

## MALVERN FESTIVAL CHORUS

### Minutes of Annual General Meeting Held on the 7th September 2021 via Zoom

The meeting was held via Zoom as a precaution against gathering in a large group, in light of the level of Coronavirus infection. Kevin Ilsley opened the meeting and welcomed members. He also welcomed MFC President James Oxley.

1. **Apologies** had been received from 8 members; there were 47 members present.
2. **The Minutes of the AGM** held on the 8th September 2020, were proposed for approval by Jackie Tolliday and seconded by Tony Collins. They were approved nem con.
3. **Matters Arising**. There were no matters arising.
4. **Committee Reports/Newsletter** had been circulated prior to the AGM with the request that members should read them in advance.

**Music Director's Report.** Jonathan Brown greeted everyone. He commented that his report looked back over the year which culminated in getting together to sing, despite the rain. He felt that members had shown remarkable commitment to the rehearsals on Zoom, for which he expressed thanks. He also thanked Penny Vere for her contribution to rehearsals. He and Penny had found it to be a very strange experience, seeing people singing and hearing nothing.

**Chairman's report.** Kevin Ilsley summed up the year as "challenging". He recalled that at this time last year we were experimenting with Zoom. He was attending zoom meetings with Making Music, which he had come to appreciate as a very professional organisation, and the involvement with which he had found very helpful. He stated that our primary objective for holding Zoom rehearsals had been to keep the choir together. He appreciated that rehearsing on Zoom was not for everybody and he had no criticism about that. He highlighted the decision to expand the newsletter activity to keep members engaged, and he thanked Bridget Corlett for coordinating it and all those who had contributed.

Kevin thanked the Committee, and Jonathan and Penny for their commitment to holding rehearsals on Zoom. He commented that many MD's had declined to do that. Although Zoom rehearsals created extra work and was less rewarding, members had been buoyed up by Jonathan and Penny's enthusiasm.

Kevin also thanked non-Committee members Jackie Tolliday for her work on the website and Liz Gait for assisting us with Zoom. Although the choir is hoping to get together more in person, Zoom will continue to be used to broadcast the live rehearsals.

Special mention was made of John Price who had decided he could no longer be a member and serve on the Committee as Concert Manager, due to health issues. Kevin said that as a fellow tenor he would miss John at rehearsals and recorded our thanks to John for the contribution he had made to the Society.

Kevin congratulated Eileen and Roger Wilson on their Golden Wedding and made mention of those who had died during the season.

He commented that he was looking forward to getting back together and rebuilding from the core maintained by Jonathan and Penny, and he thanked members for their commitment.

Marion Couston said how pleased she had been to have Kevin as Chairman, particularly with his medical expertise.

Kevin stated how privileged the society is to have James Oxley as President. He referred to the difficulties experienced by professional musicians in having their livelihoods taken away. He expressed our regret at not having James sing for us and hoped that might be rectified in the near future.

James commented that it is good to see that MFC has healthy funds. He had recently taken part in an event in support of Cancer Research and it was clear how much people are yearning to see live music.

**Secretary's Report.** Barbara Moss wished to add to her report, her appreciation for the kind words received from members about the work put in by the Committee to keep MFC going. It had been very encouraging to receive the messages. That said, she highlighted the fact that the number of members on the Committee was reducing, with members resigning after years of long service. This was making it difficult to cover all the responsibilities, when in fact those have been increasing. She stated that new people really are welcome to join and bring fresh ideas and practises, to help us work "smarter". She asked members to consider how they might contribute and stated that anyone on the Committee would be happy to talk about this. After all, members know most of the Committee members pretty well after reading their life stories in the newsletters.

Barbara also thanked Kevin for his support during the year, particularly in helping to ensure that good communications were maintained.

**Friends' Report.** Alice Osmond restated that the Committee is very supportive and she encouraged people to come forward. She referred to her report and stated that the main source of Friends is through members; one friend per member would make an enormous *difference to the Society's income and assured audience*.

