

General Secretary:
Graham Stroud



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2nd Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Bach Choir (Charitable Incorporated Organisation: Registration No. 1194569) held on Wednesday 23rd November 2022

Present: Baroness Gisela Stuart of Edgbaston, Paul Spicer and 42 members of the Choir (Appendix 1).

1. The meeting started at 8.35pm.
2. **Chairing of Meeting:** Under section 11(4) of the CIO constitution, Philip Bellshaw invited The Right Honourable Baroness Gisela Stuart of Edgbaston, President of the Birmingham Bach Choir to chair the meeting.
3. **Apologies for Absence** were received from Brian Kay (Patron), Roddy Williams (Patron), Stuart Dean, Kate Crocker, Hilary and Peter Boszko, Sarah Hess, Clément Schoepfer, Rachel Quick, Diana Newsom, Linda Gresham, Jonathan Spencer, Alex Lindsay, Alma Beattie, Nick Fisher and Gareth Thomas. Peter and Hilary Boszko had appointed Philip Bellshaw as their proxy. Messages of support were received from Brian Kay, Stuart Dean and Kate Crocker.

Before embarking on the substance of the meeting, Gisela Stuart presented Paul Spicer with a gift to mark his 30-year stewardship of the choir.

4. **Minutes of the 73rd Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Bach Choir (Unincorporated Charity) and the 1st Annual General Meeting of the Birmingham Bach Choir (Charitable Incorporated Organisation)**

The two sets of Minutes were adopted unanimously without comment.

5. **Matters arising from the Minutes (not elsewhere on the agenda)**

There were no matters arising.

6. **Chairman's Report**

The Chairman, Philip Bellshaw, presented his report (Appendix 2). Adoption of the Chairman's Report was proposed by Maroussia Oakley and seconded by Ray Jones. Adoption of the Chairman's proposal to appoint Michael Palmer as Honorary Life Vice-President was proposed by Linda Hughes and seconded by Jane Francis. Both resolutions were adopted unanimously. In closing his report, Philip Bellshaw added his personal thanks to Michael Palmer for the many things that he had done for the choir and for his unwavering support over many years.

7. Treasurer's Report and Accounts

Pauline Hygate, Treasurer, presented her report (Appendix 3). She drew the members' attention to the difficult financial climate for performing bodies and explained the reasons behind certain recent decisions on future concerts as well as the proposed levels of subscriptions for the 2023/24 season. Adoption of the Treasurer's Report was proposed by Corinna Gregory and seconded by Barbara Hathaway. The report was adopted unanimously. Adoption of the proposed subscription levels for 2023/24 (£252, £63 for full-time students and £126 for those aged under 26) was proposed by Julia Sadler and seconded by Ela Claridge. The proposal was adopted unanimously. Geraldine Child thanked Pauline Hygate and the committee for the clarity of the reporting on financial matters. She said that she felt that the choir understood much better the reasons behind the financial decisions taken.

8. Musical Director's Report

Paul Spicer, Musical Director, presented his report (Appendix 4). Paul noted that, although the Bach Christmas Oratorio concert on 19 November should be included in next year's report, he could not pass up the opportunity to thank the choir and the committee for all the hard work that had made it such a successful and memorable occasion. He felt that the choir was now fully back to its old form and that next year's programme would bring opportunities for further development. Adoption of the Musical Director's Report was proposed by Ray Jones and seconded by Catherine Evans. Members adopted the report unanimously.

9. Retirement of Trustees

The meeting noted that the following trustees had retired at the meeting: Michael Palmer, Jane Eminson, Graham Stroud.

10. Election of Trustees, Officers and Ordinary Members

	Nomination	Proposed by:	Seconded by:
Officers:			
General Secretary	Graham Stroud	Philip Bellshaw	Barbara Hathaway
Ordinary Member	Ela Claridge	Philip Bellshaw	Barbara Hathaway
Ordinary Member	Eike Ritter	Mark Painter	Catherine Evans

Members of the choir unanimously agreed to appoint the nominated Officer and Ordinary Committee Members as trustees of the Birmingham Bach Choir.

Members of the choir unanimously agreed to appoint the nominated Officer and Ordinary Members to the roles indicated for a period of three years.

