

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

## THE FUN ORCHESTRA

### Our Ethos

This document was written to establish the fundamental aims and objectives of the North Downs Community Orchestra: who we are, what we hope to achieve and how we ensure we remain 'fun'.

It is intended as a flexible set of guidelines, built around collaboration between the members of the orchestra, the presiding committee, and the Director of Music.

It remains our vision to ensure the orchestra will have fun and thrive as we enjoy our musical journey together.

This document will:

- Outline where the orchestra came from.
- Establish the ethos of the orchestra.
- Identify the types of repertoires we may wish to consider which will nourish the orchestra and entertain our audiences.
- Provide the basis on which we can ensure we welcome new members and maintain the fun, social side to the orchestra whilst enhancing our musical development.
- Provide guidance and information on such issues as:
  - rehearsal attendance,
  - the yearly concert schedule,
  - the venues most often used.

We hope that everyone who gets involved with the 'fun' orchestra will buy into the concept and promote our aims.



## **WHERE DID WE COME FROM?**

In late 2015, two men were bemoaning how they loved playing their clarinets in their school orchestra but didn't have anywhere to make music, now they were adults, in this area around Surrey/Kent/South London – essentially the North Downs.

It was a light bulb moment – if there wasn't an existing orchestra, they would create one!

Their vision was an orchestra where anyone with an instrument and some musical knowledge could make music in a fun and social atmosphere, with no auditions and a flexible approach to rehearsing, practising and performing. Those men were Dave Ellis and Peter Matthews and the orchestra they formed was the North Downs Community Orchestra. The "Fun" Orchestra. The first rehearsal was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016.

## **WHO ARE WE?**

We are a varied adult group which includes:

- members who played their instruments in school 20 odd years ago and found them gathering dust in the attic – they used to be good, but are rusty;
- musicians who wanted to take up another instrument and have only had a few lessons but always wanted to play in an orchestra;
- players looking to practice their second instrument;
- experienced players who do not want the pressure of other orchestras that require lots of practising; and
- many other backgrounds.

The orchestra:

- is non-auditioned;
- meets on Wednesday (and sometimes Tuesdays) during term times and occasionally during the holidays;
- meets in a variety of venues, mostly around Oxted and Limpsfield;
- collects subs on a weekly/termly/yearly basis;
- generally plays two concerts a year;
- holds separate, extra sectional rehearsals for wind/brass/percussion and strings.

From time to time, we have various ensembles which have played in schools and to other community groups, or simply for their own enjoyment.

It is to the orchestra's credit that during the pandemic we rehearsed via Zoom thereby continuing to provide a musical and social outlet for our members – providing some 'fun' even in the most difficult of circumstances.

## **WHAT ARE WE?**

We are the 'fun' orchestra. Above all, we want to play music, have fun while we do it and give pleasure to those that come to listen to our concerts.

The North Downs Community Orchestra is what it says on the tin. We are a *community* orchestra. That means the people who play in the orchestra come from the local North Downs community, but it also means that the orchestra is 'for' the local community.

We want to play music that our members enjoy playing and feel enthusiastic about and which our audience will enjoy hearing. We want our audiences to feel part of the orchestra by recognising at least some of our repertoire and joining in on occasions.

It is an important distinction that we are ***not*** a symphony orchestra and we do not aspire to be one, but

the instruments we play are those normally found in a symphony orchestra.

Yes, we want to grow and develop our talents, but we never want to lose our original vision to welcome warmly anyone who has an orchestral instrument, can read music to a reasonable standard, and can blend within a musical group.

We aim to provide a musical 'home' to those who would not otherwise have an opportunity to play in an orchestra. That might mean that at any time, we have no trumpets and 10 flutes or at another time, 6 oboes and only 1 viola, but over the years we have found the numbers of instruments in any section is fluid and varies as people join and leave us. We actively recruit for those instruments where we have limited exposure but never turn away anyone from a section that is flourishing.

