

BRISTOL CONCERT ORCHESTRA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Ashton Park School
at 7:30 pm on Monday 17 October 2016

Present: the Conductor, the Officers and c. 40 * members of the Orchestra
* plus latecomers not counted

Apologies: Rob Bartlett, Roger Levett, Helen Sherwood and Will Singleton.

1/16 Minutes of AGM held on 19 October 2015

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.
(Prop. Andrew Stephen; Sec. Gill Richards; carried unanimously).

2/16 Matters Arising from Minutes

None.

3/16 Conductor's Report

The Chairman, Brenda Stacey invited Stefan to give his report.

Stefan remarked that we had done incredibly well; a positive story again. He said it had been a very good season, the last season - one of our best in fact; and he thought he might have said that last year, and maybe the year before too.

Stefan then gave us his thoughts on the season, a very mixed season, programme-wise:

"The first concert, the 1865 (150th anniversaries) concert, as dreamt up by Andrew Rees, was a genius idea. It could have been difficult, with lots of works to rehearse, but we found a good method by rehearsing in blocks, and that came off very well. Sibelius 5 had always been a problematic work for me, but the performance was great and I actually like the piece now... so thank you very much for that. The Glazunov was very beautiful, but I was to be picky, we did come to the Glazunov a little late, perhaps only on the Friday rehearsal for some, and I had wondered if we would get there in time.

The second concert - Scheherazade, Rachmaninov 4th Piano Concerto and the Debussy - as a programme had been one of my favourite programmes style-wise, with very high quality playing. The Scheherazade was a blast and I enjoyed rehearsing it because I think we had a lot fun looking at the styles and phrasing, so thank you very much. The solos and the lead in that was great. The Rach 4 is one of my favourite pieces and I was glad that You-Chiung accepted the invitation but she did say something like, "You want me to play what? Oh, OK!" She actually learned it for us and played it so amazingly well. I can now tell you that she hadn't worn her contact lenses for a year and when she went onstage wearing them she could hardly see a single note! And then, typical You-Chiung, she just found her way and it went fantastically, as did the Debussy.

Then for the third concert with Brahms, Dvořák and Smetana, a very romantic affair, and with the great Matthew Barley playing with us. It was so inspiring to have him there. Apparently it was inspiring for him as well. In the email he sent afterwards, he said it made him realise again why he played music - working with a positive group like ourselves, in a setting like St George's - so that was great for us to hear.

So I guess I can only say, keep going the way we are going. I think this orchestra works so well and is so much fun with a real sense of unity, sounding like one orchestra with one specific orchestral sound, which is great.

Keep getting the practice in early because it makes it a lot easier, rather than a scramble at the end, and the rehearsals are more productive for all of us. A tiny little thing: could we all make sure that we keep our section leaders informed about our availability for concerts and rehearsals and

don't trust that messages given to your immediate partner will get to the 'senior management' at the front. Let the leader or me know if you can't play.

The programme we had last season showed a great variety of styles and though each one of us has our own choices of music that we'd like to play, it's a challenge to bring all that together in a season where we are going to play as many different styles as possible. My grandmother always used to say that she was able at the end of the week say that each of her three children had hated at least one of the pieces of music they had to play, then she had succeeded. I think it's the same thing here.

On programme planning: it is very positive for us all to put plenty of suggestions on the annual list but it is soul-destroying if then you come to the list and say "I don't like this", "I don't like that", and so on. So please be more positive, make lots of suggestions, and we will pick from those (which is very exciting for the committee).

I want to thank the committee very much for making life so fantastically easy for me and making the orchestra run as smoothly as it does. Section Leaders: thank you very much for all your hard work; you are all busy people and the level of dedication is appreciated. I think the level of playing you achieve is fantastic.

It's a sad evening as well, because it's the last time I can say thank you to Phil. It's been an absolute privilege to work with you. I came in as this strange Dutch person. "OMG shall we go with this?" "Is it a good idea?" But the eagerness of the orchestra, and you putting it into practice, changing things and getting new ideas moving... again it's been a real privilege and you will be sorely missed. Tsehai, who is going to take over, has in committee has been a real powerhouse for great ideas as well, so I'm sure it's going to be amazing working along with you, but, Phil, it's a big moment and thank you very much for all those years."

