

**Present:** Officers - Chris Walker (Chairman), Kitty Ross (Treasurer), Liz Buxton (Secretary), Anne Adams (Social Secretary), Vicky Highet (Publicity Manager), Sarah Hogan (Joint Librarian) and Michael Buxton (Box Office Manager). Also in attendance were George Nicholson (President), Jonathan Brice (Independent Examiner), and approximately 30 members of the Society.

- 1. Welcome** – the Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He referred members to the Officer's reports which had again been circulated with the agenda this year.
- 2. Apologies for absence** were received from Joan Gaunt, Ramsey Hertzog, Chris Phillips, Caroline Denby-Hollis and Vice President Alan Brown. The Secretary read out a letter from Alan Brown with his best wishes to Sheffield Bach Society members. This prompted a suggestion from Jane Ginsborg that it might be possible to arrange a wheelchair taxi to enable Dr Brown to attend one of our concerts. The Secretary agreed to look into this.
- 3. Minutes of the previous AGM** held on Monday 21st November 2021 and previously circulated with the agenda, were approved (proposed Anne Adams, seconded L Paice) and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the meeting.
- 4. Matters arising**  
There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.
- 5. Secretary's report for 2020-21**  
The report from the Secretary (*previously circulated and attached*) was received and no questions were asked. The secretary was thanked for her report.
- 6. Treasurer's report for 2020-21**  
The report from the Treasurer (*previously circulated and attached*) was received. The treasurer presented the annual accounts (*previously circulated*) adding some context for the year 2021-22. The treasurer indicated how valuable it was to be able to claim Gift Aid on donations and subscriptions, although there was still some uncertainty about the level of Gift Aid due to changes in HM Treasury rules. If any members were unsure if they were signed up to Gift Aid, then they were urged to speak to Kitty. There were no questions on the treasurer's report or accounts which were formally received by the meeting. It was recognised that the role of Treasurer necessitated considerable workload and the Treasurer was thanked for her report.
- 7. Independent Examiner's report for 2020-21**  
The Chairman welcomed Jon Brice (Independent Examiner) to the meeting. Mr Brice reported that as the appointed Independent Examiner, he had scrutinised the accounts presented for the 2021-22 season and was entirely satisfied that these were fully in order and had been presented in accordance with the reporting requirements of the Charity Commission. Jon was thanked by the Chairman on behalf of the membership for his work on behalf of the Society.
- 8. Election of officers**  
The Chairman reported that nominations for the Officer vacancies as indicated in the invitation to the AGM, and now proposed and seconded by members of the Society, had been received and the following were consequently elected unopposed to serve for a further two years: Treasurer – Kitty Ross, Box Office Manager – Michael Buxton, Publicity Manager – Vicky Highet. All three were thanked for their continued support for the work of the Society.

The Secretary explained the rationale for currently leaving the Membership Secretary role unfilled pending a review of the Committee structure. It was felt that much of the organisation and administration of the Society was increasingly undertaken in a different way since the establishment of the Constitution. This review would consider Officer roles and the number of 'ordinary' member places on the Committee (*see also 9. below*) It was recognised that any formal change to the Committee as outlined in the Constitution, would require approval at an AGM or at a Special General Meeting.

## 9. Election of two ordinary members of the Committee

As indicated in the AGM invitation, Neil Dummigan and Alan Heath had come to the end of their three-year period of office and were thanked for their contribution to the work of the Society during a particularly challenging time as a result of the global pandemic. The secretary reported that one nomination had been received and StJohn Wright was elected unopposed. No further nominations had been received at this time. However, the secretary indicated that whilst currently, ordinary members were not eligible for immediate re-election, this was another aspect of the Constitution that the Committee would seek to consider as part of the review, whilst appropriate safeguards would be put in place to ensure that the membership of the committee did not become static in keeping with the wishes of the Charity Commission. If it was subsequently agreed that there would be fewer Officer roles, then this would open up the opportunity for more members to contribute to the management of the Society, perhaps with specific roles as SATB voice representatives? Any member's views about the make up of the committee would be welcomed.

## 10. Election of Honorary Independent Examiner

Jonathan Brice was re-elected to the position of Independent Examiner. The Chairman thanked him for his work on behalf of the Society and willingness to continue in this role.

## 11. Honorary Conductor's report for 2021-22

The report (*previously circulated and attached*) from George Nicholson, currently as acting Conductor was received and no questions were asked.

The Chairman thanked Professor Nicholson for his report.

## 12. Chairman's report for 2020-21

The report (*previously circulated and attached*) from the Chairman was received. The Chairman again expressed his thanks to George Nicholson for his work for the Society over the last year. He remarked that without George's willingness to step in at such short notice, the choir could very easily have collapsed!