5. **Treasurer's Report / Accounts.** A copy of the Accounts is filed with these minutes. The Accounts had been issued with the AGM Notice and members had been asked to review them in advance of the meeting.

Mike Tweedie commented that there had been very little expenditure, so reserves had increased. The Accounts had been examined by John Connell and Mike expressed his thanks to John. John had agreed to do this again for the coming season.

Mike had prepared budgets for next season, including costs for musicians at both concerts. Based on a membership of 80 and a good level of ticket sales, the loss is expected to be £5K. Mike had had to take a pessimistic view of membership numbers as he couldn't be sure how many people who hadn't been rehearsing on Zoom would come back.

Mike was not seeking nomination for another term as Treasurer and asked that someone with business or accounting expertise who could take this on should let him know.

Kevin said on behalf of everyone how much Mike's skill, calm and dedication over the years had been appreciated.

The Accounts were proposed for adoption by Joy Black and seconded by Marion Couston. They were approved nem con.

As there were no further questions about the Officer and MD reports, they were proposed for approval by Dorothy Knights and seconded by Bridget Corlett and accepted.

6. **Appointment of Independent Examiner.** Mike Tweedie stated in his report that John Connell was willing to continue in this role for the next season. No formal vote was held.
7. **Election of Officers.** Mike Tweedie would have been due for election for a further 3-year term but had declared his intention to stand down. As there were no nominations for someone to replace him he had agreed to be elected onto the Committee in order to oversee the transition of Treasurer duties once we have found a new person to take this on. As the Society cannot function without a Treasurer the importance of filling this role was emphasised, with all the benefit of the assistance that Mike would give. A Job description was available on the website. Mike was to be elected to the Committee

Another position had become available since the AGM Notice was issued and that was for Concert Manager, with the resignation of John Price. This vacancy would need to be filled and a Job description would be made available.

In order to keep a rotation of vacancies/elections the new Constitution states that one third of the Committee/Officers should stand down at each AGM. In order to fulfil this requirement Bridget Corlett had agreed to be one of that number this year (the other elections being for the offices of Treasurer and Concert Manager, and for Tenor voice rep). Bridget was nominated as Music Librarian by Edwina Ward and seconded by Eileen Wilson. The meeting approved her appointment.

Kevin expressed thanks to Bridget (and husband Malcolm) for being part of the backbone of the choir. Bridget commented that she feels very supported, always getting help when she asks.

8. **Election of Committee.** Jacqui Richardson had been seconded onto the Committee as Tenor Rep during the season. She was nominated for election to the Committee by Barbara Moss, seconded by Jackie Tolliday and duly elected.

Mike Tweedie was also appointed to the Committee, having been nominated by Bridget Corlett and seconded by Edwina Ward.

As indicated in the AGM Notice, there were vacancies for Soprano Rep, as Edwina wished to stand down, and Alto Rep, currently being covered by Alice Osmond. As yet, no one had come forward to take up these roles. Kevin stated that should anyone want to come to a Committee meeting as an observer, without obligation, they would be very welcome.

9. **Rehearsal plans** Barbara outlined the plan to start rehearsals with limited numbers (28) to allow 2 m spacing, to wear masks to sing and to monitor air quality. It was hoped to move forward from this position after a few weeks.

Kevin stated that despite more relaxed government guidelines, infection figures were still high in the area so we should continue to be cautious. It would be easier to move forward from prudence rather than backwards from recklessness. He reminded members that when we cancelled the concert in March 2020, the government were still saying it would be OK and we know that it wasn't, as some members had Covid.

Jackie Tolliday asked whether special masks needed to be worn and it was stated that ordinary masks were acceptable. Kath Skinner suggested that people be asked to take lateral flow tests but Kevin stated that we could only advise and not insist. Heather Williamson asked about what would happen if rehearsals were oversubscribed and whether the same pieces would be

repeated the following week. Jonathan indicated that it was unlikely as they would be hybrid rehearsals and those on Zoom would be able to practise and hear the others sing.

