

NORTH KINGSTON CHOIR COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

20th March 2019

Attendees: Penny Hamilton (PH), Chair; Sue Manson (SM), Treasurer; Nello Bearzatto (NB), Events; Lesley Keirle (LK), Membership; Tristan Bate (TB), Communications; Sally Winter (SW), Social; Georgi Vaughn (GV), Secretary; Jessica Bate (JB), Musical Director (partial attendance by video conference).

1. Budget – SM

SM reported that our finances are in very healthy shape. SM has budgeted generously for this year but reported that we still have reserves currently of £3,467, and that is before this year's Gift Aid rebate is taken into account. TB pointed out that our surplus should be equivalent to six months' running costs.

SM proposed that choir fees should be reduced for the summer and autumn terms to £50 a term. The Committee unanimously approved.

SM proposed that we stop offering payment of fees by instalment because very few people pay this way and those who do have not been very good at paying on time. The Committee unanimously approved, on the basis that any choir member who will struggle to pay their fees in one payment may still request to pay their fees by instalment.

SM drew attention to the fact that our pianist, Henry, is a large expenditure as his fees are now £60 an hour, and wondered if we should look for a cheaper pianist or a volunteer like the rest of the band. JB felt that Henry is good value for money as he is reliable and also understands how to play with the choir and band. JB pointed out that other pianists we had tried previously had not been up to scratch, or let us down at the last minute for performances. The Committee agreed that it would be useful to have some backup pianists in mind, but we will stick with Henry for big performances.

2. Performances – NB

NB provided the Committee with a spreadsheet of possible performances for this year.

NB said we had applied to Kingston Council's new CirKT music project, which might offer us a performance in a Kingston venue in June or November. NB is not sure if a choir is the sort of artist they are looking for, but we should hear back from them on 31st March and can then decide how to proceed.

NB said we had three possible events in June: (i) Ham Fair on Saturday 8th June; (ii) Princess Alice Hospice Summer Fete in Esher on 15th June; (iii) Claremont Gardens on 23rd June. The Committee felt that to do all three would be too many commitments for choir members.

The Committee agreed that Ham Fair went well last year and is a good event to do as it is so local. TB also pointed out that it was good publicity for recruiting new choir members. NB to contact Ham Fair organisers to confirm; we agreed to keep Princess Alice Hospice as a backup option in case Ham Fair falls through. JB said that she had originally contacted Princess Alice Hospice with an interest in doing more community outreach-type performances and suggested that we might consider whether we could do events such as singing at hospices/hospitals/homeless shelters with smaller groups of members.

JB said that although Claremont Gardens is currently confirmed for 23rd June, it is not an event and can be moved depending on what other events are booked in. The Committee agreed that it would be best not to have performances on adjacent weekends. Date to be reviewed once other summer events are confirmed.

JB suggested that rather than doing another formal concert in July, we could do a more informal cabaret-style show, with table seating and an open bar/BYO depending on the venue. The choir would sing some songs but also individual members or small groups could perform with the band or pianist. The Committee agreed this would be a good opportunity to do something a bit different. Suggested venues were the Cornerhouse in Surbiton and the Vera Fletcher Hall in Thames Ditton. Preferred dates would be either Saturday 13th or 20th July. NB to contact venues to find out availability.

JB said we have applied for Rewind festival in Henley-on-Thames in mid-August. We are waiting to hear back. This is a high-profile event, but the timing might not be good for us as many choir members tend to be away in August.

NB asked whether we would be interested in performing at Surbiton Festival at the end of September. The Committee felt that it would be a nice local event for our calendar and we could reprise songs from the summer term; we would not have to learn a whole new repertoire in September. NB to contact Surbiton Festival organisers.

PH pointed out that if we want to do another formal concert, we should think about booking a venue soon as larger theatres tend to get booked up quite far in advance. JB said she was not keen on doing another theatre concert in November as it is a lot of work getting songs ready for it and doesn't leave very long afterwards to work on songs for Christmas performances. The Committee agreed not to do a formal concert in the autumn term.

TB said Mary Bourne had emailed and invited us to participate in the choir Christmas concert at the Rose Theatre. The Committee felt that since this is on a Wednesday evening and choir members would need to attend in the afternoon for the rehearsal, this would not work for our members. TB to respond to Mary and decline.

We hope to perform at the V&A again at Christmas. NB to keep an eye out for other possible events in the autumn term.

JB suggested to organise the next formal concert for around Easter time 2020. GV said it is good to have an event to be working towards in the spring term to keep choir members engaged. The Committee agreed that we should aim to book a venue for a formal concert in May 2020, which would give us the full spring term to learn repertoire and then a couple of rehearsals after the Easter break to refresh and polish the songs. Suggested venues were the Exchange in Twickenham (capacity around 300), the Arthur Cotterell Theatre in Kingston (capacity 176) or the Hampton Hill Theatre (capacity 197). JB emphasised the importance of being able to rehearse at the venue prior to the performance, ideally on Monday night. NB to contact venues to check availability.

JB informed the Committee that Ellie Giffard had asked the choir to sing at her wedding, which will be on 18th April 2019 at Hampton Court Palace Golf Club. NB to add to calendar.

