Merchant Sinfonia

Chairperson's Report 2025

Committee

The management of the orchestra is carried out by the committee, which has met eight times since the last AGM, 5 times in face-to-face meetings and 3 times online. It is increasingly difficult to find venues and times for face-to-face meetings that suit all members and we rely more on online Zoom meetings. The orchestra also relies on non-committee members to help with tasks such as stewarding at concerts and inspecting our accounts and balance sheets. I am grateful for all the hard work that the committee has carried out in this last year and to the non-committee members who have also helped.

I took over the chairperson's duties when Chris Gledhill resigned from the committee in May 2025 and I am grateful for the support that the committee has given me in that time, including secretarial assistance from Dominique Somers. Other committee members who have stood down since the 2024 AGM are Anne Richards and Peter McLean-Buechel. Our thanks are due to Chris, Anne and Peter for their hard work and dedication during their time on the committee.

Glasgow Life

Since the orchestra became independent in 2014, we have been supported by Glasgow Life and its predecessor, and continue to use City Halls for rehearsals. Our thanks are due to Tom Dalzell and the staff at Glasgow Life for all their help and continued support.

Rehearsals

We continue to enjoy the use of Studio 1 at City Halls for rehearsals and of Studio 2 and smaller rooms in the same venue for sectional tutorials, given by professional musicians from the Glasgow area. The organisation of these tutorials is a significant task and we are grateful to Anne Richards for carrying out this task until the spring season and to Ceri Sellers, who has taken it over for the autumn season.

Concerts

Because of increasing demand for the use of the City Halls for musical events, it is becoming more difficult to book concert dates there, and our last two concerts have been held in Sherbrooke Mosspark church. This turned out to be an excellent venue, although it was a little chilly at the December concert. Both the December and May concerts were well attended and well received. Our thanks are due to Peter McLean-Buechel for his work in liaising with the church and making all the arrangements necessary to ensure the concerts ran smoothly. When our concerts are held at City Halls, ticketing is carried out by Glasgow Life, but for the Sherbrooke concerts we had to use Eventbrite for ticketing. This was organised by our treasurer Rebecca Kay, and our thanks are due to her for ensuring that it worked so well. We are also grateful to Niall Morris for designing the programmes and flyers for both concerts. For all of our concerts, we rely heavily on the expertise of our stage manager Elldon Byrne, who ensures that everything is set up properly and all goes smoothly on the day. We are very grateful to Elldon for his continuing support.

Playing Membership

We were again oversubscribed for both seasons since the last AGM (spring 2025 and autumn 2025) and had to use a balloting process to decide who would be offered places. The committee has developed revised guidelines for allotting places in the event of oversubscription; these were used in the balloting process and are available to view on our website. Our thanks are again due to membership secretary Allison Brown for keeping a record of the applications and organising the balloting.

Music Director/Conductor

We continue to be grateful to our music director Louise Martin, who selects the music we play and guides, coaches and encourages us every week until we are ready for the concert performances. Her patience, enthusiasm, expertise and commitment are inspiring and she always manages to bring out the best in us.

Collaboration with Drake Music Scotland

Drake Music Scotland (DMS) is a charity that aims to empower disabled musicians. We have been having discussions with DMS and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) about performing a piece that will include parts for Drake musicians, and Meg Kelly, an RCS student, is composing a suitable piece. We hope to perform this at our summer 2026 concert. This is an exciting project and we are grateful to Louise for initiating it and to Louise and committee member Jenny Kenny for liaising with DMS and the RCS.

Librarian and music

Rebecca Pye has taken over the librarian's role and, as well as purchasing the parts that we require for the concerts, she has been rationalising our collections of parts that we have used in the past. Our thanks are due to Rebecca for her dedication and enthusiasm in carrying out these tasks.

Treasurer and finance

Rebecca Kay continues to carry out the role of treasurer for the orchestra and to consolidate the move to online banking, and orchestra member Gib FitzGibbon continues to act as independent examiner of our accounts. Our thanks are due to both for their diligence in carrying out these tasks.

Website, social media and marketing

The orchestra's website continues to be our main resource for informing the public and our members about the orchestra's programme and activities. I have been webmaster for 6 years but am now standing down from this role.

The orchestra also has a Facebook page, used to publicise forthcoming activities and events. This is now being looked after by Kathryn Bradley, who has also taken on the task of looking after publicity and marketing. Thanks are due to Kathryn for her enthusiastic and expert work.

Constitution

The committee has identified inconsistencies and omissions in several parts of the constitution and has agreed on a resolution to rectify these, which will be presented at the AGM for approval. The proposals in the resolution are intended to achieve the following goals:

1) Clarification of membership and voting eligibility conditions;

2) Consolidation of clauses relating to fee payment and late payment and changes to allow the committee more flexibility in the timing of the deadline for fees payment and handling of late payments;
3) Replacement of the details of the place allocation process by reference to the place allocation guidelines;
4) Addition of new named committee role: Webmaster;
5) Addition of a clause to specify what happens if a committee member stands down before the end of their term of office
6) Removal of references to out-of-date membership categories;
7) Use of a consistent term for the Music Director role;
8) Minor correction to the capitalisation in section 10.

Deceased members

We were very saddened by the death of two long-standing members of the orchestra during the past year: Ernie Spencer (cello) and Maria Clarke (violin). Both were very enthusiastic and popular members and will be much missed.

Bill Gray
Vice Chairperson, Merchant Sinfonia
5 November 2025