## **WHO ORGANISES THE NDCO AND MAKES THINGS HAPPEN?**

The orchestra is a registered charity (as of 2019) managed by a group of members who form a committee, elected by the members at the AGM which is usually held in July or September each year. Any playing member can volunteer to join the committee and new members are welcomed with open arms!

The committee is headed by a Chair who also handles communications with the Director of Music and the orchestra members, a secretary, a treasurer, a concert manager and other trustees (as many as possible, but usually between six and ten) carry out varying tasks. In addition, there are orchestra members involved in doing such things as organising sectionals and helping at rehearsals and concerts. We have a happy band of family and friends who also help out at concerts.

We have been financially successful and registered with the Charity Commission in 2019. Our funds come mainly from weekly subscriptions, donations and concert takings. Since 2020, we have been able/registered to claim gift aid on donations.

The orchestra employs a Musical Director who has a formal contract on a self-employed basis. Our current Musical Director is Anna Tabor, who joined us in September 2024.

We are members of the Making Music organisation who provide insurance for the orchestra along with practical services, and guidance, and is a collective voice for advocacy which was particularly helpful during the pandemic.

## **ORCHESTRA VISION**

The central concept of the orchestra is that it:

- **is open to all adults with their own instrument, and a reasonable ability to sight read and blend within a musical group;**
- **is non-auditioned;**
- **does not turn away a player, no matter how many instruments are in a section (notwithstanding the first point above);**
- **plays repertoire that is enjoyable and varied, and enables involvement by all musical skill levels.**

*Note: the orchestra owns a range of basic percussion instruments which can be used by percussion players without their own instruments.*

Originally attendance at rehearsals was on a 'pay as you play' basis with subs paid at each rehearsal attended by the member. We have retained this flexibility, but members are encouraged to pay in advance online per rehearsal or, preferably, by term.

Whilst no pressure is applied to participate in a concert, we do require members to sign up for a concert at the beginning of rehearsals for that concert if they wish to take part. We also ask members intending to play in a concert to aim to attend 50% of the rehearsals for that concert, and in particular, the last

rehearsal before the concert and the rehearsal on the day of the concert. Members may come to rehearsals even if they are not playing in the concert.

We do, of course, understand that life can get in the way at times and flexibility and understanding is always given to exceptional circumstances.

To ensure a balanced sound, we may need to ask external, experienced players (amateur or professional) to join us to play at concerts. This will be limited, and always agreed with the Committee prior to any concert, but we find it motivational to the orchestra members to play with skilled musicians and the audience get an enhanced sound.

## **REPERTOIRE and CONCERT PROGRAMMING**

Repertoire is one of the most important aspects in making the orchestra enjoyable and pleasurable both for members in rehearsal and for audiences at concerts.

The Musical Director has responsibility for selecting repertoire for a concert, with approval by the committee.

The following types of repertoires have proved successful in the past to ensure a varied and balanced concert programme:

- A mixture of light/popular classical music and music from films/musicals.
- Pieces specifically for wind or strings that are practiced at sectionals.
- Orchestral pieces that feature one or more of our more talented musicians in short solos.
- A medley of songs for audience participation.
- One or more pieces from the orchestra's music library to reduce the cost of purchasing new music and to give the orchestra a chance to perform favourite works again.

The following guidelines are important to note:

- At any one time, it can help in the orchestra's musical development to have one or two more challenging pieces but works that exclude groups or individual players should be avoided.
- Where parts for a certain instrument do not exist, we will attempt to have these written, so no instrument is left out.
- Sheet music is expensive and this is also a consideration in selecting repertoire.
- For the vast majority of our repertoire, we try to select music:
  - which has parts for differing levels of skill.
  - where all musicians are able to fully participate for the majority of the piece.
  - that does not require excessive amounts of extra individual practice (although practice is always recommended to enhance enjoyment).

## **MUSIC AND SCORES**

We will always aim, if possible, to have music for a concert available to members well in advance of a rehearsal or concert, to allow for practice.

