



South Devon Choir

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

17 February 2022, 7.30pm

Central Church, Torquay

Present: Jill Stevens (Chair); Prim Wood (Treasurer); Lisa Prager (Secretary); Committee members Rosie Clapham, Stella Currie and Fenella Davis; co-opted Committee member Dee Jevons; and 30 members.

President's Opening Remarks (John Hobbs)

Jill Stevens opened the meeting by reading a message from John Hobbs, who, like Simon Dunbavand (Director of Music), was unable to attend due to concerns over Storm Eunice.

John apologised for being unable to be present to steer the Choir through the AGM, and to renew old friendships and join the bass line during rehearsal.

John commented that the past year had seen the Choir emerge intact from the difficulties of the online rehearsals and performance of an edited version of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*. He extended his thanks and admiration to Simon Dunbavand, assisted by the technical expertise of Stella and Mike Currie, and the determination of the Committee led by Sally Laird and later Jill Stevens, who collectively ensured that the Choir remained focussed and poised to resume live singing as covid restrictions eased. This was triumphantly realised in the splendid performance of Handel's *Messiah*, at St Matthias' Church, Torquay, in December 2021, before a large, appreciative audience.

The repertoire was now moving to the late 20th century, with works by John Rutter, Paul Drayton and Simon Dunbavand – the ability to sing music from all periods is precisely what a choral society of SDC's standing should be doing. The Choir is clearly in very capable hands and he wished it every success for the future.

1. **Apologies** were received from John Hobbs (President), Simon Dunbavand (Director of Music), Sally Laird (Past Chair), and members Hugh Morton and Patricia Beauchamp.
2. **Minutes of the 2021 AGM** on 21 January 2021 had been made available to all members via the Choir's website. The Minutes were accepted and signed as a true record (proposed by Mike Beckett, seconded by Jennie Litt).
3. **Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising.
4. **Past Chair's Report for 2020–2021 (Sally Laird)**

The Past-Chair's Report was sent to the Secretary in advance of the meeting.

Sally commented that the past choir year was very frustrating for all members. It was hoped that at least by the beginning of the summer 2021, the Choir would be able to meet together and start singing again. This was not to be. However the Committee never gave up hope of bringing that about, but eventually realised that nothing would happen until at least autumn 2021.

September 2020 saw many singers online, with Simon leading rehearsals from his home. About 50 or 60 members joined in each week, starting to rehearse Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, although it became clear that a concert was not going to happen. Simon inspired the singers to produce a video of selected movements, including solos by John Hobbs and Rebecca Smith. Stella and Michael Currie and Paul Barton must be thanked for the effort they put into making this happen, working with professional video engineer Angus Breton.

The Committee met regularly as usual, though online, making plans to celebrate the Choir's 150 years of singing in Torbay during the 2021–2022 season. Plans for the Choir to be able to meet again in person, when allowed and safe, kept having to be changed and pushed back.

In the spring and summer of 2021, the Choir began rehearsing Haydn's *Creation*, still online, though again it became clear that there would be no in-person rehearsals or performance. The Choir was entertained online by a quiz and virtual cream tea from Prim, and a talk by Simon including a demonstration cookery lesson.

The 2021 AGM was held online in January, involving a massive amount of information and organisation from the Secretary, Lisa Prager, who also worked hard to produce regular newsletters to keep members in touch and up-to-date with Choir information.

The last 2 years have not been easy at all for the Choir and its members – but thanks to many members' loyalty and commitment, and Simon's inspiration as conductor and musical leader, it has held together pretty well.

5. Chair's Comments (Jill Stevens)

Jill had only been in post for half of the 2020–21 year. During that time the Choir has grappled with the constantly changing covid requirements involved in live rehearsals and responsibilities for public performance. All of this culminated in the 150th Anniversary performance of *Messiah*, in December 2021, which was very well attended. Jill said she was proud of the Choir members for rising so admirably to the occasion.

She thanked the unsung and often unseen heroes who do so much work in the background: providing refreshment for soloists, helping to carry the harpsichord, doing Front of House, and especially the team who safely erected and removed the concert staging.

The Choir was now facing further challenges: some of them exciting – as in the new music they were about to learn – and some of them financial. There was much to look forward to together, not least a concert of two extremely popular works by Mozart and Handel in November 2022.

6. Hon. Treasurer's Report (Prim Wood)

Prim presented the Treasurer's Report and Annual Accounts for 2020–2021. The Income and Expenditure Account showed income of £7,652 and expenditure of £6,236 (surplus £1,417).

The largest elements of income were subscriptions (£5,976), social & fundraising (£548), and tax repayment on Gift Aid (£1,104). The largest expenditures were the deficit on one concert (£400), honoraria (£2,850), secretarial expenses (£709) and professional video production (£1,601).

Although eventually cancelled due to covid restrictions, the *Carmina Burana* concert planned for April 2021 showed a deficit of £400 after costs. The total deficit on the *Messiah* concert in December 2021 (outside the 2020–2021 financial year) was £3,055.

The closing balance of all accounts at 31 August 2021 was £8,476 (£7,059 in 2020).

Acceptance of the Annual Accounts was proposed by Jennie Litt, seconded by Paul Barton, and approved.

7. Music Directors' comments (Simon Dunbavand)

Simon's comments had been forwarded to the Secretary prior to the meeting.

