

Minutes of Scottish Chamber Choir Committee Meeting

Monday 26 August 2024 (19.00 to 21.00) (on Zoom)

Present: Brian Kerr (chairing), Julie Morrice, Iain McLarty (items 1 to 8), Stéphanie Robin, Marjory Lobban, Catherine Hadshar, Graham Drew, Alan Miller, Alastair Wilson

Apologies: Alison Fraser, Valerie Holehouse

1. Matters arising from Minutes of meeting on 15 March 2024

(Minutes approved)

(a) Library

Valerie had indicated before the meeting that she will approach the Scottish Music Centre and Edinburgh University to see whether they would welcome the original scores of *Cantos Sagrados*. **(VH)**

(b) Scholarship

Alison will be in touch with Grant Haddow about his availability for the coming term. **(AF)**

(c) Ailie Robertson Commission: outstanding requirements

The Committee reviewed outstanding elements of the project - to be completed before remaining funds from Creative Scotland would be released. Julie confirmed that the school workshops would be completed by the end of September. The requirement for a second performance of *Lost Lights* is discussed below under item 3. Iain will consult Ailie Robertson on potential live recording. The end of project report will need to include audience feedback; as no email address or hard copy forms were provided with the programmes at St Machars, Graham will collate suitable comments from one or two known contacts in the audience and will discuss future arrangements for getting audience feedback with Martin Tarr in good time for the Rossini concert. **(JM, IMcL, GD)**

2. Finance

The Committee discussed the SCC's finances, fully illustrated in papers from Marjory. These showed a near £5,000 drop in reserves between June 2023 and June 2024, to £7,606, and an increase of over £3,000 over the previous year in expenditure on professional musicians amongst other expenditures in the 2023-24 season (which had been discussed and approved in advance as part of an agreed three-year financial strategy). The choir had also invested in a new commission and had received welcome commensurate funding to cover that investment which we could hope to deploy further to good effect. However, indicative budgets for concerts in 2024-25 projected further losses and the current position did not appear sustainable in the medium term.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the forthcoming AGM that annual subscriptions should increase from £168 to £240 with effect from the 2024-25 season. A proposal to phase this increase in over two years was rejected following the chair's casting vote. **(BK, JM; ML)**

Following a recent approach to Julie from the property investment firm This Is Wealth about providing around twelve singers to sing about 30 minutes of Christmas songs on Saturday 7

December at the Mansfield Traquair centre in Edinburgh, the Committee agreed that we should indicate a willingness to consider doing this for a fee of £750. **(JM)**

Valerie is also reviewing the rates that we charge other choirs for music hire from the choir library. **(VH)**

3. Season 2024-25 Programme

In addition to Marjory's budget projections for the three concerts (23 November, 8 March and 24 May), the Committee received updates from Iain on the proposed programmes, Stephanie on venue arrangements and Valerie on music hire.

Following discussion of several potential options, the Committee asked Iain to look at incorporating a second performance of *Lost Lights* in the programme for 8 March. **(IMcL)**

4. Improving Ticket Sales

Several points arose in a wide discussion of how the SCC could look to build audiences and improve ticket sales.

In Edinburgh, it will be important to establish a reliable anchor performance venue, with suitable alternative(s). There is continued clear value in performing outside Edinburgh, not least in view of the choir's title; however, there are significant challenges with attracting good audiences, especially in places where we do not have close contacts or representatives locally who know the local scene and can therefore help us navigate the best ways to publicise our concerts locally, or in towns or cities where we have not performed for many years and are therefore an unknown quantity. Experience also indicates that we may struggle to attract large audiences in some (not all) towns close to Edinburgh where people already have access to plentiful musical options in Edinburgh and surrounding area.

Repeating in Edinburgh programmes also performed elsewhere is certainly worth considering; this would need to be planned for well in advance.

The choir's virtual, including social media, presence would benefit from regular and imaginative feeding, building on valuable work already done by members in this area. Procuring professional assistance in developing a distinctive house style, including professional branding, could be a useful investment to be deployed consistently in all media.

These and other considerations will be built into the AGM on 7 October. **(JM, BK, IMcL) (See item 7)**

Graham will meanwhile consider with Julie arrangements for publicising this season's concerts, including the Rossini in November. **(GD, JM)**

5. SCC Constitution

Alan updated the Committee on the work that he has done since March, together with Brian and in consultation with Walter Thomson who drafted the current constitution, to prepare an amended Constitution for the SCC, as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and based on the SCVO model. The revised document brings the constitution into line with

the choir's recent and current practice; addresses anomalies in the current constitution, for example in relation to the Trustees and a current absence of any provision for co-opting; and unpacks, in modern style and in line with the SCVO model, what is currently more densely or elliptically expressed.

The Committee agreed that references in the draft to the Musical Director will be amended to reflect his being contracted to provide services to (rather than being employed by) the SCIO, and that term limits will be reinstated for the posts of Chair (or co-Chair) and Treasurer; and in addition that the percentage membership threshold for calling Special General Meetings will be raised from 10% to 25%. Subject to these changes, the Committee endorsed the new draft Constitution for presentation to the full choir membership for formal adoption at a Special General Meeting immediately preceding the AGM on 7 October. **(AM, BK)**

6. AGM and Workshop on Future Programmes

Brian and Julie will arrange for finalising and issuing by 16 September the Agenda and papers for the AGM, and for the preceding Special General Meeting, consulting Alan on the latter. Brian will also liaise with Cath on treatment of the Access and Inclusion Policy on the AGM agenda. **(BK, JM, AM, CH)**

Julie will work with Iain, Brian and Milda Zinkus, who has kindly agreed to facilitate a programme planning workshop, to be held on 25 November. The workshop will take a broad look at repertoire as well as building on committee reflection on increasing audiences. **(JM, IMcL, BK)**

7. Collaborative Concert (Mozart C Minor Mass): Autumn 2025

In brief discussion of joint planning with the concert partners (Calton and Meadows), including lead responsibilities for finance, management and publicity, the Committee noted that Marjory will not be available to contribute beyond June 2025. Brian will discuss with other Committee members individually whether they would wish to carry lead responsibilities for concert management and publicity, and any other necessary lead responsibilities not covered by other partners. **(BK, ML)**

8. AOCB/ Date of Next Meeting

Noting that vacancies remain for the posts of Chair and Membership Secretary, the Committee agreed that consideration of the date of the next meeting (in January 2025) should wait until after the new Committee is in place. **(AW)**

9. Review of Musical Director 's Fees: 2024-25

The Committee agreed a proposal from the Treasurer and Chair; this will be put to the AGM on 7 October.

Alastair Wilson
17 September 2024