



Report of the Trustees 2022-23 Season

1 INTRODUCTION

This report covers the period 1st September 2022 to 31st August 2023. In all its actions, the Board operates under the aegis of the Constitution and the Procedure Rules, both of which are available in the member area on the Chorale's website at www.mkchorale.org.uk.

2 MEMBERSHIP AND CONCERT PARTICIPATION

The season began with 91 registered members. In the course of the season, seven new members joined and 18 left. Membership peaked at 94 and fell to 80 at the end of the season. A number of people who remained on the register of members during part or all of the season did not in fact pay any fees. The Board has operated a permissive policy on this issue, recognising the range of difficulties that members may face in participating and in paying fees. Consequently, actual active membership has tended to be overstated in the course of the season.

The number of members by voice section at the end of the season is shown below in Table 1. This follows a rigorous check by the Membership Secretary of the position of people who had not participated in concerts and/or failed to pay their fees. A small number of people did not respond to requests for information, so were deemed to have left. For comparison we also give the number of members at the end of the preceding two seasons and at the end of 2018-19, the last full season before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 1 Membership by voice section, at the end of each season

	2018-19	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Soprano 1	21	20	17	16
Soprano 2	20	18	17	12
Alto 1	17	18	20	17
Alto 2	10	7	12	12
Tenor 1	5	6	7	7
Tenor 2	3	3	5	5
Bass 1	9	7	6	5
Bass 2	8	6	7	6
Total	93	85	91	80

Note: this table was amended following the AGM on October 17th 2023, to correct an error identified at the meeting.

The Membership Secretary asks leavers, where possible, for their reasons for leaving. Not all departing members respond to these enquiries. Over the season, these reasons included:

- moving away from the area;
- increased pressure of work;
- a move to a new job;
- poor health;
- family commitments;
- singing elsewhere (one member).

No one said that they left the choir because they were dissatisfied with their experience as a member, or because they could not afford the subscription fee.

The number of members, by voice section, performing in the four concerts covered by this report are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Concert participation by members, by voice section

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight 19th Nov 2022</i>	<i>Christmas with the Chorale 17th Dec 2022</i>	<i>St John Passion 26th Mar 2023</i>	<i>Songs of Love 1st July 2023</i>	<i>Overall participation rate</i>
Soprano 1	8	9	9	9	53%
Soprano 2	10	9	8	8	51%
Alto 1	14	10	12	11	63%
Alto 2	9	7	9	5	55%
Tenor 1	5	3	5	4	61%
Tenor 2	3	3	2	2	59%
Bass 1	2	0	3	3	35%
Bass 2	5	5	5	5	77%
Total	56	46	53	47	56%

An overall concert participation rate for the season has been calculated and is shown in the rightmost column. This is the actual number of 'sings', divided by the maximum possible 'sings'. For example, in the Soprano 1 section there were 8 + 9 + 9 + 9 = 35 'sings'. The number of section members was 17 up to Christmas, then 16 for the rest of the season, so the maximum possible 'sings' was 17 + 17 + 16 + 16 = 66. Thus the overall section participation rate was 35/66 = 53%.

This year, for the first time, we have also looked at how many concerts each member sang in during the season. There were 76 people who were fee-paying members for the full season. Table 3 shows the number of members who sang in none, one, two, three or all of the four concerts. For example, the bottom row shows that 23 members sang in all four concerts, and this represents 30% of those who were members for the whole season who paid their full fee.

It is disappointing that only just over half of members sing in any given concert, as Table 2 shows, and that less than six in ten sing in all concerts or miss only one, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Number of concerts in which members performed

<i>Number of concerts performed</i>	<i>Number of members</i>	<i>Percentage of full season fee-paying members</i>
0	7	9%
1	9	12%
2	15	20%
3	22	29%
4	23	30%

To understand why so many members do not sing in concerts, we ask for information about their reasons in post-concert surveys. Our understanding is limited by the relatively low return rate – 61% for the season as a whole – from members who do not sing. However, the actual return rate is likely to be higher, given that the survey is sent to all members who did not sing, and we know that some of them were not, in practice, active members.