The Chairman then went on to make some remarks about the current season including the need to recruit new members. Recognising that with smaller numbers of members, some of the larger choral works would become especially demanding, he confirmed that we had been invited to join with another choir for a concert in June 2024 and that members of St Peters Singers had already agreed to join us for our performance of Mass in B Minor in March 2023. The chairman also acknowledged the help of the Voice Exchange scheme and confirmed that some members of SPC had already agreed to sing Messiah with us in December.

He then went on to acknowledge that many members would be wondering what was happening concerning the substantive conductor's absence and added the following verbal statement to his report: *"We recognise that the past months have been an unsettling period with Simon's absence and then his health issues which were clearly concerning, and we have increasingly been asked by many people as to why Simon has not been with us. In our Officer's reports, we have already mentioned how extremely grateful we are to George who has enabled the remainder of last season and the start of this season to go ahead as planned. George has also kindly agreed to be on stand-by until the summer."*

*As members have previously been informed, we had hoped that Simon could be back for our December performance of Messiah which would involve rehearsals from 21<sup>st</sup> November. As of this evening however, we regrettably have not had the confirmation we need to enable this plan to happen. The timescale is therefore that the Committee are meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November to determine next steps with regard to the position of conductor. The secretary and I do appreciate that many of you, including the Committee, have been wondering what has been happening but we can assure you that a clear pathway to a resolution of the current situation is now very close and we will be in a position to update the choir after the Committee have met. Thank you for bearing with us for just a short while longer"*

The Chairman re-iterated his opening remarks and thanked members for their continued support during the 2021-22 season.

## 13. Any other business

- Tony Cowling commented on the review of Committee structure and roles and offered the suggestion that a change could be to enable ordinary members who wished to, to serve two consecutive terms of office with a requirement for a one year break. He confirmed this arrangement had been approved by the Charity Commission in relation another society. Tony was thanked for his suggestion which would feed into the planned review.

- Lisa Heller proposed a vote of thanks to the Committee for their work on behalf of the Society, especially steering the choir through the pandemic and its aftermath. This vote of thanks was much appreciated by committee members.
- Liz Arnesen thanked colleagues again for the flowers to mark her move to the North West. She reported that this was unfortunately delayed and hoped to continue to sing with the choir for a little longer.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.25 pm

**OFFICERS reports circulated with the agenda and included as part of the minutes of the meeting**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

It has indeed been good to be back singing after the pandemic and overall we had a good season return. The tentative steps at return in November with the Rutter and shorter concert length without interval started us off well. I was pleased to see a perhaps better than expected audience for Messiah and audiences seem to be recovering in number.

We are very grateful to our president, George Nicholson, who stood in at the last minute to conduct the Messiah performance in Simon's absence and to Ruth who also stepped up to play the continuo role. George remained in post for the remainder of the 2021/2022 season for which we are extremely grateful. We performed Bach's St Matthew Passion and a Summer concert entitled "The brilliance of Bach" in which we were joined by Darius Battiwala as guest organist.

As I write this, we are in the 2022/2023 season and hopefully have said "goodbye" to the pandemic and most of the Covid restrictions. We now need to continue to build in membership and audience numbers to continue with some exciting music making and performances.

There is always a lot going on behind the scenes and in some ways just as much when we were not performing during the aforementioned pandemic! Watching Covid regulations, booking orchestra members and soloists/cancelling or postponing bookings and so on.

I remain very grateful to the other officers of the society, George and the committee for working on all these aspects to get us up and running again. I would like to make a special mention to Liz Arnesen, Membership Secretary, for all the work that she has done over the past years and wish her and her husband great success in their move to Northumberland.

I would also like to thank Alan Heath and Neil Dummigan whose term as ordinary members of the committee reaches its end.

*Chris Walker*

Chairman

### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

As you can see from this year's accounts, the society has made a modest loss on the season, some of which may be attributed to adjustments in our first season post-pandemic. We made the decision to reduce ticket prices for the November concert to entice audiences back. We were also unable to fundraise as much as before without the regular tea funds, stalls and little raffle draw, both of which we are reintroducing this season.

We had very generous sponsorship for the Messiah which enabled us to bring in top-notch soloists.

The coming season does pose financial challenges for the choir as costs are rising, particularly hall hire because of the hike in heating costs, but also some of our professional fees. We will also be affected by a decline in the amount we can claim as gift aid if income tax is cut in April.

