyed. However the extensive recitative in the Schutz was not. Our Christmas audience was looking for more familiar Christmas music and our engagement of Ben Gautier and Daniel, the RCM scholars we had used previously, was ill-advised. They were not well-trained in the art of recitative. Rosemary spent some

time in the interval with Ben in the interval, but I think to little effect. Friends of mine from the cycling group left at half-time. There was also a deafening silence at the end of the Schutz because the audience was unsure work had finished. It has been suggested that in future we should have a "plant" in the audience to kick-off the applause. Rosemary commented in her review that we were probably 2 rehearsals away from performance standard and advised that we should have a seating plan drawn up in advance of the concert. The concert incurred a loss of £661.

The Poole Music Series benefited from a large donation from the dissolution of the Wessex Festival and it would be reasonable to expect some payback to this area from these young musicians. Our target should be to engage young local soloists with a fee expectation of around £100.

The Spring concert was much enjoyed. The soloists were excellent, and the choir was well prepared to perform the anthems selected from the European Sacred Music book, including the eight-part Lotti Crucifixus. The Nelson Mass was a success. The young organist was greatly appreciated, which reminds us that we should use every opportunity to involve young people. The event ran at a loss of £562.

For the Summer concert, we were blessed with a beautiful summer evening. The situation was delightful and the soloists were excellent. Both Grace and the harpist were engaging. The acoustic was not enhancing and the sight lines for the audience were less than perfect. The choir was much reduced, and Hazel and I spent time in the previous week sourcing a tenor and an alto, but failing to engage a soprano. The objective in organising summer concerts is to perform a wider range of music in the hope of attracting new members. The choir performance was not brilliant but the programme was engaging and varied. The loss incurred was £342.

I would like to point out that Gift Aid rebate would, and hopefully will, mitigate these losses.

So where do we go from here?

Firstly, I would like all members to commit to learning the music. Hazel is able to improve the quality of the sound we make – the vocal exercises make a huge difference and it is not satisfying to rely on someone else. Hazel will be providing information on ways in which we can access online vocal support. In addition, each section of the choir has a representative either on the committee or in touch with the committee and it is essential that you feedback your ideas for improving your choral experience and our concerts.

We are facing a challenging future with so many choirs in the area discovering Lady St mary church as a concert venue and this will escalate when the church is improved with the addition of toilets and a meeting-and-greeting area. We must use the funds from the DGoS wisely and endeavour to enrich the choral experience for members of Wareham Choral Society. We must seek to offer a rich choral experience to all ages, particularly the young, so that they obtain the same joy of singing that we have had in our lifetime.

6. Music Director's Report

Hazel Ricketts reported as follows:-

"Last September saw a new phase for Wareham Choral Society, and me, as I was appointed and started work as Musical Director here.

The first year with a new musical director is always interesting for any choir and they get to know each other and how they work and so on. To start with the musical director is very much reliant on both the information given by those who have known the choir longer, and her own experiences and resources as she discovers what the choirs strengths and weaknesses are and how best to further their music making.

We started off with a 'come and sing' event in Remembrance tide. It was suggested that rather than the normal fare we should look for something a little different for both this and the Christmas concert. As a consequence we opted for Vaughan Williams 'Toward the Unknown Region' as our main piece, with some other shorter works. Given that this is very much an 'unknown' work and at the suggestion of the Chairlady so we didn't start Christmas music too early, we devoted a fair amount of rehearsal time to this. I think, musically, this may have been slightly too ambitious a piece at this stage although several choir members expressed to me that they very much enjoyed the music and were glad to

have discovered it. For me, this was also a learning curve with regard to the choir's capacity to learn and retain, and even such things as the simple question of confidence in sight reading and so on. However, having said this, we accomplished a great deal of music with the Come and Sing, with the movements from the Faure being sung confidently and musically, and many of the shorter pieces equally so! I was told by several members that the day was enjoyable and that they had enjoyed the challenge of this music. Having Rosemary Field available as a second keyboard player was, on this occasion, useful as John Radford was able to take the organ accompaniment whilst Rosemary supported the vocal parts where necessary.

