

**BISHOPWEARMOUTH CHORAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Wednesday 6th September 2017, 7.30 p.m.
at Sunderland Minster.**

Minutes of last year's AGM 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 – 2015/2016 SEASON

This was held at Sunderland Minster, on Wednesday the 7th September 2016. The meeting began at 7.30 p.m. with Christine Alder in the chair and 38 members of the Society present.

Apologies for Absence : PR, GB, WC, SR, EM, JK, CT, AJ, LC, CL, FG, JM, CM, SW, ES, PB, and KC.

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.

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

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

Welcome to this year's Annual General meeting, as we look back over the past season, and forward to that of 2016/2017.

David will, as usual, be reviewing the three concerts in detail. I should just like to say how wide ranging the programme was, including that of the Young Singers, demanding much of all of us as performers, but feedback from audience, chorus, soloists and orchestra has all been very positive. My thanks go to both David and Eileen for maintaining the high musical standards of both choirs.

However, growing our audience is proving to be very difficult, as is growing the Society itself, and the two are connected. Person to person conversation i.e. boldly asking people you know if they would like to sing with us, or buy a ticket for our concerts, is certainly the most effective way of ensuring our future, and we just have to go on trying!

But there are other things that we can do. This year, for the first time, we took part in one of Sunderland's Citizenship Ceremonies, on the Queen's 90th birthday in fact. It proved to be a most worthwhile experience, and one which we hope to repeat this year. The Mayor at the time had been to our December concert, and, as a lover of Vaughan Williams, had really enjoyed "Sea Symphony", complete with natural sound effects! I hope that we can strengthen our links with the Civic Authority, and that they will come to recognize the value of our work within the cultural life of the city.

As we try to recruit new members, the observant ones among you will see a new banner on the railings outside the Minster. It will be put up for a few weeks at the beginning of each term to try to attract passers-by. In addition, we have 1000 recruitment leaflets, which I would like to find their way, with your help, onto noticeboards in Churches, arts centres, community centres i.e. places where people regularly meet. They are designed to be left there or given out as appropriate. 1000 may seem a lot, but really is not, if we are to be better known. You will hear more of that in the next week or two. I should like to thank Neil Pont for help in their design and production, and Eileen and Peter Watson for their never ending work in liaison with all concerned. The Minster is always so supportive, and many thanks to Rev. Sheila Bamber and the office staff for all their help.

Last season also saw us taking part in a workshop singing Christopher Wood's "Requiem" at the Sage. Conducted brilliantly by David, and accompanied so well by Eileen, it was a very good day, made more enjoyable by some excellent young soloists. There was a suggestion of a further performance but as yet nothing has happened.

The other concert which sadly will not now take place is the proposed Summer concert of 2017 in the Sage with Orchestra North East. They (the orchestra) are not at the moment in a financial position to be the prime movers in a concert as they have been in the past, so there would be too large a financial contribution required from us, i.e. we would have to hire them, the Sage and soloists. The Committee did not feel in any way able to commit to this, and so our third concert will be here in the Minster and as on the five Year programme; David's new arrangements of popular songs.

Tonight we will start to prepare for an "English Christmas", and the second concert will be? Well, we do not yet know. After David's report we shall be voting to decide whether to sing Mozart Mass in C Major and the Solemn Vespers, or Haydn Nelson Mass and Vivaldi Gloria. I hope that you have given it some thought and will be happy with the outcome.

The reports of all those tasked with specific jobs in the Society have, as promised, appeared on the website and I must thank them all for their hard work individually and on the committee. My thanks also go to Eileen our Secretary and Sheena our Treasurer. Their work is never ending and much appreciated, especially by me. Sadly, our Patrons' Officer, Claire Latham has tendered her resignation. She has done the job for ten years and feels that it is time for someone else to take it on. I shall be writing to all our Patrons asking for a volunteer, so our new officer may not be a singing member. I thank Claire for her work and support. Tonight we also must elect, for the first time, a vice chairman as agreed at last year's AGM. This, it is hoped, will aid succession planning and widen the participation of members.

