

The Amersham Festival Society

Chairman's report AGM 2023

Taking over as Chairman of an organisation after one's predecessor has done a superb job during the previous ten years is a daunting proposition. I needn't have worried, though! We owe Jane Partridge a considerable debt of gratitude for all she has done for us, and with her usual calm efficiency she ensured that the transition could not have been smoother – at least from my perspective.

Indeed, from almost all perspectives the past year has been a very successful one for the Amersham Festival Society.

As Artistic Director, Iain is reporting on the varied programme of music that we experienced both in the Autumn / Winter series of concerts and during the Amersham Festival in April: music of the highest quality that I enjoyed immensely. A number of our concerts sold out – something almost unprecedented in recent times – and running two performances of the traditional New Year Italian Concertos meant that, in total, more people attended than would have been able to fit into St Mary's for a single performance. We have a loyal and appreciative clientele, which, in turn is greatly appreciated both by our wonderful orchestra and by the distinguished visiting musicians who perform for us.

At each concert, many in our audience are members of our Friends scheme and I am pleased to say we have been able to welcome many new Friends during the past year. Friends numbers continue to exceed 100, and the Friends scheme provides an extremely valuable underpinning to both audiences and finances; the support of our Friends is crucial to us. As I have mentioned previously, we are examining changes to the Friends scheme. We expect to have more news about this in the coming months.

Similarly, I would like to pay tribute to our sponsors, whose continuing support for the Festival allows us to put on events that might otherwise be beyond us; we are very grateful.

To audiences and Friends it probably seems that after all the disruption of Covid, life for the Festival has returned pretty much to normal. The reality is rather different. Behind the scenes, a lot has been happening. Last year we appointed two capable and energetic new trustees – Claire Jenkin and Nick Kirkbride – and a third, Hilary McCann, recently joined our Committee. We also appointed an Event Manager, Pam Edkins (who has now moved on to another challenge) whose support in the year in which she was with us was invaluable. Emma Strudwick, who has worked with us for a while, has now expanded the scope of her role to include Event Management and other administrative tasks. Our aim has been to create an organisation that works efficiently in support of our musical offerings and we are well-advanced in doing so. That sounds awfully like something that a management

consultant might say – and that’s not a coincidence! Fortunately we’ve been able to undertake much of this work in-house.

For charities such as ours, attracting and retaining volunteers is crucial. We have a loyal group of people who work “front-of-house” at concerts and behind the scenes: running the Box Office, dealing with publicity, maintaining and updating our website, paying the bills, catering, and other tasks too numerous to mention. They all deserve all our thanks ... .. but we always need more of them!

Costs are becoming an issue for all charities. It’s not just about the effects of inflation. Charities are finding that they now have to pay for services for which people would previously volunteer or accept a modest honorarium. We ourselves try our best to channel as much of our income as possible into directly into our music, but as you will see from our Treasurer’s Report, it is becoming more of an effort. I am pleased that despite the cost pressures we continue to be able to provide bursaries for young local musicians; they are the future of music and supporting them is a core part of our charitable aims.

Finances apart, though, for me this has been an immensely encouraging first year as Chairman. We have a strong sense of how we want to achieve our charitable aims musically, and we have a first-class team of people to help our musicians in doing that. Long may that last!

Jonathan Pegler