

## **Minutes of the St Mary's Music Association (SMMA) Annual General Meeting**

**held at 7.30 pm on Friday 30 April 2021 by Zoom**

### **In attendance (31 people using 26 devices):**

Officers: Rev Jeremy Trew (President), Bron Ferland (Chair), Oli King (Director of Music), Steve Cass (Treasurer), Jim Butler (Publicity Secretary)

Other SMMA Committee Members: Peter De Vile, Nell Hardingham, Alison Lawrence, Ottilie Lefever, Hannah Razell

Others: Lorna and Jeremy Allen, Kate and Ellie Beare, Lizzie Bennett, Anne Cass, Gill Gibson, Caroline Goulder, Lesley Green, Diana and David Hoy, Kathleen Huey, Martin Hugall, Margaret Jacobs, Christine Lawrence, Patrick Li, Anna Martin, Francoise Mouchet-Davies, Maureen Pullen, Noel Starr, Cecilia Tudo

**The President** opened with a prayer, reminding us of the power of music to move and inspire, soothe and challenge us.

### **1 Confirmation**

The Chair welcomed everyone and confirmed that the meeting had been properly advertised in accordance with guidance issued by the Charity Commission to comply with Government regulations during lockdown.

### **2 Apologies for absence**

Phil Dudfield

### **3 Adoption of the Minutes of the previous AGM, held on 8 March 2020.**

The Minutes were adopted for signature by the President.

### **4 Matters arising**

None reported

### **5 Correspondence**

None reported

### **6 Chairman's report**

Bron started by welcoming our new Rector, Jeremy Trew, who was perhaps a little surprised to hear that along with all his parish, team and Deanery responsibilities he was also SMMA President, and said that the SMMA is looking forward to working with him.

She reflected that like many other organisations, the SMMA has had a strange year. The usual report on a lunchtime concert series, an organ recital series, a cathedral visit, an informal concert by the Choral scholars and visits made by the Junior choir to other churches to sing or for a social event could not be made as none of those things happened.

However, this had not been a year off. Within the first few days of lockdown our intrepid Director of Music was discussing with Rev Alex Jeewan how they might between them produce a weekly service

of worship which could be broadcast on Oli's YouTube account, and plans were made to get the senior choir rehearsing on something called Zoom, a package the SMMA was pleased to fund.

Oli was keen that we didn't lose people over the first period of lockdown and the SMMA ensured that there was regular communication with everyone, and helped to produce endless risk assessments to ensure that safeguarding was still robust with the new focus on online working.

As soon as the Juniors were on Zoom at the start of May, they and any Choral Scholars who wished to take part were offered ribbon training. Bron gave particular thanks to Jeremy Allen, Kate and Elli Beare, Sophie Faith, Karen and Liam Goddard, Sophie Ollerenshaw and Hannah Razzell.

As confidence in the technology grew, we all began to contribute to recordings which could be used in services, and very quickly the responsibility for stitching these together passed to Peter De Vile. Patrick Li began to assist with control of the weekly Zoom meetings.

The Juniors were back face to face in the Autumn, supported by RAs. The Senior choir sang three services scattered throughout the nave and more risk assessments were done, as indeed they were also during the period when small groups were allowed to sing. The SMMA has even funded some new music for the Juniors. Throughout, one of our Committee members, Ottilie Lefever, has written articles for Church News, many on what it has been like to provide music during lockdown.

Bron thanked the committee members who have willingly met via Zoom – even when all we had to report was how we were coping, and on a number of events that clearly weren't going to happen.

No concerts have been planned for summer 2021 as it is still unclear if they could go ahead, but one or two might be arranged at short notice later in the year. Although our financial situation looks OK, there is no certainty of any money coming in this year without fundraising. It is likely that we will want an event to mark the easing of lockdown, and we shall then want to spend appropriately.

So many things (like the Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholarship) have just been carried forward each time, and only now does the SMMA feel able to advertise for a replacement for Elliott, with the hope that a new scholar might start in September.

