

VIVACE CHORUS

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the
Millmead, Guildford on Monday 29 June 2015

Present

94 choir members - James Garrow (Chairman), the remainder of the committee (except Lesley Scordellis) plus Jeremy Backhouse and Francis Pott.

- 1. Apologies for Absence:** Philip Beastall, Mike Bishop, Jo Bolam, Mary Broughton, Bob Cowell, Margaret Dentskevich, Jo Glover, Carol Hobbs, Isabel Mealor, Alison Palmer, Lesley Scordellis, Marjory Stewart, Anne Whitley, Frances Worpe.
- 2. Minutes of the last meeting:** the Minutes of the last meeting, held on 29 June 2014, were approved and signed by the Chairman.
- 3. Matters arising:** there were none.
- 4. Treasurer's Report:** the Statutory Accounts have been examined by Tony Garrood and he will sign them tomorrow. Our income has increased from £97,000 to £164,000, mainly due to the Verdi concert. Our costs rose from £71,000 to £134,000 and the overall surplus increased from £26,000 to £30,000. On the balance sheet the stock increase is mainly due to the recent purchase of choir folders, sales of which have only just started. Cash at bank has increased from £107,000 to £135,000. Creditors have reduced from 45,000 to £7,000 due mainly to the considerable up-front costs of the RAH concert.

Turning to the Management Accounts the membership income has dropped from £27,000 to £24,000 as a Gift Aid claim has not yet been made for this financial year. Fundraising income: a huge thank you to all who raised funds for the Verdi concert. Overall income was just under £100,000 and, after costs, this gave a surplus of £35,000. There was a deficit of £2,500 on the Bach concert, and of £7,000 on the Mendelssohn: Tasmin Little's fee was actually reasonable considering fees charged by other professionals.

Thank you to Michael Taylor (ticket sales). He does a superb job and has sent me a weekly spreadsheet so I know exactly where we are. Also to Christine Medlow (librarian) who does a terrific job and I also know where we are there as she sends me termly accounts. Thank you also to the committee, especially James, who puts in a huge amount of effort.

Simon opened the floor for questions: can Gift Aid still be claimed for this year? Yes, up to 3 years.

The adoption of these accounts was proposed by Margaret Parry and seconded by Jeremy Johnson and passed unanimously.

5. Music Director's Report: Jeremy Backhouse addressed the meeting. Firstly a very brief review of the year ...

The main concentration of the Autumn was Bach's glorious B minor Mass in the cathedral on Saturday 15 November – my all-time favourite work, so obviously I was hoping that my inner concept of how this should sound was not too far from the actual reality! Mercifully and genuinely, the two were not too far apart! It's unusual these days for larger choirs to tackle such works and I was at times during the rehearsals period nervous about whether I had made the right decision to take on such a massive and complicated work. Masses of notes and a lot of them pretty rapid! But I was thrilled by how we rose to the occasion and gave a really confident, accomplished (for the most part accurate) and certainly a moving performance. The soloists were fine and the orchestra, the Brandenburgers, were in their usual brilliant form. What an amazing performance that was!

Our usual Mayor of Guildford's Carol concert in December, was well attended and contained its usual mix of new and old carols which seem to be well appreciated by the audience. We travelled again to London and St Martin in the Fields on 15 January for a concert containing the Vivaldi 'Gloria' – a change from the Mozart 'Requiem'! Good fun to do and, as ever, a privilege to sing there to a capacity audience.

On 24 January people came and sang for the annual 'Come and Sing', looking at Mozart's sublime 'Mass in C minor' and the 'Solemn Vespers'. These are always terrific days: intensive and tiring, but always rewarding and popular, as is amply demonstrated by the numbers who always attend! Or is it just the soup they come for?!