I think it is fair that the Christmas concert would be said to be similar. In hindsight although the Christmas Story by Schutz was a fantastic work, it probably over-reached a little the capability of the choir at this stage, especially the sections for split parts. Having said this, it hung together well, and there were some really nice moments within it, and it was a slightly different choice. Our other Christmas carols went well, with some particularly notable musical moments in "O Holy Night" which was wonderful with our harp soloist Katie Salamon. Likewise our soprano soloist, Grace Lovelass, working with Katie was something different, and overall a good musical offering.

By the time we set the programme for the spring concert I felt more confident in the choir's capacity for the music set – this time Haydn's Nelson Mass. As a basically 4 part piece I felt that the choir would be more confident with this, and that there was a fair chance that some of them had sung this before. This, I think, proved to be the case. I did feel that I would like to continue to stretch the choir, hence setting the 8 part Lotti Crucifixus, and I think that they rose to this challenge well, but, of course, this was just one shorter piece. I am pleased the choir members can come and talk to me about concerns, and it was expressed that, with the additional shorter pieces from the European Sacred Music book, there were a lot of notes to learn. In addition the generally early music I had chosen was in an unfamiliar style, so the decision was made to lighten the load by asking our 4 very competent soloists to take two of the pieces to sing as a quartet. I think this helped to balance the programme as well as take the pressure from the choir. I felt the spring concert, yes, had a few 'moments' but generally went well, and was much more assured than the Christmas concert. Overall the sound the choir has been making has been improving, and I have been very encouraged and pleased by the positive reactions and participation in the warm-ups that I have been doing to help with technique overall.

In the background to all of this was also learning the way the Wareham Choral operates, and such things as who produces programmes for the concerts and so on. Bob – thank you for your hard work on specifically the programmes, and for allowing me to interfere and to suggest adaptations and alterations in the way of doing things! I haven't meant to be a pain in the neck, but I hope that what we've come up with has been useful for audiences and has helped them to follow, understand and enjoy our music making more!

The summer concert venue was stunning, although it had challenges in terms of layout for the choir and audience. The programme was one which was undoubtedly eclectic! I found it disconcerting to be preparing a concert without prior knowledge of how many singers I would have, and other practical arrangements which, in this particular case, I know was not the fault of those trying to put these arrangements in place. Therefore my initial programme was one intended to 'play it safe' that should work with fewer singers and considerably less rehearsal time. My aim being that all involved would feel confident with the music. However it became apparent that my understanding of the brief for the programme was not the same as all of those who had given that brief and as a consequence, in order to fulfil this difference, a few more pieces were added. This made for a programme that was certainly varied but I think well balanced and generally enjoyed, although possibly not quite as secure as I had hoped due to its length. I need not have feared though as I felt that you really 'pulled it out of the bag' and the performance went very well. Particular credit to you all for coping with my last minute seating changes. It really helped the sound overall, but I hope without causing you too much angst! Our two vocal soloists were fantastic, and their repertoire fitted into the overall scheme very well, with Katie Salamon offering a slightly different dimension and showing how versatile the harp really can be. The feedback I received was that the concert was well received and enjoyed – despite the heat!

Overall I have found some aspects of this year challenging, and I am aware that the choir have, but at the end of a year I feel that I understand and can judge repertoire for the choir much more

confidently than a year ago, and I hope this will help to leave the choir feeling confident in what they are singing in concert, and able to sing musically rather than just 'get through the notes'. The choir's sound has improved, and I feel you are getting used to me and my ways of working, and what I expect from you, as well as me learning the best ways to 'teach' you new music!

I can only see this all improving as time goes on – my experience is that it really takes 2 years to really get working at our best, but we are very well on the way. I think we've explored quite a bit of new territory musically, with varying degrees of success, and I definitely feel musically we go forward with more strength now than a year ago. Albeit that, as ever, we could do with a few more to help that strength in the tenor and bass departments! I hope you share my confidence that the choir is 'on the up' and looking forward to not only this Christmas term, but beyond to the Spring term (when we have some exciting plans – some familiar and some new music!) and through to summer...

As musical director though there is one last thing I have to say, and that is massive thanks to John Radford who indicated before the summer break that there was the possibility of a job nearer home which would mean his leaving us. John has always been supportive, as well as absolutely on the ball and reliable musically within rehearsals. A very valuable extra pair of eyes for typos and other inconsistencies, as well as being a superb accompanist both for rehearsals and concerts. Thank you John for all you have given to Wareham Choral over the years, and within the last year for your support and music making, and we wish you all the very best for the future."

