

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

**held at 12.00 on Sunday 18 May 2025 in the Parish Rooms**

### **In attendance (21):**

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), Ottilie Lefever (Secretary).

Other SMMA Committee Members: Jeremy Allen (Assistant Organist, Honorary Member), Lewis Colley, Peter de Vile, Bron Ferland, Nell Hardingham, Philip Sunderland.

Others: Lorna Allen, Siong Siong Butler, Paula Griffiths, Margaret Jacobs, Jenny Kirkaldy, Patrick Li, Roger Mance.

### **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, Caroline Goulder, Gill Gibson, Lesley Green, Kathleen Huey, Anna Martin, Noel and Judith Starr.

### **3 Adoption of the Minutes of the previous AGM, held on 21 April 2024**

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 2025**

The Chairman exhorted us, as busy volunteers, not to get bogged down with logistics but to be inspired by St Augustine who said 'I realise that when they are sung, these sacred words stir my mind to greater religious fervour and kindle in me a more ardent flame of piety than if they were not sung'. She reminded us that music continues to be at the heart of worship at St Mary's and is a vital aspect of our mission to reach out to the wider community.

The many concerts this year have not only provided moments of beauty and reflection but have also become a welcoming entry point for many who may not otherwise step into a church. Audience members regularly comment on the peace and inspiration they find here—often discovering a renewed connection to faith through the language of music. This is at the heart of what the SMMA believes is fundamental.

Last summer Jonathan Scott gave an awe-inspiring organ recital, and uploaded a video featuring St Mary's and Saffron Walden for the 150,000 subscribers to his YouTube Channel.

The SMMA has run 3 very successful recital series, at lunchtime in the summer and as Coffee Concerts in the spring and autumn, to increasing audiences. Performers range from local 'home-grown' talent to up-and-coming professionals who enjoy airing a programme prior to higher-profile concerts. Many performers ask to be invited again. We also hosted a 'Music and Poetry' evening, a different event which drew a different audience into the church.

We were very grateful to Philip Sunderland for giving his time and expertise to direct Purcell's Dido and Aeneas in our Come and Sing event which was greatly enjoyed by both audience and participants, together with a string quintet and some stunning soloists.

We once again invited local primary schools to attend our Organ Outreach Concert which was great fun; the audience was treated to an arrangement of Peter and the Wolf, and also the famous finale from Widor's Toccata on no fewer than three organs!

Thanks to Peter De Vile and Caroline Goulder we welcomed the choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, who performed a marvellously inspiring concert. The feedback from their Director of Music, Matthew Martin, was wonderful and we hope to welcome them back. It has been heartening to see the church as a focal point in our community for these events.

This year we introduced Prosecco and nibbles after Evensong except in Lent (though many people reminded me that Sundays are a day off Lenten abstinence, so we may review that)!

The SMMA is a very sociable organisation. Our thanks to Noel and Judith for hosting the summer party, and to Jim and Siong Siong for Christmas Eve, Ellie's leaving party and a gathering after the Palm Sunday Devotional Offering. Gill and Paul once again kindly provided mulled wine and mince pies after the Nine Lessons and Carols. The Choral Scholars' annual concert and show-case was supported and encouraged by Kate and Ellie.

The Chairman then thanked Oli for his talent, hard work, dedication and drive, and for the pastoral support he lends to all, Jeremy and Ziyi for the organ music, all the choirs, Phil Dudfield for his help with the brass, the committee for all their support and counsel, including Otilie for keeping tabs on everything, and Steve for the accounts. She also thanked Jim and Siong Siong for their assistance with the concerts, ranging from publicity to refreshments, and Bron, Peter, Gill, Patrick, Margaret, Kate, Lewis, Alison for their additional roles, as well as all the SMMA supporters and those present at the AGM. Finally she thanked Jeremy Trew for his continued support for all that the SMMA does.

She finished by quoting Theologian Tom Wright: "Music is the language of beauty, and beauty is the language of God."

## **7 Treasurer's report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024**

The Treasurer's audited accounts were circulated. He advised that although there appeared to be a small deficit at the end of December, this did not reflect the monies then due to come in by way of reimbursement, from the PCC and Gift Aid. These funds were received in January, so that the SMMA in fact made a small profit of £200 credit for the year.

The main source of income had been concerts. He also thanked some individuals for generous donations.

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

The Director of Music (DoM) said that for the first time since the Covid Lockdown in 2020 he felt that numbers of singers under the age of 18 are now starting to recover to 2019 levels. There had been times during lockdown when he feared the worst for church music and for our community.

He read a report from Kate Beare about Joyful Noise. This has a core of 10 children aged 5 to 7 who meet on Fridays for singing, percussion and musical games, for 10 sessions per term. They have grown in confidence and are enthusiastic and quick to pick up new skills and songs, volunteering for solos and leading rounds. They joined the Junior Choir for the Harvest

Family Service in September and again for Christingle in December. During Spring Term 2025 they rehearsed and performed a mini-musical, The Musicians of Bremen. She thanked Ruby Parsons for support with refreshments, and Poppy Razzell who is an excellent role model for the children. The DoM thanked Kate and everyone who supports her in running this group.