And finally, I should like to thank you all, for without you Bishopwearmouth Choral Society would not exist. We are only as strong as our membership from the point of view of numbers and commitment, and I hope that this coming season will excite us all, and that we will look upon it as an opportunity to grow in numbers, commitment and excellence.

The Treasurer's Report : The Treasurer, SR, presented a number of points :

- We had three excellent concerts but our expenditure in the last season exceeded our income. As you can see from the balance sheet, we have used funds both from the COIF deposit account and for the first time the Prudential account. Thanks to our donors including the Patron who sponsored the Piano hire for the Sondheim Concert. Again a big thank you to Cathy Lennox for the Barbecue last September.
- Our membership has fallen which has resulted in lower subscription income and also the ticket income at concerts. Please encourage your family and friends to be part of our audience.
- We have pursued funding from grants locally and nationally but so far have been unsuccessful. Having money in the bank seems to go against us.
- The committee has decided to keep the subscriptions the same (£90 and £18 for students) for a third year. I noted that a local community choir was advertised at £3 per rehearsal for a one and a half hour session. The equivalent rate would provide us with 22 two hour rehearsals – far short of what members get here. The

cost of concert tickets will remain the same. However, just like the budget, there is one increase. We propose to ask for a donation of £1 for coffee/juice and biscuits as there has been no increase from 50p for many years.

- I was asked about costing from earlier concerts so I looked at the costs for the Sondheim from 2006. The concert cost just under £6000 to put on compared with £8000 this year and the soloists were £240 less than June. However the ticket sales were about £600 more last time.
- Finally thanks to all who help to raise our funds.

There were some comments made from the floor:-

- That reserves were only likely to last for two years if we continue the way we are, and that there was a need to cut costs or raise revenues – possibly by appealing to a wider audience.
- The figures were surprising – perhaps one concert per year with an orchestra and the others tailored more to a budget.
- Perhaps a raffle for the audience at each concert could be considered.

The accounts were unanimously accepted.

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

Once again I have to congratulate everyone in the choir for their hard work and commitment over the last season, which resulted in three very successful concerts, and three concerts which could not have differed from each other more in content and style. The high standards that we have come to expect were very much in evidence, and the versatility of the choir in dealing so successfully with music in total different genres is also to be congratulated.

The hard work of everyone who is responsible for organizing the concerts, particularly the excellent work of the committee, is not unnoticed, especially by me, and I hope everyone here is aware of just how much time and care is taken to ensure that this choral society continues to thrive, and go artistically from strength to strength. I also, as I think many of you are aware, could not possibly achieve the musical standards we manage time after time without the invaluable help and support of Eileen, whose pianistic skill and fine musicianship are a great asset to this choir, and once again I do not for one moment take them for granted.

It all started with the Sea Symphony, the work with which my association with this choral society started some 22 years ago- so I'm told. It is still a thrilling, exciting and very challenging work 22 years later. In 2004 I remember taking over half way through preparation. In those days you only did two concerts per season, the first in December and the second in May. This was scheduled for May and I think I joined you in February. I'm quite sure that the choir is a more polished and experienced unit than it was then, but the Sea Symphony is no less difficult than it was 22 years ago. The preparation was therefore quite grueling, and the learning initially slowish: the rhythmic character is very tricky and vocally there are some very difficult things asked. The words, though in English, are often set to very small note values demanding a very slick articulation. However, once the music is internalized it sticks and is memorable. That doesn't ease the technical demands.

We got there in time and with the arrival of one of the best orchestras we've ever had, the piece gained new dimensions. The afternoon rehearsal was thrilling and exciting: the orchestra followed all the tempo changes and time signature changes marvelously, and we had two fantastic soloists – Sally Harrison and Alexander Robin Baker. Alexander also sang the Butterworth song cycle 'A Shropshire Lad' with Lance Baker's orchestration, which was interesting – although I didn't like all of it and actually made some changes in the

afternoon rehearsals. But to have the orchestral colour in something I've performed so many times with the original piano accompaniment was very different and again added some new dimensions.