The most frequently quoted reasons for not singing are:

- other planned commitments (30% of all respondents);
- unable to attend enough rehearsals (31%);
- ill health (28%).

10% of respondents said they did not sing because they did not like the music. Being forced to withdraw at short notice was rare (4%), as were issues with the venue (3%), concern about Covid (4%), and finding the music too difficult (3%). More detail on the survey results is given in Section 3 below.

We also asked all members, regardless of whether or not they sang in a concert, to respond to the statement: ‘Overall, I enjoyed rehearsing for this concert’ on a five point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Table 4 compares enjoyment of rehearsals for those who did and did not sing in the three main concerts of the season.

Table 4 Percentage of performing and non-performing survey respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘Overall, I enjoyed rehearsing for this concert.’

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight 19th November 2022</i>	<i>JS Bach: St John Passion 26th March 2023</i>	<i>Songs of Love 1st July 2023</i>
Performers	82%	79%	74%
Non-performers	90%	53%	74%

We cannot conclude from Table 4 that enjoyment of rehearsals is a factor influencing concert participation. For one concert, a larger proportion of non-performers enjoyed rehearsals than did performers; in another the opposite was the case, and in the third, there was no difference between the groups.

The Board is concerned at the number of members who did not sing because of other planned commitments. We recognise that some of these are unavoidable, but we ask that members recognise that being a member carries with it an expectation of concert participation. Concert dates are generally published two years ahead. The current formal expectation, enshrined in the *Code of Conduct*, is that members should sing in at least one concert per season (Paragraph 27). We believe that, in the light of these results, this needs to be strengthened, and that members should be expected to sing in at least two of the four concerts per year. This standard was met by nearly 80% of members in 2022-23. A separate resolution will be submitted to the AGM on this matter, along with other proposed revisions to the *Code of Conduct*.

3 EVENTS

Five planned events - four concerts and a choral workshop - took place during the season. In addition, the choir sang at the third annual Milton Keynes Choirs Festival. Two open rehearsals were held.

3.1 COUNTERPOINT BY CANDLELIGHT

19th November 2022, St Peter & St Paul, Newport Pagnell
Alex Aitken, piano and organ

Palestrina: Kyrie from Missa Aeterna Christi Munera
Tallis: If ye love me and Why fum'th in fight
Farrant: Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake
Byrd: Bow thine ear, O Lord, Ave Verum Corpus, and Agnus Dei from Mass for Four Voices
Tomkins: When David heard
Purcell: Hear my prayer, O Lord
Mendelssohn, Verleih uns Frieden
Brahms, Geistliches Lied
Bach: Donna Nobis Pacem from Mass in B Minor

Estimated audience size: 190

Financial outturn: Exceeded target: surplus of £652, against a target deficit of £1,440.

The performance of the music in this concert was supplemented by explanations of the structure and history of counterpoint by the Musical Director. The atmosphere was enhanced by electric candle lights along the nave to either side of the audience and large oil candles on either side of the performance area. Audience response to the music and the 'guided tour of counterpoint' was very positive, including:

Thank you for an amazing concert - one of the best I have been to, beautifully put together with great explanations and gorgeous organ playing. The singing was superb.

We both really enjoyed the performance last night. Beautiful music, singing and wasn't Alex fabulous? I also really benefitted from the explanations. The music itself was sublime and my untrained ear doesn't really pick up on eek moments. My partner was familiar with some of the music and the composers, I had heard of a couple of them! For me, the talks helped to explain the historical context and what I was about to hear and it was all at just the right level.

The concert was the first in which we attempted to live-stream the performance to enable members of the families of those singing to join the event, who would not otherwise have been able to attend. The technical set-up was complex and fragile and the chosen software – Zoom – not entirely well-suited to the purpose. However the stream did provide access to people who could not have attended in person and demonstrated that, in principle, live streaming is possible.

