



Registered Charity 800116

# South Devon Choir

## Minutes of Annual General Meeting

21 January 2021, 6.30pm

online via MS Teams

**Present:** Sally Laird (Chairperson); John Hobbs (President); Simon Dunbavand (Director of Music); Prim Wood (Treasurer); Lisa Prager (Secretary); Committee members Paul Barton, Rosie Clapham, Stella Currie, Ann Gardiner, Mark Saxelby and Jill Stevens; and approximately 40 Choir members.

John Hobbs as President welcomed everyone to the online meeting.

1. **Apologies** were received from Tricia Turner (member) and Juliet Morton (Friend of SDC).
2. **Minutes of the AGM** on 23 January 2020 had been made available to all members prior to the meeting. The Minutes were accepted and signed as a true record (proposed by Mike Beckett, seconded by Ellen Cole).
3. **Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising.
4. **Chairperson's Report for 2019–2020**

Sally recalled the concert of Handel's Judas Maccabaeus in December 2019, to say farewell to retiring MD, John Hobbs. The Choir began 2020 by welcoming the new Director of Music, Simon Dunbavand. Suddenly everything changed with the coronavirus covid-19 pandemic, and all choral singing ceased from 16 March. Throughout the late spring and summer terms, the only way the Choir could get together was by singing online, a totally different experience made possible and enjoyable by the hard work and enthusiasm of Simon.

The Judas Maccabaeus concert was held in St Mary the Virgin's church, St Marychurch, Torquay, on 7 December, and was the final concert conducted by John Hobbs after 12 years as Music Director. The Choir was accompanied by the Festival orchestra and soloists Lorna Anderson (soprano), Rebecca Smith (alto), Arthur Swan (tenor), and Tim Mirfin (bass). There was hardly a spare seat in the church, and it was followed by a buffet in the nearby parish rooms where a presentation was made to John. Past conductor Melvyn Batten and future conductor Simon Dunbavand were both present.

In November, some members joined the choir of Churston Parish Church to mark Armistice Day. In December, Mike Thompson gave a talk about carols, and a group from the Choir, led by Richard Toll, sang carols for residents of two care homes in Paignton.

Rehearsals of Carmina Burana began in January, under Simon Dunbavand, which was to have been performed with Russian church music by Rachmaninov. However, the coronavirus meant the end of choral singing. The Committee was only able to meet online from March, and in April online rehearsals began, courtesy of MS Teams and organised by Stella and Michael Currie. Simon prepared special booklets of music for members to join in online. Most found rehearsals more difficult but Simon helped by providing backing tracks and accompanying the singers. Other online activities included music theory lessons by Wyn Turner, quiz afternoons by Prim Wood, and a coffee morning.

As summer approached, it was clear the Choir would not be able to sing safely together for a long time, until a vaccine had been discovered. Sadly both the spring and summer concerts had to be cancelled. Simon suggested that the Choir could make a montage video. With a great deal of help from Michael and Stella Currie, members learned how to

record themselves, and about 20 people submitted their attempts, singing Tchaikovsky's Tebe Poem, in Russian, and these were made into a short video by Angus Breton. Thanks are due to Paul Barton for taking on the project, finding the editor/producer and seeing it to completion before the season ended in late July.

In addition to those mentioned above, Sally thanked the many members who worked hard with the Committee over the year, including Janet Bovey who collated the Book of Memories for John Hobbs, the team led by Mark Saxelby which organised and set up the Judas Maccabaeus concert, Margaret King who arranged two coffee mornings in Brixham, and Ros Allen for her book discussion mornings. Sally thanked every member of the Committee, who have done their best to keep the Choir together in a very difficult time, meeting regularly to discuss the way forward and how best to keep Choir members in touch with each other. Lisa produced a weekly newsletter containing items and photos from Choir members, as well as information about the Committee's efforts to keep everybody involved. Many members had commented on these endeavours, the majority of them very positive, and Sally thanked them warmly.

Thanks were given again to Simon, the enthusiastic backbone of everything musical, to Stella and Mike as the cogs that made it all possible, and to Lisa for her information skills. Thanks also went to all members who continued to support the Committee and the Choir, even if unable to join online, as well as those who participated in the online rehearsals and the challenging recordings.

## **5. Hon. Treasurer's Report**

Prim presented the Treasurer's Report and Annual Accounts 2019–2020. The Income and Expenditure Account showed income of £14,199 and expenditure of £9,849 (surplus £4,350).

The largest elements of income were subscriptions (£9,461), social & fundraising (£1,639), and tax repayment on Gift Aid (£1,798). The largest expenditures were the deficit on concerts (£2,654), honoraria (£4,737), and hire of the rehearsal hall (£1,168). The total deficit on the Judas Maccabaeus concert – the only one performed – was £1,875, and although eventually cancelled, the Carmina Burana concert showed a deficit of £779 after costs.

The closing balance of all accounts at 31 August 2019 was £7,059 (£2,709 in 2019).

Responding to questions, Prim said that the rehearsal hall had been used for about half the year (from September 2019 to March 2020); other costs included having to reprint the annual brochure. Prim thanked John Haslam, who took on the role of Independent Examiner of Financials during the year and had been very helpful.

Acceptance of the Annual Accounts was proposed by Hugh Morton, seconded by Fenella Davis, and approved.

## **6. Music Directors' comments**

**John Hobbs**, as Music Director to December 2019, commented on the universal difficulties faced by choral societies throughout most of the year.

As President, he wished to assess the overall health of the Choir and its fitness for the future, normally measured by the quality of its performances and the communal sociability engendered by its activities. Looking at the year's sole example of performance, Judas Maccabaeus, John praised the excellence of singing, with fine attention to musical detail, and superb quality of soloists and orchestra, which made it a most memorable occasion. He would be forever grateful for the tributes paid to him by the Choir – vocal, written, pictorial and edible.

