

AGM - 21 May 2019

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

We have heard from Laurence's report this evening about the success, from a performance point of view, of our two concerts staged in the past year. I would like to say thank you to Laurence for his key role in another memorable and hugely enjoyable singing year. Our financial report confirmed that we ended the 2018/19 year with a strong cash position to carry into the new year. However, when looking back at what we can consider to be a highly successful year overall, it was, as one might expect, made up of highs and lows.

In particular the first half of the year had its successes and its disappointments. We began the year on a high when Jilly Rumble announced that an application for a grant towards our Staging Project we had made to the Truemark Trust, was successful. Indeed, successful to the extent that the £3,000 we were awarded, was more than we had actually asked for. This meant that we were able to complete the project, purchasing the chairs as planned but acquiring the trailer to store and transport the staging components in, earlier than anticipated. In total Jilly raised just over £10,000 as the project's Fund Raiser. We owe her a huge thank you. Jilly without your efforts the project would still be work in progress. On the subject of staging, the member who was actually the design and technical brains behind making this a practically achievable project was the man I always refer to as our Staging Guru, Julian. I daren't think of the number of hours of his time he put in on this project for us. Thank You Julian.

During the autumn term however, the income from our normal main sources i.e. member subscriptions and concert ticket sales were lower than we had hoped. Our November Concert, consisting of music, including the Durufle' Requiem, and poetry chosen to commemorate the centenary of the end of WWI, whilst receiving many plaudits from those who were there on the night, particularly representatives from SAAFA and the British Royal Legion, attracted neither a high number of members to sing or a large audience to listen. Though, given the many concerts, services and other events that were taking place locally at that time to commemorate the centenary, our numbers were, in retrospect, probably understandable.

In addition, two events we organised at members' suggestion - our two Summer Sing Saturdays and a Quiz, whilst both making money, did not attract the number of members we had planned for. I must thank Ann Holland for organising the quiz which for those who came was a hugely enjoyable evening. One I think that we must repeat on a regular basis, hopefully with more members attending in future.

So, by the end of the Autumn term we were considerably behind our budget target.

In contrast the spring term more than made up for the weak start to the year. A blitz on flier distribution and publicity in local publications over Christmas about our SMP concert, helped to ensure we were joined by a number of new and returning members. Secondly Jilly, having completed her roll in raising grants for the staging project earlier, stepped up and again worked her magic, raising revenue from programme advertising, adding the significant amount of £658 to our income from that source. And thirdly, I think our publicity team, in particular, and many members, generally, performed brilliantly in getting the message out to the punters and pushing ticket sales. 223 tickets sold meant we really did have a full house at St John's. As a result, we exceeded our budget figure in all these areas of income and ensured the strong cash position we enter the new financial year with.

During the past year we have tried to keep a high WCS profile in Wellington Town and the surrounding area in order to reach out to as wide a potential member and audience base as possible. This has included placing regular articles in The Wellington Weekly and The Edge, inviting the Mayor and his party to our concerts, attending functions representing the society (Spring fete in the park, Christmas at the Wellesley and various functions at the invitation of the Mayor during the course of a year).

This proved to be of particular importance when applying for grants, both from the local council and further afield, and when searching for local advertisers for our concert programmes. We built up an excellent group of advertisers for our SMP concert and hopefully for the future. We were delighted that our Patron Liz Watts came along to join us for the concert to help with this exercise.

This being my last evening as Chair of WCS I will leave my successor and his supporting team to consider what the future will hold. However, I continue to believe that to bring in new members, particularly younger ones, we must find ways to make our society more approachable to those in the local community who enjoy music and, in particular singing, but might view what we sing as difficult and perhaps see those who sing it as elitist. I am delighted that the agenda for tonight's meeting includes the topic of engaging younger members in singing.

As this is the last opportunity I will have I cannot end without thanking a number of individuals for their help in the past year. I have already mentioned the Treasury role but also, of course, we have seen a change, in our Secretary very recently and I thank Lucy who has taken on the role on an interim basis. Sue, our former secretary isn't here tonight, of course, but I must put on record my thanks to her for the highly efficient work she did for us generally and particularly in ensuring that our society has the necessary systems and documentation in position to ensure our governance and compliance with current regulations. I would also like to thank the two committee members who are leaving their roles tonight. Malcolm who has masterminded the very successful publicity campaigns we ran this year and Hilary who has been responsible over recent years for our always up to date website, our highly informative concert programmes and the design of our eye catching posters.

My thanks also to those Trustees who are staying on in their positions- Rosemary (Concert Secretary) who was pivotal in ensuring the smooth running of the arrangements for the SMP. And Ann as Publicity Assistant. Also, Kate who continues as our Librarian, Liz our Newsletter editor and Michaela our Minutes Secretary.

And finally, my thanks to those members who have given their help when needed:- during the term with the coffee rota and providing cakes and refreshments when required and our 4 voice reps Fiona, Miranda, Ray and Chris for being available to help make new and returning members feel welcome. I must also say that the help we received from members at the time of the SMP Concert, setting up the staging and the church before the concert, assisting on the day with catering for the orchestra and in-house work on the night, were all pivotal to the smooth running and success of an unusually complex concert. And the number of you who stayed behind after the concert to help, made sure that we had the staging down and packed in its trailer and St John's returned to its normal state in record time. Those of you who were involved in all these activities made all the difference. Inevitably, there will be individuals or items I have missed out but please put that down to a failing memory rather than ingratitude. Thank you all.