All sheet music loaned to members, conductors and guests remains the property of the NDCO, or another lending library, and must be returned promptly and in good, clean condition to the NDCO music librarians after each concert, or otherwise as requested.

## **ATTENDING REHEARSALS and PLAYING IN CONCERTS**

Whilst the original aim was that members could simply turn up at rehearsals and pay on the night, COVID

required the introduction of a booking system and payment online. This system has continued as it allows both the MD and the committee to know approximately how many people are attending and how many seats are needed.

Members can still pay in cash on the rehearsal night or by term, but it is helpful if members indicate their attendance in advance via the website booking system.

Members are encouraged to participate in as many rehearsals and sectionals as they can, whether or not they are available to play in the next concert.

For planning purposes, we request members to indicate their availability for a particular concert as soon after rehearsals for the concert begin, usually the beginning of the term in which the concert is being held.

The success of the orchestra and the limited size of available venues means that there is a small chance that not everyone will be able to play in a concert if it is oversubscribed and/or a particular section is over-represented. If this is the case, any member unable to play will be able to play at the next concert.

We expect members to aim to attend at least 50% of the rehearsals for a concert.

The final Wednesday rehearsal, before a concert, is reserved only for those who are playing who are expected to attend.

The rehearsal on the afternoon of the concert is very important and members performing in the concert are strongly encouraged attend.

New members, especially those with limited experience, who ask to join within 4 weeks of a concert, may be asked to wait until after the concert, at the discretion of the Committee and Musical Director.

## **CONCERT AND CONCERT VENUES**

Typically, the NDCO performs two concerts each year. These are usually in the late spring/early summer and a winter/Christmas concert in late November or early December. However, specific dates are dependent on venue availability and cost of hire.

The location of the concert can impact the enjoyment of the orchestra and audience access, so we try to select concert venues that provide the following:

- plenty of parking adjacent to the venue;
- good lighting;
- enough space for the orchestra to sit and get good sight line of the conductor;
- a piano is good working order, preferably already tuned;
- percussion instruments especially Timpani;
- a green room;
- if possible, an area for serving refreshments.

Our preferred venue is Bawtree Hall, Hazelwood School but others have been used.

In the past we have also taken advantage of other performance opportunities as they present themselves eg. playing at the Godstone Fete.

## **COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND AGM**

Committee meetings are scheduled in advance along with the date of the AGM to give the Committee and members as much notice as possible.

- The committee should meet once per term, around 1 month before a concert.

- The AGM will be held in July or September each year.
- Other meetings will be held on an 'as needed' basis.
- Committee meetings are generally held via Zoom.
- The Musical Director may be invited to attend one meeting each year.
- Orchestra members are encouraged to provide the committee with any items for the agenda.
- Agenda and minutes of the meeting will usually be available on request.

## GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

This is the Fun Orchestra and as such a welcoming and friendly environment is a cornerstone of the vision.

Regular members of the orchestra will get to know one another well, but we endeavour to make sure all new members get to know other members in all sections of the orchestra.

To this end, where regulations allow:

- There should always be an interval or 'tea break' in rehearsals.
- We will hold a social at the end of each term.
- At these socials we will introduce the committee to the rest of the group.
- At each rehearsal, we introduce any new members to the existing members during the interval.

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

*The aims and objectives of the NDCO may change from time to time as we develop and grow. We will always aim to reflect the wishes and views of our members. The orchestra exists for them and our most important aim is that we continue to have fun! Therefore, this document and the contents will be updated occasionally.*

v1 AAC 15/11/18  
v2 Revised PMD  
8/2/19 v3 AAC/PMD  
14/7/19 v4  
PMD/AAC 25/7/19  
v5 AAC/PMD 16/9/20  
v6 AAC 30/7/23  
v7 AAC 25/10/23  
v8.2 AAC 8/1/24  
v8.3 AAC 10/1/24  
v8.4 AAC 14/1/25