The transition to Simon's leadership was seamless, but the advent of the pandemic was a baptism of fire for him. Many conductors and committees might have shut up shop, but it was very much to the credit of the Choir's leadership that immediate steps were taken to hold the Choir together, through online rehearsals and a most creditable virtual

performance of Tchaikovsky's Tebe Poem. The technical achievement was immense and John admired the dedication and expertise of Simon and the team involved in producing the necessary materials for learning parts, and for compiling the individual recordings into an impressive whole. It was a massive undertaking, made worthwhile by those members who were able to take part. Some members do not have computers, and other means of keeping in touch were introduced, chiefly the newsletter providing information, members' activities, funny stories and quizzes. Keeping in touch by whatever means were available contributed to the well-being of the Choir and merits congratulation.

Particularly deserving of special thanks was Sally, Chair of the Choir for over eight years. Under her active leadership, the Choir has gone from strength to strength, numerically and artistically, and, just as importantly, in the thoughtfulness bestowed on the care for individual members. John thanked Sally for doing so much to knit the Choir together.

All these factors – leadership, membership and musicality – reassured John that the South Devon Choir was in excellent health, well poised to surmount all immediate challenges and to reassemble with renewed vigour when the virus has finally been consigned to the history books. In the mean time, he wished the Choir a year of good health, happiness and harmonious hope!

**Simon Dunbavand**, as Director of Music from January 2020, said the Choir was rapidly approaching its special birthday season [from September 2021], due to open with a complete performance of Messiah, followed by a festival concert of music by Rutter, Drayton, and himself. It was an exciting time, building on John's courageous embracing of new and unusual repertoire including the Tsunami Requiem, while Judas Maccabaeus still resounds for him for the outstanding calibre of the soloists – many moments in many of the arias induced a spine-tingling effect. But sometimes other things happen which make one uncomfortable – a lack of ensemble which may be attributed to the venue or lack of eye contact with the conductor. Many solo performers and orchestral players spend hours of personal preparation, but some musicians do not, relying on their skills and experience to sight-read their way through the rehearsal. Sometimes this turns out just fine. Other times, maybe not.

This time last year Simon and the Choir embarked on Carmina Burana, which would have been an astonishing concert using the composer's own version for two pianos and battery of percussion. Soloists were booked, including Devon's finest professional piano duo and Michelle Hiley, a percussion specialist. Rehearsals of Carmina and some unaccompanied pieces by Rachmaninov were progressing well, before the pandemic struck. As restrictions took hold, all choirs faced dilemmas and decisions, some taking a long break, others opting for online social contact, and some mounting more ambitious programmes. The Choir's approach was been threefold: first, working on light-hearted music and shorter extracts not normally part of the Choir's repertoire. Then, as it became clearer that online singing was going to continue far longer than originally envisaged, making a video of members singing Tchaikovsky's Tebe Poem, a tremendous success. Then, in the autumn, a return to core repertoire, because, as the large-scale choral society of Torbay, it's what the Choir does. After a term of hard work on Rossini's Petite Messe Solennelle, a video is in the pipeline – a testament to how the Choir overcomes adversity, and carries on doing its duty to bring performances of the great classical choral masterpieces to the local area.

But choral singing is about hearing and being finely tuned to others around you, and online that's simply impossible. For as long as rehearsals need to be online, it will be important to integrate the Choir members into real performances of Haydn's Creation – learning the notes with the piano and then singing along with a real performance of the choruses, with a real orchestra and soloists. Soon we will make music again all together; thank you for 'hanging-in there'.

## 7. Election of Officer and Committee Members

In accordance with the Constitution, the Chair and two Committee member positions fall vacant from September 2021 by rotation, while a third Committee member position is made vacant by the retirement of Paul Barton.

Sally Laird (Chair) does not wish to stand again; and Jill Stevens was nominated as Chair. Committee members Rosie Clapham and Ann Gardiner were willing to stand again. Fenella Davis was nominated to fill the vacant position left by Paul's retirement.

**Jill Stevens** was proposed as **Chair** by Paul Barton, seconded by Stella Currie.

**Rosie Clapham** was proposed by Stella Currie and seconded by Tricia Turner.

**Ann Gardiner** was proposed by Jill Stevens and seconded by Rosie Clapham.

**Fenella Davis** was proposed for the additional vacancy by Rosie Clapham and seconded by Prim Wood.

All were duly elected.

## 8. Music Staff

The Director of Music, Simon Dunbavand, is on a rolling contract as from January 2020.

## 8. Other Posts

The following positions are held with the Choir:

Independent Examiner of Financials ..... John Haslam  
Orchestral Secretary ..... Anna Cockroft  
100 Club Organiser ..... Sandra Worrall  
Gift Aid Secretary ..... Jennie Litt  
Ticket Sales ..... Rae Gilderthorp  
Publicity Officer ..... Stella Currie  
Sponsorship ..... Mark Saxelby  
Concert Manager ..... Mark Saxelby  
New Members and Welfare ..... Ann Gardiner  
Music Secretary ..... Jill Stevens / Paul Barton  
Librarian / Hire Organiser ..... Rosie Clapham  
Data Protection Officer ..... Lisa Prager  
Refreshment Organiser ..... Stan Gardiner

## 9. Subscription Charges for the 2020–21 Season

Prim recommended that the subscriptions for 2021–2022 should remain unchanged at £100 (or £35 per term). Accepted by the meeting.

## 10. Any Other Business

The President congratulated Patricia Wyatt and Patricia Turner on each achieving 30 years of membership of the Choir. A certificate will be forwarded to each.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.20pm.

Signed: ..... Sally Laird, Chair, ..... January 2022