

## SSO Chair's annual report 2021

No one needs me to tell them what a strange year it has been so I will oblige by not doing so. I try to post regular Chair's reports on the orchestra website and below is a synopsis for those who may have missed them.

Following last year's virtual AGM that so many members participated in, the following actions were taken by the committee and a wider group of orchestra members.

1. An orchestra WhatsApp group was established as an informal way for members to keep in touch.
2. An orchestra YouTube channel has been established linked to the website and Nikola (2nd Violin) took over the update of the site from Matthew
3. Matthew's contract as development manager for the orchestra came to an end. Matthew did a fabulous job of work for the orchestra and we hope to be able to work with him again in the future.
4. A tea break Zoom event was suggested by Judith every Wednesday evening at 8.30 pm and has been regularly attended by up to 25 members.

The orchestra has pursued virtual performances. They have been difficult but effective and instructive. They are hard work to get right and unlike in ensemble playing each player has to effectively play solo for all to hear in order that Sophia can then meld the total together via her digital wizardry.

We were not successful in our emergency arts council bid. The Arts Council bid round will continue to reopen and as an orchestra we will need to consider how we see our future delivering music over the next few years and make decisions as to where future funding bids should be targeted.

In the middle of the year we were so close to a cautious return to small orchestra rehearsals. The plan was to start sessions of six players maximum and record performances of Christmas music to be used for a virtual concert at the end of the year. We had all the risk assessments in place, all the music organised, obviously all the players keen to come together again — but then came the Sunderland lockdown. Everything was put on hold again and the frustration continued. The positive is that the preparation work was not wasted and we are still poised to start making music together in a safe environment the minute the lockdown is relaxed.

Sadly I have to report the sudden death of John Shipley, a longtime friend and supporter of the SSO. John helped in organising the concerts over many years at West Park Church and was made an honorary patron in 2011. The concert ticket desk will not be the same without him.

Towards the end of the year we responded positively to Sunderland Council's request for contributions for inclusion in the Mayor's virtual Christmas Concert with a Zoom recorded rendition of "Sleighride" with orchestra members playing along to our 2019 concert recording of the piece.

In January the weekly tea break meetings morphed into virtual rehearsals of music chosen by David Milner. Each week we play through sections of the programme accompanied by a recording of our choice at a play back speed agreed as comfortable to all players. The

orchestra will now produce a virtual concert of the music all dressed up in whatever is the relevant dress code for a Zoom concert.

The orchestra has been successful in attracting a grant from Sunderland City Council towards the cost of commissioning and recording a new piece of music. Philip was then asked to compose the piece with the theme of town twinning in mind. Once it is completed the orchestra members will record the various parts and Sophia will assemble them into a finished virtual performance. Who knows, we may be able to play it live- now there would be a thing.

The committee have continued to have very well attended bi-monthly meetings during the year and are indebted to all members and supporters who have maintained their financial support over the period. Together we have all helped to maintain a functioning, musically adventurous and socially supportive organisation through “the plague year” and we will emerge a stronger and more resonant orchestra as and when society gradually opens up once more.

Ged McCormack

SSO Chair 2021