

MINUTES OF THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WATFORD PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

HELD ON MONDAY 2nd OCTOBER 2022 AT 7.00PM AT ST LUKE'S CHURCH, WATFORD

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chairman, Pam Allanson, welcomed members to the meeting. About 60 members attended, and there were apologies for absence from Tony Booth, Dorothy and Keith Champion, Hilary Chapman, Nina Duncan, Paulina Dyason, Janet Fanshawe, Rosemary and John Mackenzie-Corby, Liane Mallett, Philip Meager and Valerie Proudley.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM HELD ON 3rd OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the previous AGM were accepted as an accurate record. Proposed by Malcolm Two and seconded by Jackie O'Rourke.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman, Pam Allanson, reviewed the previous year which she described as varied, challenging and enjoyable. She regretted the need to raise subscriptions for the first time since 2018, due to ever-rising costs, and explained the rationale behind the move to St Luke's for rehearsals. Sadly Watford Girls', the previous venue, had become too expensive. Pam thanked the committee for their hard work and also those members who helped in other ways, including the organisation of social events, running the raffle and obtaining scores. She concluded with special thanks to Musical Director Michael Cayton and Rehearsal Accompanist Rosemary Venner.

4. SECRETARY'S REPORT

A report written by Audrey Adams and detailing the activities of the Society during the 2022-3 season was approved by the meeting.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

Charlie Hancock presented his financial report which had been circulated before the meeting. He explained the increase in subscriptions was entirely due to increased costs all round. The moves to St Luke's for rehearsals and Bushey for concerts had both resulted in savings, though Bushey also meant a reduced audience capacity. Subscriptions had raised £22,000. Overall, the Society had made a loss of £8,000 for the year, but there was still a healthy £43,000 in the bank. Charlie noted the useful contributions made by Gift Aid (£3,000) and the raffle (£1,000). A motion to accept the Treasurer's Report was proposed by Tim Pettigrew, seconded by Paul Buckley and passed unanimously.

6. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Charlie Hancock invited the meeting to re-appoint the firm of LPS Livingstone as the Society's Independent Examiner. The motion was proposed by Judy Newton-Davies, seconded by Frances Pyatt and passed unanimously.

7. MUSICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Michael Cayton reviewed the previous season's concerts and said he had enjoyed many special moments. He picked out some personal highlights, including the choir's "Amen" at the end of the Autumn Two Requiems concert and the performances of "Oh Radiant Dawn" and Nigel Hess's Overture at Christmas. The Rossini concert in March had been the highlight of the whole season, especially the end of the "Gloria", while the outstanding moment in the Summer had been the last section of the Chichester Psalms. The Orchestral concert had been an opportunity to showcase the various sections of the orchestra and to enjoy some outstanding solo performances.

Moving on to the current season, Michael welcomed the influx of new members who had contributed to a strong start. After the first full concert season at Bushey Grange, the Society was coming to terms with the implications of the more limited performance space and the need to deploy choir, orchestra and audience to the best advantage. The new venue also meant that the contribution of every voice and every instrument was vitally important.

8. ELECTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Before proceeding to the election of new committee members, Pam Allanson thanked Margaret Burke, who was retiring as Rehearsals Manager after ten years in the post. Pam said Margaret had been meticulous in ensuring the smooth running of rehearsals and had also contributed in many other ways as a hard-working committee member. Responding, Margaret thanked her helpers, especially Nikki Hind and Heather Russell. After ten years, she would not be missing the job of preparing the weekly Notices.

Moving on to the election, five nominations had been received for the six vacant committee posts. Judy Newton-Davies was proposed as Vice Chairman by Anne King and seconded by Jean Hinks. Frances Pyatt was proposed as Concert Manager by Carolyn Routledge and seconded by Pat Mitchell. Heather Russell was proposed as Rehearsals Manager by John Malin and seconded by Charlie Hancock. Michael Huxham was proposed as IT Manager and Webmaster by John Malin and seconded by Sarah Lockwood. Sarah Lockwood was proposed as Publicity and Marketing Manager by Susie Huxham and seconded by Angela Roy.

