

Chairman's AGM Report 2023

I'm a great believer in looking forward, however this is the official 'look back' moment to reflect on the business of the past year.

We've had three successful concerts in new venues - Woolpit Village Hall, The John Peel Centre & St Mary's Buxhall, with two Come & Sing Days studying Haydn, Bach & Handel.

We also had the pleasure of a Celebrity Guest Recital with Tenor, Paul Phoenix, superbly accompanied at short notice by Richard.

These performances were attended by our President, Sir Terry Waite, whose Knighthood was announced on the day of our Handel concert. We thank him for his personal support of the Chorale, which is greatly appreciated.

On the social side, we held a Quiz Night in September, a Pub Night in July and a Garden Gathering in August.

None of this could have happened without the strong commitment and musical tenacity of you, the Chorale's members, under the direction of our professional music team, William Baldry & Richard Cook, who have been leading us so brilliantly since the unanticipated departure of Benedict Collins Rice in March. We clearly have much to look forward to with this dynamic duo and I thank them both, on behalf of us all.

I cannot continue without acknowledging the management challenges the Committee has met and overcome this year, with the trust and support of the Chorale's members.

Solutions have been found for alternative concert venues and staging, for new concert programme content, following the unsuccessful Arts Council bid and for a seamless transition of conductor and accompanist/AMD. All achieved through diligent, careful consideration on the Chorale's behalf, without compromising our values, integrity or reputation.

We also can't overlook the presence of that uninvited and unwelcome guest, Covid, at our performance of the Mozart Requiem.

These hurdles have served to inform future strategy and show that all things are possible, even within the limits of the Chorale's financial resources. Although we are a choir of modest income, without the financial bolster of patrons or donors, we uphold high musical aspirations and the desire to give invigorating and commanding performances for the benefit and enjoyment of ourselves and our audiences.

Before I come to the proposed changes of trustees, I wish to thank every member of this year's Committee team, who have worked together effectively to ensure the successful management of Stowmarket Chorale continues.

Committee Changes

Stephen Peake is standing down and the Committee has nominated Terry Willington to take on the Officer role of Vice Chairman.

Adrienne Marriott, Membership Secretary is also standing down and the Committee propose that she is succeeded by Carolyn Oldfield.

Adrienne will continue to assist with PR and Stephen to maintain the website and represent the tenors and basses, amongst other things. Our thanks to them both.

The co-opted members Jenny Mosesson, Cair Foster-Cannan and Rachel Belcher-Nairn are standing for election to the Committee.

In addition, Mary Payne, the Chorale's Friends Secretary, is passing responsibility for the Friends to Committee member Ruth Langridge, and SC Friend, Derek Cook, will take on the art design of flyers and programmes at the end of the season.

Mary's significant contribution to the running of our choir, over a number of years, will be officially acknowledged in the summer. Many thanks, Mary.

The three voice reps, Jan Sheldrake, Sue O'Keeffe and Stephen Peake, along with the Librarians, are all unofficially 'appended' to the committee and may be asked to attend meetings and be involved in official business.

As ever, there are various other non-committee members who undertake Chorale jobs and deserve acknowledgement. Many thanks to everybody who helps with the running of our choir.

Succession planning

A year ago, I stated 'Whilst any organisation needs stability, changes in personnel are healthy and I encourage all choir members to consider being part of the team that manages your choir'.

I also announced that both Catherine, our Committee Secretary and I would stand down today as Committee Officers.

However, we are both willing to be re-elected for this year and will anticipate our replacement in twelve months, when absolutely, we will be relinquishing the Officer roles of Chairman and Committee Secretary.

I feel very strongly that a fresh take with new leadership is needed periodically and should be planned for, with a strategy in place for succession of management.

If any choir member would consider a Co-Chairman or shadowing arrangement for either role during this year, please step forward and have that conversation with myself, Catherine or any Committee member.

Perhaps the most encouraging message of the past season has been our success in attracting new audiences across all age groups to each of the three concerts. This proves that effective publicity can increase our visibility and enable us to become known to a wider audience.

Our thanks are extended to The John Peel Centre and the PCC of St Mary's Buxhall for supporting us as fellow charities in the community, with a warm welcome to hire their buildings on very generous terms.

This year, I want us to recruit more members, persuade younger singers to join us and improve our financial position and reserves, with exciting future concerts in mind.

We're aiming to raise sufficient Chorale funds in the coming months to cover the costs of employing orchestral players, including a timpanist, and two soloists for our June performance of the Vivaldi Gloria and Handel anthems.

As we look forward, there will always be things to strive towards for our choir. I close with three 'How' questions, for us all, which hold the key to sustaining our success, enjoyment and viability as an amateur community choir:

How can we become increasingly visible and accessible?

How can we attract new members and Friends to join us?

How can we reach new audience members and maintain their attendance at our performances?