

BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 2012/2013 SEASON

This was held at Sunderland Minster, on Wednesday the 4th September 2013. The meeting began at 7.30 p.m. with Christine Alder in the chair and 39 members of the Society present.

Apologies for Absence : M.Scott, J.Brookes, K.Carruthers, A.Carruthers, A.Jackson, M.Atkinson, I.Wright, C.Latham, L.Whitehead, M.Johnson.

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

Matters Arising :

- There were no matters arising from the minutes.

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

The Chairman's Report : This report was presented by C.Alder:-

Good evening, and welcome to the Annual meeting for the season of 2012 to 2013, certainly one of the longest, if not, the longest and busiest yet! This can only be achieved by the dedication and hard work of your committee, and especially, this year, by the enormous number of hours put in by Eileen, our secretary. You are extremely fortunate to have such a "jewel", and I really do appreciate all that she does.

I am delighted to be able to record a very successful season, of huge variety. Four concerts sung, one concert by the Murray Family which was enormously enjoyed by a very appreciative audience, and for which we thank them, two coffee mornings and a Games Evening, the latter being a first for us, but hopefully not the last, as the enjoyment of playing "Beetle" was a life changing experience for some, and a reliving of earlier times for others! We have a faithful core of the society who support these ventures, which are fundraising as well as social. Many thanks to all who organise these, and I hope that more will feel able to support them in the future.

I am sure that David will relive those four concerts in his report. From a Chairman's perspective I can say that we enjoyed a very wide variety of repertoire in a wide variety of venues with great support from you and our audience. Whilst we are not the biggest choral society in the region, we always give an excellent account of ourselves, and size is never the measure of quality. Whilst always working to recruit new members, I am happy that our numbers keep up and have not dropped significantly in recent years. In fact, the tenors are stronger than they have been for many years.

Last year we were able to support St.Gabriel's church centenary celebrations, and whilst logistically it "had its moments", the whole venture was a success, and St. Gabriels were very supportive and grateful to us and the Young Singers for their excellent contribution.

The Sage concert was another "saga", but in the end an enormously successful venture, made possible by Orchestra North East and Ryton Choral Society. Peter Chester from ONE was an absolute marvel of organisation, and we could not have done it without him. Collaboration with other societies will, I feel, become increasingly important, so that costs may be shared, and great repertoire continue to be performed

by amateurs. This will happen again this season, as Ryton will join us for the St. Matthew Passion. That concert is part of our season, and will only take place here at the Minster.

Sheena will be presenting the balance sheet to you, somewhat truncated because of our late fourth concert. David, Eileen and all the committee continually strive to arrange a balanced programme, which will engage you and our audience, as well as keeping us reasonably within our means. One can never please everyone all the time, but if you feel that there is a work which it would be good for the Society to sing, please use your section reps. to bring it to the committee, or just have a word at coffee time. We shall be happy to discuss it. We like to plan ahead for five years, but nothing is written in "tablets of stone", and certainly from 2015 onwards flexibility is possible.

Maintaining and increasing our audience size is obviously of paramount importance. Our website continues to be extremely well visited, our paper publicity is of a very high standard, and this year we have acquired a banner to go outside the Minster prior to each concert. Nowadays Social Media plays an increasingly important role in getting the message "out there". If any of you do tweet, please include the choral society. Membership of this choir is a wonderful thing. We all, I hope, join because we like to sing and enjoy the particular repertoire which we perform. Some join for a short time and leave for many and varied valid reasons, whilst others are able to give many years of loyal service. I have two instances which I bring to you today.

Few of you (only old fogies like me) will remember Fred Oliver, a friend of Clifford Hartley our founder, and a great supporter of the choral society in his day. He died earlier this year, at a considerable age, in Hexham. Whilst I was unable to attend his funeral, a donation was sent, at his request to Making Music. Subsequently I received a lovely letter from his son David, recounting how important the society was in Fred's and in all the family' life, remembering concerts in the Empire and in Bishopwearmouth Church as it was then. Brahms' Requiem was loved by Fred and indeed is a favourite of David, and he hopes to attend our concert in December.

Now the second instance. We have among us tonight someone who has given the society fifty years of faithful service. Someone who has never sought the limelight, but who is the bedrock of choirs like ours. We should like to mark this great achievement by presenting Hilary Burke with a small token of our love and thanks, and honorary life membership of the society.

Finally, I should like to place on record my thanks to you all for your help, criticism and support over the past year. I hope that you will have great pleasure in tackling this coming season's programme.