Bron also thanked David and Diana Hoy for sourcing a supply of music masks which we hope will help to get us back together safely in the near future. (That is something which would have been completely unheard of at our 2020 AGM!)

In particular, Bron thanked the members whose term of office is ending. She hoped that Peter would be staying for a further term, and we will be glad of his expertise with the organ again, just as we have appreciated this year his newly displayed skills of stitching together recordings.

Gill will be very much missed for her thoughtful contributions to discussions and for her wonderful organisation of lunchtime concert refreshments over many seasons. Thankfully she is remaining in charge of the robes – although she may regret that when she realises just how much the Juniors have shot up over the past year.

Karen Goddard, who sadly could not be here today as she was helping her mother to celebrate a really significant birthday, has been a truly helpful and efficient Secretary for the past few years. The SMMA will really miss the enormous all-round contribution she has made since her son joined the Choral Scholars eight years ago when the family arrived in town for John to become the Baptist minister. Karen speedily became a responsible adult, missing odd services at her own church to do

so, and about four years ago agreed to help alternate weeks at Friday practices, rushing off afterwards to help at her own church group.

Anne Cass, who is stepping down as leader of Joyful Noise will also be leaving the committee, and Bron thanked her for her contributions over the past few years.

Sadly this year has seen the death of three people very much part of our music family - Mary Knight, Susan Smith and most recently Hilary Parry Jones. We are so grateful for all that they have meant to us.

Bron reminded us that this coming year marks the end of her time as Chair, so the SMMA will need to concentrate on succession planning.

Bron ended by thanking Oli. The past year has been totally different from what we envisaged last March, but he has risen brilliantly to all the challenges encountered. Last summer the musicians marked his ten years in post as our Director of Music. The messages which came in at that time reflected the many, many strands of music he has nurtured in that time and the esteem in which he is held. We are all so grateful for his efforts.

## **7 Treasurer's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020**

Steve reported that it had been a quiet year so far as the SMMA's accounts were concerned. While no fundraising had taken place, there had been very little expenditure either, though a 50% payment had been made to Choral Scholars who regularly attended Zoom practices, some music had been bought for the Junior Choir, a Zoom account had been set up for the Director of Music and there had been a payment towards the Organ Scholarship. No contributions to the MSOS had been asked for or paid by the PCC or Wendens Ambo.

The accounts nevertheless showed a small profit due to a generous bequest and retiring collection at a funeral, for which the SMMA is very grateful, as we are for David Hoy's donation of the receipts from his annual stamp sale.

There were no questions on the accounts, which were received.

## **8 Director of Music's report**

Oli said he would describe the past year as bewildering and frightening, but also as a time for opportunity, social connection, upheaval, creativity.

The initial focus in March 2020 was trying hastily to establish an online service format. Alex Jeewan was highly impressive in his spontaneity and energy, and we soon managed to establish a short service format which we pre-recorded in Great Chesterford and uploaded to YouTube on a weekly basis. This involved a lot of research in exactly how to go about doing this with a wide variety of local musicians.

Oli was relieved that the Junior and Senior choirs remain intact, and overall numbers are healthy in the circumstances. We were able quickly to establish and develop a process for online choir practices, and moved onto Zoom by the end of March. This involved daily 'test practices' at one point, teaching various members of the choir, then widening the net to include everyone. Recently, we marked the anniversary of having been online for one year. At services, the choir has sung in various formats ranging from solo cantors to elaborate 'choir units' consisting of 4, 6 or 8 singers. This involved the use of 'Excel', another formerly unfamiliar thing. A very steep learning curve for everyone involved.

Weekly online practices have helped to maintain core skills/repertoire and routine – all crucial to an active church music scene. Other essential factors also include social connectivity. Patrick Li organised a fantastic Zoom performance of 'Under Milk Wood' by Dylan Thomas. Quizzes were also popular. Peter De Vile and Caroline Goulder devised the first one, Jeremy did one, and Diana and David Hoy put two together. The sopranos also had a series of enjoyable coffee mornings. We also developed formats for online Choral Evensong, Remembrance Day Words and Music, mini Daily Devotional Offerings during Holy Week and several Plainsong Compline services. Oli thanked everyone involved.