Despite this, the Board has decided not to pursue live streaming as a general practice. Live streaming presents significant rights issues. There are increased charges to consider for professionals performing in concerts and for composers and arrangers of the music performed. To introduce live streaming as a routine practice, we would have to invest in dedicated hardware and software, and have technical volunteers present throughout the performance to ensure quality of service. A number of venues that we use do not have stable wi-fi in the performance area, and mobile networks are not a dependable transmission mechanism inside venues. However, the future use of low quality live streaming in special circumstances for family members is not ruled out.

Whilst St Peter & St Paul, Newport Pagnell is a wonderful venue in many ways, the poor heating is a significant disadvantage, and was the subject of comment from some audience members. The Board will continue to avoid using this venue in Autumn and Winter where possible until its programme of improvements, which includes a new heating system, is complete.

3.2 CHRISTMAS WITH THE CHORALE

*17th December 2022, St Peter & St Paul, Olney
Alex Aitken, piano and organ*

*Estimated audience size: 180
Financial outturn: Exceeded target: surplus of £688, against a target surplus of £500.*

This was our first Christmas concert since December 2019 (the 2021 Christmas concert was cancelled at short notice with the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19). It was a delight to have a large church practically full for what the

Musical Director later described as the best Christmas concert in his tenure. The concert marked the end of our second Choral Conducting Scholar, Lily Platt's term with us.

3.3 COME & SING: MENDELSSOHN'S ELIJAH

28th January 2023, Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes
 Alex Aitken, piano

Mendelssohn: Elijah

Participants: 82, of whom 53 were not Chorale members, including members of at least 14 other choirs.

Financial outturn: Exceeded target: surplus of £1,068, against a target surplus of £1,000.

Feedback was very positive. 45 participants returned the feedback survey, a return rate of 55%. Summary responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Feedback on Come & Sing: Mendelssohn's Elijah

	1 (Strongly disagree)	2	3	4	5 (Strongly agree)
I enjoyed the day.	0	0	0	4	41
I am likely to attend a future Chorale singing day.	0	0	1	5	39

Attendees were asked what they particularly enjoyed about the day. Typical responses included:

- Everything. Seeing old friends. The humour of Mark and Alex. Informality. Fab cake. Laughter.*
- Enjoyable, fun, very good quality musicians. Well organised.*
- Good choice of music for the occasion. Great organisation.*
- Singing with Mark – he's very inspiring and great fun (and very musically knowledgeable of course!)*
- Alex's playing! and obviously the singing.*
- Nice friendly atmosphere. Lots of attendees makes it feel fun and welcoming.*
- Excellent teaching, atmosphere, music. All of it.*

We also asked what could have been done better. The only recurring comments were about the heating (6 comments) and the difficulty hearing the conductor and other sections (3 comments).

3.4 BACH: ST JOHN PASSION

26th March 2023, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Musical & Amicable Society

Charlotte Kennedy, Soprano

Katey Rylands, Mezzo-Soprano

Sam Harris, Tenor

Daniel Barrett, Bass

Sam Hird, Bass

JS Bach: St John Passion

Estimated audience size: 140

Financial outturn: Exceeded target: deficit of £3,060, against a target deficit of £3,600.

This concert was the first in which the choir has benefitted from a grant from the Josephine Baker Trust - a charity dedicated to supporting early career professional singers. It offers grants to individuals studying vocal music at The Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music by paying part of their performance fees at concerts. Both the individual soloists and the body organising the concert must be approved by the trust for the purpose. Approval of the choir by the Trust is a valuable badge of quality, and meant that 50% of the soloist fees were funded by the Trust.

Audience response was very positive. We were particularly fortunate to have the following reaction from an experienced choral musical director:

It was a wonderful, wonderful performance. The chorus was performing at a level not routinely expected of amateur choirs in England; I cannot imagine the hours of work which went into last night's performance, and having heard the St John Passion numerous times I found MK Chorale's sensitive singing of the piece fully equal to these renditions of it. To have been able (with those such very young soloists!) —at that stage of the piece— to still add the necessary conviction, solemnity, and devotional feeling to the 'Ruht wohl, Ihr heiligen Gebeine' chorus was truly wonderful to experience, and was a huge tribute to their (and the soloists, and the instruments) hard work.