Our main sources of income are choir subscriptions and ticket sales - so attracting new members and selling more tickets are the best ways to help us financially. Subscription rates have been kept at £125 this season and can be paid in instalments. However, if some members can afford it we are always very grateful for additional donations and sponsorship.

We are also hoping that more members will join the monthly draw (£4 per month) and to sign up to online gift schemes such as Give as You Live, Easy Fundraising & Amazon Smile. Please contact me if you would like more information on any of these.

Kitty Ross

Treasurer

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

I can confirm that the Committee has continued to work on behalf of members, to meet the 'object' of our Society as outlined in the Constitution.

Your committee has met 5 times during the 2021-22 season. Meetings were until recently held via Zoom. The Committee planned for and considered feedback relating to the choir's 'post-Covid' future. Meetings focussed on detailed planning for 2021-22 season when we were once again permitted to rehearse and perform. With detailed protocols in place to ensure safe rehearsals, the choir enjoyed being back together again. It was with some sadness that two of our members sadly died during our period of enforced closure.

Following our tentative steps from November 2021, the Committee felt sufficiently confident to be able to plan in earnest for the choir's 2022-23 season, which of course required considerable commitment of society funds in booking orchestral players and soloists. We have reduced the 'paperwork' at rehearsals and an electronic attendance record has replaced the signing-in sheets. Attendance was rather more unsettled during the season due to the post-Covid effect and illness of a number of members and their families, but attendance is now improving. This is encouraging, but also really important if we are to be a choir of sufficient size to perform the larger choral works. Although we have dispensed with the suggestions book to avoid unnecessary hand-to-hand contact, the Committee do genuinely welcome member's ideas and the 'theme' for our June 2023 concert was suggested by Derek Hollingsworth. Please note that the Committee has taken the decision to move all re-auditions on and will reinstate these for the 2023-24 season.

Over time, the way in which our Society operates has changed with an increased emphasis on electronic communications with members and with our potential audiences. In order that the Committee roles and responsibilities adequately reflect these newer ways of working, in Autumn 2022 the Committee will undertake a review of the relevant section of the Constitution. The suggested changes will be outlined at the AGM and members views will be welcomed.

Liz Buxton

Secretary

[secretary@sheffieldbachchoir.co.uk](mailto:secretary@sheffieldbachchoir.co.uk)

## ACTING CONDUCTOR'S REPORT

What an extraordinary season this has been – especially for me! I had never realised how significant a missed phone call can be until I responded to Chris one Friday night last December and found myself committing to conducting *Messiah* the following Monday. As my Sunday was already given over to an event taking place in London, you can imagine how I spent all of Saturday! Ruth was placed in a very similar position, taking over the role of continuo and with it the novel experience of playing both the harpsichord and the chamber organ, not to mention the choreography involved in shifting from one to the other. It was a daunting prospect to have to conduct the choir in performance without any preliminary rehearsal, but I have to say that you were all so welcoming and amenable that the concert was a joy and a delight (it did help that you had been very well prepared!). And so it has continued. We have successfully negotiated a *Matthew Passion* together and a memorable summer concert made up mostly of Bach 'lollipops'. Many thanks to you all for your hard work and commitment in meeting the challenges posed by the sterner stuff in that programme – *Jesu, meine Freude* and *Ein feste Burg*. The process of bringing a performance to fruition is one I have always relished, and of course it is so much easier to do when you're in charge of the rehearsals as well as the actual concert! I hope that you find all stages of that process as fulfilling as I do.

The pandemic did unfortunately continue to dog our efforts, even as the choir returned to a regular programme of rehearsals and concerts, and choir numbers remained rather small for some time. Attendance also became less reliable as people took time out through illness and/or isolation. Finally, of course, there was the continuing risk of exposure to the virus in larger gatherings of people, and no doubt a number of choir members were unwilling

to return on a regular basis until conditions were more reliably safe. It is gratifying that we are now seeing the return of some long-standing stalwarts of the choir, and our numbers are now being swelled by the welcome arrival of some new members. Long may this trend continue!

It is a privilege for me to be able to work with the responsive and committed group of people who make up the Sheffield Bach Choir, and to have the opportunity to get my hands (literally!) on the wonderful repertoire you perform. My thanks must also go to Ruth, who provides such imperturbably solid and reliable support each week, and to the members of the committee, with whom I have been in regular dialogue throughout the year. Needless to say, the calibre of the soloists and instrumentalists who join us in making music is absolutely extraordinary. In that spirit I look forward with immense pleasure to our forthcoming concert with Derek Grover and the Fine Arts Brass Quintet.

*George Nicholson*  
Conductor

Minutes signed: ..... (Chairman - Mr C Walker)      Date: .....

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