11. Any Other Business

Philip Bellshaw thanked Gisela Stuart for chairing the meeting. Paul Spicer thanked her for supporting the choir, including attending concerts. Gisela Stuart thanked everyone for attending and wished the choir well. Members present sang 'Happy Birthday' to Gisela.

12. The meeting closed at 9.25pm.

Appendix 1: Birmingham Bach Choir AGM 23 November 2022 – Attendance

<p>Soprano 1 Chi Han Clare Cowley Georgina Stockley Lucinda Spicer Heather Gay Merryn Lloyd Ros Ansell Ruth Oliver Sharon Buckley Sue Partridge</p> <p>Soprano 2 Marion Bellshaw Catherine Evans Corinna Gregory Barbara Hathaway Linda Hughes Maroussia Oakley Julia Sadler Alison Stroud Marion Thompson Noreen Trusselle</p>	<p>Alto 1 Hilary Bloxsom Geraldine Child Alison Douglas Jane Francis Pauline Hygate Irene Moon Judith Moreland Mark Painter</p> <p>Alto 2 Ela Claridge Jane Clarke Catherine Harper Helen Grew</p>	<p>Tenor 1 Raymund Jones Graham Stroud Jonathan Willis Edward Shirley</p> <p>Tenor 2 George Harrison Jon Homer</p>	<p>Bass 1 David Hughes Alan Girling Nick Partridge</p> <p>Bass 2 Philip Bellshaw Arthur Wrench Eike Ritter James Eyles Jens Christian Claussen Niall Gault Sam Noakes</p>
<p>Also: Gisela Stuart Paul Spicer</p>			
<p>On Zoom: Alison Pickles Rachel Quick Debbie Harris Clément Schoepfer Gareth Thomas</p>			

Appendix 2 - Chairman's Report to AGM - 23 November 2022

It is impossible, when looking back over the last 12 months' choir activities, not to have at the forefront of one's mind the magnificent and staggeringly successful concert we put on last Saturday. What a wonderful occasion to mark the 30-year anniversary of Paul Spicer directing Birmingham Bach Choir. Brilliant soloists, orchestra and choir combining to produce what must have been one of the very best performances we have ever given, and with 450 or so in the audience, it was a superb celebratory occasion, and the undoubted highlight of the last year.

Corinna Gregory, our concert secretary, put in many hours of hard work in planning and organising Saturday's concert, and I'm sure we will all agree she did so superbly. Heather Gay was kept especially busy as our ticket secretary, and has also spent hours in organising tickets for this and all our other concerts. Hilary Boszko did a magnificent job in marketing the occasion, managing adverts and news stories in the local media and keeping our fantastically professional website updated, and also organising VIPs' attendance on Saturday. Julia Sadler has kept up our profile on social media. Ela Claridge produced a fantastic programme, which took endless hours of work, as the English translation had to be gone through line by line to avoid copywrite complications, so many thanks to her for all the work she does on this and all our programmes, and also her team of proof-readers. Kate Crocker was an amazing assistant to Corinna in booking the cathedral and helping sort out the practicalities. Kate is responsible for raising funds for the choir, a thankless task in the current climate, and Kate was helping on Saturday night - as she always does - with selling tickets, together with Pauline Hygate who is of course also our fantastically able and diligent treasurer. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to Robert Grew, who led the front of house team and did a lot for us in liaising with the cathedral during the days and hours leading up to the concert, ably assisted by Diana Newsom and others in selling programmes and showing people to their seats. A huge team effort went into planning the practicalities on the night to get everyone through the door, check and sell tickets, issue programmes, and get people seated to enable the concert to start on time. It was a real team effort, all beautifully coordinated by Corinna. Thanks too to choir members for selling tickets to friends and family, and to Jane Clarke for organising reviewers. Bravo to all! Reviews and photos of Saturday are on the website.

The same thanks apply to the same people for organising the previous concerts held since the last AGM – at St Philip's cathedral on 4 December, when we premiered David Bednall's work, the Dear Bargain, which we commissioned, on 2 April, again at St Philip's, when we premiered Sound the Invisible Trumps by our own Paul Spicer, which we also commissioned, and on 25 June in St Paul's and 2 July at Malvern, when we sang some marvellous music, but to disappointingly small audiences, particularly for the Birmingham summer concert. But we achieved high standards, and all of the concerts were well delivered and received. It really has been quite a year! The only disappointing note in delivering last year's planned programme was the difficult last-minute decision to cancel the Carol Service, due to worries about the omicron variant which at the time was on the rampage and with little known about how serious it might prove to be, or whether even, as was rumoured at the time, the government might announce another lockdown over Christmas. For much the same reasons we did not hold an annual dinner in January either, nor will we be having one in January 2023, although we expect to plan something later in the year.

