

----- NORTH **NDCO** DOWNS -----
COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA

North Downs Community Orchestra and Ensembles - Registered Charity Number: 1183074

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: 28th SEPTEMBER 2022

Trustees Report to Members

covering the period April 2021 – March 2022

INTRODUCTION

In April 2021, we were still in the grips of the 2nd lockdown with no clear pathway to resuming rehearsals, let alone concerts. Zoom was continuing to provide some engagement with committed players, but membership was waning, and it was difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

By the end of the period covered by this report, we were rehearsing face to face with few regulated restrictions and had performed two concerts to the joy of players and audience alike. With another concert to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee being planned, life was beginning to feel more 'normal'.

In between these times, thanks to the commitment and hard work of several dedicated individuals, we developed safe ways to rehearse, took numerous covid tests, invested in a carbon dioxide meter, investigated, and used, new venues for rehearsals and concerts to allow optimum social distancing and learnt glorious new repertoire. We upgraded the website which allows us to book online for rehearsals and tickets for concerts. We welcomed new members to the orchestra and welcomed back old friends, and we enabled anyone who couldn't attend a rehearsal to join in on Zoom. We said hello to a new treasurer and other members of the committee.

No one could accuse the North Downs Community Orchestra of letting the grass grow under our feet. Despite what was happening in the outside world, during the reporting year of 2021-2022, the NDCO continued to thrive and make strides to develop our musical offering and provide fun for our members and audiences alike.

This report is split into several sections:

- Rehearsing
- Concerts
- Website
- People
- Conclusion

REHEARSING

At the start of April 2021, the pandemic still had the world in its vice with the delta variant wreaking havoc and the NDCO continuing to hold rehearsals on Zoom. The government was promising a roadmap out of lockdown and there was hope that the summer would see Covid numbers reducing and restrictions lifted so we could begin planning not just in-person rehearsals but also concerts. Our last concert had been in November 2019, and we were desperate to perform again to an audience.

But did Pam and her trusty band of helpers (AKA the NDCO committee) sit back, wring their hands, and do nothing? No, they did not! Ever optimistic and working on the assumption that the lockdown would come to an end on April 12th 2021, they started planning the NDCO roadmap out of Covid. The government were proposing to lift all restrictions from 21st June, and we were hopeful that the entire orchestra would be able to meet from that date. A search was on to find a venue big enough for the whole orchestra to play together with allowance for social distancing.

Sadly, virtual rehearsals continued well into May as the government delayed ending restrictions, the roadmap out of covid took a detour and there was general uncertainty about whether groups of 6 musicians could meet indoors or outdoors. There were even letters to The Telegraph! But the NDCO continued to hold virtual rehearsals and even started learning new repertoire.

But things improved, not least due to Pam's hard work and due diligence of the ever-changing Covid regulations, and by June we were holding in-person rehearsals at two venues – St Peters Hall in Limpsfield and St Andrews Church Hall at Limpsfield Chart, albeit with strict requirements in place. As previously, seating was allocated and recorded; it was gently encouraged that attendees should be vaccinated and take a Covid test before they came; masks were mandatory at all times (except for the wind and brass when playing). Rehearsals were limited to an hour, windows and doors were left open to provide a through draught. Thank goodness it was a mild spring!

Over the coming months, and until the emergence of the omicron variant, the stringent Covid requirements gradually reduced over the second half of 2021. Masks became non-mandatory, although we still advised their wearing and continued to ensure our rehearsal venues were well-ventilated. A carbon dioxide meter was purchased to ensure that the air remained fresh and was monitored regularly. A review of venues meant that for the time being it was agreed not to rehearse at the Red Cross Hall in Oxted and the dining hall at Hazelwood School was also deemed not suitable for full orchestra rehearsals. St Peter's Church Hall in Limpsfield and Bawtree Hall were rehearsal venues of choice and, notwithstanding the pesky omicron variant which wreaked havoc from December 2021, provided good venues to rehearse for our much anticipated Christmas Concert (which was held just before omicron took hold) and the much delayed birthday concert.

