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COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA

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

Report to Members for the AGM – 10th July, 2019

In the past 12 months the orchestra has continued to grow and develop. In April 2019 we received a notification that our application to the Charity Commission had been approved so we are now a registered Charity. The application process for registration has involved considerable paperwork and commitment from our founding treasurer – Lucy, our current treasurer – Harriet and committee members. The application was supported by reports which have been published in the local press and our musical credentials were confirmed by Richard Cross who was our interim Musical Director at the time the application was submitted to the Charity Commission. Our thanks must go to all who have helped in this process and of course, to those who will act as trustees in the future.

Our Charity has the same ethos as we have had since the very beginning in 2016. This ethos has been described more fully in our 'Members Information and Guidelines' document brought in with our Making Music Constitution which was adopted at the 2017 AGM. At the end of the autumn term, 2018 we published a committee paper entitled – 'Future Plans, a proposal'. As a committee we did not want to lose sight of the original ethos where anyone playing an orchestral instrument should be welcomed to play with us. We are a non auditioned community orchestra with no grade requirements and we don't restrict numbers of popular instruments. No one is turned away for being too many of a particular instrument. This does mean that we may need to actively recruit instrumentalists to try to fill gaps and balance our sound.

With our 'pay as you play' system, no one is expected to have perfect attendance because we know that all sorts of things can interfere with that. On the positive side, it means that we have members who stay with us, and, even if they have to take breaks for one reason or another, we usually see them back with us sooner or later. So everyone can participate at a level that works for them – this approach may not be so welcome in other orchestras which require more commitment to rehearsals.

Our repertoire has always been 'eclectic' with a wide variety of musical genres ranging from popular classics through to pop music and music from stage and screen – this range seems to suit us and our audience. We should have parts for everyone for each piece of music we play - as far as we possibly can. This inevitably means using arrangements as well as original pieces and also accepting that some parts will be re-written/simplified if needed. Our members like a steady flow of new pieces to work on and now expect a Musical Director to work with the committee/rep group to source the new music using suggestions from members where ever possible.

In January 2019, after nearly three years together, as a result of different aspirations for the future development of the Orchestra, we parted company with Shona Fenion as our Director of Music. We hugely value the contribution Shona had made to the orchestra as our founding conductor – she certainly helped us realise that the North Downs Community Orchestra has tremendous potential for involving local people

in group music making. Shona, who was the conductor who had been there from the beginning, had shown remarkable commitment to a new idea and put in a lot of energy. We should all remember that and thank her for getting us started.

Outreach

The ensemble

We haven't been so active with the ensemble this year, mainly due to other commitments. We did visit the year 4 class at Marden Lodge Primary School, Caterham, in February as we did last year. Once again we played them a mixture of pieces which they participated in. We introduced our instruments to the children on a 1:1 basis which allows them to ask all sorts of questions! This visit went very well and it is hoped that we will be able to visit other schools etc in the coming months.

Caterham Festival

Although our Summer Prom concert was originally planned with the Caterham Festival in mind, we weren't able to find a suitable venue for a concert on the date in June that we wanted.

On the first Saturday in June some of our members attended a Caterham Festival event entitled 'Things to do in Caterham'. They manned a table with fliers, posters plus a selection of instruments and interacted with visitors to explain about our orchestra and band. It was a useful opportunity to meet other community groups as well.

NDCO diary: July 2018 –July 2019

July

Our Percussion Project was launched with a 'Junk percussion workshop' lead by professional percussionist, Claire Halsted. As well as being an introduction to playing conventional percussion instruments it included a lot of rhythm practice with everyone able to be involved. Additional 'instruments' were provided by Claire in the form of broomsticks, buckets, bins and hard-hats! The workshop was open to non member adults who had expressed an interest in becoming an orchestral percussionist and also to our members and their families. It was a very well attended, enjoyable and memorable evening which was financed by part of our grant from Hazelwood School Community Fund.

Our would- be percussionists then joined our North Downs Band for the autumn term, to begin to get used to playing in an ensemble, to play different percussion instruments and to start deciphering percussion sheet music. Our thanks must also go to Dave and fellow band members who made this possible by their continuing help and support.

Autumn term

Orchestra rehearsals saw our most ambitious set of music yet being rehearsed plus a few old favourites. String and wind sectionals continued together with much personal practice.

Our 'From Mozart to the Sound of Music' concert followed at the beginning of December. Conducted by Shona, it was held in the Bawtree Hall at Hazelwood School where the facilities and acoustics are super.

We finally performed Banks of Green Willow after 2 years of working on it! The solo woodwind parts were played beautifully.

Spring term

January began our 'self-help' and 'interim conductor' period. Without a permanent Musical Director, our kind members rallied to help the committee put in some temporary arrangements.

