

Sunderland Symphony Orchestra (SSO)

Executive Committee Annual Report for 2020

Message from the Chair: Ged McCormack:

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. The committee has 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.

Membership figures are difficult to gauge accurately; not all members have engaged in virtual or on-line musical activity; a majority continued to pay membership fees. We anticipate there may be some changes. The current position appears to be 62 members (36 playing, 5 non-playing, 9 patrons, 12 honorary members, includes one player). However, there are a further 15 regular players, some of whom would normally be paying members.

Sadly, we 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 member in 2011. The concert ticket desk will not be the same without him.

2020 AGM was held on Zoom;

Retiring Chairman and Treasurer, David Mills and Kathleen Mills were thanked for sterling work over twenty years and awarded Honorary Vice Presidency and Honorary Membership respectively. Honorary Membership was also given to six long term helpers. Emma Mapplebeck and Judith Thompson also left the Executive Committee but continue to be involved in supporting it. New committee appointments: Chair, Ged McCormack; Vice Chair, Louise Baxter; Treasurer, Peter Chapman; Librarian, John Harding

Orchestral Events and Activities:

1. In January and February 2020, led by Emma, 12 members delivered four excellent school workshops, based on Swan Lake (Usworth Primary) and Film Music (Big Orchestra Format, involving pupils from many primary and secondary schools and held at Washington Arts Centre and Venerable Bede School)
2. In March 2020, the Spring Concert, Marching and Waltzing, marked the end of SSO's successful two year Coming of Age Programme of enrichment, funded largely by Arts Council England and managed by Matthew Burge. Special farewells were made to David and Kathleen Mills and David played a final piece on the organ to mark the memorable occasion.

3. The orchestra was due to perform for The Red Sky Charity Ball and the Rotary Club Charity Bond Fundraiser but, sadly, these event were postponed.
4. Following last year's virtual AGM in which many members participated, the following actions were taken by the committee and a wider group of orchestra members:
5. An orchestra WhatsApp group was established as an informal way for members to keep in touch.
6. An orchestra YouTube channel has been established linked to the website and Nikola (2nd Violin) took over the update of the site from Matthew
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. In the middle of the year we were 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, 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.
12. 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.

Financial and Practical Issues:

The Financial Records are currently being scrutinized by the Independent Examiner and will be available shortly for inclusion in this report. The orchestra continues to be in a strong position financially. This is largely due to the continuing support of its members and the goodwill of the Musical Director and the owner of West Park Church. Fees are being frozen at previous rates and members were offered an optional fee break for the first three months of 2021. We are grateful for the continued interest and support of all involved and we are confident that the orchestra will re-establish quickly when circumstances allow.