CONCERTS

Rehearsals and websites are important, but the real purpose of an orchestra is surely to put on performances. Starved of the ability to play in public for nearly two years, it was with much relief and excitement that a concert was arranged for November 21st 2021 at the Bawtree Hall, Hazelwood School. Sara, our beloved Maestro, had cleverly programmed repertoire that included a few pieces we had played before, including favourites *The Great Escape* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, plus a piece that we played at our very first concert in Edenbridge in 2016, *Moon River*. There were some works we had started practicing during lockdown including *March to the Scaffold* and Mozart's *Symphony No. 36* and, glory of glories, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture*. Rather poignantly, and even rather presciently in retrospect, given Olivia Newton-John's recent death, the audience participation number was a medley from *Grease*. It was a truly wonderful concert. We were joined by our president Rainer Hersch and a number of guests, a lot of fun was had, and some very fine music made.

The audience comprised mainly friends and family, but they were very enthusiastic, none the less. We were not able to offer refreshments to the audience due to Covid concerns, but this did not seem to dampen the audience's enthusiasm. It was hard to believe that this was the same orchestra that scratched its way through *Moon River* in 2016. Now we had a brass section and a percussion section, and the sound was full and more than competent.

With Christmas out of the way, but Covid omicron variant in full swing, we began rehearsing for our 6th Birthday concert scheduled for 13th March 2022 at the United Reform Church in Reigate where we had planned to perform our 4th Birthday Concert back in 2020. There was not much time to rehearse, but again Sara produced a magnificent programme which was within reach. We reprised *Go West* and *Something*

Stirring on Godstone Green; the audience participation piece was *Mamma Mia*, a medley of Abba songs (always a winner!), and Richard Cross composed a piece for the wind section called *Beneath the Surface of Things*. Despite a few teething problems, the venue turned out to be one we could use again, with good audience and refreshment facilities.

Just a few weeks before this concert, Russia had invaded Ukraine and in an act of solidarity with the people of that country who were suffering so terribly, Sara and three other string players played a very moving version of the Ukraine National Anthem, arranged by Julian Spencer, at the very start of the concert.

It was truly wonderful to be playing in-person to a live audience just as we are supposed to do. The audience was very appreciative, and Sara was pleased with the sound we made. The *Rosamunde Overture* by Schubert and Brahms' *Symphony No. 1*, seemed to go down particularly well.

As with all performances we are indebted to the people who did so much to help make both concerts such a success. Wendy Tai is again due our thanks for fantastic flyers and programmes, as are the relatives and friends of the orchestra members stepped up to help with front of house and refreshments.

WEBSITE

We are much indebted to Wendy Tai who spent a considerable amount of time and energy revamping the website. It really looks splendid. But looks alone do not make an excellent website, the functionality is also important, and Wendy has made the most of the options offered by the website platform to create a resource that allows members to book and pay for rehearsals and concert tickets and even sends out automated reminders.

PEOPLE

The orchestra would never exist without a number of individuals who make things happen. The committee are a dedicated band of members who continued to meet through lockdowns and restrictions, to make sure that when life got back to 'normal' we were ready to regroup and perform. Special thanks go to our secretary Alex Colbourne who keeps the committee on point.

Due to family circumstances, pressure of work and other charity commitments, our 2nd treasurer, Harriet who has done such sterling work, in particular registering the orchestra for Gift Aid and obtaining a very sizable refund, has given up the role. We are indebted to Harriet and thank her for her work. Her role is ably taken by Sue Pharoah to whom we are grateful for taking on such a major task.

We have mentioned Wendy Tai who has done so much to bring the orchestra up to date with a state-of-the-art website. We are also grateful to Richard Cross who has continued to rehearse the wind and brass sections.

But our most effusive thanks must go to Sara Young, our Director of Music, who has continued to challenge the orchestra with new targets to develop our skills and build our confidence, and introduce us to new and exciting repertoire. And on top of this, she makes each rehearsal and concert exciting and fun. And of course, there is our beloved chair Pam, without whom nothing would be possible. It is hard to express the efforts that Pam went to keep the orchestra together and practising both on Zoom and in person, through lockdowns and restrictions, always keeping up to date with the latest regulations and risk requirements. She is a legend in her own lifetime.

Thank you to everyone who is involved in running the orchestra, however small your role is, we are extremely grateful, and your help is vital.

But of course, the most important thanks must go to our members without whom there would be no orchestra and nothing to organise. Thank you all, you make it all fun!

IN CONCLUSION

The orchestra has certainly had a much better year than it did previously, with the return to in-person rehearsals and two concerts. And since the period covered by this report, the orchestra has performed a further glorious concert to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee – but more of that next year.

We are perhaps not at the strength we were in early 2020, but numbers are increasing, and the growing confidence of the orchestra is tangible. We got through the pandemic, we can get through anything!

Pam Deverill and Alison Cattermole, September 2022