On Saturday 7 March we were back at G Live where the programme was all Mendelssohn in the first half: 'Hebrides Overture' ('Fingal's Cave'), 'Hear my Prayer' (including "O for the wings of a dove") and the Violin Concerto. In the second half we sang the Delius 'Sea Drift' and Stanford's 'Songs of the Fleet'. I loved conducting the wonderful Brandenburg Sinfonia in the Overture: they are always so responsive to what I try to convey and we always seem to make music together rather than just play the notes! The choral singing in 'Hear my Prayer' was stylish, well disciplined, and full of commitment; also it was well able to be projected over the orchestra. The treble soloist was fabulous: confident, totally reliable and with a lovely voice. Tasmin Little was amazing in the Concerto: a lovely person to work with (no airs and graces) and I felt there was again a really strong rapport between her and the orchestra and me. I think it made for rather a wonderful performance. For the second half we were joined by the baritone soloist for the Delius and Stanford. A number of singers who had guests in the audience have mentioned about the acoustic in the hall: how the soloist was very difficult to hear, how the orchestra dominated. There is only so much I, as the conductor can do to keep the orchestra playing *piano*, but anyway it seems

to me that that is not the problem, as, from where I am standing the balance is generally good between choir and audience and between soloist and orchestra. The problem lies in the acoustic of the hall. There are, I understand, technical means to the staff in the hall to help to combat this; it is just a question of them being able to use these means to our benefit when we need them. James is on to that! Despite these acoustical tribulations, it was a lovely concert and the choir showed itself off really well in all three works, even the Delius! I hope that, by the concert, those Delius-haters were more convinced by the work. I love it ... and one of the great things about being your conductor is that I get to choose the programmes!

Next up was the big concert of 2015 – The Concert for Rowan on Saturday 23 May. A huge amount of planning and head- and heart-ache went into this concert, but I think you will all agree, the concert itself was outstanding and moving; something very special. Many thanks indeed to Gill Perkins and her team for all the incredible amount of time, thought and energy they all put into making the day so memorable in so many ways, not least performing to a full house. The whole thing looked and sounded unbelievable! I really hope you enjoyed singing with the SCC and Vasari alongside you. For me, of course, it was an extraordinary and unique experience, to see and hear all my choirs there in front of me! Will and Rowan's involvement was unforgettable, as perhaps, was my wardrobe malfunction! I sincerely hope you have taken away from that day some deep-rooted and profoundly happy memories.

That was our season and I think a hugely successful and enjoyable one!

Traditionally this is the moment when I announce the repertoire for the coming season to the accompaniment of blazing brass fanfares ... but these days we work much further ahead, so you will all already know that on:

10 October CHASE Charity concert at Holy Trinity; movements from *Carmina* and the Rutter *Gloria*

14 November we sing Orff's *Carmina Burana* and the VW *Five Tudor Portraits* (a set of touching and somewhat bawdy Elizabethan portraits – great fun!);

13 December for our usual Mayor of Guildford's Carol Concert;

23 January for the Come and Sing, looking at the Duruflé Requiem and his motets;

5 March 2016 another of our popular Night at the Opera shows at G Live – and we have a dramatic selection of operatic extracts that I think will make for a fabulous evening's entertainment!

21 May again in G Live, we sing the Fauré *Requiem* plus various other delicious French delights, both lightly religious and secular, that I know you are going to enjoy and have great fun with!

The most significant change to the choir, which has of course affected our musical life, is the new venue. Now this church may not be as beautiful as Holy Trinity, but, for me, in every other way, it is far preferable. I can now hear what the basses are getting up to! I can hear exactly and clearly what is going on rather than hearing your singing through a washy filter. And I think that you can hear me too, which is also quite important! So, all in all, I think this has been a great success.

Deborah Miles Johnson continues to be fun and useful to us on her visits. Her technical expertise and especially her encouragement in making a focussed, projected sound that will carry over an orchestra, is invaluable.

THANKS

First and foremost, thanks to James, for his continued, tireless work on our behalf

To all the committee for its terrific support.

Especially this year, personal and sincere thanks from me to Christine; she has been remarkable and unstintingly selfless in the time and effort she has put into the librarian's job

To Prue for her support at auditions and many other non-committee members.

Last but not least, massive thanks as ever to my friend and musical mate Francis for his ever-brilliant playing!