3.5 MILTON KEYNES CHOIRS FESTIVAL

17th June 2023, Campbell Park, Central Milton Keynes

Alex Aitken and Stephen Meakins, Piano

Daley: Upon Your Heart

Lauridsen: Sure on this Shining Night

Whitacre: Five Hebrew Love Songs, No 2

Brahms: Liebeslieder Waltzes (selection)

25 members of the choir joined 16 other local choirs and two guest choirs from London and Birmingham for a day of choral music in the open air – the third such festival to be held.

This year's Festival was notable for a performance of one of the songs from *Forever!*, a new piece with music by Roderick Williams and words by Rommi Smith. The work was commissioned by The Stables and the Cowper and Newton Museum to mark the 250th anniversary of the writing of the hymn *Amazing Grace* by John Newton who was a curate at St Peter & St Paul, Olney. All participating choirs were invited to sing the piece, with the aim of 250 singers certainly achieved.

A deposit of £100 per choir is charged to participate in the Festival, which is refunded subject to sufficient donations from members of the public from the bucket collection during the day. As last year, choir deposits were fully refunded.

The low number of members who sang in the festival is of concern to the Board. For future years, we have decided to establish the number intending to sing, and only participate if at least a sufficient number commit to taking part. We will also no longer depend exclusively on the programme for the Summer concert for music for the Festival; a dedicated Festival repertoire will be chosen for rehearsal in the Spring and Summer terms.

3.6 SONGS OF LOVE

1st July 2023, St Mary & St Giles, Stony Stratford

Alex Aitken, piano and organ

Stephen Meakins, piano

Anna Holmes, violin

Brahms: Liebeslieder Waltzes

Whitacre: Five Hebrew Love Songs

Franck: Violin Sonata, final movement, allegretto poco mosso

Ireland: Greater Love Hath No Man

Daley: Upon Your Heart

Lauridsen: Sure on this Shining Night

Estimated audience size: 130

Financial outturn: Exceeded target: deficit of £332, against a target deficit of £1,440.

This was the first concert in which our new Choral Conducting Fellow, Felix Dickenson conducted, leading the choir in John Ireland's *Greater Love Hath No Man*.

Audience feedback was collected from feedback forms placed on chairs. As expected, the return rate was low, at 14 respondents. All rated the choir's performance as good or excellent, and all said that they would be likely or very likely to attend another MK Chorale concert.

3.7 OPEN REHEARSALS

4th October 2022 and 7th February 2023, Christ the Cornerstone

No-one attended the first open rehearsal; two guests attended the second open rehearsal. Neither subsequently joined the choir. The Board is taking steps to improve advertising of open rehearsals, particularly through social media.

3.8 POST-CONCERT FEEDBACK

This was the second season for which we conducted post-concert feedback surveys for all concerts, except at Christmas. Two surveys were issued for each concert: one to members who sang in the concert, and one to members who did not sing. The surveys asked members to respond to a set of statements about rehearsals, the performance, the venue and the organisation of the concert using a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Members were also invited to provide written comments on the concert. The survey to members who did not sing was primarily designed to understand the reasons why they did not participate, as discussed earlier in this report.

FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS WHO SANG IN CONCERTS

Table 6 shows the quantitative feedback for the three concerts. The weighted average response rate was 78%, giving good grounds for confidence in the validity of the results. There is strong evidence that members were generally satisfied with the music chosen, the concert venues for the season, and the practical organisation of the events. By the performance nine in ten members, on average, felt confident with their part. Members generally enjoyed performing, and felt that the concerts had helped their development as singers.