The evening performance was even more thrilling, due not in any small way to the fact that we had added sound effects: the storm that was raging around the North East that night was terrific and the offstage wind noises and rattles gave the evening a truly nautical flavor, very much like being on a boat in a raging storm. And I didn't have to pay a penny extra for it – it was wonderful. The choir, well disciplined and ready to meet any surprises – and there plenty of those in terms of orchestral colours and textures, rose marvelously to the occasion. Simply thrilling.

The new year saw us tackle a rather off the beaten track work, the Hummel Mass in Bb. This, although less technically demanding and less musically difficult than the Vaughan Williams by a long way, was but no means a push over in terms of learning it. Retention seemed to be the problem, and although the music was easier the remembering was not. Thank goodness we had as the rest of the programme our tried and tested repertoire of what we referred to in the concert title as "Smooth Classics for Spring". These were all classic FM pieces, all quite short, not too difficult and all very easy on the ear. We have been singing them for years off and on, and now and again it's very nice to be able to pull them out of the drawer and present them in one of our main concerts. This can't be done all of the time of course, but now and again it's very nice.

Now the Hummel was, I thought, a big success. It was chosen – as was the whole programme, because it had a small orchestra and no soloists, therefore keeping costs down in the aftermath of an expensive Sea Symphony. The music is very fine – not Beethoven perhaps, but finely crafted with some interesting twists in the harmonic language. Some unexpected moments. I think these were a large part of the problems in learning it. But a very fine work and again with an orchestra there to support a very different dimension.

The audience of course lapped up all the lollipops in the second half – why wouldn't they? Faure Cantique de Jean Racine, Panis Angelicus, Rutter's All things bright and Beautiful, Goodall and Schubert versions of the 23rd psalm, and of course to cap it all the Young Singers charming everyone with their rendition of the three Carter pieces from Benedicite. The evening was truly enjoyable, with even the small but perfectly formed orchestra going out singing the tunes.

Before discussing our final concert, I must not forget to mention two extra events that occurred this season. Firstly, in February, we had a very successful one-off event in Northern Rock Hall at the Sage, where we spent the day with other choristers from all over the region learning Christopher Wood's Requiem, written in memory of the Queen Mother. Both Ryton and Bishopwearmouth choral societies were well represented and in fact Neil Pont was responsible for arranging the event. Mr Wood financed the day, and although normally learning a piece in a day for a performance at the end of the same day would normally be a very daunting prospect, the whole experience was immeasurably buoyed up by the presence of about a dozen fine young soloists from London who boosted the choir when not singing solos. They were great, and I think Eileen enjoyed herself enormously playing the Steinway model D piano in the hall. It was a great success, and a mixture of very enjoyable and completely exhausting! Many thanks to Neil Pont for putting in all the leg work necessary to make it all happen, because it certainly didn't happen on its own.

Secondly, in April, quite a few of us did performed at the Citizenship Ceremony in the Civic Centre. We had to learn the repertoire in a very short time. The original ideas weren't all manageable because of the lack of rehearsal time, but thanks to the David Murray Songbook (whatever did we do before we had that?) we managed fine. The seating arrangements were – well a little unorthodox to say the least, perched in the gallery, and I think it's the only time in my career that I've had to conduct sideways – quite a challenge, with

Eileen playing my keyboard at the back instead of the front of the choir. I was particularly impressed with the timings – I was aware that we were a little short of material, but with some judiciously slow tempos and an unhurried approach to following one number by the other, the timing was actually perfect, and the choice of 'You've Got a Friend' in the main slot mid ceremony couldn't have been more appropriate. The event itself I think we all found very interesting and enlightening, and it was a pleasure and privilege to be there as part of it. We also were able to enjoy Sue Winfield, in her role as Lord Lieutenant, addressing the new citizens very eloquently, as well as giving us a suitable plug, but of course in a very gracious manner.

