

Chairperson's Report 2024 – 2025

It has been another good year for the Dumfries Choral with a larger number attending practices at the Bridge than in previous years. The season opened on 19th August with the AGM and 46 attended. There were 63 choir members in total and we had 8 new members make an appearance. We actually had 9 tenors on some occasions – they are normally on the endangered species list! Geoff Creamer tendered his resignation as Chair and Stephen Raikes stepped back from being Treasurer but we were immensely grateful to David Lennon who agreed to become treasurer in Stephen's place. Ana Price (Secretary) Jill Asher (Librarian) Michael Clark (Friends/Patrons Secretary), Alison Robertson, Kathryn Logan and Katie MacMillan and myself (as concert secretary) were all unopposed and re-elected to the committee. A nomination of myself for Chairperson was proposed at the AGM by Emma Munday and seconded by Christine Guthrie and ratified by the committee on 2nd September (proposed Ana Price Seconded K Logan). Given the difficulty of compliance to the charity regulations without a chairperson, we needed this urgent resolution.

Katie MacM and Michael C are due to step down this year but I hope can be persuaded to be re-elected. We need more to join the committee because it makes the duties less time consuming when they are shared, so please suggest a friend you could nominate. We now have our committee meetings on choir nights which makes attendance easier and more business-like and efficient. Here I have to say that Ana P does a splendid job of taking minutes and e-mailing everyone, and works hard every concert to ensure refreshments and gifts are on hand. All the committee are great at helping out. And my grateful thanks to Geoff, Lesley, Daveen and others who help set up the concerts and to the kind choir members who help with refreshments. Another big vote of thanks goes to Christine Guthrie who tirelessly created and tweaked posters and programmes for our concerts. We are very grateful to Eileen Cowie for organising the tickets every concert. We are thankful to Christine Dudgeon, who has kept us right about the website and organises photos for us. Katie MacMillan has kept our Facebook presence active and we are grateful that our honorary president Barbara Kelly has been so enthusiastic and involved. A special thanks goes to Alan Price who regularly does front-of-house. We always need more than one to take/sell tickets and programmes so please suggest supporters who could do this.

We must pay tribute to our top-class accompanist Kate Durran who has coped with some very difficult scores this year, and didn't take time off even when injury struck. Thank you Kate.

Another year with Jamie Brand our director has been fun, he has challenged us and teased us to get better music out of us and it is working.

The first concert was 16th November when we took a musical journey round the British Isles in (approx.) 80 minutes. Trickiest was the Vaughan-Williams' "Towards an unknown region" representing England, which took a lot of dogged rehearsal but produced a really good result. Charles V. Stanford (of Irish origin) wrote "Songs of the sea" which represented Ireland. This was greatly enhanced by our Baritone soloist Colin Murray. In the second half the Welsh offering was 3 choral songs (Daffodils, The Golden Wheat and Ash Grove) to which Colin Murray added solos of "All through the night" and "Men of Harlech". Finally, Ken Johnston's arrangement of 5 songs relating to Bonnie Prince Charlie "I landed with seven men" was narrated by our soloist. I really enjoyed this refashioning of familiar tunes, and I think the audience appreciated it too.

Once again we arranged to sing carols at the entrance to Tesco (Cuckoobridge) and Morrisons on the 14th December and were pleased with the public's generosity for this year's cause: Alzheimer Scotland.

Our Christmas concert was rescheduled to Monday night 23rd December and it seemed to draw a better audience as schools were closed, and the main shopping panic was probably over. We were delighted to have Lorna Anderson (Soprano) but our programme featured that well-kent face, Robert Lind as Bass. The problem was that he came down with a heavy cold and we were amazed to have Geoffrey Davidson stand in for him at very short notice. Geoff had directed our choir in past years and he had assumed he was now retired until I phoned him up! However, he performed wonderfully as King Wenceslas to Lorna's Page in Bob Chilcott's re-imagining of the "Wenceslas" carol. We sang carols by Holst, Head and Rutter and community hymns also and had the benefit of Kate Durran on the piano and John Turner on the organ. More money was collected for Alzheimer Scotland who received a cheque for £900 from us.

Our concert on 15th March this year was Elgar's "Music Makers" and "A Sprig of Thyme" folk song arrangements by John Rutter. We added Chilcott's "Like a singing bird" and another Ken Johnston arrangement both featuring Burns songs. Lynn Bellamy was our Mezzo-soprano and performed beautifully throughout.

I have to thank all the committee for all their work and support and it has been such a reassurance to have the steady head and hand that Ana brings to choral affairs, and the sterling efforts of David Lennon as treasurer. His voice will be just as big a loss to the choir as his financial skills.

I liked having nominal reps for each vocal section who not just noted their section's attendances but also fed back problems to the committee and advised on future planning. So my thanks to Douglas Dawson, Margaret Newlands, Alastair Brown and Daveen Morton. Please make suggestions to them on how we can improve the choir and use rehearsals better.

We must thank the Bridge and Max West for our rehearsal space and Dumfries Music society for allowing us access to the piano at the bridge and we continue to help with the costs of tuning it. Thanks to Donald Henry who helps tune the piano at St John's. We need to thank both Merlin office supplies for ticket production and Mac at Solway Print who produces our colourful posters and programmes. We are also grateful to St John's church for giving us their facilities and we realise that other venues are so much more expensive and much less convenient. While on the subject of concerts I think we have to accept that the choir has a more balanced form and a better understanding with the organ when we are behind the screen and this will be important when concerts are led from the organ.

Also on 28th February several of the DCS joined in the Rotary quiz but I am sorry to say the Bases were knocked off the top podium, but all the members enjoyed it and there was no disgrace incurred or ruination of the reputation of our choir. Perhaps more classical music questions would have given all the DCS teams a better chance!

And now to the future. The "100 club" still seems to fulfil a purpose and generate that little bit of extra income with an understanding that we only get extra when more than 70 are signed up for it. Happily, this past year 86 did sign up. Our weekly raffle has also eased the money worries and has generated £578.26 this year. Do let your reps know whether chocs and alcohol should be substituted with other prizes and whether, as I propose, we keep the raffle and the "100 club" going.

Our concert dates this coming year are Saturday 22nd November at St John's 7.30pm: Handel's Messiah with Lorna Anderson(S), Euan Macdonald(T), Paul Grant (B) and Parker Millsbaugh (Mezzo) with John Turner on the organ. My slight disappointment for us is that Lynn Bellamy cannot sing. But I am happy to report she expects a child in November. I hope there will be the joy of another future musician in Scotland's population!

The Christmas concert we hope to perform on Monday 22nd December. I hope we can still do a few hours of carol singing in public and can we get suggestions passed on to reps or the committee for what charity we support this year?

Our Easter concert will be on 21st March at St John's and will feature Schubert's "Stabat Mater" and Howard Goodall's "Eternal Light" but we have no confirmed soloists as yet.

Because our accompanist is hard at work at the Conservatoire on Saturdays we can no longer plan Saturday workshops to give us a solid session of extra rehearsal so it is up to all members to try to practice a bit more on their own so that Jamie can see we are making progress.

I am hoping that for the Christmas concert we will have the committee in place to manage the accounts and use a card reader both to purchase tickets in this increasingly cash-less society.

Thank you all for your support over the year and I hope you have an enjoyable and musical year.

Alastair Rigg.