Heather arranged a successful Come and Sing for us, of Durufle's Requiem, on 21 May, delayed from February, and we managed to get together socially in July to enjoy another successful garden party generously hosted by Paul, with food organised by Jane Eminson and her team of helpers.

As we all know, a great deal of time, thought and effort has gone into planning rehearsals over the last year to make them as safe as they possibly can be. We successfully moved back here to Newman House, which I suspect we all felt was a relief after last year's interregnum at Trefoil House, although it hasn't quite been business as usual. Business as usual is very much the committee's aim, though, in so far as it is possible to achieve that in the current climate. As you know from recent emails from Barbara, we are abandoning questionnaires and fixed seating, and moving towards a position where we rely on vaccination and ventilation, with people using their common sense and taking personal responsibility to manage the risks of catching covid or anything else contagious henceforward. There are still some discussions that the committee needs to have about the details of some of this, including - hopefully - the resumption of coffee breaks in the new year. There will be a committee meeting on 1 December to look further at all this, so if you have any further comments please do mention them to Graham or me, or any other committee member.

We will also be looking again soon at the possibility of a choir tour – possibly in May 2024. Depending on what the world looks like in the New Year, we hope to put a proposal out to the membership for consultation. It would be great to have a project like this to look forward to, and more information will follow just as soon as we can.

We have also been looking ahead to the 23/24 season and beyond. You should all have had the choir diary with dates, venues and programme details. One point to note is that there will be no orchestral concert next year. We live in an age where getting funding for the arts is problematic, even with Kate Crocker's remarkable efforts on our behalf, and we have to be good stewards of the money we have accumulated, in the hope that we can stretch it to keep putting on the concerts we all love doing, confident that we can afford to pay our way and ensure there is a sufficient reserve to cover the costs of a season's liabilities. We have had a tremendous example in the person of Michael Palmer whose generosity over many years has been amazing. He has for some years regularly made significant financial contributions to choir projects (for instance he paid for the hire of Lichfield Cathedral for the Christmas Oratorio performance). I would encourage those who are financially able to consider making some additional donations themselves. Maybe some could voluntarily increase subscriptions to next year's level now or make a donation to the future concerts fund that Pauline has set up. I know there is a cost-of-living crisis and that even the thought of an extra penny for the choir may be impossible for many, but if you are in the fortunate position of being able to make a donation to choir funds, it really will help our finances and give your committee confidence in future planning.

Musically, we pay tribute once again to Paul for his inspirational and energetic direction of both rehearsals and performances. He is forbidden to think about retiring any time soon! We also acknowledge the tremendous support from Martyn Rawles in accompanying us, and didn't he have a great concert too on Saturday? Also, Paul Carr, and others from time-to-time too. We really are lucky to have such able and professional musicians available to us.

I must thank everyone on the committee for all the hard work they have done over the last 12 months. Each and every one of them deserve the thanks of all of us, and in addition to those I have already mentioned there is Jane Eminson, who has now stepped down as General Secretary, and Graham Stroud who has been an ordinary committee member for the last year and is taking over as General Secretary. Jane has done a remarkable job for us, in organising the transition to a CIO, and taking the lead in producing the choir handbook that we will have all received and hopefully read (and even maybe enjoyed!?) Kate Crocker and Julia Sadler attend committee meetings as co-opted members, as does Paul. We welcome two new committee members and trustees namely Ela

Claridge and Eike Ritter. Michael Palmer is not now able to fulfil his role as a trustee or committee member due to his failing health, but we send him our best wishes. I propose that we make Michael the Honorary Life Vice President of the choir, rather than a vice president role to which he is elected annually.

Then there is Barbara Hathaway, for whom no words can adequately express our collective grateful thanks for continuing so amazingly to fulfil the role of Choir Secretary, which appears to have become a euphemism for full time unpaid administrator with no fringe benefits and hardly any time off!

