

NORTH KINGSTON CHOIR COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

21st July 2020

Attendees: Penny Hamilton (PH), Chair; Sue Manson (SM), Treasurer; Nello Bearzatto (NB), Events; Sally Winter (SW), Membership; Shira Keshet (SK), Communications; Georgi Vaughn (GV), Secretary; Jessica Bate (JB), Musical Director (partial attendance).

Apologies: Phil Meir (PM), Social.

1. Finances – SM

SM stated that the choir currently has £5,600 in the bank. The choir does not currently have much expenditure. SM suggested that if the choir organises five or six fortnightly sessions for the autumn term, they could be financed out of choir funds. The Committee considered that this would be a good use of choir funds and benefit members. The Committee noted that it would be complicated to charge fees only to certain members who were participating in virtual choir sessions.

2. Communications – SK

SK stated that there had not been much to post about on the choir's website and social media channels since the choir had not been meeting or producing anything. SK had promoted the choir's previous Shallow video online. PH suggested that SK should write a blog post to share an update on the choir's lockdown activities and let people know that we are still active.

3. Membership - SW

SW noted that one woman and several men had left the choir. The choir currently has 33 out of 34 women's spaces full and 12 out of 18 men's spaces. There are no men currently on the waiting list. The Committee noted that it is not possible to recruit members until rehearsals start again.

4. Social

PH wondered whether the choir could organise a socially distanced social activity. The Committee reviewed the government guidelines in this respect, which state that people can meet up to 30 people in an outdoor setting, but only from a maximum of two households. Therefore it is not possible currently for the choir to organise in-person social activities. The Committee noted that choir members could meet up independently in groups of up to six people if they wanted to. The Committee will continue to monitor the government guidelines in this respect and organise a social event if it becomes possible. Currently all choir social events will remain virtual.

JB joined the meeting.

5. Impact of Coronavirus

The Committee noted that the government has released new guidance for musical groups. Unfortunately, amateur singing groups are not currently permitted to resume their activities, pending more scientific research being done to show that it is safe to do so. The Committee will monitor any updates to the government's guidance in this respect. Choir rehearsals in person will not be resumed until the government states that it is safe to do so.

(a) Results of member survey – PH

PH asked GV to summarise the results of the member survey regarding virtual singing activities for the autumn term, as previously circulated to the Committee. The headline points were as follows:

- There were 48 respondents, which is most of the choir's members.
- The most popular frequency of singing activities was fortnightly (22 votes), although weekly was close to this (19 votes). The Committee considers that it should therefore organise fortnightly virtual choir sessions, possibly with a few extra, but not every week.
- 31 members said they would still want to attend paid-for virtual choir activities run by a guest conductor rather than JB. The Committee considers that it is therefore worth organising virtual choir sessions in the autumn term.
- We surveyed different options for virtual singing activities. The most popular was "Learning new songs with a guest choir director", followed by "One-off workshops with different guest choir directors". The least popular activity was "Practising songs from our repertoire with a guest choir director". However, the options were all quite close. The Committee will therefore seek to employ a guest choir director to run Monday-night choir sessions in the autumn term.
- Members suggested other activities they would be interested in participating in, including: outdoor singing; socially distanced rehearsals; smaller group collaborations; social events. The Committee notes that this survey was specifically regarding virtual singing activities in the case that it is not possible to meet in person. Government regulations do not currently permit amateur singing groups to meet, even outdoors or with social distancing. The Committee will take members' suggestions about social events into account, but these are not relevant to the organisation of singing activities.
- Many members expressed thanks to the Committee for their work in trying to keep the choir community going in the circumstances.

PH observed that it was interesting that some people were getting involved in other virtual choirs, but not all members seem to be interested in other choirs, i.e. it seems members want to participate specifically in singing activities with the rest of the choir.