Table 6 Members who sang: percentage of survey respondents who responded to survey items with 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight</i>	<i>St John Passion</i>	<i>Songs of Love</i>	<i>Weighted average, this season</i>	<i>Weighted average, last season</i>
Number of singers	56	53	47		
Number of respondents	45	42	35		
Overall, I liked the music chosen for this concert	87%	88%	77%	84%	94%
When rehearsals started, the part felt within my ability	78%	55%	80%	71%	79%
By the performance, I felt confident with my part	89%	88%	91%	89%	94%
Overall, I enjoyed rehearsing for this concert	82%	79%	74%	79%	93%
Overall, I enjoyed performing on the day	84%	98%	89%	90%	97%

(table continued overleaf)

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight</i>	<i>St John Passion</i>	<i>Songs of Love</i>	<i>Weighted average, this season</i>	<i>Weighted average, last season</i>
As well as knowing the notes and rhythms, I felt able to put detail into my performance	91%	71%	86%	83%	94%
Rehearsing and singing in this concert helped me extend my musical skills	78%	82%	77%	79%	81%
Overall, the venue worked well for this concert.	78%	88%	80%	82%	82%
Overall, the practical organisation of the concert and the rehearsal on the concert day was effective.	87%	86%	94%	89%	87%

FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS WHO DID NOT SING IN CONCERTS

Table 7 shows the distribution of responses to being asked to identify all reasons for the not singing. The response rate from members who did not sing was lower, with a weighted average of 61%, so there is a greater risk of bias in the findings compared to the surveys of members who did sing in concerts.

The most prominent reasons for not singing concerned other commitments on performance day and being unable to attend enough rehearsals, followed by ill health. Concern about the risk of Covid-19 largely disappeared. Reasons connected to the chosen music and the venue were cited by very few members.

Table 7 Members who did not sing: percentage of survey respondents who identified reasons for not singing.

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight</i>	<i>St John Passion</i>	<i>Songs of Love</i>	<i>Weighted average, this season</i>	<i>Weighted average, last season</i>
Number of members not singing	35	35	40		
Number of respondents	21	20	26		
I was unwell.	29%	35%	15%	25%	30%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at rehearsals	0%	15%	0%	4%	27%
I was concerned about the Covid risk at the performance	0%	15%	4%	6%	19%
I had another planned commitment on the concert day.	14%	25%	50%	31%	20%
I was not able to attend enough rehearsals.	48%	10%	38%	33%	18%
The venue did not work for me.	10%	5%	0%	5%	8%
A change of circumstances meant I had to pull out at short notice.	5%	0%	8%	5%	7%

(table continued overleaf)

	<i>Counterpoint by Candlelight</i>	<i>St John Passion</i>	<i>Songs of Love</i>	<i>Weighted average, this season</i>	<i>Weighted average, last season</i>
I didn't like the music.	5%	20%	8%	11%	5%
I found the music too difficult to sing.	0%	10%	4%	5%	4%
Other	29%	30%	23%	27%	18%

The Board has decided to include the Christmas concert in the set of post-concert surveys for the 2023-24 season.

4 THE WORK OF THE BOARD

The Board met formally on five occasions during the year: 22nd September, 25th November, 2nd March, 18th May and 29th June. In between meetings, Board members were very regularly in contact through email, WhatsApp, telephone, and face-to-face at rehearsals.

At the beginning of the season, Christine Dickens resigned from the Board. We are very grateful for Christine's service as a trustee and, in particular, as Concerts Manager over a number of years. Following election at the 2022 AGM, the Board welcomed Jacky Holloway as a trustee.

The bulk of the Board's work was devoted, as normal, to the planning and organisation of the season's events and the planning of events for future seasons, particularly our 50th Anniversary Season beginning in September 2024.

4.1 MARKETING

There were three significant developments in marketing during the year:

1. Most importantly, we were able to make significant progress in improving our social media presence. The Board approved proposals to make better use of Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram with the aims of increasing audience size, and recruiting new members, particularly younger people and tenors and basses. Expenditure was approved to engage a free-lance social media marketer, Amy Undrell, for two hours per week whose role is to post regularly to the approved platforms on a wide range of topics relevant to the target audiences, always ensuring that the content supports the character and objectives of the choir. The impact of the increased activity will be monitored to ensure value for money.

