

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

## ORCHESTRA ETHOS

### PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper was written to inform all involved in the North Downs Community Orchestra and Ensembles (NDCOE) about the ethos of the orchestra, our aims and objectives.

It will:

- Outline where the orchestra came from.
- Establish the ethos of the orchestra.
- Define:
  - the yearly concert schedule
  - Identify venues
- Put a shape around the repertoire we want to play so we can identify actual pieces and obtain the music.
- Provide a plan to ensure we welcome new members and maintain the fun, social side to the orchestra.

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



## BACKGROUND

### **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 in this area; Surrey/Kent/South London. 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 group. We include:

- 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 twice a month (sometimes three times); collects subs on a weekly/termly/yearly basis; plays around three concerts a year; holds separate, extra sectional rehearsals for wind and strings.

We have a band that practices alternate weeks and welcomes any one of any standard with any instrument from a washboard to a good voice to a clarinet or trumpet.

Plus, we have various ensembles which have played in schools and to other community groups.

During the pandemic the orchestra rehearsed via Zoom. As soon as possible, the orchestra and sectionals restarted under strict COVID-19 regulations for as long as government regulations stipulate.

### **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 therefore our audience will enjoy hearing. We want our audiences to feel part of the orchestra by recognising 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. Yes, we want to grow and develop our talents, but we never want to lose our original ethos that anyone who has an orchestral instrument and can read and play music to a reasonable standard can join us, no questions asked. ***No one should ever be turned away or prevented from playing.***

## **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. The committee is headed by a Chairman who also handles communications, a secretary and a treasurer; there are a number of other trustees (as many as possible, but usually between six and ten) who each carry out varying tasks. In addition, there are other 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 are entitled to claim gift aid on donations.

The orchestra employs a Director of Music who has a formal contract on a self-employed basis.

Our current Director of Music is Sara Young, who is assisted by Richard Cross as deputy Director of Music. Richard also runs the wind sectionals. Sara runs the strings sectionals.

## **ORCHESTRA ETHOS**

Everyone involved needs to understand what we stand for and buy into the concept.

**The central ethos of the orchestra, to which all those involved must agree to, is that the orchestra:**

- **is open to all with their own instrument and ability to sight read;**  
*Note: the orchestra owns a range of basic percussion instruments which can be used by percussion players without their own instruments.*
- **non-auditioned;**
- **no one turned away no matter how many instruments are in a section;**
- **repertoire is light and varied and enables involvement by all musical skill levels**

Membership will be on a 'pay as you play' basis with subs paid at each rehearsal attended by the member. Payment can be made in advance for a whole term if a member wishes, but this is not required.

There is no requirement to sign up for a concert at the beginning of rehearsals for that concert and no pressure will be applied to participate in a concert. It is accepted that this could cause potential difficulties in ensuring coverage of all instruments.

It is further accepted that we may need to ask external, experienced players (amateur or professional) to play at concerts but this will be limited, and must be agreed with the Committee prior to any concert.

## **REPERTOIRE**

Repertoire is probably the most important aspect in making the orchestra enjoyable and pleasurable both for members in rehearsal and for audiences at concerts.

Responsibility for choosing pieces of music is with a small group of members who represent sections of the orchestra and The Director of Music who advises and consults on choice of repertoire.

The following describes how repertoire will be selected:

- It should be varied.
- We will play a mixture of light/popular classical music and music from films / musicals.

- Concerts should be programmed with the following basic shape/structure:
  - Light / popular classical works
  - Music from film and musicals
  - Audience participation (singing along)
- For the vast majority of our repertoire, we try to select:
  - music that has parts for differing levels of skill;
  - where all musicians are able to fully participate for the majority of the piece;
  - does not require vast amounts of extra practice.
- At any one time, we have one or two pieces that challenge the whole orchestra, but none that exclude groups or individual players, whatever the balance.
- Where parts for a certain instrument do not exist, we will attempt to have these written, so no instrument is left out.
- We also have pieces specifically for wind or strings that are practiced at sectionals.

If possible, music for a concert will be available to members well in advance of a rehearsal or concert, to allow for practice.

All sheet music loaned to members, conductors, coaches and guests remains the property of the NDCO, or another lending library, and must be returned promptly to the NDCO Music Librarians after each concert or otherwise as requested.

## **ATTENDING REHEARSALS**

Whilst the original aim was that you could attend rehearsals and pay on the night, COVID has required the introduction of a booking system and payment online. This assists both the MD and the committee by knowing how many will be turning up and how many seats are needed.

It is also planned to allow people to pay termly in advance, but booking will still be required.

Obviously plans change and personal circumstances can always be taken into account with a quiet email or call to the Chairperson.

## **CONCERTS and OTHER PERFORMANCES**

Concerts should be fun for both the musicians and audience alike. The rehearsals should be pleasurable and the performances enjoyable for the orchestra and audience.

Opportunity may also be given for some of the more experienced members to play solos or duets.

The arrangements for concerts are currently expected to follow this schedule:

- Three NDCO concerts per year :
  - Birthday Concert, late March or early April, scheduled to avoid Mothers' Day and Easter holidays.
  - Summer Concert around the end June/early July.
  - Christmas Concert around the first Sunday in December
- Concert programme content will usually include:
  - One or two pieces that challenge the orchestra.
  - Pieces from film or TV (eg. Dambusters, Star Wars, Sound of Music)
  - Pieces from the well-known classical repertoire.
  - At least one piece for the audience to sing along to.
  - A string sectional and/or wind band piece.
  - Possibly a piece that will showcase one of the more experienced musicians in a solo.

We aim to perform works more than once, though repetition at consecutive concerts should be avoided.

- Rehearsals and concert availability:
  - Members are encouraged to participate in as many rehearsals and sectionals as they can, whether or not they are available to play in the concert.
  - For planning purposes it is hoped that members will be able to indicate their own availability for a particular concert by 'half term' in that series of rehearsals.
  - The final concert rehearsal, usually held on the afternoon of the concert, is very important and members are strongly encouraged attend.

We can take advantage of other opportunities as they present themselves eg. playing at the Godstone Fete.

During the pandemic, no concerts were possible.

## **CONCERT VENUES**

The location of the concert can impact the enjoyment of the orchestra and audience access.

Concert venues should meet the following criteria:

- 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 green room;
- an area for serving refreshments.

Examples of venues that work well are:

- St John's Church, Hurst Green; and
- Bawtree Hall, Hazelwood School.

These venues are also centrally located in our geographical catchment area and we propose to use these for at least one concert each year. Other venues will continue to be explored, especially if there are existing links with members, but they will need to meet the criteria.

## **COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND AGM**

It would help everyone if committee meetings were scheduled a year in advance and the date of the AGM in people's diaries from the start of the year.

- The committee should meet once per term, around 1 month before a concert.
- The AGM will be held in July each year
- Meetings of the repertoire group will take place as required.
- Other meetings will be held on an 'as needed' basis
- If possible, the meetings will be held at committee member's home rotating the day of the week to ensure maximum participation.
- If face to face meetings are not possible, for whatever reason, they may be held virtually via ZOOM or other online meeting interface.

The Musical Director may be required to attend repertoire planning meetings.

## **GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER**

Regular members of the orchestra know one another well, but we need 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 should hold a social at the end of each term.
- At these socials we should introduce the committee to the rest of the group, so everyone knows who we are.
- At each rehearsal, we should make a point of introducing any new members to the existing members during the interval.

During the pandemic, ensuring social contact and engaging with the wider membership has not been easy, but the introduction of a bi-monthly newsletter has helped.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

*The aims and objectives of the NDCOE 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