The Treasurer's Report : The Treasurer, S.Riddle, in her Financial Report to the Society presented a number of points :

- This year, once again, our income has decreased and our expenditure has increased. We financed two excellent, but expensive concerts and have used some money from our Deposit Savings account in the process. The large balance in the current account was needed to pay costs arising in July.
- I'd like to thank all those who organise fund-raising, the Murray family for their concert and the Patrons. Jan has passed the running of the Hire Library to Stephen and their time and effort have continued to provide a steady income.

- We received the final instalment from Ann Todd's generous legacy to the society. Sadly one of our previous treasurers has died – Jim Manwaring who moved to New Zealand a few years ago. Eileen Manwaring has written to the society and Jim has kindly left a bequest of £1000.
- You are getting better at handing in money in labelled envelopes, but it is best if you can give me payments before rehearsals. The subscription remains at £80 for the season and let me know if you would like to pay in instalments. We now have internet banking and I will give you the account details if you wish to pay your subscription online. The Charity Commission consider that using choir funds for gifts is not good practice and therefore the committee has decided that we ask all members for £1 to create a Social Fund.
- If you have any ideas for fund-raising, please let the committee know and try to sell concert tickets.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for her very efficient work, which was so important to the Society. There were no questions on the Treasurer's Report and the accounts were unanimously accepted

The Business Manager's Report would normally be presented by L.White but due to circumstances this has not been possible. The Chairman reminded the Society that the Business Manager prepares the concert programmes and that we were very grateful for her completing this onerous task.

The Conductor's Report was given by D.Murray :-

I think the last words in my previous conductor's report were 'this promises to be a really fantastic season and I am looking forward to it hugely'. Well I wasn't wrong and I wasn't disappointed. This year has seen some real highlights and we've broken new ground in a variety of different ways and I'm very proud of what we've achieved.

It started with a bit of a muddle with dates and we ended up doing the concert in St Gabriel's not the Minster as a consequence. But the really unusual thing about the Christmas term was that we had already agreed to do an extra concert at St Gabriel's in October. This meant learning and relearning some repertoire for that concert alongside the learning of the Christmas programme. Well this was tough and at this stage I have to say how very grateful I am to everyone for turning up at 7 pm instead of 7.30, actually right the way through till Easter as it transpired. It started with the urgency of learning two sets of repertoire in the Autumn but actually became necessary to get through the learning of Belshazzar in the Easter term.

The learning certainly was tough and we were badly short of tenors and I had to import a lay clerk from Durham, but we managed, and we gave a really lovely concert in St Gabriel's which was a real mixture of things - some French repertoire remembered rather well from our concert last season, and some of my arrangements, and some Rutter and Goodall and even a little duet on a not half bad electric grand. The young singers featured as did one of Miranda Wright's singers and it was a really lovely evening. It also got us used to singing in there in readiness for our Christmas concert which by default was also in there as already described. St Gabriel's on their part were delighted - it was their request that we do this concert as part of their anniversary and they really enjoyed our music making. I think the informal nature of the concert helped too - they weren't too intimidated!

Meanwhile preparations had been going on for our own Christmas concert, with a Vaughan Williams first half featuring the Oxford Elegy as well as the Lark Ascending with Martin Hughes as soloist. Learning the Oxford

Elegy was tough, with a really unusual harmonic language to negotiate, and a lot of wordless singing which is always difficult both musically and rhythmically. The introduction of some of the Chilcott settings from his Gaudete collections and of course his amazing Twelve Days of Christmas setting provided a both challenging and hugely enjoyable contrast to the melismatic soul searching Vaughan Williams.

We were lucky to have Andrew Scott to read for us . As well as having a wonderful voice he is also a fine musician, having run Swing Bridge Singers for over 25 years as well as many other musical achievements . I also taught his kids so there was a good connection there. He was wonderful and brought Matthew Arnold's poetry to life and also made my job easier in terms of timing text to fit music - it was a good collaboration as I knew he was listening to me as well as me listening to him -its always much easier to accompany someone when they are listening to the accompaniment. I wasn't absolutely sure about Oxford Elegy all coming together successfully until we put it together on the Friday evening. There had been all sorts of problems with the arrangements of the piece from OUP. They have in their catalogue an arrangement for strings and piano. Imagine my horror when I opened up the package a month before the performance and found not that at all but an arrangement for string quartet and string orchestra. Done very tattily so that from about page three the original wind parts which had been turned into string quartet parts were just left alone with their independent key signatures which were wrong for the strings and also all the wrong clefs -no sign of a piano part. Worse than this when I phoned OUP to ask what was going on they couldn't find any trace at all of an arrangement for piano and strings even though they were advertising it in their own catalogue. I had no time or budget to hire in a string quartet on top of the strings already booked. I did the only thing possible which was to make a very rough piano part to cover the missing wind parts. It was probably remarkably like what had been ordered but which didn't ever turn up. But it cost a few hours of time and much agitation.

