

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE AGM 2023

At last year's AGM, the new 'choir year' was underway with preparations going ahead for the Christmas Concert – our first concert in Dulverton since the pandemic, and our first Christmas concert since 2019! So we got off to a bad start last year, when we had, once again, to cancel the Christmas Concert. The decision to do so was not taken lightly – cancellation means a big disappointment for both singers and audience – but involved taking soundings from choir members in different areas all around Exmoor, as well as consulting others who could offer a weather report. Although the forecast suggested it might clear up by the evening, we had to take into account that Exmoor is an upland area, and at 1,000 feet or more – and many of our audience, let alone singers, live above 1,000 feet – snow not only tends to come thicker, but is often slow to melt, so real-time reports were collected throughout the morning, and once it became clear that the Musical Director would likely be unable to move at all that day – well, cancellation became inevitable. And I would like to thank all those near Dulverton who stepped in to clear the hall and to undertake the tiresome business of ringing all the audience with the sad news.

I tell this story to give you all a little more insight into what goes on behind the scenes. This choir involves more than just singing, and last year we started out with a new Chair, and a few new committee members, so it has been a year of continued – and continuing – evolution as we all settled into our roles. And continuing the theme, I would like to pay tribute to the committee and the work they do outside of rehearsals.

Kevin, of course, is the old hand, having been Treasurer for a few years, and is a steady presence and continuing source of common sense and wisdom; Kevin, I think you for all your work, and for keeping us on the straight and narrow. Caroline, too, has continued to work at a job I know she doesn't really enjoy, so special thanks to her too. Claire took on the role of Librarian in what proved to be a difficult year, but has done sterling work in sorting out what we had, what we needed and sorting out licences which will enable us to photocopy music legally, thus extending our available repertoire. Denise put on the publicity hat and has clearly shown that she is efficient as well as effective, which brings some sense of relief to the Event Managers. Linda is one of those, as she has been since 2018, and I would like to thank her for her work, and for being my colleague in that, because I was, of course, the other one. I say 'was' because Katherine, who joined the committee without portfolio last year, has agreed to take on the role, and I am delighted she has done so; one hat is enough to wear. However, this is a role which needs two people, and so we still need a second Event Manager to work with Katherine. (This person need not be on the committee) so that Linda and I can both step down. So if you think you would like to get a little more involved with the running of the choir, please come and talk to me.

Whilst I'm still in an appreciative mood, I'd like to mention two more people without whom we'd be in the soup: Joke, our extraordinary accompanist. We are so grateful for all you do, Joke, which is far more than we have the right to expect. And of course, our Musical Director

I am glad to see more people getting involved and Doing Something. It's not just the committee after all – Roger has showed us that he is multi-talented, and we are privileged

to have a stand-in for Joke. Hayley, has done great work on all matters to do with IT over the last year, and continues to produce practice files for our even though she does not sing with us at present; Magdalena has a lot to do with this as well. We are indebted to all of them.

All this serves to illustrate something I think is very important: this choir is not just a bunch of people who like to sing, and a woman who likes to wave her arms around. Voices of Exmoor is a community, a community of interest, and we are all interdependent on one another.

Which is why we do ask for a considerable degree of commitment, Back in the summer it became quite difficult for Amanda, as MD, when there was quite number of sudden absences from rehearsal close to concert dates, and a number of sudden absences from concerts: Amanda was concerned on a couple of occasions about whether we should go ahead, or cancel.

So I do ask you all to avoid giving late notice of missing concerts if you possibly can (obviously medical situations may be sudden and urgent) and to make every effort to attend those vital rehearsal just before concerts.

Whatever we do to help run the choir is a service to each and every member; whatever we do to support and help one another with our activities here is of benefit to the choir as a whole, and helps to build it up and make it great. And conversely, anything we do, or fail to do, which undermines someone, or leaves the choir as whole less supported, does the reverse.

I'd also like to add a bit about roles: Amanda is Musical Director, and I think we're lucky to have her. But that's quite a big job in itself, and she needs to be able to focus on it. My job is to have some sort of oversight of everything else, and to provide a listening ear for Amanda when she needs one. But I'm also here as a listening ear for you all – if you want to grumble – about music or anything else, come and grumble to me. It might be something easily sorted out!

I'm privileged to be Chair of this community, and I thank you all for your contributions to our shared life. With the musical skills of our MD, the talents of all who have an input to our endeavours, and the enthusiasm of all of you, I am sure we can make Voices of Exmoor greater than ever.