As an initial test of impact, we asked members at the end of the surveys following the summer concert whether they had noticed any change in the choir's social media presence. Just under half of respondents said that they used social media, the great majority to read content, rather than to post. The great majority of respondents who use social media said they saw posts about

the choir often or sometimes. Over 80% of them had noticed a recent increase in the number of posts about the choir.

2. We were able to plan for the re-introduction of a season brochure. The 2023-24 season was the first season for which this was viable following the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. Work is under way to design a new Friends of MK Chorale scheme, for potential introduction in 2024. The aims of a Friends scheme include income generation through concert attendance and fundraising, and the provision of opportunities for former and potential members to be involved with our activities.

4.2 REHEARSALS

The Board regularly monitors issues that arise at rehearsals and takes action to improve member experience where possible. This year:

1. There were problems with the quality of lighting at some rehearsals. These have been largely rectified by a programme over the summer to replace all lights with LEDs, including zones which have had no lights for many years. In any event, a small number of clip-on lights are brought to each rehearsal in case any member requires them.
2. Rehearsal refreshments have re-started.

4.3 POLICIES

The Board approved:

- A new Complaints Policy, which defines the procedures to be followed in the event of a formal complaint by either a choir member or a member of the public.
- A revised Health and Safety Policy.

The Board also funded refresher training for one First Aider.

4.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Conscious of our community presence and our responsibilities as an organisation, and following fund raising at concerts for Willen Hospice, the Board decided to adopt an annual charity for which we will raise funds through collections at concerts and Christmas carol-singing. Members were invited to nominate local charities for consideration. The agreed short-list was submitted to a vote by members. The successful candidate charity was the Milton Keynes Winter Night Shelter.

The Board was also very pleased to establish a new scheme to provide free entrance to concerts for young musicians receiving music education in Milton Keynes, and members of the Milton Keynes Youth Choir, with an accompanying adult. The scheme also funds copies of scores where feasible. It was promoted to the Youth Choir, Heads of Music Departments in secondary schools and the Milton Keynes Music Hub. A small number of students made use of the scheme during the year, leaving sufficient funds to extend it into the 2023-24 season.

4.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PRIORITY ACTIONS

A1 Develop and implement a plan to recruit more tenors and basses.

The choir currently has 12 tenors and 11 basses, as against 28 sopranos and 29 altos. Over the 2022-23 season, one tenor and one bass joined the choir and one tenors and three basses left. The increase in digital marketing is designed in part to attract more lower voices to the choir. We have not actively sought to attract those who currently sing in other local choirs. Finding more tenors and basses is a challenge that we share with many other choirs.

A2 Review the rules governing participation in rehearsals for those not singing in the immediately forthcoming concert.

The Board wishes to extend the number of rehearsals before the concert reserved for those members who are performing from two to four. This change forms part of the proposed revisions to the *Code of Conduct*.

B1 Make contact with music educators working with young people aged 16-25 across the city to explore the musical opportunities offered by membership of the Chorale.

This action has been implemented in part through the scheme referred to in Section 4.4 above. The Board will continue to pursue this action through other means as well.

C1 Produce free name badges for members.

This action is confirmed for implementation by the Spring term

C4 Review our concert dress and, in consultation with members, choose a style that better reflects our personality and ethos.

This action will be completed in the current season.

D1 Introduce a voice appraisal process designed to enable the MD and AMD to better understand the vocal qualities of members, to reassign members to voice sections where appropriate, and to provide information about the profile of members' singing skills and ability to read music.

Voice appraisals are scheduled for 5th and 6th October.

E1 Introduce an internal concert review process, including invited professional reviewers and opportunities for member and audience feedback.

The summer concert for this season, *Songs of Love*, was the first at which both member and audience feedback was collected systematically. The Board decided not to pursue the use of professional reviewers in view of the difficulties in finding choral professionals who are in a position to attend concerts, given that so many choirs operate a three term year with concerts so often coinciding.

H2 Explore the potential of links to the Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy and with Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance, Milton Keynes Music Hub, Arts Central, Milton Keynes Community Foundation and other relevant local coordinating bodies.