Finally, many thanks to you for your continuing support, hard work and commitment. Hopefully, you are all still enjoying all that is Vivace: our ambitious aims and our wonderful, connective music-making, both weekly in rehearsal and, most especially, in concert. Long may it last – thank you.

6. Chairman's Report: James Garrow addressed the meeting.

I feel honoured and humble to be standing here after such an incredible year for the choir. We've done amazing things none of which would have happened without you. We came up with the ideas, and you jumped into action ready to make a success of anything and everything that we proposed.

Few choirs outside London could boast to filling the Albert Hall. Thanks to your efforts and a bit of help from our marketing team 5,000 people trooped into the Hall to hear us sing.

Without your efforts we wouldn't have filled the Cathedral for the B minor Mass or get 638 to come to the *Concert for Rowan*.

And then you went and raised £14k for the Rainbow Trust cycling from Paris to London. Whether this marketing ploy actually got anybody into the Albert Hall – one of the objectives – I somehow doubt, but it certainly raised the profile of the charity.

What your enthusiasm for the events we propose gives us, is so much more confidence to take on major projects such as the Albert Hall where something like £65,000 might be at stake. You simply rolled up your sleeves raised huge amounts of money and invited more people than ever before. Hard work. But fun!

What I love about this choir is the buzz we create. To me, it's so much more than just driving through the rain on a Monday night to learn a new piece of music. Jeremy and Francis give us true professionalism and you give us your enthusiasm and support and the confidence to take on large-scale projects.

Performing no fewer than 8 concerts this year: the Albert Hall, SMiF, the Cathedral, GLive, Holy Trinity, the cathedrals of Verona and Mantua and in front of Monteverdi's tomb in Venice. Checking on the websites of some of the major London choirs I cannot find one that has had such a variety of concert venues in a single year. It is incredible what we have been up to.

Cycle groups, walking clubs, summer parties, fundraisers such as DID, tours abroad, cook books, choir calendars, Christmas puddings, the list just goes on and on. Is there no end to your skills and support for the choir?

Another new venture is the '*Friends of Vivace*' open to those who have been associated with the choir for any length of time, has had to leave for one reason or another and yet doesn't want to lose touch.

Sometimes ending one's singing career after perhaps 30 or 40 years can leave people wondering what to do on a Monday night. We hope to fill that void and maintain a link with you.

You might want to get involved with publicising a concert or stewarding or going on a theatre or concert outing or a canal trip. Michael Jeffery is looking after this for us and has lots of good ideas for the future.

I want to thank every one of you for your fundraising – whether providing cake and refreshments, pencils, calendars, small change or using Easyfundraising – and for stepping forward to take over when somebody has to drop out or to fill a new niche and so much more. Running the book stall, the orchestra library, the choir library, helping with the Treasurer and a myriad of other vital things is so appreciated. It is a thriving community and I so appreciate it. Thank you.

We now have 154 paid-up members of the choir and growing inexorably. This is a very healthy position to be in, especially considering how numbers stood at 117 just 6 years ago.

As you probably know, the Cathedral is closing for concerts from this September, depriving us of one of our major concert venues.

As Jeremy mentioned, we have planned a Vivace Series at GLive of 3 concerts. This is a difficult venue to fill. It hasn't yet got the reputation for really good, classical choral music and so we are having to be creative with our programming. *CB*, for instance, might not be to everybody's taste but the concerts I have sung this work in have always been spectacularly good and very well attended.

Good rehearsal venues in Guildford for a choir of our size are really hard to come by; we have searched high and low, visiting over 25 halls and churches but there always seems to be something wrong with each. It was hard to leave Holy Trinity, but Jeremy not being able to hear the individual sections and we not able to hear him, was a serious problem and we just had to scour the region afresh.

It is hard getting used to a new place, but the feedback we have had about Millmead has, so far, been encouraging. One thing is clear: however dowdy the interior may be, the acoustics for all of us are very much better than anything we have previously had.

I sincerely hope that those of you who still have reservations will stick with us and in time, get to enjoy the facilities as a rehearsal base. We believe we have found the best available. The only alternative might be to have a whip-round at the end of the AGM and build a purpose-built hall of our own!