(b) Autumn term rehearsals – PH

PH informed the Committee that she had contacted Michael Searle (MS), who conducted the choir for a term when JB was on sabbatical. MS came back with some ideas for virtual choir activities; he has been working with singers via Zoom during lockdown. MS had suggested that learning new repertoire

was best done in sectionals, perhaps alternating half-hour sectional rehearsals with a full choir rehearsal every three weeks. MS had also suggested mini-vocal workshops to develop technique.

PH felt that it would be good if the virtual choir sessions were working towards something, such as a virtual choir video or some kind of virtual event at the end of term. JB stated that any songs learnt by the choir could always be sung at future events. GV suggested that the choir could do a Zoom mini-concert of several videos. JB pointed out that making videos takes a lot of production work by member volunteers. PH said MS had also mentioned videos, but PH was not sure whether he could deal with production. The Committee will need to know more about the costs involved before making any decision. The Committee agreed in principle that an end-of-term goal would be beneficial to the choir.

JB pointed out that there are many different choir directors all over the world who could run virtual choir activities and perhaps the choir should take the opportunity to do something more challenging. However, the Committee felt that virtual activities are already challenging and we should not be too ambitious in terms of what we want to achieve. The main purpose is to keep choir members singing and engaged with the choir. The advantage of MS is that the choir are familiar with him, avoiding the awkwardness of getting used to a completely new choir director virtually.

PH will speak to MS again with the Committee's preferences in mind and come back to the Committee with his comments. PH asked what the budget was. SM suggested £600 for six sessions would be reasonable, and definitely less than £1,000.

The Committee noted that it needs to notify Fern Hill School that the choir will not require the venue in the autumn term.

(c) Performances – NB

NB noted that Ellie's wedding in September has now been postponed until 2021. NB stated that the choir's booking at the Twickenham Exchange had been rescheduled for Saturday, 22nd May 2021. NB stated that Hampton Court Festival had been cancelled for 2020, but they have confirmed that we have a slot for 2021. NB stated that Surbiton Festival had been cancelled for 2020, but the choir is on their list for 2021. NB noted that he had not heard anything from Southwark Cathedral regarding our December booking, but his contact had been furloughed. NB to attempt to contact Southwark Cathedral to see if the choir could cancel its booking for 2020 and get a booking for 2021 instead.

(d) Virtual choir activity – PH

PH stated that the choir had run a good mix of singing and social events so far during lockdown. The two Live Lounge events, with choir members participating in open mic nights via Zoom, had been particularly well received. JB said she was glad that the choir took the risk of the Live Lounge events, as they had brought a lot of pleasure to choir members. JB is keen to be involved in future Live Lounge events, separate from the choir's virtual activities with a guest choir director. JB said that encouraging choir members to perform solo would benefit their confidence and performance technique, and ultimately benefit the choir.

The Committee decided not to organise any events during August, as members are likely to be on holiday. The next Live Lounge event will be on Friday, 11th September 2020, with perhaps a further event in November, TBC.

The Committee decided to organise a new social event, a 'watch party' to get members together on Zoom and watch videos of choir performances together. Some choir members had done this after Live Lounge events and it was good fun. The Committee felt that as a social event, this was more suited to a Friday night. The Committee set the date of Friday, 9th October 2020 for this event.

6. AOB

There was no other business.

ACTION POINTS:

- PH to discuss with MS re running Monday-night choir rehearsals on Zoom in the autumn term, especially about cost.
- PH to organise another Committee meeting to discuss MS's proposals ASAP and finalise plans for the autumn term.
- PH to contact Fern Hill School re cancellation of autumn term rehearsals.
- SK to write a blog post about the choir's lockdown activities.
- NB to contact Southwark Cathedral re options for rescheduling December booking.
- JB to organise Live Lounge event on Friday, 11th September 2020.
- JB/PM to organise 'watch party' event on Friday, 9th October 2020.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: The Committee agreed to meet again in the next week or two to finalise plans for the autumn term.

- **PH to arrange next meeting date via WhatsApp.**