4/16 Chairman's Report

Brenda Stacey mentioned that her report in the role of chair was probably going to repeat a lot of what Stefan had just said; but she asked everyone to bear with her as hers was from a player's perspective. She then presented the report that follows:

"The 2015/16 season has been very full with a lot of notes to play, exciting repertoire and successful concerts.

Once again we are indebted to Stefan for all his hard work and enthusiasm. He continues to raise standards in the orchestra and this in turn attracts new players of good calibre so that we have been able to play works which we had previously thought too challenging. An innovation this year was having a different leader for the orchestra in each concert, being Andrew Rees, Andrew Lawrie, Brenda Stacey and Sam Roome.

The first concert of the year was the Children's Concert at Bristol Grammar School which was performed twice and yet was still oversubscribed, with the 'Harry Potter' theme being a big draw allowing us to combine popular culture with classical music in The Sorcerer's Apprentice. Over the years the orchestra has become more adept at communicating its sheer joy in performing music to an eager audience of children and parents. David Barrell's narration is always a big hit and sets a relaxed atmosphere full of fun and enjoyment and Stefan's interaction with the audience went particularly well.

The first outing for the orchestra at St. Georges this year had something of a Nordic theme, featuring both the Karelia Suite and the ever popular Symphony No. 5 by Sibelius, together with Nielsen's Helios Overture. We were delighted to have Eloisa-Fleur Thom return to play the Glazunov Violin Concerto and David Barrell rejoined us to narrate the Sorcerer's Apprentice by Dukas - an item too good to only have an outing at the children's concert. This programme was a really good play for everyone but there were some particularly lovely wind solos and the horn section acquitted itself especially well in the Nielsen.

The repertoire for the Spring term concert could well be described as 'a box of delights' being pieces that had been requested by members of the orchestra over many years and which for one reason or another had not been performed in recent years. You-Chiung Lin returned to play Rachmaninov's less familiar Piano Concerto No.4 and the main orchestral work was Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade and featured Andrew Lawrie playing the solo violin cadenzas and

leading the orchestra for the first time. Dramatically different in character but equally popular were Debussy's 'Prelude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune and two pieces by Shostakovich - Waltz No.2 from the Jazz Suite and Tahiti Trot (better known as 'Tea for Two.')

The summer term was a feast of romantic music from the classical canon and featured an outstanding musical interpretation of the Dvořák Cello Concerto played by Matthew Barley, possibly the best soloist we have ever had the pleasure of working with and to everyone's delight he also gave an encore. The orchestra also performed a selection from Smetana's Bartered Bride and the ever popular Symphony No. 2 by Brahms.

Once again BCO Sinfonietta gave a concert at Olveston Parish Church in aid of their organ fund in the summer. This year the concert featured two magnificent young soloists (Jo Edwards & Sào-Soulez Larivière) playing Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante, which was very well received. There were also items from the church choir & organist and the orchestra played Schubert's Symphony No. 4 in C minor, known as 'The Tragic.'

As is our custom, BCO has supported various charities with collections at the end of our concerts - this year we selected 'Smile with Sidy', The British Red Cross, the 'Forever Friends Appeal - RUH Cancer Centre' and Olveston Parish Church - all charities which had a personal resonance with members of the orchestra or the public at large. These charities are always appreciative of our efforts.

I should also like to thank all members of the committee who perform the wide variety of tasks required to administer the orchestra's business and especially those stepping down, being Vanessa Pinniger and Phil Ellwood, together with Christine Davis who had been co-opted to the committee as librarian, a post which Anneka Sutcliffe has now taken on.

I wish to give particular thanks to Phil who has occupied the post of Secretary for at least 13 years. The role of Secretary is the key one in any organisation and the fact that BCO has been so well run over the years is due in no small part to Phil's energy, efficiency, diplomacy and tenacity. He has supported and encouraged fellow members of the committee in their roles, coaxed and guided new members and kept the paperwork up to date with meticulous attention to detail. Last year his forethought in announcing his intention to step down enabled the induction of another member to the role and he has magnanimously offered to provide support if needed. Phil will be a hard act to follow but I am pleased to announce that Tsehai has volunteered for the role and I hope that you will all support her in this.

Phil, you have provided us with a superb example of 'service' - always putting the orchestra first and never self-serving. Thank you from us all. Please accept this small gift."

Brenda then presented Phil with a bottle of champagne, to which Phil expressed his thanks and gave a short speech expressing his pleasure and sense of reward in serving the orchestra.