Nevertheless it all worked and as I said I knew it was going to be ok on the Friday evening when Andrew came along and read the words so beautifully. And I have to say the singing from the choir was exquisite. Really beautiful. But OUP had one last deadly card to play. We had only just got started in the Saturday afternoon rehearsal and all was going swimmingly then suddenly there were no 2nd violins playing. On close examination we found they had an extra 23 bar rest that no one else had. A quick scribbling out and on the hoof rescuing and all was well. But this is not something that you really need at all when time is so short . Martin played the Lark beautifully and was spared any sirens at the end - relief . We had joked earlier that the last time he played it a motorbike revved up just as he finished his last exquisite note. But he was spared. But our luck couldn't last. We were next to a hospital and our luck ran out at the end of Oxford Elegy and the sirens did ruin an exquisite ending to an exquisite performance which I had found really moving. It was especially disappointing as I'd only just managed to stop everyone coughing and ruining the piece that way . Never mind it was a bit of an achievement to have learnt that alongside all the other stuff we'd taken on board in the Autumn term. And it really was beautiful singing. The second half was hugely enjoyable and we had yet another Miranda singer to give us a little treat with her two Christmas songs . Clare Tunney is just starting at the Royal Academy of Music now so she's obviously on the path to a good career and we were lucky to have her along . The Twelve Days as expected was a huge success and ended a really successful and hugely varied December evening of fine music making.

The new year saw us embark on the enormous challenge of Belshazzar's Feast . This was a work long in the planning and something not to be undertaken lightly. The music is difficult and the harmonic language extremely angular right from bar one I knew it would be tough to learn and I won't mind admitting I was worried that we might not have enough time to learn it. From the first rehearsal two things became very clear: (1) you were certainly going to be able to sing it : (2) yes I was right - would we be able to learn it in time? So rehearsals started yet again at 7pm and we worked very very hard to conquer this piece. It didn't take very long for me, and I think most of you, to realise what a stupendous work this is. I had always acknowledged it

was a flamboyant and brilliant work and something which had given English choral music a much needed kick up the pants when it was written , paying due reference to Handelian pomp as well as writing the most incredibly brilliant and effective choral and orchestral passages in a way that only Willie Walton could. But that was it. I hadn't considered how absolutely fantastic this music really was - from the hauntingly beautiful ' By the Waters of Babylon' to the sheer exuberance of the Praise sections and finally to that last unbridled romp as the Babylonians celebrate their deliverance it's sheer magic throughout and in spite of its nerve racking complexity I loved working at it. And I really got the feeling that there was a great commitment from all of you to the success of this performance : there was a lot energy going into the rehearsals and gradually we could attempt longer and longer passages without the need for continually revising and relearning . The orchestral score for this piece is one of the scoring wonders of the twentieth century. It is massive and is equally complex and technically difficult. It has some crazy metronome marks which we were never going to do and I think our players were grateful for that. It's fine if you have a week to rehearse cranking up the speeds like that but actually it's not necessary and I personally think that you lose the clarity of the music never mind the diction . The orchestra when it arrives is something you can try and prepare yourself for - and heaven knows I'd spent so many hours preparing the score and some of that work involved listening to recordings - but the impact of that orchestra was overwhelming . I was actually surprised by how much I didn't need to rehearse. Everyone had obviously practiced the parts fastidiously and it is the first time in living memory that the brass players asked for the parts in advance. In fact everyone was following so well it was unbelievable : the only time I had to stop was when a horn was playing in a GP. Everything else seemed to go like clockwork. I think I already mentioned that I conducted a three bar in four and everyone followed me and played four beats in that bar. Unbelievable. I didn't do it in the show I hasten to add.