Another lockdown innovation has been 'Stitched' recordings. These have now become commonplace and the choir individually record themselves on a regular basis. Much credit goes to Peter De Vile who has been instrumental in painstakingly editing together hundreds of individual tracks into various motets destined for inclusion in our weekly worship.

The Adults sang as a full choir in church three times over the year: All Souls Service in November, and the Advent and Christmas Carol Services. These were all designed with near military precision with full seating plans, risk assessments and Covid safe distribution of music! Jeremy Allen accompanied the choir which was literally scattered over the entirety of the main body of the church. Oli said he had never seen this done successfully before and it was a testament to Jeremy's expert musicianship.

The Junior Choir resumed practices in early May 2020 after a short break. Bron Ferland spearheaded a comprehensive ribbon training programme which is the most impressive which Oli has seen in recent years. He thanked the other volunteers and helpers who assisted with this substantial project. The Juniors have had the opportunity of sending in recordings for whole choir motets and have additionally recorded one or two of their own tracks. They were fortunate to go back to practicing in-person during the Autumn term and sang at a couple of family services, Christingle and Christmas Eve services.

Sadly it has been necessary to suspend the Brass Group and Joyful Noise over the past year, but Oli's intention is to restore both groups when times allow as they are both integral to our music making and are hugely missed. He thanked the SMMA for all of their help and support over the course of this year. They have continued to meet and have been a useful base for discussion and advice.

Looking forward, the SMMA is enormously excited to welcome Jeremy Trew and his family to St Mary's and to working with him in future. Precise long term planning is difficult though Oli hopes to further explore having a folk band for the family service and perhaps a church orchestra at certain times of year.

Our organ scholar Elliot left us in July after two very successful two years. He is a highly musical, hard-working and enthusiastic young man and went from beginner level obtaining a place to study at the Royal College of Music Junior Department – a huge achievement, and we wish him the best. Preparations are now well underway in the search for our next scholar, hopefully in time for a September start.

Very sadly, we lost Hilary Parry-Jones recently. Hilary was a much loved and loyal member of the choir and Librarian extraordinaire. Her loss is much felt by this community. We also lost two ex-members of the choir: Susan Smith and Mary Knight. May they all rest in peace.

Oli thanked a number of contributors to the musical life of the church this year: Lizzie Bennett who has run online soprano sectionals throughout the year on Zoom; Steve Hasler for his incredible

energy with driving forward the online and sound systems; Martin Hugall for his help with the website; Judith Hasler for steering the services with such combined sensitivity and efficiency. He also gave heartfelt to Bron Ferland who has helped, advised, and administrated continuously over the year, as well as to Jeremy Allen who has supported, composed and led many of the choir practices. Lastly Oli gave an enormous thank you to Dennis and Gill, whom he described as our simply awesome church wardens who have been there every step of the way, and without whom we could not have done what we did.

Oli concluded with three very apposite verses from psalm 98. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King".

## **9 Elections**

The position to be elected were: Secretary (normally a 4 year term) and 3 ordinary Committee Members (3 year terms). Ottilie Lefever was elected as Secretary for 1 year only at her request (proposed by Bron Ferland, seconded by Oli King), Peter De Vile was re-elected Committee Member (proposed by Jim Butler, seconded by Caroline Goulding). Maureen Pullen (proposed by Ottilie Lefever, seconded by Sue Sylvester-Bradley) and Francoise Mouchet-Davies (proposed by Gill Gibson, seconded by Jim Butler) were elected as new Committee Members

## **10 President's closing remarks**

Jeremy reminded us of music's power to move us in ways that the spoken word cannot. He reminisced about singing as a small boy in his local village choir, practising some music provided by the diocese, and then participating with other choirs in in a service for what seemed to be 1000 people. These experiences led him to love and to cherish church music, and he said he would give the SMMA his full support.

## **11 Any other business**

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.