- Strings ran their own sectionals to begin with.
- Our 'Rep group' was born. In the case of a mixed ability community orchestra, finding the right sheet music is key to happiness in the ranks. Ideally it should have the correct range of parts for our wide selection of instruments and playing abilities. Our Rep group consists of around 10 volunteers who offer to research new pieces and then to look at suggestions from the point of view of members in their own sections. In the hope of finding pieces of music with tunes that we like, with parts for everyone and rejecting pieces that could bring us problems. Problems like the piece being too complex for the majority or requiring too much stamina from orchestra or audience. We set about selecting music for our 3rd birthday concert at the end of March and had most parts available for all before the first week of February.
- Richard Cross, our long standing wind section coach, was able to move some of his other commitments around to help us out by conducting most of our spring term rehearsals and Richard could also conduct the 3rd Birthday concert. This was a terrific relief!
- One of our violinists was able to introduce Sara Young to us – they played together in a different orchestra and Sara had been head of music at Hazelwood School prior to her retirement. Fortunately Sara could cover the rehearsals that Richard couldn't and she was able to take on the strings sectionals too.

In February, at our committee meeting, we arrived at the conclusion that we had already found two excellent candidates for the post of permanent Musical Director. We checked that both Sara and Richard would like to be considered for the permanent position and then arranged that Richard would be our interim conductor for the Spring Term and the 3rd Birthday Concert in March and that Sara would take over for the Summer Term and our Summer Prom Concert in June. After the interim trial periods, we would take feedback from our members to help choose our new Permanent Musical Director.

Two pieces of music in particular that we had chosen, 'Pirates of the Caribbean' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' had significant percussion parts. At February half term we ran a special band session with orchestra music for the new percussionists to have a go at those two pieces with. A good selection of orchestra players also turned up to support the percussionists and much progress was made. After that our percussionists began to attend orchestra rehearsals gradually taking on more pieces to work on.

In March, our 3rd Birthday Concert was the hoped for enjoyable anniversary celebration. We were back at St John's Church, Hurst Green with its good facilities and flexible seating. Richard ran the concert in his usual relaxed and good humoured manner. Our audience joined in with 'I vow to thee my country' and then probably left their comfort zone to sing some of the Bohemian Rhapsody lyrics with us. Oboes and flutes did us proud with their solos in 'Gabriel's Oboe'. The wind section performed their Shostakovich 2nd Waltz piece and we also had our first duet performed in a concert. This was 'The Swan' from the Carnival of the Animals and was played beautifully by Dzana on cello, and Margaret and harp, who also played the cadenza in the Tchaikovsky Flowers Waltz.

Summer Term

Began with Sara introducing us to another set of new music. Sara had chosen the programme with reference to the suggestion lists provided by members in 2018 and our rep group had then checked. Sara and Richard continued with their respective sectional rehearsals. As before, there was a special band rehearsal held at half term where friendly support was given to our percussionists who, by now, were playing all the pieces in the orchestra's programme.

The Summer Prom Concert in June was once again held at St John's Church, Hurst Green. We are grateful to St John's for letting us use their lovely building and grounds. It went very well indeed. Sara was her friendly, energetic self and quickly established a happy rapport with orchestra and audience alike. Audience participation was the best we have ever had with enthusiastic singing of both Jerusalem and, at the end, Land of Hope and Glory – for which they all stood up! Prior to that our venture into the Pop music world with Lady Gaga's 'Born this way', caused a good deal of 'clap and party' as required by the score!

Both sections also performed separate pieces ('Afterburn' for strings and 'Palladio' for wind). Dzana played another lovely duet with Margaret (cello and Harp). Our members played various solos in the main works – violin, brass, piccolo and tambourine to name just a few.

Our progress

We are fortunate indeed that everyone pulls together so well! Especially for our concerts. A lot of preparation and help is needed to organise them and pull them off. Somehow, after each concert, our friends and families in the audience declare that, 'That was your best concert yet!' Steady progress seems to happen as a consequence of playing together at regular rehearsals and sectionals with skilled and sympathetic musical direction.

However, it's important that we can still find ways of welcoming new players, even if they are very 'rusty' or learners - and therefore not playing at a more advanced level, or if they play an instrument we already have many of.

Our numbers have continued to increase steadily. We now have members playing just about all orchestral instruments. Our brass players and new percussionists have made a big difference to the sound we make. As ever, we always need more string players, especially violinists. Please spread the word as so many of our new members arrive as a result of personal recommendations from our members.

Members' survey 2019

So that our members had a direct input to our upcoming decision concerning the appointments of a permanent Musical Director and also, hopefully, a deputy conductor, a survey has been devised. It asks for feedback on many aspects of our 2019 activities. The survey was distributed just after the Summer Prom concert, to members who had attended rehearsals and sectionals in 2019. We are currently analysing the results and hope to make the appointment(s) well before the start of next term.

The NDCOE committee of trustees, 10.07.2019. This report covers the period 11th July 2018 – 9th July 2019