The aim was to get as many people back together as quickly as possible.

In response to a question about availability of music, Bridget confirmed that she would issue music for the first 3 weeks outside rehearsal. Details would be confirmed in an email.

Mention was made that rehearsals would be from 7.45pm- 9pm, and that it was wise to have a later start time, to allow members to enter the hall safely and follow Covid protocol guidelines as they arrive.

10. **Subscriptions** Mike confirmed that subscriptions would be held at £110 due to the continuing uncertainty about rehearsals. The full subscription would be payable at the beginning of the season and usual concessions would apply. The bank details were given in his report and he asked that payment be made by direct transfer if possible, with name included as the reference.
11. **Chamber Choir Proposal** Barbara explained that after a discussion about this, the proposal would be put to a vote. However, it was felt that it should be a blind vote. Those members who had attended the AGM, heard the points for and against and had the opportunity to make comments, would be eligible to vote in a poll on Doodle in the next couple of weeks.

Jonathan gave more background to the proposal that had been circulated with the AGM notice. He stated that he was aware of singers who are ambitious and others who are less so. Those who would like to do more could be catered for by an offshoot Chamber choir. He also felt that more should be done to reach out and offer more to recruit singers. The bread-and-butter big choral works is not for everyone, similarly some don't want to do the smaller scale pieces and this would be the opportunity to wider the appeal of MFC and offer something to both ends of the spectrum. He was aware of the debate about auditions and felt that by auditioning the Chamber Choir it would allow those people to do more challenging work. In his opinion MFC is positioned as a community choir and shouldn't be auditioned.

Peter Brook asked when this would start and Jonathan indicated that it could possibly be January but with a lot to consider before it starts, including programming, it may have to be September next year.

John Connell stated that there were a lot of talented singers in the choir and he thought it very good to have something to stretch them. As a less "able" singer, he was happy to be stretched by what we already do and also to rehearse for a slightly shorter time.

In response to Kevin's question about the possibility of it creating an "us and them" situation, Jonathan stated that it was his wish to maintain the integrity of the choir and he felt that it could enhance the quality of performance of the main works. He accepted that it would be tricky auditioning for a balance of voices, which would mean including more sopranos and it would be a voyage of discovery working out how to do it. Those not in the Chamber choir would be able to sit in on rehearsals if they so wished.

Caroline Wood stated that she was against the proposal and would set out why in an email.

Meriel Bennett and Marion Couston thought it would be divisive. They stated that people join MFC to sing the big choral works and there would be reduced rehearsal time for that. They felt that everyone should be auditioned.

Heather Williamson said she was quite excited about the proposal but challenged the assumption that the choir only wanted to sing the big works. She stated that the choir had done more interesting things in the past such as Vaughan Williams' "Sea Symphonies", Tippett's "Child of our Time", Mahler's "Resurrection". She would like to see the choir widen its repertoire to increase appeal and draw in wider audiences. Jane Barnes stated that she thought these points were very relevant as it is the programme that makes people want to come and listen. Dorothy Knights also agreed with these points; she stated that she was excited by the idea of a Chamber Choir and backed doing things in a different way.

Jonathan stated that we needed to recruit more singers and he believed having the Chamber Choir would help to do this. The main choir could number about 100, set up to do the large scale-works but he would look at the programme too, with a core alongside doing something different.

Meriel asked how it would work if the Chamber Choir were oversubscribed. Would newcomers be disappointed and not want to join the Choir at all? Jonathan stated that he would think about numbers and might have to review it at the time.

Kevin asked people to read through the proposal prior to casting their vote.

**12. Any other business.**

Chris Little asked whether there was any "guesstimate" of choir numbers this term. Kevin stated that the only indication was through numbers participating on Zoom and taking part in social events.

Kevin thanked Barbara for the work she had put into preparing for the AGM. He thanked James for giving up his time, those who had contributed and everyone who had attended.

The meeting was closed at 8.55 pm by Kevin Ilsley.