

NORTH KINGSTON CHOIR COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

25th March 2020

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

Apologies: Phil Meir (PM), Social.

1. Impact of Coronavirus – PH

PH stated that the main business of the meeting would be to discuss the impact of the current coronavirus epidemic and resulting government lockdown on the choir's planned activities. The choir finished for rehearsals for the spring term two weeks early, the last rehearsal having been on Monday 16th March. Ordinarily rehearsals would start again after the Easter break on Monday 20th April but at this point it seems unlikely that it will be possible to do so.

2. Performances – NB

The Committee discussed the postponement of upcoming events.

NB stated that Ellie Giffard's wedding had been postponed from 18th April to 19th September 2020.

NB stated that he had not heard from the Twickenham Exchange regarding cancellation of our booking on 16th May 2020. SM clarified that we have paid half of the fee upfront and therefore it would be best to postpone rather than cancel our booking because the deposit is non-refundable. The Committee felt that it would not be possible to hold this concert in the autumn term as we have other commitments, so it would be best to try to rearrange it for May 2021. NB to liaise with theatre and JB to confirm a date.

NB stated that he had had no contact with the organisers of Ham Fair on 13th June, but it seems likely that the event will be cancelled. JB confirmed when she joined the meeting that Ham Fair is being postponed to either 12th or 19th September. The choir is already engaged on 19th September and the Committee agreed that 12th September is too early in the autumn term for a performance. JB to email Ham Fair organisers to decline to perform this year but express interest in a slot next year.

NB stated that Hampton Court Flower Show had not been in contact. GV stated that the RHS had currently cancelled all their flower shows up to the end of June, so it is possible – though unlikely – that Hampton Court would still go ahead. The Committee felt that even if the lockdown has been lifted at that point, the choir will not have had a chance to rehearse and therefore this performance should be cancelled.

The Committee will continue to review the situation but the current consensus is that all rehearsals and events for the summer term will be cancelled and the choir will begin to function again in September.

NB said the choir had been invited to perform at Surbiton Festival on Saturday 26th September 2020. NB stated that this event may not go ahead as it is dependent on funding and volunteer support. The Committee felt that it should be possible to pull together a short set for this date using the material learnt during the spring term and it would give choir members something to work towards in the interim. NB will keep this event pencilled in and the Committee will review at the next meeting whether it seems feasible.

The big choir event in the autumn term will be the concert at Southwark Cathedral on Saturday 5th December 2020. NB stated that the booking is confirmed. SM stated that the cost will be £260 plus VAT but the choir has not yet paid a deposit. When JB joined the meeting, she warned that it is possible that there will be a resurgence of coronavirus and the country may have to go back into lockdown in November/December. The Committee agreed to keep this event in the diary for now and review as circumstances require.

Action Points:

- **NB to contact Twickenham Exchange to postpone concert to May 2021.**
- **JB to email Ham Fair organisers to decline a slot this year but request a slot in 2021.**
- **NB to contact Hampton Court Flower Show to decline a slot this year.**
- **PH to inform choir members that no events will take place in the summer term.**
- **Committee to review situation at next meeting, especially re Surbiton Festival.**

3. Rehearsals

The Committee discussed whether it would be possible to arrange some rehearsals if the lockdown is lifted in July. SK suggested that one possibility could be to have a one-off workshop for choir members. GV suggested that it might be possible to organise a couple of Monday night rehearsals. SM stated that use of Fern Hill may depend on whether schools reopen or not; this will need to be checked. The Committee will review the position at the next meeting if this seems likely to be the case.

PH stated that the body percussion workshop arranged for June should be postponed. SM stated that we had not paid a deposit yet. The Committee felt that as the choir will be busy in the autumn term getting back up to speed, this workshop should be postponed to January 2021. JB agreed when she joined the meeting.

PH stated that JB is finding it difficult to bring the choir keyboard to rehearsals every Monday and the Committee should consider whether other arrangements can be made. One possibility would be to find a rehearsal space that would allow us to store the keyboard or has a piano there. Another possibility would be for a choir member to be in charge of storing the keyboard and bringing it to rehearsals but PH stated that nobody volunteered for this when the choir was asked before. Kingston Academy was suggested as a possible rehearsal venue; PH to contact them to see if they have a suitable rehearsal space for hire. The Committee will consider whether there are any other possible rehearsal locations in Kingston.

Action Points:

- **PH to inform choir members that no rehearsals will take place in the summer term.**
- **Committee to review situation re restarting rehearsals at next meeting.**
- **JB to postpone body percussion workshop to January 2021.**
- **PH to contact Kingston Academy re possible rehearsal space.**
- **Committee to consider other options for rehearsal location.**

4. Budget – SM

SM showed the Committee a revised budget for the year assuming no choir activities during the summer term. Membership fees will not be charged for the summer term. SM stated that the choir had £5,090 in reserves at the end of 2019. The choir will not break even this year but still has plenty of money on hand, with projected reserves of £4,490 at the end of the year.

