

BRISTOL CONCERT ORCHESTRA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2015

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Ashton Park School
at 7:30 pm on Monday 19 October 2015

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

Apologies: Helen Sherwood, Will Singleton, Julia Kraus and Jay Suntharalingam.

1/15 Minutes of AGM held on 13 October 2014

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

2/15 Matters Arising from Minutes

None.

3/15 Conductor's Report

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

Stefan remarked that we had the most amazing year; probably the best year he had known for the orchestra, in many ways. It was a very challenging and varied season programme that we had set ourselves. The playing level was amazing; and the audiences that we pulled in for the concerts were very good.

Also very important for all of us here, Stefan said, because we are not just about concerts, although that's important, but also being here weekly, being an orchestra, making music together.

Stefan remarked that he had really enjoyed the rehearsals, which, in the past, sometimes had been a bit different - with tricky works where some people had left their practising a bit late on in the term. He had really enjoyed the fact that at every rehearsal we could build on what had been done before and the level went up through the rehearsal period and that was incredibly satisfying.

So, Mahler 9, Stefan had to say, had been a very technical work, but he was a sucker for that piece. It had been incredibly special and the level of playing was amazing - and what happened there was fantastic, something that will be with him for a long time.

The Beethoven as well: another difficult piece that everyone knew so well so could have been easy to get stuck in the youth orchestra way of playing it. Stefan thought we did something really amazing with the work. And the summer concert was fantastic also, in that fantastic space of St Mary Redcliffe. And then there was the now legendary crotchet, the 'organ crotchet'. So Stefan thanked us very much - it had been a great year for him.

Stefan remarked that the thing that makes him very happy to work with us is the great continuity. There's a real team spirit and a real sense of one instance that works on pieces; that's the real privilege. That is due to all of us, but also reflected in the committee who are incredibly hard working and they make life so very easy for him and for all the orchestra. So he thanked the committee very much for all the hard work and said that is not always like that in other organisations.

Stefan then mentioned some minor grumbles:

He thinks that some of us could be slightly better prepared for rehearsals, rather than just showing up with their music, to see what it's like in the rehearsal, and then expecting everything will be spoon-fed to them. So if we all could - and we know we're all busy with work - be more prepared on whatever we can do (e.g. rhythms!) and how the work holds together, listen to the work a bit more, that makes rehearsing it even better.

He thought we could – and realising there is some insecurity involved here – consider the rotating system and use it a little more. Some people are quite nervous to move to the first violins, and that's fair enough—we don't want people dragged to another section, but people who have been nervous at the beginning are now quite happy to rotate along and have really enjoyed it, and there's always the chance to look at it per programme. Talk to the section leaders. It really makes for a more dynamic orchestra, and a more enjoyable experience.

The other thing was that people have – for example with the Mahler 9 – disrupted the orchestra flow and decided they were not going to play in a concert like that. A team effort means that even if you can't play all the notes, be musically aware and make sure you can contribute as much as you can, where you can, and it's still a fantastic thing. So, he hoped that you will feel you want to be part of the team. Even when it's a bit scary, join where you can and it will still be a very positive experience.

Overall, Stefan thanked us very much and said he looked forward to the next few seasons. The repertoire might get a little more varied as we go along, but it will be great.

4/15 Chairman's Report

Brenda Stacey mentioned that her report is totally in agreement with Stefan; and she hoped that everyone would think so. She then presented the report that follows:

“The 2014/15 season has been one of challenge but nevertheless a very successful one.

Right from the start, the Children's concert at Bristol Grammar School, with Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite proved so popular that the concert had to be performed twice and it looks as if this will become the norm. These concerts are greatly appreciated by both the children and parents in the audiences especially due to the sheer joy and enthusiasm for music which both orchestra and conductor display - far removed from the stuffy impression some people have of classical music and musicians.

In December Stefan set challenges, both technical and musical for the orchestra with the inclusion of Mahler's 9th Symphony in the calendar. Whilst this was not to the taste of all members of the orchestra, several admitted that having lived with the work for a term they had grown to like it and appreciated the experience. The other work in this concert was Beethoven's Two Romances for Violin and Orchestra performed by Eloisa-Fleur Thom.

