

AGM 2020

Chair's Report



The 2019-20 season was curtailed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing measures aimed at preventing the spread of the disease. At the time the national lockdown was announced on 23 March 2020, DSO was only two weeks away from its spring concert, which was cancelled. There were no further rehearsals or concerts during the season.

Through the commitment of a number of members of the orchestra, in particular our secretary Tessa Crilly and our Treasurer, Liz Cleary, and with the active support and encouragement of our conductor, Leigh O'Hara, we were able to put on social events on Zoom during what would have been the summer term. These included a quiz and a concert, consisting of videos submitted by a number of members of the orchestra.

Extensive further work by Liz and Tessa, with Leigh's advice and drawing on the advice of Making Music and other music groups, we were in a position to begin socially-distanced rehearsals for a limited number of members of the orchestra at the beginning of the 2020-21 season, although there was no prospect of concert performances.

Concerts

DSO's concert in November 2019 represented a new departure in our use of the Vaughan Williams Auditorium at James Allen's Girls' School (JAGS). We were fortunate that Patrick Rafter again accepted an invitation to play with us, performing the Glazunov violin concerto. The remainder of the concert consisted of a performance of Shostakovich's epic 7th Symphony, 'The Leningrad Symphony', which required a large orchestra augmented by additional horns and trumpets. The acoustic of the auditorium did justice to the massive sound of the climactic points of the symphony. Once it is again possible to plan public concerts, it will be for the orchestra to consider whether we should look to perform other large-scale works in the VWA.

Our second concert was to have comprised Mendelssohn's 2nd and 5th symphonies, with a chorus brought together by Ruth Holton. The rehearsals of these relatively lesser-known works had gone well, but sadly we did not get to perform them.

DSO website

During the year, it was resolved to reconstruct the DSO web site using the platform developed and managed by Making Music. We have signed up with the platform and most of the development work was completed over the summer. The absence of concerts makes the creation of new content a challenge, but also provides an opportunity to plan and test the new site. It will feature online payment mechanisms for tickets and members' subscriptions and a password-protected members area. The platform also provides tools for the management of mailing lists and feedback from members so that we should be able to transfer much of the administrative business of the orchestra to the platform. This should make life easier for the secretary, reduce the cost of online ticket sales (previously managed via Eventbrite) and provide a more sustainable basis for succession of officers and for

keeping the site abreast of technical developments. Members will be invited to register for access to the members' pages by the end of 2020.

Finance

The financial impact of the lockdown was largely neutral. The November concert, which required a large number of extras and the hire of music, made a loss, but the cancellation of the March concert was achieved without incurring costs for venue hire, though the Committee decided to pay Leigh and Paula and the soloists for the concert the fees which had been agreed. During the summer, we had no income from members' subscriptions but minimal expenses. We were greatly helped during this period by the very understanding position of our conductor and leader on fees, notwithstanding which they have enthusiastically committed themselves to helping us restart rehearsals in 2020-21.

The overall impact of these varying factors meant that we made a loss of £1,357 on the year, and that our reserves fell to £6,539 against a target for reserves of between £8,000 and £10,000. However, this result does not reflect the additional income we expect to receive under HMRC's Orchestra Tax Relief scheme, which pays out a year in arrears. 2019-20 was the first year in which we were participants in the scheme.

We are grateful to John Crilly who helped to set up the accounts for the Production Company and looked over all the accounts for this year.

Education and outreach

There were no outreach activities in 2018-19, although we remain committed to using the funds (amounting to just over £6,000) from the Philip McKenna bequest to encourage performance and composition of orchestral music in local state schools.

Privacy and data protection

No applications were made under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) in respect of data held by DSO. We will of course amend our data protection policy to reflect our use of the Making Music Platform.

Jeremy Crump
Chair, DSO
21 October 2020