

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

held at 11.45 on Sunday 20 March 2022 in the Parish Rooms

In attendance (24):

Officers: Rev Jeremy Trew (President), Bron Ferland (Chairman), Oli King (Director of Music), Jim Butler (Publicity Secretary), Otilie Lefever (Secretary)

Other SMMA Committee Members: Jeremy Allen, Alison Lawrence, Hannah Razzell

Others: Lorna Allen, Kate Beare, Helen and Matt Counsell, Mark Ferland, Gill Gibson, Lesley Green, Diana and David Hoy, Yvonne Huang, Kathleen Huey, Margaret Jacobs, Jenny Kircaldy, Simon Potter, Sue and Rowan Sylvester-Bradley

1 Confirmation that the AGM had been properly advertised

The Chairman welcomed everyone and confirmed that the meeting had been properly advertised

2 Apologies for absence

Ellie Beare, Lizzie Bennett, Steve Cass, Peter De Vile, Caroline Goulder, Nell Hardingham, Mo Pullen, Noel Starr

3 Adoption of the Minutes of the previous AGM, held by Zoom on 30 April 2021

The Minutes were adopted for signature by the Chairman.

4 Matters arising

None reported

5 Correspondence

None reported

6 Chairman's report

Bron reminded the meeting that it was now around 10 months since our last AGM and still Covid is the factor which has most affected the role of the SMMA for a second year. However, that meeting was held on Zoom, and today we are meeting in person, which is far more satisfactory. Last year we welcomed Jeremy Trew as our new Rector and president. She thanked him for his support of the choir and music generally.

She reported that once again there was a lack of very much action. A second year with no lunchtime concerts, a second year with no social gatherings, no mulled wine, no outings for the Junior Choir. A second year with no fundraising activities for the SMMA. We are grateful for the donations which individuals have made, which have kept our funds virtually stable. However, she was very glad to say that nonetheless many positive things have happened this year.

We had had a year without an organ scholar, but were able to take advantage of improved social interactions to set in motion the process of advertising for someone to take up the position in September 2021.

Encouraged by a few outdoor practices on summery evenings we held a Come and Sing Fauré Requiem at the end of the summer term. This was well attended and felt like a real dose of normality at last. Funds raised from this went in their entirety to the church as church funds took a real hit during Covid.

A concert – yes, an actual concert – took place in September, when Oli and Martin Huggett entertained a goodly number with more of their piano duets. Again, the proceeds were handed over to the church.

In September we were suddenly able to accommodate all adults and choral scholars who wished to sing at services, rather than having people sing in small groups. Oli had a series of spreadsheets recording who had sung when... Now everyone could sing, which was another huge step back to normal. The Juniors began to sing again for Family Services, but not yet at regular services – that began to be rectified after Christmas when they were placed in two teams, singing on alternate weeks. We hope that by Easter this year we will all be able to sing again as one choir.

In January the churchwardens agreed that the SMMA lunchtime concert season 2022 could go ahead, albeit without sandwiches at this stage, so Bron began to contact those whose concerts had been cancelled in 2020 and to sort out a programme which will begin on Wednesday June 1st with a programme of cello and guitar music. Jim will shortly be producing an SMMA brochure – the first for more than two years.

The committee has met regularly and been planning for the new normal. Bron thanked every one of them for their willingness to help with anything that needed doing. She said she was thrilled that, having firmly said she'd do just the one year as secretary, Otilie has decided that she may as well continue now. Steve will work as Treasurer for this coming year, and Jim continues as Publicity Officer, producing wonderful posters and fliers whenever asked. Peter continues to ensure the organ works, and makes recordings when required. He and Caroline are again turning their thoughts to organising choir cathedral visits, Alison has just organised a fantastic Junior Choir party, as well as running their breaks each Friday, whilst Hannah explores funding options, Nell is planning a choir social event and Mo and Jim are about to liaise on ensuring that the archives are ongoing. It is almost like the part of Sleeping Beauty when the court wakes up and starts to go about its business once again.