The DoM reported that the Junior choir is now full, and the children are a joy to work with. They continue to sing at a full complement of services, and at times led the top line for major services – for example, the confirmation service and other family services. They are well-knit and lead their own musical rounds on a week-by-week basis. Poppy, the current head chorister, has been sterling in modelling exemplary behaviours and leading by example. Role models for the younger singers, particularly, are essential for the continued healthy functioning of a choir which learns and performs music at a high frequency. The DoM thanked all who support the Juniors, including Siong Siong and Bron Ferland, and particularly Alison Lawrence as social coordinator and provider of countless activities, games and social functions.

There are now 10 choral scholars, an encouraging number. Their commitment and enthusiasm has been very strong throughout this year. They are an integral part of the adult choir, and their presence, musically speaking, shines through. The DoM thanked Lewis Colley for his new role in supporting this group, and to Noel Starr and Ellie Beare.

The adult choir has seen some comings and goings. We waved a sad farewell to Rowan and Sue Sylvester-Bradley towards the end of 2024. They sang in the choir for many years and were stalwart supporters of virtually everything musical. Rowan also ran the choir tick list. Ellie Beare left the choir in March to explore pastures new in Devon after over 20 years in the choir, first in the Juniors, then as a Choral Scholar, then in the Adult Choir. Ellie was for many years also a Choral Scholar mentor, and she helped to organise the choral scholar evenings, and carol singing. We also said adieu to Polly Britton, who is preparing for a new addition to her family. Looking forwards, the adult choir is shrinking, and while this isn't yet an existential problem, we must consider ways of recruiting 1 or 2 new members, especially sopranos.

The DoM thanked Jim and Siong Siong Butler and Margaret Jacobs for their continued support in serving as choir librarians and Gill Gibson for her work on the choir robes.

Musically speaking we have divided our time between consolidating our existing repertoire and learning a range of new music, much of it written in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In August 2024, the SMMA were thrilled to commission a series of 3 new motets from the composer Brian Moles in memory of Chris Ferland (former chorister at St Mary's). Paula Griffiths very generously wrote a set of poems which form the textural basis of the pieces. The motets are titled 'The Spark Motets' and reflect on the 'spark of life'. They are scored for choir, organ and obligato euphonium, and we are hugely looking forward to starting preparation on this project. A potential new commission is also in prospect.

One highlight among many this year was the choir trip, kindly organised by Peter De Vile and Caroline Goulder, to Norwich cathedral in October 2024, where we led choral evensong in this historic and spiritual building. We look forward to visiting Bury St Edmunds Cathedral in October this year, and perhaps to a weekend residential trip to follow in 2026.

Our current organ scholar Ziyi has been simply brilliant and she is now playing large parts of the Sunday services. She has given us so much over the last 20 months and is starting to set her sights on university organ scholarships. She will give a short recital at St Mary's in June, and given her great progress I think that the recital will be tremendous. She has demonstrated exemplary commitment to both the choir and her own organ studies, and we wish her the best

for her future studies when she moves on from St Mary's at the end of July. Over the next few months, we will be looking to appoint our next Michael Swindlehurst Organ Scholar.

The brass group continues to play for the Easter, Christmas Fair and Carol Services, though is running on an occasional basis only. The DoM thanked Phil Dudfield who played the tuba and facilitated this group for many years. He will stay involved by playing the euphonium and continuing to act as librarian.

The DoM thanked Peter De Vile for continuing to maintain our aging pipe organ. The statement of needs is complete, and we hope to push this forward in a meaningful way over the coming months, especially with the new Chair of the Organ Committee.

The DoM concluded by thanking the SMMA for their tireless work on our many musical activities, especially Bron Ferland for her continued admin support, Patrick Li for his enormous help, Jeremy Allen, our amazing Assistant Organist who has continued to play with panache as well as mentoring our organ scholar on a Sunday-by-Sunday basis. He is a joy and pleasure to work with. He thanked our stellar SMMA Chair, Hannah, who has continued to steer us wisely forward, for her incredible concert planning, and for her superb people and baking skills. Lastly he thanked Jeremy Trew and the clergy team for their continued generous support over the course of the year.

#### **10 Election of Committee members**

The position to be elected was 1 Ordinary Members (3 year term)

Lewis Colley was elected as an Ordinary member, having formerly been a co-opted Member, proposed by Peter De Vile, seconded by Patrick Li.

#### **11 President's closing remarks**

The President commented how much he appreciated the lovely atmosphere in the SMMA, and the great variety of music performed by musicians of all ages. There was a very good combination of fun, together with discipline, to achieve a high standard of performance. At a diocesan meeting he had learned that St Mary's had among the highest numbers of children attending church, and he considered this was in large part because of their inclusion in music making with the SMMA. He thanked the SMMA for its many contributions to worship.

#### **12 Any other business**

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12.30 pm

Signed as a true record of the SMMA AGM of 18 May 2025

.....(SMMA Chairman)

Hannah Razzell