Instead of the rigors of training a whole new set of singers to sing the semi-chorus - something I didn't have time to do - I hired three of Miranda's singers and another colleague to learn it as a solo quartet. Bless them they came almost note perfect and not a little nervous but they did a brilliant job and of course when the two choirs sing together we had the benefit of their solo tone blending in with the main choir and adding an extra bloom especially Millie on the top. I remember thinking in the Friday evening rehearsal that I could get used to this ! Matthew Brook was a guest to welcome back with open arms - he sang Samson with us in his early days as a Countess of Munster artist and he's gone from strength to strength. He was magnificent. The first half was necessarily lean in terms of choir input but I was pleased that we managed to relearn / resurrect ' I was Glad ' as our contribution to the programme . Crown Imperial and the lovely Elgar Serenade it sat very nicely in a thoroughly English programme. The exact programming of the first half was unusually left till quite late as (a) I didn't really know till quite late on how much we'd be able to learn if anything for it and (b) I was conscious that I also had to go easy on the lips of the brass players as Belshazzar is really a kick in the teeth for them. Mind you I had no end of fun winding them up with ridiculous suggestions for possible programming - which they fell for hook line and sinker! Anyway hence the Serenade for Strings .

This concert was in my view a huge landmark in the achievements of this choral society. Belshazzar was learnt in time and sung with fantastic bravado and energy. It was a huge learning curve for all of us but it was a huge success and many congratulations are due all round to everyone who sang. I know that the summer concert which I will talk about next was amazing but actually for me Belshazzar was the musical and technical high spot of the season .

The summer term saw us embark on our long awaited and long in the planning project between ourselves Ryton Choral society and Orchestra North East. The project, I have to say right now, was masterminded by a guy called Peter Chester who is a trombonist in the orchestra . He was superb - it was a model of how to do it, and basically all the rest of had to do was answer his e mails - he didn't miss a trick and he was on top of things almost before they happened. He also managed to deal with the Sage without causing himself either a

nervous breakdown or suicide which is - well, amazing. It was very gratifying, as I think I mentioned at the time, that the two choirs proceeded at pretty much the same pace and it certainly made my life easier as although there were certainly two schedules - one for each choir - there were certain weeks when they were practically identical. The other nice thing about this project for me was that I didn't have to fix a single player and I didn't have to order and then post out individually orchestral parts - it was all done for me.

The putting of the two choirs together was quite a moment as the first time it happened was in the Minster and there was just not enough room on the stage. It made it difficult for altos and sopranos especially in terms of sight lines and I'm sorry about that but we hadn't done it before and there was no way of knowing how it was actually going to be. Anyway the next rehearsal at Ryton was much more comfortable and I was really enjoying the big fat sound the combined choirs were making. The other thing that I think was easier was that by this time everyone was getting used to be in different places and sitting next to different people etc - always a bit disorientating. We also managed to learn at this rehearsal the Vaughan Williams Mystical Songs pretty quickly - impressive. The orchestral rehearsals went pretty well and it was nice to be able to rehearse the orchestral accompaniment to Carmina before putting it together with the choirs. It had to be that way because although Orchestra North East contains very fine players it is not evenly represented in terms of quality and experience of instrumentalists especially in the strings, so doing a concert on one afternoon rehearsal with them is not really a good option. This way it was ideal as they were comfortable with the music by the time we came to Friday evening in Hall One. I have to say that the putting together of the choirs with orchestra lifted everyone's game. I think the orchestra was frankly astonished at just how good the choirs were - I know that they don't always have that sort of experience let's just say.

And of course the performance on the Sunday evening was spectacular. Our two soloists Alexander Robin Baker and Laurie Ashworth, were fantastic, and singing in such a spectacular concert hall with an audience of over 1000 people, and a very enthusiastic audience too, makes a huge difference. It was a great project and I'm obviously terribly pleased personally that it was such a huge success but in a way even more than that I'm terribly pleased that it was such a success for the three organisations involved - it shows that with a bit of careful planning and the right sort of leadership these things can really take off. Orchestra North East didn't take long to send me a request that we do something in the same way again in 2015 - this is under discussion at the moment but I for one would be very keen to repeat the experience with another suitable large choral work

So that was the end of an amazing season well done to all and as usual well done to all the fantastic work that goes on behind the scenes from the Committee. The committee meetings are so essential to the really smooth way that this Society operates and I know everything is dealt with meticulously. They also give me 100% support in all sorts of ways - from paying bills quickly when required to making really crucial decisions. Sometimes there are more amusing moments like when OUP had the audacity to try and charge us twice for those awful Oxford Elegy parts Sheena was very quick to supply the necessary cheque numbers etc to prove that we had actually paid some six months previously. So many thanks Committee and of course as ever many thanks Eileen our accompanist, sometimes soloist, sometimes duet partner and all the time joint choir trainer - we couldn't achieve what we do without her fantastic input in rehearsals and concerts.