Just over a week ago, we took part in the concert to support the Ukraine crisis. Masterminded by Oli, it only happened because many people helped to make sure everything came together. Jeremy and Andrew willingly took the lions' share, Jim produced posters and programmes, a team came together to set up and put away – Bron said she was not going to name everyone as she would forget someone – but it was a shining example of how many people gave time and effort for the cause. The amount of money raised was stupendous. We intend to pass the proceeds of the Good Friday Devotional Offering to the funds to help Ukraine – as Jim said recently, we can't take funds for ourselves when the need is so great at present. However, Bron hoped that the members of the SMMA would remember that at some point the coffers will need replenishing – the SMMA continues to support the work of Joyful Noise, vocal training for the choral scholars from time to time, activities for the Junior Choir, the greater share of the costs of the Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholarship, the cost of the Voice for Life medals and ribbons, new music for the choir and brass group – she was sure everyone got the picture.

Bron said she was nevertheless bowing out. though she was going to miss it all far more than she could say. For more than thirty years the choir had been an absolute rock and support. When

Simon broke his neck and died in 1989 it was the choir, individually and as a group, which helped her learn to carry on, providing an environment in which she could laugh or cry if she needed to, and just kept her going. In a very real sense the choir became an extension of her family. Joining the SMMA committee gave her the chance to give something back, and that's exactly how she had felt about it ever since. In 2019 when the unthinkable happened and she and Mark lost their remaining son, Chris – again it was the choir family that carried her through.

She said that it has been an absolute privilege to spend the last nine years as Chair. She has been well supported by all who have served on the committee during that time.

The SMMA exists to support the Director of Music and to help ensure that the potential of young people is encouraged and nurtured. She was delighted to have been part of it under Oli's tenure and to have seen the Choral Scholar scheme flourish and the Organ Scholarship established. Oli and Jeremy make a fantastic team and she has loved supporting them both, and is grateful for their friendship and support.

Bron said she knew that the SMMA is going to go from strength to strength under its new chairman. She thanked everyone for their support.

7 Treasurer's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021

A copy of the Accounts was presented to the meeting. The Treasurer's report was read by Jeremy Allen. Due to Covid restrictions the lunchtime concerts, the largest single contributor to SMMA income, did not take place in 2021 for the second successive year. However, the SMMA is very grateful for individual donations which have enabled activity to continue without needing to call on reserves.

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

8 Director of Music's report

Oli said that it has been a mixed year for us all, though he could safely say that we have grown and learnt from the new reality of a world which has changed so much in just two years. Music is a uniting force for good. A working mantra should be "I will sing of loyalty and of justice; to Thee, O Lord, I will sing." – Psalm 101:1.

Music at St Mary's thankfully continues on a strong footing, largely down to the sheer hard work and determination of a number of extremely kind, generous and committed people.

Joyful Noise is re-establishing itself under the leadership of Lizzie Bennett. It has been a joy to see the progress which this choir has made in such a short period of time. Lizzie writes "Joyful Noise restarted in October 2021 and has been meeting weekly in term time with a small but enthusiastic group of children. They have worked on songs specific to the season as well as more general pieces, with action songs being particularly popular!" More recently they have produced a short music video in support of Ukraine. Lizzie has done a fantastic job so far and we can't wait to see how things develop over the coming year.

Numbers in the Junior Choir are healthy and we have developed a plan for further recruitment later in the year. Covid has unfortunately continued to affect music substantially, though a plan is currently also underway for the full integration of the Junior Choir back to the original routine from pre-Covid days. They are a great group to work and always keep us on our toes! Oli's heartfelt thanks go to Alison Lawrence for her help with this group.

The choral scholars and adult choir have amazingly continued to go from strength to strength. The adult choir is running at close to capacity and Oli is extremely proud of their sheer tenacity for 'sticking at it' through the pandemic. Two years ago, he honestly feared the worst for choral music and there were 'head in hand' times when we simply didn't know how to cope with the latest wave of Covid. The adult choir 'went with it' and have experimented in ways of singing and being together: from starting on Zoom, cut and splice recordings, to socially distancing throughout the nave (this presented serious logistical problems!), to rehearsing with the evening bird chorus on the front lawn in the graveyard, to finally being back in church. There is still some way to go with this, though Oli is more confident than ever that we will all make it back musically in one piece.

