

**BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Wednesday 4th September 2024, 7.30 p.m.
at Sunderland Minster.**

Minutes of the last AGM (2023) have been published on the Society website – under Members’ News. Anyone without access to these can request a paper copy from the Secretary (Tel: 522 7721) as long as this is made before the meeting. Nomination Forms for the elections are also available from the same source.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of last AGM
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman’s Report
5. Treasurer’s Report
6. Conductor’s Report
7. Election of Officers
8. Election of Representatives
9. Any Other Business

BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 2023/2024 SEASON

This was held at Sunderland Minster, on Wednesday the 6th September 2023. The meeting began at 7.30 p.m. with Mike Foster in the chair and 40 members of the Society present.

Apologies for Absence :. JA, CB, DC, JC.

Minutes of the last A.G.M. : These had been previously circulated and were unanimously accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising : None

The following reports were presented at the meeting and are reproduced below.

The Chair's Report : This report was presented by M.F. :-

It was good to have a normal year after covid disruption. We enjoyed three excellent concerts, all different, all successful.

We also tried a number of new things last year. We had our first performance at the Fire Station with our "Sondheim Side by Side" Concert. Although the level of preparedness from the Fire Station for our rehearsal day was disappointing, the concert itself was excellent. With a really good response from an enthusiastic audience.

We had our first student through our Student Singer Programme whereby promising new singers (who may take singing as a career) work with us through rehearsals and in concerts and in return we provide professional singing lessons.

We were delighted to have Bradley Cheswick to play Beethoven's Violin Concerto which mixed choral and instrumental pieces to great effect.

We have agreed a new fee structure £125 per year, which now covers our annual running and rehearsal costs. Our accounts are transparent and shared with the society. We also have the same 25% increase for patrons. We are very pleased and deeply grateful, to have accepted generous donations from members and patrons. Thank you.

In the coming year are that we hope to be combining with a children's choir for part of our Christmas Concert. We look to have an extra coffee morning to raise funds and we will continue with our recruitment drive for new members. We were delighted to welcome five new members at the first rehearsal of the year.

Martin Richardson is taking a responsibility for marketing this year. Please feed him with items for the press and social media.

I would like to say a huge thank you to the dedication of our singers, and our outstanding professionals, Eileen Bown and David Murray. We produce quality musical concerts of a very high standard for ourselves and the public. We do it because we love it and long may it continue.

Please talk to the committee. We are open to ideas which will help the Choral Society to flourish. The Society is all of us.

Last but not least: This is our **75th Anniversary year**: We are the longest continually operating Choral society in the North East region and we will be celebrating in Style. Check our website for details, www.bishopwearmouth.co.uk.

Enjoy the year ahead.

Note : The meeting was asked to confirm by vote the increase in subscription to £125 and this was accepted unanimously.

The Treasurer's Report : The Treasurer, JC, presented the following points :

- a) The accounts for 2022-2023 are presented with the equivalent figures for 2021-2022 and 2020-2021 for comparison, however there was no activity in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic and only one ticketed concert in 2021-2022. This year, 2022-2023 is a return to 'normal' choral society activities.
- b) The Choral Society spent £4227.78 more than it had income in 2022-2023. Choral Society subscriptions were about the same as the previous year and there was a large increase in patron subscriptions. There was also a substantial increase in donations for which the committee is extremely grateful. Gift Aid income has not yet been received from HMRC so is recorded as an estimate. Society members have been very generous on coffees and raffles at rehearsals, and we had a very successful coffee morning last October. Had it not been for this extra income especially donations, the Choral Society would have ended the year much worse off.
- c) The cost of hiring the Minster for rehearsals increased from £65.75 to £80 per week from March onwards, plus an additional charge of £40 an hour for heating. The Committee put this to the choir at the start of the summer term and it was agreed the annual subscriptions would increase to £125 from September 2023 to cover the higher cost of rehearsals. There was also the unforeseen cost of repairing the piano last autumn. May I remind choir members that the cost of hiring scores can be significant (score hire and royalties for the Sondheim were £705.40) therefore it is essential that everyone pays Angela their hire fee for music each term.
- d) We presented three musically excellent and thoroughly enjoyable concerts during the year, but all made losses which were covered from our savings. We still have £25,618.49 in savings and can afford to put on good concerts for our 75th year, however it would be wonderful to have bigger audiences to increase ticket sales as well as spreading enjoyment of our repertoire. Every member of the choir can help by spreading the word about our concerts and selling tickets.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for the accounts and his report.

