

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

held at 12.00 on Sunday 21 April 2024 in the Parish Rooms

In attendance (24):

Officers: Rev Jeremy Trew (President), Hannah Razzell (Chairman), Oli King (Director of Music), Kate Beare (Joyful Noise Leader), Jim Butler (Publicity Secretary), Steve Cass (Treasurer), Alison Lawrence (Juniors' Social Secretary), Otilie Lefever (Secretary)

Other SMMA Committee Members: Jeremy Allen, Ellie Beare, Peter de Vile, Bron Ferland, Philip Sunderland

Others: Lorna Allen, Gill Gibson Caroline Goulder, Lesley Green, Diana and David Hoy, Kathleen Huey, Margaret Jacobs, Patrick Li, Sue and Rowan Sylvester-Bradley

1 Confirmation that the AGM had been properly advertised

The Chairman confirmed that the meeting had been properly advertised

2 Apologies for absence

Karin Fischer-Buder, Nell Hardingham, Simon Potter, Noel Starr

3 Adoption of the Minutes of the previous AGM, held on 20 March 2022

The Minutes were adopted for signature by the Chairman.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising

5 Correspondence

None reported

6 Chairman's report 2024

The Chairman said that, in a very busy year, she saw the key functions of the SMMA as supporting worship, welcoming existing and new people to the church as part of outreach, and fundraising.

The first ever spring coffee concert series in 2023 had been such a success that it was followed by an autumn series, and in spring 2024 the attendance was the highest so far. These concerts, along with the summer lunchtime events, attracted not only "regulars", but also people who had never been into St Mary's before, and some of these, especially the vulnerable and lonely, had described the concerts as an opportunity for calm and reflection, even a lifeline. The Chairman said that she was amazed that not only did all the performers want to return, but even some very well-known musicians were happy to perform for modest expenses, or sometimes for free. Of course putting on so many events takes a great deal of work, and she thanked everyone who helped, in particular Jim and Siong Siong, who also hosted a number of choir social occasions. Funds raised pay for Junior choir trips, for example to Ely Cathedral to attend Evensong sung by the Girls' Choir, for new music, and for new equipment.

The Chairman thanked Peter de Vile for bringing social media and organist sensation Anna Lapwood to give a recital which attracted a huge audience. Jonathan Scott will be giving a similar recital on 1 June.

A much younger age group was targeted at an Organ Outreach concert for years 3 and 4 of local primary schools, masterminded by Oli, Jeremy Allen, Philip Sunderland and Peter. The SMMA hopes to repeat this type of event in 2024 or 2025.

Social events for the adult choir included a summer party and drinks after the Carol and Epiphany Carol services, as well as events organised for the Junior Choir by Alison Lawrence. The Choral Scholars also provided a very successful annual concert, and even Joyful Noise have performed a mini concert to family and friends.

A long list of thanks included Oli, Jeremy, Ziyi, the choirs, Kate Beare for running Joyful Noise, Phil Dudfield for helping with the Brass Group, the Committee (including Rosie Kennedy-Cadell who has since retired), and Jeremy Trew.

The Chairman concluded with Martin Luther's words: 'The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man that he should proclaim the Word of God through Music'. Long may we all continue to do that, strive always to value the importance of 'serving the Lord with gladness' and coming before his presence singing.

7 Treasurer's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023

The Treasurer reported that the SMMA ended 2023 £6,500 better off than at the end of 2022. Around half of this sum was attributable to donations, with the remainder from concerts. Anna Lapwood's organ concert, organised by Peter De Vile, had raised more money than any other single event he could recall. The new spring and autumn coffee concerts had also boosted income, together with the summer lunchtime events. These funds enabled the SMMA to do more than just jog on, for example to buy new music.

Diana Hoy asked about funding for scholarships and bursaries, and about the Cyril Coe Fund.

- The Treasurer advised that the Organ Scholarship has adequate funds to support it for at least the next 5 years, with monies coming from the original foundation, and also from both St Mary's and Wendons Ambo
- The Scholars' Bursary scheme is still running, and the Bursary was awarded to Hayden this year to pay for singing lessons
- The Cyril Coe Fund falls under the PCC's remit, not St Mary's, even though it pays part of the Assistant Organist's salary

Peter De Vile said that it might be possible to approach other bodies, such as the Cathedral Trust, for funding if necessary, but the Director of Music said that they are now generally limiting grants to start-up ventures. If a new partnership is set up with a local school, this might be eligible for an initial grant.