Yechan Yun, the MSOS organ scholar, started with us in September and has made strong progress so far. It continues to be a pleasure to work with him and Oli is thrilled that he will stay on for a second year. It is also a delight to note that our previous organ scholar, Elliot Randall, was recently awarded a place to study at the Royal College of Music. It should be remembered that Elliot was a complete novice when he first started and his progress has been simply meteoric. He is someone to look out for in the future!

Unfortunately, the Brass Group have met only once in 2021. Plans are afoot for a slightly rationalised version of the group moving forward. Alas, due to various event cancellations and alterations, 2 of their major outings did not take place. It is hoped that they will play for the Easter Day 10am service.

Encouragingly, the Family service music group is developing nicely and we now have a core of between 4-12 musicians in addition to the Junior Choir. Oli hopes to be in a position to say more about this over the coming months.

Oli thanked everyone who helps and supports the music at St Mary's: the members of the SMMA who support and encourage much of what we do; Margaret and Yvonne who tirelessly deal with the mountains of music and last-minute changes; Peter for his help with caring for the ailing church organ. He also wanted to thank Jeremy Allen – a role which is absolutely crucial. To quote the Organist Emeritus: Andrew was asked what he thought makes a successful Director of Music – he answered "the main ingredient is to choose an excellent assistant organist". Never have truer words been said. Gill, Denis, Steve, Judith and Patrick continue to give their full support and it has been a great pleasure to have now spent a full year working with Jeremy Trew.

Oli then turned to Bron. She has encouraged, supported, cajoled and motivated all of us and is quite possibly the key reason that he was standing here in the first place. He revealed that Bron, when churchwarden, had phoned him and persuaded him to stick with his application to St Mary's 12 years ago. He described her as very determined and supremely enterprising - the sort of person you want on your side. Since then, she had amazingly spearheaded virtually every activity and project. There have been times when he suspected she was working overnight in order to pull all the amorphous strands together which constitute a busy church music department. After 9 exceedingly full years, Bron has decided to step down from her role as chair on the SMMA. She will be hugely missed. Her energy, dynamism and sheer drive have been the bedrock for much of the activity which takes place at St Mary's. Whilst this includes music, her activities have not been limited to this. Oli was pleased to say that she has agreed to stay on in a smaller role of music administrator and he hoped that she enjoys a well-earned rest from driving the SMMA. He thanked her once again, on behalf of everyone present, for everything that she has done.

The positions to be elected were: Chairman, Secretary and Publicity Officer (all 4 year terms); 3 ordinary Committee Members (3 year terms).

Hannah Razzell was elected as Chairman (proposed by Oli King, seconded by Bron Ferland), Otilie Lefever was re-elected as Secretary (proposed by Bron Ferland, seconded by Oli King), Jim Butler was re-elected as Publicity Officer (proposed by Jeremy Allen, seconded by Bron Ferland).

Alison Lawrence was re-elected, and Ellie Beare was elected (both proposed by Oli King, seconded by Bron Ferland), both as Committee Members.

10 Any other business

In recognition of, and many thanks for, Bron Ferland's 9 years as SMMA Chairman, Oli presented her with a locket, a standard rose bush, John Lewis vouchers and a lively portrait by Jim Butler. Bron's first reaction to the painting was "good grief"! She received a heartfelt ovation from everyone present.

11 Any other business

Jeremy Allen thanked an anonymous donor for the gift of a fine linen work curtain to replace the tatty old one in the organ loft.

Diana Hoy thanked Oli for his inspiration to Janet Wheeler in encouraging her to start Zoom rehearsals with SWCS (and Granta Chorale), when other choral societies ceased singing over the past 2 years and have suffered as a result.

12 President's closing remarks

Jeremy Trew paid tribute to the powerful, moving and very high quality Concert for Ukraine which was put on at very short notice. He said it showed the SMMA's strength in depth. He added that it was wonderful to have music to lift worship at St Mary's and in the town, acknowledging that in church he has the best seat in the house.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12.20pm

Signed as a true record of the SMMA AGM of 20 March 2022

..... (SMMA Chairman)