There were no questions and the accounts were unanimously accepted.

The Conductor's Report for 2022-2023 was given by D.M :-

This last season was quite a turning point for us all, as it was the first season where we returned to a completely normal schedule, and were able to give three concerts in unrestricted circumstances, after the challenges of the pandemic and its aftermath. This came as a relief to me, certainly, and I am sure to everyone else.

However, it wasn't without its own challenges. In the Autumn we set about learning a lovely Christmas programme, full of shorter pieces with a wide variety of styles. This is always in a way more challenging than doing a larger work where there maybe upwards from half a dozen larger choruses all in the same style. It took a bit of learning, and we were further challenged by two other things: firstly, we had quite late on decided to perform the whole concert a week earlier at St Mary's Monkseaton, where a slot had become available, and secondly we also decided to make a recording to be submitted for a Classic FM competition. This was really hard and on reflection we weren't quite recovered enough from the ravages of Covid to be in the best vocal health for it. Flat singing was cruelly revealed in the recording and it wasn't our best effort. However, it did act as a wake up call and over the next few months we were all acutely aware of the necessity of correct breathing and proper support especially in softer, slower passages.

The concerts at Christmas were very successful: there was a lot of interest at St Mary's – where they do hear a lot of choral singing. They were very impressed both by the choir and by the choice of repertoire which was both ambitious and eclectic. We had our usual team of strings and piano as the instrumental support and as usual they were top notch. And we had our young soprano Anna Dias with us singing solos and also the soprano part in Chilcott's lovely settings of carols in On Christmas Night. We had also from within the choir Cathy Price and Chris Moore singing solos very beautifully.

And from the body of the choir we had readers to read the passages in between the settings. I thought that everyone read superbly and the musical performance of the piece was very fine, as well as the overall effect being deeply moving. The whole evening ended with our old favourite - Chilcott's outrageous and very funny setting of the 12 Days of Christmas, bringing things to a boisterous and very animated conclusion.

Into the new year we were embarked on a lovely project. We had chosen to sing Haydn's Nelson Mass, and Haydn's setting of the Te Deum, and joining us for the Beethoven violin concerto was Bradley Creswick. It was going to be quite an evening.

The rehearsals for the mass went very well indeed. By now we were in better voice, and we had more stamina. The movements were learnt well and reasonably quickly. The flat singing all but disappeared. The Te Deum proved more difficult, partly due to the unfamiliar text, and partly due to it being less straightforward somehow than it looked. I did one of my famous cuts, giving a tricky passage to the long-suffering soloists, and we managed to master it by the time the concert came along.

With a really magnificent orchestra full of high quality musicians, we gave a really strong and very committed performance of both pieces. The mass in particular was full of really strong rhythmic singing with everything from the boldness of the Credo to the very expressive, softer and shaped singing in the Et Incarnatus est. With a magnificent team of soloists, this was a performance really worthy of a Bishopwearmouth Choral Society at standards we had achieved pre pandemic. The icing on the cake was Bradley's sublime performance of the Beethoven Violin concerto which rounded off the concert. This had everything – stunning virtuosity, but also deeply moving passages, especially in the slow movement, and then with unabashed humour in the finale. It really was a privilege to make music with such a hugely talented soloist of international standing and brought this concert to a triumphant conclusion.

The summer term saw us on a very different venture. One of the most enjoyable programmes to work at, Side by Side by Sondheim, was a bit of challenge right from the start. Firstly, getting enough copies from the publishers was a big ask and then getting them to appear when we needed them was an even bigger one, despite the large sums of money needed for the privilege of hiring them.

We were undeterred however, and were soon engaged in the business of learning this very very tricky material. But its astonishing quality, and terms not only of the music, but of the lyrics, kept us all going and

at times very amused and tickled. We had quite a lot to do, and it took us all our time to learn everything in time, but it was fun. Anne Marie's appearance half way through to give us some well needed vocal coaching was both welcome and enjoyable as well as deeply instructive.