By the time this event took place we were well on our way in the preparation of our third concert, which was my adaptation of Side by Side by Sondheim. This is the second time we've done this piece, and for me it's hugely enjoyable and fun. It's also no pushover in its musical demands. Again rhythmically tricky and very wordy, and the unconventional layout spooked you a bit. Especially the basses who had to cope with clef changes and register changes. At one point they were doing falsetto but I dropped this when they started turning a funny colour.

One thing which was a great bonus was the visit of Pippa Anderson who took a rehearsal when I was away doing a concert. I was sorry to miss the rehearsal as it obviously had very beneficial technical effect, and the idioms of the music suddenly became more alive and convincing. This is the second time one of my professional singing colleagues has had an input into the work of the choir, and it is something I'd like to keep as a part of the mix of what we do. Their technical skill and ability is an extremely valuable asset, and they enjoy the challenge of working with choral voices as opposed to solo voices. I hope to be seeing more of Miranda and Pippa in the Minster working with us in the future.

It was quite interesting picking the soloists- James Black as usual provided two fantastic singers who were as far as I was concerned untried on this repertoire . I needn't have worried. Adrian Powter was terrific both in his lyrical numbers and also in his comic ones. Laurie Ashworth was fantastic in all aspects and may have stolen the show. And we had our very own Anne Marie showing fantastic vocal control in Losing My Mind but also able to turn a fantastic brassy, powerful version of Broadway Baby. We had a great narrator too, who had taken the trouble to rewrite the script and modernise it – it hadn't been changed since Ned Sherrin wrote it in 1976. I thought his voice and style were perfect.

The presence of a sound system I wasn't sure about at first but as the technical problems were sorted I think it was great for the soloists and the narrator to have that, and it made it possible for the solo singing to be in a different and more appropriate style suited to show music.

Again the choir picked up the idioms of the music and as usual just went for it. What a show! I wanted to do it again the next week and so did all the soloists but alas it had to come to an end, and so did the season. So I went home tired but happy.

So what do we have for this coming season?

We embark today on a really Christmassy programme. Some of the pieces we've done before, and some of them are new. For example Holst's lovely Four Old English Carols originally for SATB and piano, but I've added string parts. Edward Watson, from whom we commissioned Salute Another Morn quite a long time ago now, has written a couple of lovely Christmassy pieces – Pies Cakes and Puddings which is great fun, and Go Lovely Rose which is beautiful. Vaughan Williams' Wassailing Song from the Five English Folksongs will be quite challenging as it's unaccompanied. We'll have a break from singing whilst we have the strings play Vivaldi's Winter from the Four Seasons. And then of course Mr Chilcott is well represented in his carol settings with a

bit of twist and of course this concert would not be the same without his riotous Twelve Days of Christmas to end it all.

The new year sees us either doing Mozart's Mass in C Minor and the solemn Vespers or an alternative programme which we will vote on presently tonight, which will be a pairing of Vivaldi's Gloria and Haydn's Nelson Mass.

The Mozart programme would see us return to a great work – I'm talking about the Mass in C Minor- which haven't performed for a very long time, but which I think we need to return to. We're in a lot better vocal shape than we were when we last did it. It's tricky – it has double chorus in it and it's technically quite hard, but its fantastic work so if not this season let's do it sometime soon. The companion work, the Solemn Vespers, we have done more recently. This is simpler and shorter but no pushover, and needing a slick and rhythmically assured approach.

Or – the alternative programme, which uses about the same type of scoring in terms of soloists and orchestra, so there is not much of a cost difference, is a pairing of two very popular pieces in the choral repertoire. The Vivaldi Gloria is a lovely piece and for the most part straightforward, with some exciting textures and good baroque rhythms. There some exquisite solo movements too. The Haydn Nelson Mass is definitely Haydn's most popular mass, and it's easy to see why. Written in time of war, in 1798, when Europe was in complete turmoil, Lord Nelson was certainly a military hero and in fact when the piece was first performed in September of that year, it came after the stunning defeat of Napoleon in the in battle of the Nile. That blow was dealt by none other than Nelson, and so the title 'Nelson Mass' has stuck. Again it is a piece not without angst, reflecting Haydn's world being in turmoil, but there are some very beautiful moments too. Watch out sopranos there are a couple of top B's too!