There were no nominations for the post of Membership Secretary. Nikki Hind had stood down after completing the maximum eight years in the post, but happily she was prepared to continue with a view to being re-elected next year. Accordingly, the committee had decided to co-opt her for the current year. A motion to elect the new committee en bloc was proposed by David Pollak and seconded by Lindsey St John Smith.

9. LONG SERVICE AWARDS

The customary long service awards were presented by Pam Allanson and Michael Cayton.

- 25 seasons: Rosemary Reed
- 30 seasons: David Wellings
- 40 seasons: Libby Newman

40 seasons: Jenny Quinn (orchestra)

50 seasons: Dorothy Chapman

50 seasons: Sheila Malin

A Special Award was given to Rosemary Venner, who had never received previous recognition despite completing almost 30 seasons. David, Dorothy and Jenny were absent but received their certificates at subsequent rehearsals.

10. QUESTIONS FROM THE MEMBERS

Members took the opportunity to ask a number of questions:

Q: What sort of repertoire is the Society planning in future?

A: (Michael Cayton) The Society is keen to widen both its repertoire and its audience. However, Bushey Grange imposes certain size limitations as already mentioned which limits the number of performers in both choir and orchestra. We intend to invite soloists from Watford Music School.

(Pam Allanson): A Come and Sing event in conjunction with the Bushey Festival is under active consideration.

Q: What about collaborations with other choirs or orchestras?

A: (Michael Cayton) Unfortunately there is not enough room at Bushey Grange. Our last collaboration with the Chiltern Choir was at the Colosseum, and even there it was a tight fit. So far as orchestras are concerned, John Galloway is liaising with other local orchestras on our behalf with the aim of co-ordinating dates and possibly exchanging players.

Q: Are there any other venues under consideration?

A: (Michael Cayton) St Albans Abbey would be splendid, but prohibitively expensive unless we combined with another group. We probably won't be able to afford the Colosseum when it reopens, or sell sufficient tickets, but we will investigate fully and it has not been ruled out.

(Pam Allanson): The priority at present is to consolidate our new rehearsal and concert venues.

Q: Are we going to invite a school choir to join us for the Christmas concert?

A: (Frances Pyatt) I'm afraid it's logistically impossible. There's not enough room at our new venue.

Q: Can we reintroduce the "Green Book" enabling members to suggest music for future concerts?

A: (Pam Allanson) Certainly – if we can find it! It's a good idea.

Q: Can the minutes of committee meetings be made available to choir members in the interests of greater transparency?

A: (Pam Allanson) I have broached this question, which was submitted in advance, with various committee members and we are firmly against this suggestion. We need to be able to discuss all matters freely when in committee. However, I have always tried to be transparent with members and I will continue to make sure everyone knows what is going on.

Q: Are there any plans for further social evenings?

A: (Judy Newton-Davies): A Christmas social has been suggested, subject of course to someone being willing to organise it. A new venue will be needed as WGGs is no longer available to us.

Q: I was in the audience for the Summer concert in 2022, when the ladies of the choir wore their own summer dresses. They looked most attractive – are there any plans for a repeat?

A: (Frances Pyatt) We did look lovely, and we'll certainly consider it for next summer's concert. We are presently considering dress options for the Christmas concert.

Q: Not really a question, but I just wanted to say I find travelling to St Luke's for rehearsals is difficult for me. Can I take this opportunity to thank those who help out with transport?

Q: A suggestion if I may. I am also a member of the South Oxhey Community choir. We are allowed to pay our subscriptions by monthly standing order, to spread the cost. Could this be an option for Watford Phil as well?

A: (Charlie Hancock) A good suggestion – I'll look into it.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None. There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.00pm. Pam Allanson thanked Mary Bowen for her kind assistance with setting up the hall for the meeting.