Repertoire for the spring term provided a complete contrast with Beethoven Symphony No. 5, Liszt Piano Concerto No. 1 with soloist Ashley Wass and Debussy's Ibéria each providing their own different challenges and requiring very clean, neat playing due to the clarity of ensemble and timbre.

The summer term concert was probably the highlight of the year, being set in the charming church of St. Mary Redcliffe on a beautiful summer's day and drawing a total sell-out audience. The Dukas Fanfare and Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia gave a platform for wind and strings respectively, the latter providing a logistical challenge with a small chamber group playing in the gallery at the back of the church needing to co-ordinate with the main body of the orchestra both in timing and balance which they achieved very successfully. Next the orchestra was joined by Laura Curry to perform Richard Strauss' Four Last Songs, then the orchestra was joined by a choir from the church and school to perform Borodin's Polovtsian Dances in Russian - on only limited rehearsal time with the orchestra (itself a challenge!) The climax of the concert was Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony - a huge dramatic work requiring an organ. The performance went very well but there was one heart-stopping moment when organ and orchestra parted company for half a bar but a decisive beat from Stefan brought everyone back together on the next bar and saved the day and most of the audience didn't even notice.

The final concert of the year involved the BCO Sinfonietta - a smaller version of the orchestra playing a more classical programme of Bach, Mozart and Schubert at Olveston Parish Church and featuring the young flautist Ben M'Caw from QEH School: again this was a great success and much appreciated by the local community.

As ever we have supported different charities in each concert, being the Great Western Air Ambulance, the Bristol Child Contact Centre, Bristol Special Friends Club and Olveston Parish

Church - the charities involved are always very appreciative not only of the funds raised but the publicity it gives them.

A new initiative is to donate two tickets to charities so that they can raffle them and raise further funds for themselves whilst giving us the publicity.

I should like to thank Stefan for his continued hard work and infectious enthusiasm which is an inspiration both for the orchestra and our audiences. He has set us challenges in the last year which by and large we have usually met.

I should also like to thank the members of the committee who perform a wide variety of tasks all of which contribute to the efficient organisation and administration of the orchestra, ensuring that we have the opportunity to perform our concerts in pleasant venues, with good soloists, and to large audiences. In particular the officers have done sterling work but above all Phil's contribution as Secretary has been outstanding - I should point out here that he is looking to stand down from this role at some stage in the future, so we are seeking to find a new volunteer for this post - having said that he is willing to make it a phased handover so that the new incumbent can be broken in gently. He has a wealth of knowledge and experience which he has freely given in the service of BCO and he will be a hard act to follow, but it would be an excellent opportunity for someone to learn how to perform the role of Secretary under the direction of such an experienced person."

5/15 Treasurer's Report

Brenda remarked that having had a musically successful year, she was looking forward to the Treasurer's report.

Tim opened his report by saying that the most important numbers on the accounts were the second row from bottom [showing the Surplus / (Deficit) for the last two years]. These figures showed that we have had two very healthy years, and that we had made a surplus of over £4,700 last year. The only real difference between this year and the year before was the fact that several years of Gift Aid were claimed last year; and one only one year's claimed this year, and that accounts for most of the difference in the overall surpluses.

Tim then mentioned that since we had put up our ticket prices a few years ago, our concerts had been much more likely to break even, and if you looked on the back page you would see that our overall concert surplus for this year was around £1,600. If you were to drill into it a bit, you would find that almost all of that comes from the Summer 2015 concert [at St Mary Redcliffe] for which we had sold more tickets, so we therefore got a lot more money in; and the venue was much cheaper than St George's Bristol had become these days. So, the bottom line was very good for us, for that concert. Tim remarked that he was pleased that we are going back there in Summer 2017!

Tim said that beyond that, the finances are all very healthy, as we could see from the accounts. He then asked if anyone had any questions.

Emma Clark asked what we were going to spend the surplus on. Tim replied that for the moment we are still working on building up a reserve, which is just about getting to the level recommended by the Charity Commission. So now we will be looking to make not quite such heavy surpluses in the future, because that would become hard to justify, from a charitable perspective. On the other hand, we have various exciting ideas: like we might buy some more percussion instruments; and we might take some bigger risks with soloists. In fact, this coming year, we have scheduled possibly our most expensive soloist ever, an international name. Yes, we don't want to stack up the deposit account indefinitely; we will be looking to moderate that, in various ways.