The choir is now a member of the Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance. Trustees have attended and contributed to workshops on the Milton Keynes Creative and Cultural Strategy, which is currently under revision.

J1 Take opportunities to enable members to contribute their time and skills to the management and development of the choir through the design of specific, concrete and time-limited tasks.

A number of existing roles have continued to be undertaken by non-Board members (e.g. refreshments), but, because the season was characterised by re-establishing routine activities there have been fewer opportunities for new tasks than envisaged in the Strategy. However, with our ambitious plans for the 50th Anniversary Season and beyond, establishing short-term groups and projects in which members can be involved will be important.

5 CHORAL CONDUCTING FELLOWSHIP

At the Christmas concert, we said farewell to our second Choral Conducting Scholar, Lily Platts, and, in January, we welcomed our first Choral Conducting Fellow, Felix Dickenson, following a decision to change the title of the position. Felix, who is Recording Studio and Production Co-ordinator at the Royal Academy of Music, is the first person holding the position to be fully funded by the Garrick Club Charitable Trust. Funding for 2023 was confirmed following submission of a report to the Trust on the use of the grant in the first of three years for which we have been granted funds.

6 FUTURE PLANS

6.1 SUBSCRIPTION FEES

To ensure appropriate subscription fees for each season, the Board maintains a financial model which projects future income and expenditure based on a large number of carefully considered assumptions. The overall financial objective is to ensure that reserves are maintained at a minimum of £12,000. As members know, last year it was necessary to raise the standard annual fee from £180 to £220. This, combined with the financial success of last season's events, meant that reserves grew from £14,193 at the start of the 2022-23 season to £18,085 by the end. This gives us a strong basis for our ambitious plans for the 50th Anniversary Season.

Members will see from the agenda for the Annual General Meeting that no increase in subscription fees is proposed this year. We are confident that we can maintain reserves above the policy threshold without an increase this year.

The Board will keep the financial position under regular review over the season, updating the model assumptions as new information on factors such as the inflation rate, the number of members and the financial outturns for events, becomes available. It will not be until the start of next season that the Board will be in a position to assess whether or not to propose a fee increase in 2024-25.

6.2 2023-24 SEASON

The event plans are:

Autumn Concert: Innovation and Invention

Saturday 18th November 2023, 7:30 pm, St Peter & St Paul, Olney

Boulanger: Hymne au Soleil

Gesualdo: O vos omnes

Ešenvalds: Stars

Laura Mvula: Sing to the Moon

Saint-Saëns: Danse Macabre (piano duet)

Bach: Invention (piano)

McDowall: Da Vinci Requiem

Christmas with the Chorale

Saturday 16th December 2023, 5:00 pm, St Martin, Fenny Stratford

Come & Sing

Saturday 27th January 2024, 10:00 am, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius

Open Rehearsals

Tuesday 3rd October 2023, 7:30 pm, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Tuesday 6th February 2024, 7:30 pm, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Spring Concert: War and Peace

Saturday 16th March 2024, 7:30 pm, St Mary & St Giles, Stony Stratford

Haydn: Nelson Mass

Vaughan-Williams: Dona Nobis Pacem

Summer Concert: A Musical Menagerie (family concert for all aged 5+)

Saturday 6th July 2024, Activities from 1:30 pm; music at 2:30 pm, The Venue, Walton High

Horovitz: Captain Noah and His Floating Zoo

Whitacre: Animal Crackers

Rutter: Wind in the Willows

6.3 2024-25: THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

The event plans are:

Autumn concert: 50th Birthday Concert

Saturday 23rd November, 2024, 7:30 pm, St Mary & St Giles, Stony Stratford with Milton Keynes Youth Choir

Britten: St Nicolas (55 mins)

Lauridsen: Lux Aeterna

(Our very first concert was on the 23rd November 1974 at St Mary & St Giles, Stony Stratford with a performance of Britten's *St Nicolas*. This concert takes places 50 years on, to the day.)

Christmas with the Chorale

Saturday 14th December 2024, 5:00 pm, St Mary and St Giles, Stony Stratford

The concert will include John Rutter's Gloria, with additional brass instrumentalists.