Now to the next season

For our Christmas concert we don't this time have a Christmassy concert - nothing wrong with that especially when it's the Brahms Requiem. We are doing it in the fantastic arrangement Brahms himself made for piano duet and we have an excellent team of duettists - Eileen is joined by my other colleague at the university and at the Sage Venera Bojkova. Our two lovely soloists who did such a fine job for me when Ryton did this piece

in the Kings Hall earlier this year are Jessica Holmes and Richard Gooding. It's a wonderful piece, one of the great great choral masterpieces, and there is something about doing it in this arrangement which is very intimate but very direct and powerful- I know you'll love it.

The New Year sees us once again in partnership with Ryton, this time on one of the greatest works ever written, Bach's epic St Matthew Passion. It's not every year you can do this piece ,it's so massive and very expensive, needing five soloists including an Evangelist who has to be very special indeed - and don't worry I am in touch with Richard Edgar Wilson and there we have the right man for the job -you'll remember he's superb . You may remember this piece also needs two orchestras two continuo players two organs a group of young singers - no problem there -and some strange extras like a viola da gamba with one extraordinarily difficult solo which can't be played on the cello or anything else, so the gamba player has to be hired in specially to play one movement .It also needs two choirs. They often sing together but choir one and choir two also have things to do on their own .We last did this piece in 2004 when we sang choir one and I hand picked a choir two- they were wonderful and I managed to get everything learnt with them in two rehearsals . But the hand picking bit was a nightmare. So this time the solution was fairly obvious and now especially obvious flushed with the success of Carmina, I have asked Ryton to be choir two. You'll remember that the music is not easy and actually Ryton will be using part of their rehearsal time this term to get to grips with it . We for our part have to relearn a vast amount of music but on the plus side it was only a few years ago since performed it and we should remember much of it. On the worrying side we only have the Easter term to put it all together . And don't forget the small parts -we need things like Peter, Pilate and 1st woman etc these all need to be done from the membership of the choirs. So its really challenging. But it's more than worth it: the experience of performing Matthew Passion for those of you who may be new to it is really quite extraordinary on many levels : musically it's simply the best ever- it doesn't get any better than this and of course spiritually it's an intensely moving and profound journey.

And finally the summer programme . It's a bit different -you can say that all right. But I'm really excited about it. We are doing Dido and Aeneas that fantastic early English opera by Purcell, and we are doing it - wait for it - without a conductor !! He's going to be busy playing the harpsichord. The other instrumentalists are just a string quartet. But not just any string quartet . I can't quite believe I've managed this but I seem to have procured the services of the Heath Quartet. Now I mustn't go on and on here as a proud father but they are only one of the most outstanding young quartets around and have many accolades the most recent being in receipt of the Royal Philharmonic Society prize for the best emerging artists. And as you probably realise my son is the cellist. So that is going to be - well exciting is one way of putting it . Frightening is another. And from my point of view expensive is another - my wine cellar will be under great threat. The piece is fantastic, the quartet is fantastic, so we'd jolly well better be fantastic too. I hope to get Sally Burchell and James Geer to be Dido and Aeneas and Jessica Holmes to be Belinda . Some of you sopranos will take on the voices and characters of the witches (challenging I know) and I need a sorceress from somewhere in the altos. I am sure that given some work we can come up with this - a bit of a change from 1st woman or Pilate's wife in the Matthew . The other piece for the same scoring to go with this is MacMillan's 'Who are these angels ?' An effective and perfectly accessible piece of about 8 minutes written specially for string quartet and choir. I hope that the quartet will do something on their own ie a quartet from their current repertoire and that our illustrious soloists will contribute something also .

Well it's a different season from the one just gone but in many ways just as exciting and certainly just challenging. As usual I look forward to it hugely .

The Chairman thanked the Conductor for the huge amount of work which he puts into making our performances such a success.

The Patrons' Officer's Report was presented by C.Alder in the absence of C.Latham.

Throughout the season we had a total of 41 Patrons with subscriptions totalling £448.00.

While it was interesting and beneficial for the Society to have a peripatetic concert season, ticket sales suggest that our Patrons find a central location in the city to be more accessible. A comparison of ticket sales for the December 2012 concert at St. Gabriel's and the March 2013 illustrates this:

21 tickets generating an income of £241.00 – including donations- were sold in December. 14 of these were bought by Patrons who are also members of the choir.

41 tickets were sold for the March concert, totalling £522.00 including donations.

I estimate that the discrepancy is due to transport issues. Patrons sales are not affected by our programme because we average about 40 tickets sold per concert. Patrons are very loyal. However, it is not easy for drivers or those using public transport to cross town. Parking becomes an issue and bus services are poor after 7pm at weekends across the town.