There were no further questions.

There then was some confusion about the agenda placement concerning the next item, Subscriptions for 2015-2016. Tim thought that it should follow the election of the Treasurer. Phil advised that the order was our usual one and we should proceed on that basis. Tim checked that there was only one candidate for Treasurer so it became a moot point anyway.

[Post-meeting note: 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 Special (Extraordinary) General Meeting, in due course].

06/15 Subscriptions for 2015-2016

On the basis of the Treasurer's Report already presented (see 05/15 above), Tim Barrett explained that he certainly was not going to recommend increasing subscriptions. He had contemplated proposing a reduction but in the end his recommendation is to leave subscriptions at the current levels (but was happy to hear other views from our members).

Brenda asked for any views from the floor. One member suggested keeping subscriptions the same as last year, as already proposed by Tim.

By show of hands, it was agreed unanimously to keep subscriptions at the current levels for 2015-2016. (Prop. Gill Richards; Sec. Siân Rees).

[For the record, current levels means: £45 per term (concs. £30), each with a £5 reduction if a full year's subscription is paid in the Autumn term].

7/15 Election of Chairman (Secretary in chair)

Brenda Stacey stood down and Phil Ellwood took the chair.

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Chairman: Brenda Stacey.

*Brenda was re-elected unopposed. (Prop. Geraldine Roberts; Sec. Andrew Lawrie). **

* the names on the nomination form, rather than those taken (in error) during the meeting.

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

8/15 Election of Secretary

Brenda Stacey informed us that Phil had agreed to stand again as Secretary (for one more year).

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Secretary: Phil Ellwood.

*Phil was re-elected unopposed. (Prop. Lyn Harradine; Sec. Will Singleton). **

* the names on the nomination form, rather than those taken (in error) during the meeting.

9/15 Election of Treasurer

Brenda Stacey informed us that Tim had agreed to stand again as Treasurer.

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Treasurer: Tim Barrett.

*Tim was re-elected unopposed. (Prop. Nigel James; Sec. Jane Hickson). **

* the names on the nomination form, rather than those taken (in error) during the meeting.

10/15 Election of Committee Members

Brenda Stacey noted that we had one vacancy on the committee because Julia Kraus had decided to stand down. Thanks were given to Julia, in her absence.

Only one nomination had been received for the post of Committee Member: Anneka Sutcliffe.

Anneka was elected unopposed. (Prop. Sophie Cottrell; Sec. Andrew Lawrie).

Brenda welcomed Anneka to the committee.

Two existing committee members had come to the end of their three-year term of office: Andrew Coombs and Mike Organ. Andrew and Mike were happy to stand for re-election (though they had each forgotten to fill a nomination form in advance, we realised during the meeting). They each re-confirmed their willingness to stand again and Proposers / Seconders were sought from the floor.

Andrew Coombs Prop. Linda Bearpark; Sec. Sam Roome

Mike Organ Prop. Roger Levett; Sec. Liz Bagshaw

By show of hands, the members voted to accept these two candidates as re-elected unopposed.

11/15 Any Other Business

No subjects had been notified in advance.

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

Rachel Howell asked about the Christmas Party. Brenda explained that the committee had talked about it and we were thinking about doing the same as last year: having a party here at APS on the Monday after the concert, i.e. 7 December, with the possibility of reading through Scheherazade first. Stefan hinted that was an option but there could be other ideas. Brenda asked if we were likely to have the music for Scheherazade. Christine didn't know at this stage.

Someone suggested Sleigh Ride (Leroy Anderson), for which QEH might have a copy.

Roger Levett said that he liked the way that last year we did a substantial piece that wasn't on the repertory.

Brenda invited the members to make suggestions, either to her or to Stefan.

No other points were forthcoming.

The meeting was closed at 7:56 pm.

Date of next meeting (proposed): Monday 17 October 2016, starting at 7:30 pm

Compiled: Phil Ellwood

Approved: Brenda Stacey

7 November 2015