5/16 Treasurer's Report

Brenda asked for the Treasurer's report.

Tim Barrett opened his report by saying that he had hoped that we would have had the sign-off by the Independent Examiner by now, but that had yet to come through. He doubted that there would be any changes. He hoped that everyone had seen the accounts in their current form. Tim then gave us his report:

"As you will see from the number not quite at the bottom of the first page, the £1,386 number, that is our surplus for the year. This is not quite as much as in the last couple of years, but we were previously getting a hump of Gift Aid coming through over several years. Things are also getting more expensive, but it was still a pretty healthy year. If you look the third and fourth pages, you will see that we are subsidising most of our concerts, to one degree or another. This is entirely in line with decisions taken at previous AGMs that we would do exactly that, and we increased our subscriptions to achieve it. We will at some point be reviewing our ticket prices in that light, because St George's isn't getting any cheaper. Looking at the overall picture, it was a pretty solid year. Does anyone have any questions?"

A question was asked: "Why do we have such a surplus?"

Tim answered: "We are supposed to have a reserve that would allow us to, in the event of a disaster, cover a year's expenditure, and we are roughly at that level now, so we are not looking to

accumulate significantly more. I have three years' worth of accounts in front of me. At 31 Aug 2013, we had about £15k; it is now £27.5k. Some of that is collective Gift Aid, but yes, we do need reserves, but we don't need huge reserves, and we are not looking to significantly increase them going forward."

A vote to accept the Treasurer's Report and Accounts was not done on this occasion, as the accounts had not yet been checked by the independent examiner. Acceptance of the accounts will be the subject of a short Special (Extraordinary) General Meeting, in due course.

06/16 Subscriptions for 2016-2017

Moving straight on from his Treasurer's Report (see 06/16 above), and in the light of comments made about reserves, Tim Barrett proposed that we should leave subscriptions at the current levels. He noted that we had put them up about three years ago when we had got ourselves into a bit of a hole. Also we had received Gift Aid in the intervening period. Tim encouraged any eligible taxpayer who had not yet completed a Gift Aid declaration to do so. He offered to bring a list for people to check if they had already declared for Gift Aid. In summary he felt that at some point we may need to put up subscriptions again, but not this year. Tim then invited comments or questions. Upon request from Brenda, Tim clarified that current levels are: £45 per term (concs. £30), each with a £5 reduction if a full year's subscription is paid in the Autumn term.

A question was asked: "Does Gift Aid carry on 'for life'?"

Tim answered: "Yes, if you have done a Gift Aid form once, it will carry on until such time as I am notified that you wish to stop; and you should do so if you cease to be eligible."

A question was asked: "Should we increase our ticket prices, recognising there is a trade-off between setting ticket prices higher and increasing subscription levels?"

Tim answered: "I did make the point a meeting or two ago that our ticket prices had been fairly static for a while and all the costs were gradually moving upwards. We discussed it; and there was quite a lot of resistance to raising the top ticket price; we did talk about maybe bringing the second band up to the same as the top ticket price. We are still thinking about that."

Brenda said that she thought one of the problems to be that because St George's was having all the building work done next year, and everyone suspects that when they re-open again afterwards, their prices will have gone up. So we are all right for the next two concerts, and the ticket prices for those are already agreed and in their publicity. Our summer concert isn't in St George's, but at St Mary Redcliffe, so that's not affected. But come December next year, we may find that they have hiked up the prices quite a lot.

Tim mentioned that St George's is already doing that: this year for the first time there is a premium on concerts in the month of December.

Brenda said that we would need to decide for 12 months' time, including the question of whether to raise income from subscriptions, or on the ticket prices.

Tim remarked that the good news for this coming year is that we are going back to St Mary Redcliffe, which if the financials are the same as last time, is significantly cheaper than St George's. Last time there we made a good concert surplus.

A question was asked: "Do people think that ticket prices are the main factor affecting audience levels, or is it more about programmes?"

Tim: you may well be right. At the meeting, it was discussed that if you go above a certain price, they will stay away in droves. Quite what that point is, who knows? Given that St George's is in such flux, I think that waiting until we see what comes out of the other side is probably a sensible approach.

A question was asked: "We have so much in reserves anyway. Could we use some of that?"