7. Treasurer's Report

The financial report for the year is shown below.

Financial Review of WCS concerts 1 Sept 2018 – 31 Aug 2019

Losses have been made in each of the four concerts undertaken during this year, namely:

Come and Sing 3/11/18	-£214.27
Christmas Concert 15/12/18	-£661.32
Spring Concert 13/4/19	-£562.86
Summer Concert 13/7/19	-£341.72

Total losses from concerts this year : -£1780.17

As advised in my 7 April 2019 letter to Committee Members, WCS requires subscription income from 42 members each term in order to meet the minimum costs of rehearsals and concerts for each term. Membership numbers for each of the 3 terms were as follows :

Autumn 2018	35
Spring 2019	33
Summer 2019	24

As membership numbers have fallen below the minimum required to meet rehearsal and concert costs, WCS has therefore incurred operating losses, in addition to concert losses.

To cover these losses, it has been necessary to transfer funds from the Deposit Account to the Current Account as follows :

£740 transferred on 14/4/19
£500 transferred on 17/7/19
£500 transferred again on 17/7/19

Total loss from Deposit Account to cover operating and concert losses : -£1740

At the beginning of the year 1 Sept 18 – 31 Aug 19, the current account stood at £1856.26 and the deposit account stood at £4022.90. **TOTAL ASSETS WERE £5879.16.**

To begin the year 1 Sept 19 – 31 Aug 20, the current account stands as of today at £1523.03 and the deposit account stands at £2286.09 **TOTAL ASSETS ARE NOW £3809.12**

TOTAL LOSS TO MEMBERS OVER THIS YEAR = £2070.04.
ie From 1 Sept 18 – 31 Aug 19, WCS has lost over 35% of its year-opening assets.

ERW 31/8/19

Elizabeth Read Wilson emphasised the salient points of her report:-

- All recent concerts have lost money.
- Over the past year, membership subscriptions have not covered rehearsal costs
- We have had to use one-third of our reserves to cover operating and concert losses.
- This situation is not sustainable – we would be bankrupt in 3 years if it continued.

So it had been an interesting (and stressful) year as Treasurer!

However, the demise of the Dorset Guild of Singers resulted in a windfall of £7000 (which arrived after the above accounts were produced), so we have a cushion which gives us time to address the situation. Also, this term has seen the arrival of several new members and we are now close to being viable again. So we can go forward with confidence.

We also await the results of our claim for Gift Aid rebate for recent years' subscriptions. This process has been more difficult than previously, because HMRC seem to be examining claims more stringently than before. We have had to rebut their claim that all of our rehearsals constitute musical tuition and so are not eligible for Gift Aid rebate.

Bob Newnham has now taken over looking after Gift Aid.

8. Election of Officers

Both the Chairman, Judith Price, and the Secretary, Bob Newnham, indicated that they were willing to stand again. There were no other nominations, so they were duly confirmed in office.

Treasurer Elizabeth Read Wilson does not wish to continue as Treasurer, due to personal commitments, but is happy to remain on the committee as an ordinary member. Thanks are due to Elizabeth, who has done a tremendous job over the past year in sorting out the accounts and wrestling with HMRC over claiming Gift Aid.

Eve Baker has indicated that she would be prepared to stand as Treasurer. There were no other candidates, so she was duly proposed, seconded and elected.

9. Election of Committee Members

David Edgington is prepared to continue on the committee, acting as a rep for the basses, and Sarah Welton is happy to continue, even though her previous assigned role as Guild representative is now redundant. She will act as tenor rep. Jennifer Haworth is also prepared to continue to serve, as is Elizabeth Read Wilson.

There were no other volunteers, despite a plea from the Chairman for more involvement from members.

Cathy Green has volunteered to act as soprano rep, but will not be a committee member.

So the committee now is:-

Chairman Judith Price

Secretary Bob Newnham

Treasurer Eve Baker

Members David Edgington, Jennifer Haworth, Sarah Welton, Elizabeth Read Wilson

10. A.O.B.

WCS wishes to record its thanks to John Radford for his work as our accompanist over the past 6 years, and to wish him well in his new position.

Alan Green thanked the committee for their work over the past year.

Heather Cerullo pointed out that the summer concert could not have failed to make a loss given the limited seating capacity of the venue and our use of soloists and a harpist.

Bob Newnham 25/10/2019