And the summer sees us returning to my songbook, and I do hope this time to cover a few more of the songs in it, including some of the more challenging numbers. I did a rather big job on it last summer when I cut out a lot of the mistakes and made a proper full score with string parts and even plectrum guitar parts added in. The string parts are now neatly printed professionally and there is even a piano part, so the whole thing is sitting there ready to go and this is always a very enjoyable concert, where we can let our hair down a bit and sing some of the classics from the popular song repertoire.

So once again a very mixed package and one which I hope we'll find both challenging and very enjoyable, and as usual I'm looking forward to it very much indeed.

The Chairman expressed everyone's thanks to David but said that the report did not reflect the many hidden hours of work he has put into preparing concerts and for which we were hugely indebted.

Several reports had been previously provided via the web-site (and not presented verbally) but the Chairman noted them and made some comments on each.

The Bishopwearmouth Young Singers Report was prepared by E.B. :-

Bishopwearmouth Young Singers have enjoyed another happy season of music making. We sang in the Choral Society concert at Easter, where the Young Singers acquitted themselves with distinction. Our Christmas and Summer concerts were very successful in terms of quality of singing and we very much appreciated the

contributions made by our young guest soloists.

Numbers remain small but commitment and loyalty remain strong. New members are always welcome and interested parties should contact our secretary Eileen Watson.

The Patrons' Officer's Report was prepared by C.L.

This year there has been little change in the numbers of our Patrons. However, with the announcement of the closure of Sunderland High School in January 2016 we will lose their patronage and we will revert to the support of Holley Park Academy only.

The breakdown of our Patrons is as follows:-

Life Patrons	17
Senior Patrons	19
Adult Patrons	2
Family	1
School	1

Patrons' ticket sales throughout the year still represent about a third of the audiences we attract.

December 2015 we sold 31 tickets

March 2016 we sold 33 tickets

June 2016 we sold 42 tickets.

The increase in ticket sales in June was entirely due to Society Patrons who made a concerted effort to boost our audience.

At the point of reporting Patrons' fees remain unchanged.

Senior Patrons	£12
Adult Patrons	£24
Family	£36
School	£50
Life	£120
Corporate	£150

The Vice-Chairman's Report was prepared by D.C :

1st Concert December Sea Symphony : Vaughan Williams and A Shropshire Lad - Butterworth

Setting up for the concert we were faced with accommodating the Christmas tree at the left of the staging and providing softer seats for the Patrons in the audience. Smaller chorus numbers meant that the whole chorus was on the staging and some players from the orchestra were accommodated on the front of the dais giving more space for the large orchestra. The Sea Symphony concert was enhanced by the noisy seagulls on the roof and the rehearsals by the slapping of covers on the scaffolding outside like sails in the wind!! Moving the long middle pews back at the end of the concert proved a significant problem as audience members wanted to talk to each other!!

49 members sang in the concert. 18 Sopranos, 15 Altos, 7 Tenors, 9 Basses.

2nd Smooth Classics for Spring

Christmas tree gone, and the outside scaffolding removed, the staging was a straightforward job. Extra pew moving was not necessary as the Minster team had already replaced six of the longest middle pews with padded chairs and we were allowed to leave them for the Sunday. Perhaps the congregation enjoyed sitting on soft

chairs! The Hummel Mass was a strenuous sing for the choir but David took pity on us and gave the choir a short rest in performance. The Young Singers, as always, enhanced the second half of the concert with their songs and joining in the finale. The chorus numbered 55 singers; 24 Sopranos, 11 Altos, 10 Tenors, 10 Basses

3rd Side by Side : Sondheim

Concert setup went well despite the fewer helpers. The concert was a success although the basses and sometimes the tenors seemed to be filling in everyone's line but things worked out in the end thanks to David's printout of one particularly tricky bass line. Tripping over Sondheim's words was an occupational hazard for some of the songs especially '*Another hundred people*'. Getting the chorus back on stage after interval was a bit patchy and I think this reflected in the weak start to the first item '*Everybody says don't*' after the break.