The weekend of the show was a very busy one for me- I had four soloists staying with me over the weekend to rehearse all that they were doing, and that was an immense amount of material. They were superbly prepared and everything was off copy – something I didn't ask for but which definitely added extra dimensions to the show. So, the chorus was well prepared, the soloists were well prepared. What a good job that was. The Sunday afternoon at the Fire Station began with some of the most stressful circumstances I have come across in all my career. The level of incompetence and unreadiness at the Fire Station – for which we were paying a large amount in hire fees – was at a level I have not seen before. In fact it was off the scale. It meant that we could not start rehearsing at 2pm, and it was after 2.30 by the time we could do anything as there no chairs and no staging when we all arrived. There were no radio mikes until 3.30, and there was no foldback until 4.30. How on earth we managed to get through everything by just after 5 is still a mystery to me, but I have to say I could not have been more proud of you all in your calmness and coolness despite the situation we were having to endure, and your complete focus and commitment to getting the job done.

The performance was – as we all know – a huge success, with great feedback from the audience, and a feeling of great enjoyment from everyone involved on stage in singing those great numbers and feeling everything come to life. The addition of the new numbers was a great success, as was the re written libretto delivered by the four soloists. It was a lovely evening and a great end to the season. It was sadly with reduced numbers in the choir for a variety of reasons, but the quality of the singing was as fine as ever.

Now we turn to our 75th anniversary season.

We start with another Christmassy programme. There are several reasons for this. You have gathered by now that our costs, especially since the spiraling costs of hiring the Minster, are rather eye watering. We always have had to keep an eye on the cost of programmes and the returns we can make on them. In this climate we need even more care. So it is a low budget concert, and one which will hopefully attract good audiences because of its easy listening and popular content. We are again going to perform the concert twice, once in the Minster and once in St Mary's after last year's success. It is a programme I have done before, but not for a few years now. It features two of Vaughan Williams' best loved works, his Fantasia on Christmas Carols and the Serenade to Music.

The second half will be a selection of music from Carols for Choirs and other sources. The thing I am most excited about is being able to perform two carols by Lucy Walker. Lucy was my pupil for 11 years and was one of the most talented pupils I ever had. She has recently become a sought after composer, and at the amazing age of 23 has got herself commissioned by BBC singers amongst others, and also finds some of her compositions in the new edition of Carols for Choirs! At age 23! So, I am really looking forward to doing those. Her music is simply beautiful. And also, there is a possibility of doing this concert together with a local children's choir which we are investigating at this moment. We could do some pieces such as Oh Ebenezer from my Christmas Carol which we used to do with the young singers. And, of course, these children will have their own repertoire, and they will hopefully bring their own audience and swell the box office returns.

The big concert in March, and one which will cost a bit of money, is an Elgar programme I have been wanting to do for some time. It will feature Elgar's The Music Makers, which is the most fantastic piece, and which we haven't done for some time. It will also feature Elgar's Sea Pictures which are also on my top

ten, and we will start things moving by singing I was Glad by Parry – always a spectacular start to any occasion as the recent coronation proved.

Finally, we return in the summer to a selection of my arrangements of popular songs which we haven't done since 2017, so it will be a more light hearted summer term. It will also be another low budget concert to balance out the costs of the Elgar and I look forward to it as indeed I do to the whole season with great excitement.

My great thanks to our hard-working committee for their great commitment to making everything run as smoothly as it does, and in particular thanks to Mike who has had a great first season as chairman, with big shoes to fill, but has brought a lot of enthusiasm and energy to meetings and has some great ideas for the future.

Election of Officers – These were conducted as follows :

There were no other nominations for the posts of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer so it was carried that the present incumbents – M.Foster, E.Watson and J.Cripps would continue in those roles.

For the post of		Proposed by	Seconded by	
Soprano Representative	J.Kilpatrick	EM	KC	carried by meeting
Bass Representative	M.Atkinson	PB	CM	carried by meeting

Any Other Business :-

1. AL, as Librarian, presented a report. It noted that there were 17 members who had not paid their £6 for score hire – and this was not good practice. Prices for hiring scores varies and members' contributions were needed. She also announced that at the end of this 75th season she will no longer be able to continue with the Librarian role, because of other commitments. She was asking for anyone who might be interested in taking on the role to speak to her, saying that she would work alongside the volunteer for this season and then they would assume the responsibility from September 2024.

A question was asked about the possibility of paying for score hire via BACS. It was agreed that this would be possible, but both the Librarian and the Treasurer would need to be made aware of the source.

2. A question had been submitted by JS before the meeting. She would like to ask if we could have a hymn 'ready to perform' should the occasion arise; for example, it was disappointing not to be able to sing at CL's funeral earlier in the year? It was suggested by the Chair that this suggestion could be better considered by the Committee and it was agreed that it would be raised as an agenda item there.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.11 p.m.

Eileen Watson,
Hon.Secretary.