MERCHANT SINFONIA
Annual Report 2023/4

CHAIR

CHRIS GLEDHILL

Merchant Sinfonia Chairpersons Annual report 2023/24

Introduction

Since our last AGM on 14th November 2023, it has been a busy year and not without several challenges which I will briefly mention later in this report. As a committee we have met formally on 5 occasions and have held several "huddles" prior to rehearsals. As a committee of volunteers who have busy diaries outside of the orchestra, it has proved challenging to diary committee meetings, however with a mixture of face to face and zoom meeting we have been able to work through the annual business programme and deal with the issues that have arisen. Outside of these meetings we have held brief meetings or "huddles" prior to some of our rehearsals. We rely on non-committee members to help such as the distribution of music at rehearsals, marketing/PR and the work done on the inspection of our accounts and balance sheets. I am grateful for all the hard work that the committee has put in this last year and to the many who volunteered to help everything run smoothly.

Glasgow Life

Since the orchestra became independent in 2014, we have been supported by Glasgow Life and its predecessor. This support has resulted in our ongoing use of City Halls for both rehearsal and concerts. This support has proved invaluable in progressing the performances that we have put on at our concerts. I held a meeting earlier in the year with our main contact at Glasgow Life. This was partly to discuss our ongoing relationships and what continued support they would be able to offer us. It was explained that the increasing musical commitments at City Halls may pose a challenge for booking dates for a Christmas concert. This as we subsequently found out and had to seek a different venue for this year Christmas concert.

The support from Glasgow Life is critical to the ongoing success of our orchestra and we are proud to be included in their overall support and commitment and be part of the Glasgow UNESCO City of Music programme. Our many thanks to Tom Dalzell and the staff at Glasgow Life for all their help and continued support.

Treasurer and finance

This year, Rebecca Kay took on the role of treasurer for the orchestra. To support her in this important role, we have established a treasury group to ensure that information is readily available to support her in this key role. Part of the work she has done is to change to on line banking accounts, but this will be covered in her own report. Sufficient to say that she has stepped into this sometimes-demanding role with great ease. Annually one of our volunteers acts as an independent examiner of our accounts and again I must thank Gib Fitzgibbon for his help in reviewing these.

Librarian and music

Our long serving librarian Fiona Kindness regrettably resigned from this role, and we are indebted to all her hard work and the support that she has given since the establishment of the orchestra and from several of our players in the library group who supported her in this. Despite not being a playing member this year, Fiona is helping with the team under the guidance of our deputy chair Bill Gray in support of the library group.

This year we have been able to purchase and hire in some of our music instead of relying on borrowed music or free sources of music. This has been appreciated by the players.

Website and marketing

Some significant changes were made to our website as well as introducing specific emails for committee members. It is also regularly updated by our webmaster.

Marketing is one of the areas that we need to improve. We are grateful to the work of Niall Morris who has as well prepared the posters and programme for our last concert but has also kindly agreed to do likewise for our forthcoming Christmas concert. Unfortunately, due to work commitments Niall Morris, who produced our fabulous posters and programme for our last concert had to resign from the committee.

One of the areas that we looked as what getting a logo for the orchestra. Our social secretary Jenny Kenny held a competition for members to submit their ideas. Several of these were put to the orchestra to vote on and the successful winning entry was by Norman Mills.

Concerts

This last year we were able to host two concerts at City Halls and our grateful thanks to Glasgow Life for making these dates available and providing the staffing and support to ensure all ran smoothly. There is something very special performing in the Grand Hall. Both concerts were well received, and our spring concert was possibly one of the best attended since lockdown, much we believe due to its promotion and marketing. We received many complements on our performances, and we are grateful to our musical director for her patience, support and never-ending enthusiasm shaping our players into concert readiness. Although as an amateur orchestra we do also rely on a few professionals and guest players to support us through each concert.

Playing Membership

We are one of the few orchestras that recruit our playing membership for each session. This last year we have been oversubscribed on both recruitment cycles and have had to use the balloting system to decide who would be invited to join. This gives an opportunity to encourage amateur musicians of all standards, especially late starters former players and less confident orchestral instrument players, to develop their involvement in music. The onerous task for organising the balloting falls to Allison Grant. This is a significant exercise.

Music Director/Conductor

All members put their heart and soul into each rehearsal and under the baton of Louise Martin they develop in both confidence and skill. As our Music Director, Louise continues to seek out a diverse range of music for the orchestra. Her enthusiasm and commitment create a group of musicians able to put on excellent concerts. She will say more in her report.

Governance

One of the areas that we as a committee have focused on is how to respond to changing times. Since the pandemic there has been many challenges facing cultural groups and organisations. As a result of these the committee agreed that we needed to look at change to deal with these. These focussed on several, generally relating to how we run the orchestra. Early in the year a small working group was established to look at the possibility of taking on charitable status. The group looked at this and concluded that although there are several advantages of this, there are also disadvantages and at the current moment there is still work to be done including looking at other options and structures. I am indebted to Peter McLean-Buechel and Anne Richards for their invaluable input into this.

This however has led us back to look at our constitution. This was first approved in 2014 and there has been several tweaks and updates since then. However out of necessity there has been a gradual change in the way the committee has worked which is not now reflected in our current constitution. It is therefore one of the issues we will look at early in the new year.

We also have developed role descriptions for those who hold office on the committee. These lay out the key areas of responsibility. As a group of volunteers and to ensure that work and projects we have set small groups of committee members to support the key roles, including

- Finance via the treasury group
- Adminitration via the secretariat group
- Librarian group

We will prepare as usual our annual work programme for the coming year taking on board the routine management and addressing our ongoing challenges.

Chris Gledhill

Chair Merchant Sinfonia

12th November 2024

Current Committee members (as at November 2024)

Chris Gledhill (horn) – chair; governance (2022-2025)

Bill Gray (clarinet) – vice-chair; website; enrolment team (2022–2025)

Dominique Somers (flute) – secretary (2022-2025)

Allison Grant (cello) – membership secretary; enrolment team (2022-2025, 3rd term)

Jenny Kenny (percussion) – social secretary (2023-2026)

Becka Kay (clarinet) – treasurer (2022-2025)

Anne Richards (percussion)- sections and secretariat group (2022-2025)

Peter McLean-Buechel (viola)- monitoring officer (2022-2025)

CONCERTS PROGRAMS 2023/4

December 2023

NICOLAI – Overture “The Merry Wives of Windsor

STILL, William Grant – Symphony no. 1 “Afro American”; 2nd and 3rd movements

MASCAGNI – Cavalleria Rusticana; Intermezzo

TCHAIKOVSKY – Nutcracker Suite (excerpts)

GORANSSON – The Mandalorian

BAILEY, Judith – Noel (Fantasy on Carols)

EDWARD ELGAR · WAND OF YOUTH OVERTURE

DOREEN CARWITHEN · SUFFOLK SUITE ,1. PRELUDE 2. ORFORD NESS, 3. SUFFOLK MORRIS

4. FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK · SLAVONIC DANCES NO. 1 and NO. 2

FERDINAND HÉROLD · CLOG DANCE FROM THE BALLET 'LA FILLE MAL GARDÉE'

GIACOMO PUCCINI · INTERMEZZO FROM THE OPERA 'MANON LESCAUT'

ARTURO MÁRQUEZ · DANZÓN NO. 2