

Chairman's Report to the WPS AGM 7.10.2019

I hope that most of you will have read the excellent report on our last year's activities as prepared by Audrey. If not, I highly recommend it as it should make us all feel proud of what we have achieved in the last 12 months. Thank you Audrey. I shall now look forwards rather than backwards and report on what will become our strategic plan for the next 2 to 5 years.

With the closure of the Watford Colosseum for 8 months in 2021 and faced with the perennial challenge of finding music to enthuse both members and audience, your committee felt that it was a good time to reach out to you all to measure our responses to a series of questions. Your response to the questionnaire that we all received in the summer was nothing less than outstanding. Approximately 70% of all members replied which provided your committee with a clear picture of your opinions and gave us an equally clear signal of the key issues which we discussed at a committee away day held a couple of weeks ago.

I won't spend time reflecting on the challenges we face. Instead, I shall try to give you in 5 minutes a snapshot of the more than 6 hours spent at our away day. At the beginning of our day, we listed 3 specific areas which we had to consider. They were, in no particular order, The Colosseum, Marketing and Finance. Finance will be reported in detail and with Paul at the helm, we can all be confident that we are in safe hands. We now know that the new contract to manage the Colosseum will be awarded in July of next year and not November 2021 as we were first informed. In the meantime, we have a team who are actively considering a number of alternative venues for concerts from March to November 2021 – and possibly beyond.

After an invigorating brain storming session, it was clear that our main concerns broke down into 4 categories, namely:

1. Repertoire and Programme Planning from 2021
2. Marketing
3. Skills
4. Culture

For each of these categories, we devised an action plan which I shall summarise as follows:

REPERTOIRE AND PROGRAMME PLANNING FROM 2021

Our season will include a major concert in the Spring and a less demanding and lighter concert in the summer, which might even include a smaller orchestra or even a simple piano accompaniment. We also aim to include a summer orchestral concert and thank you Keith for representing the interests of the orchestra on committee. In October, with fewer weeks to prepare, we should perform a less challenging concert and follow that with our traditional Christmas concert in December for which we shall give an extra week or two's rehearsal. We agreed that our concerts must appeal to as wide an audience as possible. We should also seriously consider repeating items previously performed. This recognises the fact that some of us need a little time before we warm to the music. Inevitably, when we master the music, we love it.

Our repertoire will be selected by the membership, through our suggestions book that is available every week, and our Director of Music, Michael, in conjunction with our Planning Group chairman Graham. The programme will then be discussed and approved by the planning group committee before being presented for approval by the full committee.

MARKETING

We should recruit a Marketeer, as opposed to a Publicity Manager, who would be responsible for Sponsors, Advertisers and Social media. Our fantastic Publicity manager, Pam, will continue to oversee

Website and links, Programmes and Flyers, Press Releases radio publicity, free advertising and of course, Design. As well as Pam, we have Tim as our ever-dependable IT Manager, Liz Defries, who managed our website for many years and Steve Crocker, who designed our excellent and increasingly popular website, Margaret as our tireless Rehearsals manger and Judy, who makes herself available for everything. In short, we have a fabulous team. A designated marketeer will go a long way to completing the team. This need not be a committee position so, no meetings. Speak to Pam and offer your services. Finally, we recognised that outreach, which could bring our music and activities to schools and community groups, and our public relations with the press, audience, and even our membership, could be improved. We know that there are volunteers amongst the membership who have skills and talent to offer so please, make yourself known.

SKILLS

This topic generated some lively discussion and we agreed that Michael should identify a professional voice coach who could work with him for an initial period of one year. Michael will have more to say on this when he speaks. Workshops have proved to be popular with everyone. All new members will be given an audition. Existing members will be given auditions every 3 years which will also ensure that we're all singing in the right voice. To that end, we shall hold a repeat of our re-balancing exercise in the summer 2020 term.

CULTURE PLAN

We all agreed that greater discipline would make a difference at rehearsals and on the concert platform. Frances and her team do a great job in preparing and managing these events and we owe it to her to pay attention and do as we're told. We might not be professional in the literal sense but we can conduct ourselves in a professional manner. There was also agreement that we should all be more welcoming to new members and to look after each other, especially when we notice anyone who might benefit from a friendly word. New members should be introduced to Michael and all committee members will take responsibility and take a lead in these activities. You will also notice that fewer chairs will be put out at rehearsals which we believe will eliminate the gaps in the various voice sections and create a greater togetherness within the choir.

The one committee position that has been vacant for a couple of years is that of Social Activities. We have some wonderful volunteers and so we believe no chairperson is really necessary. Finally, the role of voice reps was identified as an essential part of our care for members and Nikki, as our membership secretary, will coordinate their activities in this respect. And one more point. Let's not be afraid of criticism. Let's use it to fuel our determination to aspire to ever better performances.

Thank you to every member of the committee and to all the wonderful volunteers who work tirelessly to make us the Society we are. I apologise for not mentioning everyone by name but I hope you'll understand that it's the only safe way to avoid overlooking people who should be mentioned. Thank you all.

DAVID POLLAK