

AGM 2017

Chair's Report



2016-17 was another successful year for DSO, with three well-attended concerts and a significant growth in membership and in our reserves.

Concerts

Leigh O'Hara again directed the orchestra in a varied programme and was ably supported by our leader, Paula Tysall. The November concert was unusual in consisting entirely of three symphonies, including Sibelius's mysterious seventh and final symphony. The March concert consisted of two great twentieth century works – Strauss's Four Last Songs and Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony – and a new piece by local composer Mark Wilderspin. The resources required for the Shostakovich meant this was our biggest ensemble of the year, with suitably lively results. Ruth Holton, who has an illustrious career as a singer when she is not playing violin and viola for DSO, sang the Strauss songs.

For our summer concert, we collaborated with St Christopher's Hospice to present a gala concert in support of St Christopher's 50th anniversary celebrations. We have played with many excellent soloists over the year, but rarely with one with an international reputation to equal that of Leslie Howard, who played Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto at this concert. The appearance of a well-known soloist and the joint efforts of our two organisations to market the event produced one of our largest ever audiences, with over 250 people attending. DSO was very pleased to raise £1,000 for St Christopher's at this event.

Running the orchestra

2016-17 was a successful year for the orchestra financially, enabling us not only to offset the considerable costs of music hire and extra players for the spring concert, but also to add to our reserves. I am once again grateful to our treasurer, Liz Cleary, for her astute financial management, excellent forecasting and detailed accounting. At the end of the year, as discussed at last year's AGM, we asked a scrutineer, Leigh Whittingham BA, FCA to carry out an independent examination of our accounts

The orchestra went from strength to strength in recruitment, both in filling some rare vacancies in the woodwind and in taking on more string players, especially violins. The number of members each term was 54, 51 and 56 respectively.

The continued successful running of the orchestra is down to the many members and their friends who carry out numerous supporting roles, from making the tea for rehearsals to staffing the ticket desk and serving refreshments at concerts. Particular thanks go to Tessa Crilly, DSO's secretary, for her part in taking on new members, liaising with venues and attending to arrangements for the concerts and rehearsals, to DSO's librarians, Nicky Jackson and Tessa Crilly who take responsibility for ensuring that music is available for our rehearsals and concerts and properly returned to the libraries and publishers from whom we hire it, and to Helen Bartholomew who edits and produces concert programmes and publicity

materials. Finally, I would like to thank the remaining members of the committee – Sarah Bort, Chris Burns, Hannah Gamlen and Ishani O'Connor, for their work as Trustees and in running the orchestra during the year.

The year ahead

Orchestra Tax Relief is a new scheme introduced by HMRC in 2016 which will enable orchestras to recover 20% of their rehearsal and running expenses (but not concert expenses) from the public purse. Amateur orchestras such as ours have been encouraged by Making Music to consider taking the necessary steps to register for this relief. We estimate that the benefit to DSO could be as much as £2000 per year, minus relatively minor administrative charges. To register would however require us to create a parallel not for profit company which would act as DSO's intermediary in booking venues, paying the fees of our conductor and leader, hiring music etc.

This is a new scheme, and we intend to talk to other orchestras about their experience with it. The business of setting up and running a new company represents a further administrative burden, and would require dedicated members of the DSO committee to act as directors and run the company. During the coming year, we will consider in detail what all this means for the operation of DSO, find out whether there is a will in the orchestra to do this additional work and learn from the experience of others. Should we think there is a case to take this forward, we will put detailed proposals to the members at an extraordinary general meeting.

This has again been a quiet year for the **education fund**, which still has about £5,000 with which to fund activities with state school pupils up to the age of 18. We will look for partners during the coming year to create a programme to be funded with this money, focussing as far as possible on relatively local communities. Ishani O'Connor is the Learning and Participation Manager for the Chineke! Foundation and Orchestras, and we are in discussions with Chineke! on working in partnership to create a project involving young people in local schools. We welcome suggestions from orchestra members and supporters for other outreach projects.

Partner organisations

Once again, we are grateful to the Elmgreen School for hosting our rehearsals and to All Saints Church, which continues to be an excellent venue for our concerts.

Jeremy Crump
Chair, DSO
26 September 2017