Tim answered: "Yes, it's sitting there in case of *extremis*, if we should have some disaster we need to be able to pay our obligations. Yes, you are right, we don't want to be hoarding too much more.

A question was asked by Jenny Dent-Young: "Could we move our December concerts into late November?"

Tim answered: "It may not have been just December [Phil then interjected that it is just December] but I guess it's something we could think about. The premium is around £200." [*Post meeting note: The premium is in fact £150 in December 2016 and December 2017*].

Lyn Harradine brought up the subject of the need for acoustic shields to help protect the hearing of players sat right next to the percussion section.

Tim asked for clarification on the proposed positioning of these shields and then said that financially speaking he had no objection to the suggestion. But he wondered about hall bookings and where the shields could be kept. Discussion ensued for quite a few minutes.

Tim concluded that the committee would undertake to look at the subject again and he asked Tsehai to include it on the agenda for the next meeting.

A vote was then taken on the Treasurer's proposal for 2016-2017 subscriptions.

By show of hands, it was agreed unanimously to keep subscriptions at the current levels for 2016-2017. (Prop. Corinne Harvey; Sec. Linda Bearpark).

7/16 Election of Chairman (Secretary in chair)

Brenda Stacey stood down and Phil Ellwood took the chair. Phil thanked Brenda for doing a sterling job as Chairman over the last year and expressed our gratitude.

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Chairman: Brenda Stacey.
Brenda was re-elected unopposed. (Prop. Bob Pinniger; Sec. Andrew Lawrie).

Brenda Stacey then returned to the table to chair the remainder of the meeting.

Phil Ellwood continued to read out the nominations, which were dealt with in a block – see also 8/16, 9/16 and 10/16 below.

8/16 Election of Secretary

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Secretary: Tsehai Mineur.
Tsehai was elected unopposed. (Prop. Phil Ellwood; Sec. Roger Levett).

9/16 Election of Treasurer

Phil Ellwood informed us that Tim had agreed to stand again as Treasurer. Phil thanked Tim for his great work in keeping our finances under control and providing us with good advice.

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Treasurer: Tim Barrett.
Tim was re-elected unopposed. (Prop. Sam Roome; Sec. Helen Sherwood).

10/16 Election of Committee Members

[Post meeting note: Phil Ellwood meant to note that we had two vacancies on the committee because both he and Vanessa Pinniger had decided to stand down this year. He also meant to give thanks to Vanessa for her valued work on the committee, especially as our Charities Coordinator. Apologies are due to Vanessa for this omission].

Unfortunately, no nominations for the vacancies had been received in advance and none were forthcoming at the meeting.

Phil told us that two existing committee members had come to the end of their three-year term of office: Hilary Ross and Andrew Stephen. Both were happy to stand for re-election and both had submitted nominations.

Hilary Ross Prop. Helen Sherwood; Sec. Andrew Coombs

Andrew Stephen Prop. Emma Clark; Sec. Mike Lea-Wilson

Andrew and Hilary were re-elected unopposed.

By show of hands, the members voted to accept these five candidates in a block vote (Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, plus two committee members). (Prop. Jane Hickson; Sec. Gill Richards)

11/16 Any Other Business

No subjects had been notified in advance.

Brenda Stacey asked if there were any items from the floor.

Stefan made a point about the previous comments about the reserves that we hold, and that having worked with similar organisations as ours, it seems a lot of money to have in the bank, nearly £30,000 but it really isn't – just one or two seasons with low audience turnout would show that this kind of reserve is good to have and we shouldn't go lower. Stefan also remarked that without healthy reserves it would be difficult to take risks and engage such high calibre soloists as Matthew Barley, even if he was performing for much less than his usual fee. Further, he pointed out that the musical experience can be so much better for orchestra and audience when we are in this position of safety – which enables us to plan our own way – and that we should try to nurture that feeling as much as possible.

Someone asked if we knew about the nature of the forthcoming changes at St George's Bristol. Some discussion then followed about parking, disabled access and additional reception and performance areas, but the overall prospect was uncertain.

[Post-meeting note: here is a link to the relevant page of SGB's website]:

<http://www.stgeorgesbristol.co.uk/support-us/buildingasoundfuture/>

No other points were forthcoming and the meeting was closed at approximately 8:10 pm.

Date of next meeting (proposed): Monday 16 October 2017, starting at 7:30 pm

Compiled: Phil Ellwood

Approved: Brenda Stacey

21 November 2016