It is difficult to assess support for the June Concert at The Sage. Patrons were kept up to date and were given the opportunity of buying tickets through the Society but it proved easier to buy direct for The Sage. However, I was able to spot a number of our Patrons and I have had positive feedback from some of them.

Patron numbers are slightly down; there were 44 patrons last season. I know the trend will continue this year and I have only 2 prospective new Patrons. In Christine's letter she suggested the members of the choir are the best resource for recruitment of new members. I would suggest the Patrons' scheme could also benefit from word of mouth. It is not expensive and we have kept subscriptions at the same level for some time to keep the Patrons we have.

The Chairman expressed her thanks for all of the effort which went into communicating with our Patrons and the emphasis that was put into ensuring that it was all in good time.

The Vice-Chairman's Report was presented by D.Cox :

Centenary Concert St Gabriel's Church "And all the people rejoice"

The 2012-13 challenging season began with an extra concert for the centenary of St Gabriel's Church. Although the venue is good, large, open space to sing in with sight lines for the audience better than the Minster, the sight lines for the choir are poor as the staging and lighting were not up to scratch. An enjoyable concert of light choral music suitable for the occasion. I am now a dab hand at the kazoo but I don't think I can compete with Ryhope All Stars who I once heard give a rendition of Crimond on the Kazoo!!! That nearly matches a brass band, who shall remain nameless, who played Crimond very well, unfortunately the drummer decided that he wouldn't be left out and played his drums all the way through the hymn!! 57 members sang in the concert. 27 Sopranos, 12 Altos, 7 Tenors, 11 Basses.

Christmas Concert St Gabriel's Church

Our Christmas Concert was meant to be held in the Minster but because of a mix up with the dates it had to be transferred to St Gabriel's Church who were only too happy to help. So the earlier concert for the centenary meant that we at least knew what the problems would be. The church has a great underchurch space where the society was able to line up with space to spare and also remain there between rehearsal and concert. It is a space where we have rehearsed in the past but the ceiling is rather low for rehearsal. The staging was adapted for us with some blocks between the choir stalls but it was still not totally satisfactory. Members from the church moved pews/put up staging/arranged chairs so we had very little setting up to do. In **'The Lark Ascending'** I made my orchestral debut as first (and only) triangle player and did my best not to emulate the Hoffnung cartoon with the triangle player falling asleep counting bars rest and sheep jumping through the triangle and spent my time practicing along with YouTube!! During the rehearsal as I was about to deliver my first 'ting' all the lights failed and Martin Hughes was left doing it from memory! The situation was remedied by my clip on battery stand light which I happened to have in my bag!! St Gabriel's were again very helpful but the venue is not ideal. As for the music we found the **'Oxford Elegy'** very hard work; it is different from the pieces we are used to singing with the central part being taken by a narrator. It came together on the Friday evening but the choir were not in their *comfort zone*! The **Chilcott** carols on the other hand were a refreshing slant on old familiar tunes and as for the 12 Days of Christmas we sang in many different styles all in one piece. Clearing away was excellent as we were not needed but several of our members did assist the St. Gabriel's team. 54 members sang in the concert. 24 Sopranos, 13 Altos, 8 Tenors, 9 Basses.

Belshazzar's Feast

Thanks to David for abandoning? plans to sing *Blest Pair of Sirens* as this would have been a step too far. We were back in the Minster on home turf for this concert. We learnt **'I was glad'** on 2? rehearsals by the skin of our teeth. **'Belshazzar'** was a great challenge but a very rewarding one for those members who stayed the course to the end and reaped the reward of a fantastic concert. Excellent singing from chorus and soloists and wonderful orchestral playing, especially the percussion. We did both pieces justice and it was great to have Matthew Brooke with his sense of drama hanging over the front of the pulpit. One of the soloists did not have bow tie, well I just happened to have spare in my bag along with the stand light!! The handpicked semi-chorus doubling up as 2nd choir worked very well. 59 members sang in the concert. 24 Sopranos, 12 Altos, 10 Tenors, 13 Basses.

Summer Concert at the Sage

After all the deliberations we finally made to the Sage to sing Carmina. Trying to seat everyone in joint rehearsals was difficult – the Minster had left all the stuff for a meeting, data projector, screen, etc. set up on the dais and had not put out any chairs. Thanks to all who helped get chairs out especially Young Singers and their parents. Ryton had similar problems with chairs set out but in the wrong configuration. Never mind when we got to the stage at the Sage it was all different again!!!! Conclusion:- don't try to set up exactly in rehearsal as it will only change at the first rehearsal on the Sage stage!!!