Action Points:

- **NB to confirm Ham Fair on 8th June.**
- **NB to contact venues about availability for cabaret night in July.**

- **NB to contact Surbiton Festival organisers.**
- **TB to respond to Mary Bourne re Rose Theatre concert in December.**
- **NB to contact venues about availability for May 2020 concert.**
- **NB to add Ellie's wedding to events calendar.**

3. Membership – LK

LK queried why there was a note on the waiting list that someone had been put to the bottom on JB's request. JB explained it was because they had been offered a place and declined it. The Committee agreed that if someone at the top of the waiting list is offered a place and declines it, they should go to the bottom of the waiting list.

LK said we have one men's place available and a new member had been invited to fill it. There are three more men on the waiting list. JB questioned whether we should limit the number of men in the choir to 16: should we be turning men away when so many choirs struggle to attract men at all? JB said Dominic Stichbury, who took a choir workshop on 18th March, was bemused to hear that we had men on our waiting list. On average about two-thirds of male members turn up on any given week. PH said it was good that we are encouraging men to sing, but part of the reason for limiting the number of men is that we limit the size of the whole choir; we need to consider the balance of voices. SM pointed out that there is quite a high turnover of men, so they don't have to wait for very long.

PH proposed adding two more men, to bring the total up to 18. The Committee approved unanimously, as we felt that this would not overly affect the balance of voices and it would make up for poor attendance in the men's sections. This will bring the total number of choir members to 52: 34 women and 18 men.

LK clarified the rules on members taking sabbaticals. A member can take a term out but will be asked to pay their subs for that term to guarantee their place the next term. If the member does not wish to pay subs for the term, their name will go to the top of the waiting list and they will be able to rejoin as soon as a place becomes available. If the member does not take up a place when offered it after a sabbatical, they will be put to the bottom of the waiting list (if they still want to stay on it).

Action Points:

- **LK to invite two more men to join.**

4. Choir Constitution – GV

GV updated the Committee on the situation with the Charity Commission (CC). The new constitution was approved at the AGM in February but had not been signed by the Committee. The Committee signed the constitution. GV explained that as the choir turnover has gone above £5,000, we need to register with the CC; we have previously only been registered with the HMRC for Gift Aid purposes. GV to collate the necessary information and register with the CC.

PH informed the Committee that once the choir is registered, we will need to include our registered charity number on all publicity material.

GV proposed that the Secretary and Treasurer have dedicated email accounts, in order to keep all correspondence with the CC and HMRC in one place. TB said this would also help us to remain GDPR-compliant. TB to check on the cost of getting @northkingstonchoir.org.uk email addresses and report back.

GV noted that HMRC should be updated of changes to the trustees at the AGM. SM did not think this had been done. GV to follow up.

PH asked whether there was any problem with having submitted our Gift Aid rebate application for last year without having registered with the CC. SM said there was no problem.

Action Points:

- **GV to collate information and register with the CC.**
- **TB to check on cost of Committee email addresses.**
- **GV to update HMRC on new trustees.**

5. Communications – TB

TB reported that the new Dropbox system was working well.

TB stated that it was difficult for him to produce videos of choir performances as they take several hours to edit and he is too busy. TB suggested getting a professional editor to edit our performance footage; TB would coordinate and oversee. SW said she might have some contacts. GV suggested asking if any members wanted to help. PH to include a request in the newsletter. NB said that when we apply for events, it would be useful to have professional-looking videos. The Committee agreed that we could consider hiring a professional editor for our next event if no choir members volunteer.

TB said we have 50 people on the mailing list. TB asked if we should run an early-bird offer on tickets for the next workshop in October and what the pricing should be. PH said the feedback from the previous workshop was that £20 was good value for money. The Committee agreed this was a reasonable price.

Action Points:

- **SW to provide contacts for editors.**
- **PH to ask for choir member volunteers in the newsletter.**
- **TB to organise early-bird offer for October workshop.**

6. Social events – SW

SW reported that she had booked a private area at the Prince of Wales pub in Hampton Court for the next social on 29th March. SW to check on attendance numbers and collect money at next rehearsal.

The Committee suggested future socials to be arranged: (i) around May, possibly some kind of activity; (ii) summer drinks in July, either Friday 12th or 19th, whichever is not the day before the cabaret night; (iii) back-to-school social in early September; (iv) Christmas dinner.

Action Points:

- SW to find out attendance numbers and collect money for 29th March social.
- SW to plan other socials for this year.

7. AOB

GV pointed out that not many people were going to the pub after rehearsals this term and asked if we could do more to encourage people. The Committee agreed the social aspect of our choir is important, but not everyone wants to go to the pub on a Monday night.

PH said that Alan was cross with people turning up late, and wondered whether we ought to move the start time of rehearsals a bit later. The Committee felt that many members who come in late would still do so if we moved the start time later, whilst the later finish time would discourage members from going for a drink afterwards. The Committee agreed to keep rehearsal times as 8.00-9.30pm.

PH wondered if we could do anything else to keep Alan happy. Two choir members have volunteered to help with setting out chairs. It was suggested we could have a rota for setting out chairs, but this has been tried in the past and was not very successful. Members should be encouraged to clear out of the hall more quickly after rehearsals so that Alan can close up.

GV mentioned that the basses do not have a section leader since Bob left the choir. PH to add an item in newsletter asking the basses to nominate a new section leader.

Action Points:

- PH to add item in newsletter asking for new bass section leader.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Thursday 2nd May, 8pm at Sue's