Outside the committee, Sam Noakes, Jon Homer and Peter Boszko have continued their usual efficiency in terms of music purchases, hiring and ordering. Maroussia Oakley and Merryn Lloyd set up every week for Wednesday rehearsals, unseen and unsung, and thanks too to all those choir members who have joined the rota for clearing up after rehearsals. Diana has dealt efficiently with the role of scarves, blouses and folders monitor, and Ela has had the burden of organising the zoom link for rehearsals, with all the angst that goes with the inevitable technical challenges which can arise.

We thank Gisela for her unswerving support of the choir and for giving up her time to prepare for and chair tonight's AGM.

Finally, thank you to all of our members for making this choir the success it is, both socially and musically, especially as we have welcomed so many new members this year, and continue to attract singers who want to be a part of this group.

We can look back with pride at all of our achievements over the last year, and also look forward with confidence, not only to next year's activities but beyond.

Philip Bellshaw

23 November 2022

Appendix 3 - Treasurer's Report – Year to 31 July 2022

When I reported to members at the AGM this time last year, we had begun our first year as a new CIO charity (ie a Charitable Incorporated Organisation) and you have been provided with the First Annual Accounts of this charity ready for filing with the Charity Commission and prepared in accordance with the relevant Financial Reporting Standard for UK charities.

In another first, this year has included our first full season of concerts since before the pandemic and I'd now like to talk about how our activities this season have impacted the choir's finances.

We began the year with funds of £54,000 transferred in full from the old unincorporated charity, and during the year made a small gain in funds of £283 so you can see that our finances have remained in a healthy position overall with £54,300 going into the current season 22/23, with the large part being in cash and deposits.

The choir essentially runs two strands to its activities – our concerts, and our membership and rehearsals – which are budgeted separately.

Our concert planning and budgeting is where the committee has spent significant elements of its time, and like amateur groups across the country we have faced uncertainty in predicting audiences' return to concerts postpandemic.

We made total expenditure on our four concerts of £16,900 last year, and total income from concerts was £11,900 which included fundraising, donations, ticket sales, and programme sales, dedication and advert income. This resulted in a concert deficit of just under £5,000 for the season. This represents a draw-down of just under 10% of our starting funds, which is significant – but justifiable – in a year in which we re-established our presence in the region's concert calendar, performing two new commissions and works held over from 2019/20.

You can see the concert net income shortfall in the infographic. The total Venues cost last year (£5,500 in the left hand column) included 2 concerts at St Philip's. The box at the top of the income column on the right shows our specific donations and external arts trusts fundraising which brought £2,800 for performing the 'Sound the Invisible Trumps' commission. We are grateful to Grimitt Trust, Roughley Charitable Trust, S & D Lloyd Trust and Merryn Lloyd for this support.

Mitigating the fund draw-down for concerts of last year, we received specific fund donations in advance of the Christmas Oratorio concert principally from Michael Palmer and are grateful for his generosity, though sad that his declining health meant he was unable to attend. This fund income totalled £4,800 including Gift Aid.

Together with small surpluses from music sales, choir parties and general rehearsal activities, which came to about £500, these elements of our income & expenditure have contributed to our small overall gain in funds.

Towards the end of my detailed financial statements, on page 4, I have set out the movements and purposes of the funds the choir holds. Last year I announced the new designated 2022 Special Concerts fund, which we hope to grow to fund future major concerts like the Christmas Oratorio of last Saturday. Our £500 sundry gains will be transferred to this fund. I believe it's important that we work at ways of raising our own funds for the concerts we want to put on in future. You are all warmly invited to contribute to this special fund at any time, either regularly or as a one-off, or perhaps even with any fundraising events now that we are able to gather in bigger numbers once more.

The principle behind our membership activities and weekly rehearsals is that our subscription income, plus Gift Aid, funds these ongoing and overhead costs. Last year we neatly met our budgetary aim. This year I forecast that we will achieve this again – and still provide really excellent value for members at some £6.15 per rehearsal. Having reviewed our cost forecasts for next year

23/24 I am recommending an increase in subscription to £252 for next season, £63 for full-time students, £126 for those under 26. A resolution will be proposed and I recommend voting in favour.

Looking ahead to this current season and beyond, we are all thrilled that the Christmas Oratorio concert has got our season off to such a great start. Our challenge is to continue to reach out to our audiences and maintain our funds at sustainable levels and which means an expensive orchestral concert may not be possible every year. Despite our healthy fund balances, which will withstand a few knocks, we need to take a cautious approach on draw-downs and maintain reserve levels capable of sustaining the choir for the future.