Come & Sing with Bob Chilcott

Saturday 25th January 2025, 10:00 am, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Programme to be announced.

Open Rehearsals

Tuesday 1st October 2024, 7:30 pm, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes
Tuesday 11th February 2025, 7:30 pm, Christ the Cornerstone, Central Milton Keynes

Spring Concert: Sacred, Symphonic and Profane

Saturday 15th March 2025, 7:30 pm, St Peter and St Paul, Buckingham
Stravinsky: Symphony of Psalms
Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from West Side Story (piano)
Orff: Carmina Burana or Poulenc: Gloria

Summer concert: under discussion

6.4 2025-26 SEASON

Planning for the 2025-26 season will begin later this Autumn. The concert dates are:

Autumn:	15th November 2025
Christmas:	13th December 2025
Come & Sing:	31st January 2026
Spring:	21st March 2026
Summer:	4th July 2026

Please make a note of these dates in your diaries!

7 THE CHOIR'S STRATEGY

7.1 PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN 2023-24

The Board has selected the following actions for implementation (or continued implementation) in the coming season:

- A1 Develop and implement a plan to recruit more tenors and basses. (The Board will also consider the outcomes of voice appraisals in relation to future recruitment requirements.)
- C3 Introduce a periodic online choir survey that includes questions about how far the choir reflects the personality and ethos to which it aspires.
- I2 Increase our social media presence and use of social media advertising in a sustainable way.
- J1 In implementing this strategy and in other ways, take opportunities to enable members to contribute their time and skills to the management and development of the choir through the design of specific, concrete and time-limited tasks.
- K7 Identify and approach potential sponsors amongst local businesses, in return for programme and banner advertising at events.

7.2 A STRATEGY FOR 2024-27

The Strategy was initially designed to be implemented over the period 2019-2023. Last year, members agreed to an extension of one year to take account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus the strategy ends at the end of the coming season. Action C3 will be implemented as a first step to establishing a new strategy for the period 2024-2027. The Board will give time in the Spring and Summer terms to the development of the new strategy, which will be the subject of consultation with members in the Summer term, leading to submission of the new Strategy for approval by members at the 2024 AGM.

8 AND FINALLY

The Board wishes to thank all choir members, both recently joined and longer-standing, for their continued engagement with the choir, both musically and in other ways.

Particular thanks go to:

Voice Representatives:

Anthea Harper-Burton (Soprano 1)

Trish Browne (Soprano 2)

Sally Jones (Alto 1)

Nicky Moss (Alto 2)

Liz Huxley-Capurro (Tenor)

Adrian Morrow (Bass)

Gill Wood for her continued dedication to the task of acting as the Choir's Librarian, ordering, distributing and returning hired music.

Felicity Head for the task of managing the hire of the Choir's own music library.

Carole Probert for coordinating rehearsal refreshments.

Lily Platts and Felix Dickenson for enhancing our experience of rehearsals.

Stephen Meakins for deputising from time to time as accompanist with great skill.

Sue Dix for raffle organisation.

James Attwood for Front of House support.

Karen Armstrong and her family for running concert refreshments.

Kevin Benson, Tim Dyer, Peter Dyer, David Ollerhead and Graham Pembrey for heavy lifting, fixing and shifting staging.

The trustees remain enormously grateful to our Musical Director, Mark Jordan and Assistant Musical Director, Alex Aitken, not only for their wonderful work together in planning and running rehearsals and concerts, but for their vital contributions to the management and development of the choir through their active and creative participation in Board meetings and other business.

The Trustees

Leah Attwood

Glenys Bloomfield, Membership Secretary

Sarah Dyer, PR and Social Media

Ian Collcott, Internal Communications

Karen Collcott, Health and Safety and Safeguarding

Juliet Gilliland, Secretary

Jacky Holloway

Will Swann, Chair

Ruth Wilkinson, Publicity and Box Office

Anne Wood, Concerts Manager

Cyril Wood, Treasurer

2 October 2023