The chorus numbered 51 singers; 24 Sopranos, 9 Altos, 11 Tenors, 7 Basses.

Observation from concerts

In general concert etiquette was well observed - just a reminder that bottles of water not allowed on stage. '*Singing is good for you*'; So be ready at the start of rehearsals/concerts, 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 27 Sopranos, 14 Contraltos, 11 Tenors and 12 Basses - a total of 64. I look forward to a challenging 68th season starting with An English Christmas followed by Mozart/Haydn-Vivaldi and finally Murray arrangements.

As always 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 in the Minster; we pride ourselves in leaving the Minster neat and tidy and ready for Sunday morning worship. *With everyone's help we can clear away and setup for Sunday Morning worship in under an hour after the end of the concert. This is a huge achievement and relies on all members to play their part even if it is only moving a few chairs – it all helps.* A huge thank you to the Minster staff for accommodating our setting up of the soft seating in the patron's area of the audience and allowing us to leave the setup for the Sunday service.

Also thanks to those who make the rehearsal interval coffee; run the weekly raffle (*You have to be in it to win it!!!* And I often do!!), those who make the concert interval refreshments and Young Singers supporters, in fact everyone who mucks in and helps in any way - these things don't happen by magic and all money raised keeps the society going! Not forgetting all those who took part in the Sage Music Day singing the Requiem by Wood and those who sang at the Citizenship Ceremony at the Civic Centre.

Finally – well – I just know you're waiting for some humour.

From the Edinburgh Fringe (not the winner)!

From my window all I can see is fish fingers. I've got a Birds Eye view.

Why was the former conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic always first off the plane?

Because he only had Karajan luggage!

How can you tell if a singer's at your door?

They can't find the key and don't know when to come in!!

The Librarian's Report was prepared by AL :-

Thank you to everyone for your co-operation over the last year, particularly after the last concert, when all the copies of Side by Side were present and correct, with all marks erased by 10.30pm on 18th of June. A miracle!

It hasn't always been easy, as we've had extra music, extra rehearsals, extra events, with music handed out and coming in at the same time. You've been very patient (most of you!)

Unfortunately, it isn't always like the Sondheim, and when I gather up the copies, there are some missing. This is particularly difficult when we have a lot of separate copies as we did at the spring concert and as we will again this time. Most people remember to leave their copies after the concert, or to hand them in beforehand if they're not able to sing. Can I ask that if you aren't able to get your copies to me by the end of the concert, that you let me know on angelalishman@blueyonder.co.uk or 01914546425 as soon as possible, so I know where the copies are – I have only a limited time to get the copies back if we hired them.

Hire of copies is normally £6.00 a term, no matter how many copies we are using. Please bring it as soon as possible preferably on the day the music is handed out, or if not, as soon as possible, in an envelope with your name on. I cannot give change. I can accept money before a rehearsal starts and during the interval, but not once we've started the warm up.

I'm looking forward to finding the music for you all this season

Election of Officers – These were conducted as follows :

For the post of		Proposed by	Seconded by	
Chairman	C.Alder	N.P.	I.W	carried by meeting
Secretary	E.Watson	E.M.	V.V.	carried by meeting
Treasurer	S.Riddle	M.B.	L.W.	carried by meeting
Soprano Rep.	JK	J.T.	L.C.	carried by meeting
Alto Rep.	CL	has agreed to continue as Rep for two years in the absence of any other volunteer (proposed by L.W. and seconded by G.K.).		
Bass Rep.	IW	has agreed to continue as Rep for one year in the absence of any other volunteer (proposed by D.C. and seconded P.R.).		

Any Other Business :-

- It was suggested that an approach could be made to a charity to underwrite a concert with the Society providing a choir free – This suggestion is to be investigated.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.25 p.m.

Eileen Watson,
Hon.Secretary.