Before I finish, I would like to thank my committee colleagues for being great people to work with. I now hand over to Gisela to propose a resolution to adopt my report and the accounts for 2021/22.

AGM Weds 23 Nov 2022. Pauline Hygate

Appendix 4 - Conductor's Report on season 2021-2022

The 21-22 season was the beginning of our emergence from the depths of the pandemic period. It was by no means over but we were now having rehearsals in person and with less distancing than we had to endure at first. So it has been a very gradual process of getting back to some sort of normality. With all this came the whole process of completely rebuilding the choir. We still had (and have) hybrid rehearsals with those not able to come for whatever reason able to join via a zoom link. It is better than nothing.

It did mean, however, that on the day of our first public concert in St Philip's cathedral on 4 December 2021 it was the first time I had stood in front of THAT group of singers! It was a slightly nerve-wracking experience especially as we had David Bednall's premiere to perform – our centenary commission. The concert actually went very well with a lovely varied programme which included Britten's Rejoice in the Lamb and Dvorak's Mass in D. We were glad to perform it at last as it had been intended for the centenary season. David's new work was much enjoyed and he was thrilled with your performance.

The annual service of Nine Lessons and Carols at St. Alban's church sadly had to be cancelled due to ongoing Covid problems which makes this year's even more special.

We had a lovely Come and Sing day with the Duruflé Requiem and a decent turn out. Thanks, as ever, to Heather for all her work in bringing it together and to everyone bringing cakes and raffle prizes etc. It is always an enjoyable day. We were very ably supported, also, by Charlie Francis from the Conservatoire as our accompanist as Martyn couldn't be with us.

Then after Christmas we began work on a very special concert dedicated to Mike Lloyd but also celebrating the 150th anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death. We were joined by Ed Ballard as baritone soloist in the 5 Mystical Songs and the short solo he had in my new work commissioned by the choir with funds given by Pauline Round, Sound the Invisible Trumps. We had an excellent quartet of soloists from the choir in RVW's Lord, thou hast been our refuge and Emily also sang a really lovely solo in my piece. You sang my new work beautifully, and I was so thrilled that two of Pauline's poems were included and that they came across as such key moments. She would have loved it.

Our summer concerts were based around a trio of Bach motets: the first Bach we had sung since properly getting together again. We sang Lobet, O Jesu Christ, meins lebens licht, and Komm, Jesu, Komm. But it was also a wide-ranging programme including music by Joubert, Gibbons, Britten, MacMillan and Finzi. It was good to be accompanied by Callum Alger, D of M at St Peter's Wolverhampton, and an ex-student of mine from the Conservatoire.

We also had auditions during the season which were enjoyed to the full by you all! I didn't ask anyone to leave though one or two are possibly coming close to retirement. But it give me a hugely valuable snapshot of the choir's individual strengths – and there are many. I know it is an awful thing to have to go through, but it shows me who can do solos and be part of a semi-chorus and reinforces my feelings about the level of musicianship which you all bring to the party.

Although the concert we have just given (Christmas Oratorio) will form part of next year's report, I want to say that I feel we are now fully rehabilitated and back on top Bach Choir form. The concert was a milestone in every way. You were on outstanding form and we had a splendid period instrument orchestra and world class soloists to perform with us. All this and in Lichfield Cathedral which is such an iconic setting – and a full house as well. A wonderful 30th anniversary event for me.

Thank you to you all. Now we need to make sure we keep on developing despite the ongoing challenges. This is a really great group offering something no other choir in the city offers in the same way. Long may that continue.

My thanks to Martyn for his simply outstanding playing for us, and especially the recent Bach which he does effortlessly down a semitone. We are so lucky to have him.

Thanks, too, most especially to Philip Bellshaw for being a wonderful Chairman who combines a light and humorous touch with a deeply serious concern for the choir's wellbeing and ongoing success. My thanks to Barbara for all she does to keep us well throughout this period, and to all the members of the committee who bring so much to the table. Perhaps especially Hilary Bozsko who gives us the benefit of her professional marketing skills and helped achieve that full house in Lichfield the other night. Also to our Treasurer, Pauline Hygate, for the professionalism she brings to our finances. There are many others, but thanks to all, and to all of YOU for being such a joy (usually!) to work with week in and week out.