The 3-concert tour to Austria now officially known as "*Get schlossed*" (thank you Carol!) has finally taken shape with 118 signed up. First instalments of £100 will be due on the first day of next term. I am waiting to hear confirmation of the cost of the flight. The total won't be higher than £725, but am hoping that I will be able to reduce it. The room lists are up; if you are still seeking to share a room with somebody rather than pay the single supplement, please contact the person with a blank against their name. The sooner the better.

After almost a year of negotiations, we have finally managed to secure a date for our concert at the Royal Festival Hall. With the closure of the Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room, the pressure on the Hall is enormous and we are so lucky to have managed to get a Bank Holiday. Mayday 2017 when, hopefully most won't be at work and there will be crowds thronging the Southbank waiting to come to our concert.

Most of you will know that we have commissioned our internationally acclaimed composer, Francis, to create a choral work for us; this we will be performing at the Southbank along with Brahms's *Requiem*. We are engaging the Philharmonia Orchestra to play with us and will be joined by another London choir.

Be warned that we will be looking for a team of May pole dancers to publicise the concert outside the Festival Hall on the day!

As you know Simon Browning took on the role of Treasurer a year ago, just as he was taking up a new position at the Yehudi Menuhin School. He has done a great job for the choir keeping the finances under control and it is really sad that, because of work and family pressures, he is unable to continue.

Thank you so much Simon for burning the midnight oil for Vivace. We know the pressure you have been under and so appreciate all that you have done in the last year.

The date is 1990 and the Guildford Philharmonic Choir is in a desperate position of not having a librarian, when who should offer her services but the young and well-respected Maths teacher, Christine Medlow.

There are a very few people on this planet for whom there simply aren't enough superlatives to describe their talents, and Christine is one of this rare breed. Efficient, organised, hard-working, thorough, energetic, conscientious, self-deprecating, charming, friendly, strong, exceptional.

Christine has been the choir's librarian for a remarkable 25 years and has fulfilled this role impeccably.

Not only did she organise the music for every singer and orchestral player, but she rubbed out markings, drove to the lending libraries to fetch and return dozens of scores, logged the scores in and out, brought in extra copies on the day just in case somebody had forgotten theirs and ran the entire operation with military precision. She must have had many opportunities to moan at our inefficiency or chaos-causing ability, but who has ever heard her moan or seen a smile disappear from her face?

As you know, she has decided to relinquish the post and has handed over to four marvellous successors, Catherine and Sarah, and Martin and Mary. She has been meticulous in transferring her in-depth knowledge of all that is required to ensure that every singer has exactly what they need for every concert, and has noted everything down on paper for posterity. Knowing her, she will be hovering around in the shadows ready to help out at a moment's notice if needs be.

Christine you have been outstanding and are much loved by all of us. As a token of our appreciation we would like to give you three gifts: This Galaxy tablet, a Vivace album recalling almost from the start of your reign as choir librarian and some gardening vouchers. All of these should keep you busy now that you have no more scores to settle.

Thank you a million times for all you have done for the choir.

We now move on five years to 1995, another huge milestone in the history of the Vivace Chorus – or Guildford Philharmonic Choir as it then was – the year that Maestro Jeremy Backhouse was appointed as our Director of Music.

I don't need to tell you what a phenomenal job Jeremy has done for the choir. His true professionalism in all he does for us, whether preparing well-balanced concert programmes, challenging us to sing beautifully or having the confidence in us to let us sing complex pieces like the *B minor Mass*. Or simply making Monday evenings such a joy.

Jeremy, it is noticed and appreciated how well prepared you are each and every Monday. It makes such a difference. You make Monday evenings so enjoyable with the perfect balance of cajoling and humour that combine to get the very best out of us.

We had a little whip round following your disaster at the *Concert for Rowan* when your trousers almost came down, to commemorate your birthday and we managed to find a new pair of braces for you.

Digital book of concert flyers dating back to 1995.