Simon commented that since the last AGM, many really great things have happened. In 2020, the Choir was meeting online on Microsoft Teams which had many features that enabled the Choir to be cohesive and stay together. Weekly singing was implemented, with booklets of accessible music; the Choir progressed to singing a piece by Tchaikovsky and made a short video; and then to a more ambitious task with Rossini. By the last AGM in January 2021, the Choir was deep in Haydn's *Creation*, with no video to assemble, and singing with real performances with orchestras and soloists on YouTube. For the summer of 2021, there was a whole term of *Choral Classics*, assembling whole performances with Simon playing the piano accompaniment or with a good quality YouTube version.

In-person rehearsals returned in September 2021 to start the birthday year with *Messiah* at Central Church, Torquay, which is comfortable and has a lovely concert Steinway, although singing there, spread out, it was difficult to hear anything. The term had some wonderful highlights: Catherine Hamilton's technical rehearsal; and the birthday workshop in St Matthias' Church, Torquay, with the wonderful organ accompaniment of Ian Curror and the responsive acoustic of the church. By hiring a real harpsichord for the *Messiah* concert, the Choir showed that important details are taken very seriously.

At this AGM we find ourselves preparing for another birthday concert, this time with a first performance, a third performance, and to start the evening, a Rutter classic.

Every choir in the country now faces questions of retention and recruitment as a result of covid. Most choirs are still smaller than they were. Let's try, in this Birthday Season, to get back to full strength.

7. Election of Officer and Committee Members

In accordance with Rule 5 of the Constitution, one Officer and two Committee members retire each year in rotation.

The positions held by Lisa Prager (Hon. Secretary) and Fenella Davis (Committee member) are due for re-election, and both are willing to stand again.

In addition, the Committee member position held currently by Dee Jevons is also due for election. Dee was co-opted to the position in September 2021 following Jill Stevens' election to the position of Chair. Dee is willing to stand for election.

A further Committee member position is currently vacant, following the death of Mark Saxelby in November 2021. Mark would have been due for re-election in January 2023.

The following positions are therefore due for election, with the names of those who have indicated their willingness to stand:

- Hon. Secretary to serve September 2022–August 2025:
Lisa Prager – proposed by Janet Bovey, seconded by Rosie Clapham
- 1 Committee member to serve September 2022–August 2025:
Fenella Davis – proposed by Sandra Worrall, seconded by Ruth Bowyer
- 1 Committee member to serve February 2022–August 2025:
Dee Jevons – proposed by Sara Smith, seconded by Joyce Roberts
- 1 Committee member to serve February 2022–August 2023:
Andrew Riley – proposed by Sally Laird, seconded by Jane Macey

As there were no other nominations, the above were elected en bloc by the members.

8. Music Staff

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

9. Other Posts (for information)

The following positions are held in 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	(vacant)
Concert Manager	(vacant)
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

10. Subscription Charges for the 2022–2023 Season (Jill Stevens)

Jill commented that the Choir has managed to continue on a subscription of £100 for some years. The Committee had been needing to discuss an appropriate increase, but covid intervened. The only plus side of having to rehearse online was that there were no costs for venue hire costs and extra accompanists, although there were significant costs for the editing and production of the short videos.

However, the Committee had problems setting the rate for the new subscription and wanted to bring members up to date with the situation.

Annual outgoings for the coming year (2022–2023) come to over £13,000, including rehearsal costs and the concert in November 2022. Our best estimate of income is £12,000. Things have changed substantially in the recent past. Fundamentally, the choir is significantly smaller in numbers – nearly one third smaller. That means that basic income is reduced by about £3000, and so income from Gift Aid is also reduced. There has been an increase of 20% in orchestral costs, soloists' fees are increasing, and we also need to increase payment to our Director of Music in line with comparable rates for professional musicians in the area.

You may be surprised and shocked to hear that our very successful *Messiah* concert in December 2021 – for which we had the best and most appreciative audience for some time – actually made a loss of more than £3,000. The Committee is considering additional ways of increasing income, including increasing membership. We must also remember our obligations under the *Charities Act* – we cannot trade at a loss. In the past some members have made substantial donations to keep the choir solvent. This has been very much appreciated, but members will expect the Choir to operate on a responsible budget which does not anticipate such a need.

The current cost of simply running the choir – without taking into account loss-making concerts – is approximately £200 a year per singing member. We know that this is not a realistic amount to ask members to pay as a subscription. We propose to ask the equivalent of just £3.94 per rehearsal (approx. 38 weeks) – an annual subscription of £150. This is very similar to the subscriptions of other Devon choral societies, and would enable the Committee to continue with forward planning, which will be much reduced in terms of orchestral and soloist requirements – with less stress on your Committee.

From the floor:

Suggestions from members included attracting music students, which a view to accessing educational grants. One member commented that choirs losing money was often due to programming; those what make money perform more populist music – the more obscure the music, the harder it is to attract good audiences. Holding more coffee mornings was suggested. Several members commented that £150 per year was less than the price of one coffee or one beer per week.

The motion that the annual membership subscription should be £150 for the year 2022–2023 was proposed by Mike Beckett, seconded by Jan Nott, and accepted by those present with no dissension.

Sara Smith proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee, which was supported by the meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Signed: Jill Stevens, Chair, 2 February 2023