The Committee discussed whether members should be given a partial refund on fees because the final two rehearsals of the spring term were cancelled. SM felt that the choir offers good value for money as its fees are low compared to other similar groups, and a refund should not be given. The Committee agreed.

SM stated that she had included in the budget the costs and income for holding a public workshop in the autumn term. JB was consulted on this when she joined the meeting. JB feels that running public workshops is a lot of work and may not be worth it for the income and public response generated. PH stated that running public workshops is a good way to contribute to fulfilling the choir's object and purpose. JB agreed, but stated that she is not able to commit to running a workshop in the autumn term, due to the current uncertainties. The Committee agreed that no public workshop will be held this year, but that in future years it would be good to hold one workshop per year.

Action Points:

- **PH to inform choir members that no fees will be charged for the summer term.**
- **SM to revise budget to remove expenses and income from workshop.**

5. Virtual choir activity

The Committee discussed whether it was possible to run the choir via remote rehearsals. A rehearsal was attempted on Zoom on Monday 23rd March and the Committee agreed it did not seem to be a feasible way to rehearse. The audio does not sync, so the only way to rehearse is with all but one microphone muted and the choir cannot hear each other singing. PH stated that JB had said she could not commit to running regular rehearsals on Zoom and is not expecting to be paid for the summer term.

The choir has subscribed to Zoom at a cost of £12 per month, which can be cancelled at any time. GV suggested that the Zoom login be made available to the choir sections in case they want to organise smaller group practices. GV mentioned that the sopranos were already planning a sectional rehearsal.

When JB joined the meeting, she said that she had found the virtual rehearsal frustrating and is not keen to continue rehearsals in this way. JB reiterated that in the current circumstances she cannot commit to running regular virtual rehearsals. JB agreed it was a good idea if smaller groups wanted to use Zoom to practice.

JB noted that she would continue to encourage choir members to take part in virtual choirs being run by other musicians online. NB stated that he had participated in the Sofa Singers online, which had 470 participants. NB felt that although he could not hear the other singers, it was still a good option for continued participation in the current circumstances.

PH stated that she had received a note from Tristan Bate saying that the band is keen to produce some virtual choir videos. The band is working on recording some backing tracks. Each choir member would then record their part at home. Tristan and Steve Ingram will then edit the recordings into one. PH felt that this would be a good way to continue some choir activity during the coronavirus lockdown and the Committee agreed. JB is keen to pursue this as a choir project. This would also give a focus to any sectionals that are organised. JB has suggested the song Shallow, as the choir knows it quite well and it is fairly simple, and Something Inside So Strong, as it promotes a message of solidarity which feels apt in the current circumstances.

Action Points:

- **JB/PH to encourage choir members to participate in the various virtual choirs being run online.**
- **JB to coordinate band and choir to produce virtual choir videos.**
- **GV to liaise with section leaders to arrange Zoom sectionals as desired.**

6. Membership – SW

SW had no update on choir membership. SW reported that she was having trouble accessing the membership email account but would work with SK to gain access.

SW left the meeting.

7. Communications – SK

SK stated that she would update the choir website and social media to reflect the Committee's decisions regarding forthcoming events.

The Committee agreed that although the May concert will be postponed rather than cancelled, since it is so far in the future, people who have already bought tickets will be offered refunds. SK will liaise with Tristan Bate to arrange refunds.

SK stated that she had been approached by a blogger who interviews choirs. SK has been sent a questionnaire to fill out and would like some input on responses. SK has started drafting responses and the document is in Dropbox if the Committee would like to review it. PH and JB to review and provide comments.

Action Points:

- **SK to update choir website and social media with information about cancelled events.**
- **SK to liaise with TB to arrange refund of purchased tickets for May concert.**
- **PH/JB to review choir questionnaire and provide comments.**

8. Social

JB suggested that in order to keep the choir connected during lockdown, PM should organise social choir meet-ups on Zoom on a regular basis, perhaps every three weeks. This could involve activities such as quizzes but would not be rehearsals.

JB suggested that choir members should take care to check up on and keep in touch with members who may not be active on social media. PH to liaise with SW and section leaders to identify any members who may be isolated and keep in touch with them.

JB suggested that PM should organise a social event in September. JB felt that booking an event now may help local businesses which are struggling in the current climate. JB suggested an event similar to the previous bandeoke night. The Committee felt that it may be sensible not to book a venue until the situation is clearer regarding when the coronavirus lockdown might end. PM to start planning and consider possible venues.

Action Points:

- **PM to organise virtual choir socials every three weeks.**
- **PH to liaise with SW and section leaders re contact with isolated members.**
- **PM to consider options for a social event in September.**

9. AOB

No other business was discussed.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: A date was not set, as not all Committee members were present, but the Committee agreed to meet again by the end of May to review the situation.

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