The Vaughan Williams Mystical Songs were more approachable than the Oxford Elegy but the highlight was Carmina and a special mention must go to the Tenors and Basses who were brilliant in the tongue twisters

especially the 'In Taberna'. Confidence was gained in joining with Ryton tenors and basses – safety in numbers. I seem to remember these passages were omitted last time. The Soprano soloists top D was amazing and the Young Singers singing their part off by heart were a credit to Eileen. The purpose built staging meant everyone could see the conductor clearly and in comfort. Getting on and off the stage was organised by the Sage staff as they are used to seating choirs. Thanks to everyone for sitting where they were told - we had to accommodate the young singers and their extras in the soprano section on Friday evening so things were a bit problematic and all previous plans were scrapped - we have learnt from the experience.

Next time I will revise my sit down instructions – they did not work for the first half as I had arranged with Faye in the Young Singers, who was at the front, to sit when prompted, not realising that she was not on stage in the first half!!! Clearing away was excellent 0 minutes nothing to do!! Choir could stay on between rehearsal and concert – café, places to change, all indoors- great audience- great concert hall – let's do it again sometime!! 108 singers were in the combined choir for the concert. 45 Sopranos, 22 Altos, 17 Tenors, 24 Basses. Has anyone got a decent photo of the choir on stage?

Chorus Points

Observations from concerts:-

The black folders are really good, a much better size. Use of black tops for women worked well, instead of 50 shades of white!!!!

One or two points that came up this season.

As for concert etiquette, memorise your etiquette sheet and if you don't know what that is or you've lost it I'm sure Eileen Watson will have a few copies handy before the concerts. Please don't wave at your friends in the audience at any point even though they may be leaping up and down wildly to attract your attention or update your Facebook page during rehearsals! Return promptly after the interval – we nearly lost a few singers at the Sage as the Sage staff will stop people returning to stage seats once the choir are on!!! Please remember to smile at the audience at the end of the concert show that you have enjoyed your singing. Singing is good for you!! So, learn the music, watch the conductor, keep with the beat and follow the conductor's interpretation in rehearsal and performance.

The Chorus at the last count consisted of 30 Sopranos, 18 Contraltos, 9 Tenors and 15 Basses a total of 72. We need to encourage more tenors, basses and altos to balance the multitude of sopranos who make almost 50% of the chorus. Interestingly enough they don't seem to make 50% of the sound as David proved in one rehearsal when 8 tenors outsang 30 sopranos – come on sopranos sing up and go for it. Don't be shy!!

I look forward to a challenging 65th season of Brahms, Bach (I'll have to brush up on my German) and Purcell - another first for the society (*I know we have sung it before for Music in the Minster*). I would like to thank David and Eileen for their hard work and patience. I would also like to thank everyone who helps set up & clear away for rehearsals and concerts, makes coffee, sells raffle tickets, buys raffle tickets and helps in any way - these things don't happen by magic! I would also like to thank all those members who joined in the extras – Beetle Drive/Social at Whitburn, Coffee Mornings at Fulwell and Young Singers Concerts at Ewesley Road, a busy season as usual.

Finally – well – Eileen – I just know you're waiting for a joke.

What do you call a singer that keeps repeating herself?

Lesley Parrot!!

And finally:- just a thought:- If you were thinking of joining Gareth Malone's latest choir you would be singing the song 'Guillotine' by Death Grips, a US hip-hop band who mix hardcore punk with heavy political lyrics, and songs by Fleet Foxes and Alicia Keys!! To quote Gareth '*I want to challenge what British choirs consider to be appropriate repertoire. I hope this is a watershed moment for choirs; they can do anything.*' Well I hope David doesn't take us quite that far. I'm happy with Brahms, Bach and Purcell with Carpenter, Sondheim and Co. thrown in for good measure!!

The Chairman thanked D.Cox for his report and commented that he did not disappoint when it came to content.

The Librarian's Report was presented by W.Coombs :-

It has been quite a bumper year for issuing music for Concerts in unusually diverse places.

However, I lost track of the copies given out after the first five hundred but the amazing thing is that only one copy went astray! Congratulations all round.

The hire fee is remaining the same; £6 per concert and the envelope system is certainly helpful ,so carry on the good work.

My thanks, as usual to Elizabeth Meikle, Ian Watson and Eileen Bown for their help with collecting and checking copies and to Ian for helping to send same off to whence they came.