8 Director of Music's report

The Director of Music drew on his experience as a music therapist to reflect on music's power to make connections where words fail or simply cannot go.

He noted that it has been more difficult to foster regular commitment to attendance since Covid, and this is a work in progress. However, there are now about 35 under 18s on the books, including up to 12 children in Joyful Noise (now run by Kate Beare), 14 increasingly accomplished singers in the Junior Choir (all of whom enjoy their regular sessions of "fun with Alison" Lawrence), and 9 Choral Scholars. 3 of the Scholars have moved up from the Juniors. They are mentored by Noel Star, Ellie Beare and Lewis Colley, and everyone is supported by Bron Ferland. A thriving under 18 section is necessary to support and in due course move on to the adult choir, so a further recruitment drive is planned for later in the year.

He said that attendance in the adult choir, in common with many choirs nationwide, has also suffered since Covid, and though it is improving it needs further stabilisation. Jeremy Allen and he are developing strategies to ensure a continuing high level of performance.

The Brass group, co-ordinated by Phil Dudfield, continues to lead the music at important services and church functions, such as the Christmas Fair, the Christmas Carol Service, on Easter Day and to celebrate the coronation of King Charles, though it no longer has weekly practices.

Our Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholar, Ziyi, is doing so well that we have asked her to stay for a second year. She plays in a service at St Mary's nearly every week, as well as at Wendons Ambo once a month. She has also both sung in the choir and conducted it, and is now working towards her grade 6 organ exam.

The organ itself is struggling, and is now nearing the end of its working life, after over a century of faithful service. It prefers wet, cool weather and dislikes heating in the church. As part of the preparation of a Statement of Needs there will be a Listening Exercise in St Mary's at the end of April, where the sound of the choir and the organ will be assessed from a variety of locations.

Highlights in the past year have included a performance of Bob Chilcott's St John Passion on Good Friday 2023 (and indeed the Faure Requiem in 2024), and visiting Birmingham Cathedral in October 2023 to sing Choral Evensong, kindly arranged by Peter De Vile and Caroline Goulder.

For 2024 there will be a "Come and Sing" performance of Dido and Aeneas in June, another organ outreach concert in September, pop-up choirs, and a choir trip to Norwich Cathedral in October. Oli thanked the librarians Margaret Jacobs with Jim and Siong Siong, Bron as choir administrator, Patrick Li for his support in a wide variety of roles, including with the Taize and Celtic services, and all sorts of logistical matters. Oli gave a special mention to Jeremy Allen for his 10 years at St Mary's, his musical expertise, and his wise advice, as well as to Hannah Razzell in her position as Chairman, baker of excellent cakes and organiser of the concert series. He also said how much he and the SMMA appreciate the support and encouragement of Jeremy Trew.

9 Amendment to the Constitution

The amendment, proposed by Otilie Lefever, seconded by Hannah Razzell, was agreed. Accordingly paragraph 8 now states that the Annual General Meeting shall be held not more than four (formerly three) months after the end of the financial year. This is to accommodate the eventuality of a delay in approving SMMA accounts if the PCC AGM or accounts are delayed.

10 Election of Committee members

The positions to be elected were Treasurer (an Officer role with a 4 year term), and 2 Ordinary Members (3 year terms).

Steve Cass was re-elected as Treasurer, proposed by Diana Hoy, seconded by Peter De Vile

Peter De Vile was re-elected as an Ordinary Member, proposed by Caroline Goulder, seconded by Margaret Jacobs

Philip Sunderland was elected as an Ordinary member, having formerly been a co-opted Member, proposed by Patrick Li, seconded by Bron Ferland

11 President's closing remarks

The President echoed the Chairman's remarks about the importance of music in St Mary's, and described it as a true blessing and enrichment to worship. He agreed that it provides a welcome to visitors, and enlarges the skills of everyone who performs, and recalled an award-winning BBC programme he once made about the preparations for Christmas undertaken by a primary school for children with special educational needs. Although they could not talk, they could all sing. He also acknowledged that the state of the organ is causing problems, but noted that these are beginning to be addressed. The President closed by saying that music brings something beautiful to us all.

12 Any other business

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12.40 pm

Signed as a true record of the SMMA AGM of 21 April 2024

.....(SMMA Chairman)

Hannah Razzell