Who is your favourite conductor? Not C Abbado by any chance? Presentation of signed drawing

By pure coincidence we have found a hand drawn illustration by 'George Krishizki of 1987 of Abbado conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. It is a beautiful piece of work, admired so much by Abbado that he has signed it himself. This letter and on the back guarantee its authenticity.

Voucher for hotel and show in London for Sally and you.

We sincerely hope that we can celebrate again in another 20 years when you're still at the helm, making singing such fun for all of us and getting the very best out of this motley crew.

On Thursday 24th September we are holding an open committee meeting to which all are invited. Do consider coming and contributing as to how we might celebrate our 70th anniversary in 2017, and concert programmes amongst other things. Details will be on Notice Board next term.

As you will have noticed, I have not singled out individuals in recognition of their hard work and dedication this year; I sincerely hope that each of you knows who I am thinking about and realise how very much each of you is so appreciated. It really has been a team effort. I seriously believe that this choir can stand up to any in the land for its professionalism in all it does, the concerts it promotes and the tremendous support and strength of its membership.

I cannot end without mentioning the choir's management committee who have been unstinting in their efforts to make this choir the success it is and to support me. I am indebted to each and every one of them. They work inordinately hard and we are lucky to have them.

As I said at the start, it is a great honour to lead such a talented, busy and happy choir. Thank you for being such a wonderful chorus and making my job so easy.

7. Election of Officers: under the Constitution all Committee members are obliged to resign at each AGM and, if they so wish, offer themselves for re-election. The following were unanimously re-appointed:

	Proposed by	Seconded by
James Garrow, Chairman	Michael Taylor	Christine Wilks
Jane Brooks, Hon. Membership Secretary	Ann Smith	Kay McManus
June Windle, Hon. Secretary	Penny Muray	Prue Smith

Simon Browning has resigned from the committee.

8. Election of Additional Committee Members: the following were unanimously re-appointed:

	Proposed by	Seconded by
Jackie Alderton	Mike Golden	Margaret Parry
Mike Dudley	David Ross	Bob Cowell
Liz Durning	Penny Muray	Elaine Chapman
Lesley Scordellis	Prue Smith	Penny Muray
Joan Thomas	Val Garrow	Christine Wilks
Hilary Trigg	Prue Smith	John Thornely

On the proposal of Joan Thomas, seconded by Maggie Woolcock, Carol Sheppard was appointed unanimously, as was Anne Whitley (proposed by Hilary Trigg, seconded by Michael Taylor).

9. Appointment of Music Director: the meeting expressed warm appreciation for the work done by Jeremy Backhouse and he was duly appointed as Musical Director for the coming year.

10. Appointment of Accompanist: the meeting expressed warm appreciation for the work done by Francis Pott and he was duly appointed as Accompanist for the coming year.

11. Appointment of Independent Examiner: on the proposal of Simon Browning, seconded by James Garrow, Tony Garrod was unanimously appointed to continue in this role.

12. Any Other Business: Sylvia Chantler asked whether it was the intention that the format used for staging our previous NatO concert would be followed for our March 2016 NatO concert, ie the choir moving about the

stage clutching folders. The Chairman conceded that a concert like this took some singers out of their comfort zone but moving around the stage made the concert more visually interesting. Plans are afoot for a 24' screen with projected images of the operas. Jon Long has produced 'opera bites' for two narrators. The choir would be off-stage during the solo items. In response to a question from the floor, Jeremy said that he agrees with this approach and likes this movement, which lifts the concert performance. The women would probably be asked to wear their coloured concert T-shirts. There would be 2 screens in the wings, higher than last time, to give singers greater visibility and the stage would be raked. It was proposed that we sing some items from memory. Jeremy agreed to consider this.

Mary Broughton had asked that Jeremy's views on the balance of voices, with particular respect to the large number of altos, be sought. Jeremy was reassuring. While admitting that the alto section is numerically larger, that doesn't translate into them being louder. Rather than potentially turn away good altos, he would rather see us being proactive in recruiting more sopranos. Michael Taylor commented that, as an audience member at the Mendelssohn concert, he had felt that the balance was good.

John Thornely proposed a vote of thanks from the choir to Christine Medlow.

The meeting closed at 20.20

JW