Finally, within the next eighteen months, two years, I am hoping to move nearer to my family in London, so if anyone has any aspirations to be a Librarian, please do have a word.

The Chairman thanked both the Librarian and S.Richardson, our Hire Librarian, for their work and noted how lucky the Society was to have a Hire Library. She noted that being the Librarian is a thankless task and we should be grateful to both W.Coombs and S.Richardson that it is has been done so well.

The Bishopwearmouth Young Singers Report was presented by E.Bown :-

Another enjoyable and successful year has gone by for the Young Singers. Numbers remain small but the singing is strong clear and confident, and the members are, as ever, supremely loyal. as are the parents of course.

The highlights of the year were obviously the performance of Carmina Burana at the Sage where we were joined by a group of lovely young singers from Kings School Tynemouth. The whole event was very exciting for the young Singers, especially all the noisy percussion! Another highlight, if slightly less spectacular was our little concert in Ewesley Road Church in March where we sang some of our favourite songs and some

members performed little solo items. We'll do this again because it was so enjoyable for performers and audience alike.

We have a very special concert to look forward to at Christmas. Back in December 2008 we performed David's little musical "Scrooge" along with members of BW and it was much enjoyed by all concerned. Well the Young Singers, who think this was written especially for them, keep asking when David is going to write another opera for them. So he has rejigged the original version slightly, to include a libretto and it is going to form the second half of Ryton's Christmas Concert on December 14th. They don't know about it yet but it should be a lot of fun. We are always ready to welcome new members so do spread the word.

It only remains for me to thank you for your continued support, David for his invaluable participation and also for writing that classic song "Oh Ebenezer"(it will probably feature in the next John Wilson Prom!) , to Kath, Vera, David and Liz for their support and of course to dear Eileen who continues to keep us all in order and without whom none of this would be possible.

The Chairman thanked E.Bown for her report and work with the Young Singers.

Election of Officers – The Chairman informed the Society that the offices of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon.Secretary, Hon.Treasurer and Hon.Librarian were all open for re-election. It was proposed by F.Godfrey and seconded by E.Bown that all of the present incumbents be re-elected. As these officers of the Society were all willing to stand for re-election and there being no other nominations they were duly re-elected, with one abstention.

Election of Representatives – The Chairman then thanked Jo Ann Appleby and Martin Richards for their work on the Committee and their contribution as excellent Representatives.

The Chairman advised the meeting that the election of new Representatives for the Soprano and Tenor sections were required. There being no other nominations, Jeremy Cripps was proposed as the Tenor Rep. by M.Richards and seconded by F.Godfrey and was unanimously elected. For the Soprano post, there being no nomination forthcoming this was left in abeyance. (On Wednesday 18th September J. Trotter was proposed by E.Midgley and seconded by V.Vincent and elected as Soprano Rep.

Any Other Business

- A.Lishman proposed that a change be considered in the ladies concert to black tops with long or $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves, and no ornamentation. The Chairman agreed to raise this suggestion with the full Society at the second rehearsal.
- F.Godfrey expressed his thanks for the birthday card he had received from the Society on his 80th birthday recently.
- A letter received by the Chairman from Cowan and Catherine Duff was presented to the meeting for information and discussion. A variety of comments were made on the points raised in the letter including
 - One response was that we should have an audience pleasing concert.
 - It was suggested that a different perspective would be seen by new officers if the constitution was changed to ensure a rotation of appointments. Further comments were made on the qualities that would be needed for good officers.

- It was suggested that there should be loyalty to the Society whether individuals like the work or not.
- The query was raised as to why the St. Matthew Passion would be sung in German but D.Murray explained that the English translation did not match the music and in any case tastes have changed.
- It was thought that the approach of two serious concerts with one lighter one was successful.
- It was explained that the loss of altos was natural attrition. Another member said that she was delighted with the repertoire. Works should be sung in German if written in German but that an audio-visual presentation of the words would be useful.
- It was suggested that there was a considerable difference between an Amateur Operatic Society and the Choral Society with a very different repertoire.
- In summarising, the Chairman noted that there was no 6 year rule in the Society Constitution but that the Committee would consider the implications of such a change. Also that there was apathy within the Society demonstrated by the lack of nominations for new officers or Soprano Rep. For the Sage concert, the budget arrangement was that each of the organisations would carry their normal rehearsal costs and any 'profit' would be split between them. The actual outcome was an additional £150 cost to the Society.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.14 p.m.

Eileen Watson,
Hon.Secretary.