



Patron: Samuel West
Music Director: Darius Battiwalla
Registered Charity No. 518073

Annual General Meeting – 11 October 2011 Membership Officer's Report

The statistics reproduced below in this report are derived from the new computerised Chorus Database.

Composition of the Chorus

As at the date of compilation of this report (August 2011) there are 195 singing members of the Chorus (October 2010 – 186) and 67 Honorary Members (2010 – 65). Of the 195 singing members 10 (2010 – 9) are on an authorised Leave of Absence.

The Chorus numbers break down as follows:

	2010/11	2009/10	
1 st Sopranos	39	36	(2 on LoA)
2nd Sopranos	30	32	(1 on LoA)
1st Altos	32	28	(3 on LoA)
2nd Altos	27	25	(1 on LoA)
1st Tenors	10	9	(1 on LoA)
2nd Tenors	13	11	(0 on LoA)
1st Basses	25	25	(2 on LoA)
2nd Basses	19	20	(0 on LoA)

Resignations, Retirements and Deaths

During the year 2010/11 11 members retired or resigned or were written off the record due to unexplained absence for more than a year (2009/10 – 19) comprising:

	2010/11	2009/10
1 st Sopranos	1	5
2 nd Sopranos	2	3
1 st Altos	3	2
2 nd Altos	0	1
1 st Tenors	1	2
2 nd Tenors	0	0
1 st Basses	4	3
2 nd Basses	0	3



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New Members

During the year 2010/11 25 new members (2009/10 – 9) were successfully auditioned and joined the Chorus comprising:

	2010/11	2009/10
1 st Sopranos	5	2
2nd Sopranos	2	1
1st Altos	5	0
2nd Altos	2	0
1st Tenors	2	1
2nd Tenors	3	1
1st Basses	5	2
2nd Basses	1	2

Concert Attendance

A detailed breakdown of the concert attendance statistics is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

Just a few points may be highlighted.

- 1 Chorus Members who have sought a formal Leave of Absence are excluded from the figures. Casual apologies are counted as absences.
- 2 The overall average Chorus attendance at Concerts for the whole season was 75.8% of those Members currently available.
(2009/10 – 86.22%)
- 3 The best attended concert was the Elgar – Dream of Gerontius concert on 4/11/2010 at 96.7%
(2009/10 – Brahms Requiem at 88.8%).
- 4 The worst attended concert was the Verdi Requiem in Leeds Town Hall on 21/5/2011 at 54.7%
(2009/10 Armed Man in Birmingham at 79.5%).
- 5 The best section attendance at a concert was jointly the 2nd Sopranos and the 2nd Tenors at the Dream of Gerontius concert on 4/11/2010 at 100%
(2009/10 1st Sopranos at the Christmas Concerts at 97.0%).
- 6 The worst section attendance at a concert was the 2nd Tenors at the Verdi Requiem concert at the Leeds Town Hall on 21/5/2011 at 38.5%
(2009/10 – 2nd Tenors at the Armed Man concert in Birmingham at 45.5%).



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Honorary Members

There were 2 new Honorary Members approved by the Committee during the year. (2009/10 – 2).

I have not been made aware of the deaths of any Honorary Members during the year.

Re-auditions

Re-auditions continue on the usual three yearly cycle. The Tenor and Bass sections were re-auditioned over three sessions in June and July and I am very pleased to be able to report that every member of those sections who was re-auditioned was successful. There were just a few people who were not able to attend for various reasons and I shall arrange for them to be re-auditioned before the rehearsals in the first few weeks of next season.

The Soprano sections will be due for their triennial re-audition session in the Summer of 2012 and I shall be very grateful if section members will sign up for their slots when advertised as soon as possible in order to keep the number of 'catch up' re-auditions to the very minimum.

I would remind all members that if they have not been heard after they have been called for re-audition then they may not sing in subsequent concerts without obtaining specific permission from the Music Director.

Computerisation of the Records

Despite just a couple of hiccoughs, the Automated Registration System seems to have settled in very well and most members seem to have got the knack of 'swiping' their membership cards and getting their confirmatory 'beep' on the first attempt. To those who still struggle a little bit I say "*Courage mon brave* – you'll soon get the hang of it". The secret is to not hold your card too close to the reader – 6" to 10" away is best. And be careful not to obscure the barcode with your fingers or thumb. It is always worth just glancing at the computer screen to ensure that your number appears there. It should be the one at the bottom of the column. If there is any problem please report it to me straightaway.

The Automated Registration System is certainly saving me a great deal of time and effort and has gone a long way towards eliminating errors in the record system. However, you will have noted that I will NOT use the computerised system in venues where I cannot ensure the security of my laptop computer. Apart from not wanting to have it stolen there is also the issue of the fundamental principles of the Data Protection Acts which require that data be kept in a secure environment. In such circumstances I will continue to use the more old fashioned tick box registration sheets. It is also worth mentioning at this point that on concert days in the City Hall I now also provide a simple registration sheet for the benefit of those people who use the disabled changing room at the top of the stairs by the choir seating entrance doors.



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I shall be printing new membership cards for 2011/12 for all Chorus members and these will be issued by the Finance Officer on receipt of the annual subscription paid at the appropriate rate. These new cards will have extra information written into the bar codes which will, eventually, enable the system to reject a registration where a subscription is outstanding beyond the period allowed for renewal by the Finance Officer.

I am acutely aware of the ever present danger of the computerised system appearing to be over bureaucratic and getting in the way of the pure artistic purpose of the Chorus. I am determined that that should not happen but at the same time I firmly believe that it has enhanced our already well entrenched sense of Chorus discipline and professionalism and has therefore been a significant factor (amongst many other factors, of course) in helping us to secure prestigious *extra mural* engagements both in the recent past and those in the future.

Voice Representatives

The team of Voice Representatives are invaluable to me and I must not fail to record my annual public expression of sincere gratitude to each and all of them for the work they do. They are my 'eyes and ears' to the Chorus.

With the retirement of the redoubtable Flick Goodliffe from the Chorus over the summer there is now a vacancy for a Voice Rep in the first Alto section. I would very much like to fill this with a volunteer from that section before the start of the new season. I did discuss this with the section at the end of last season but I haven't as yet (early August) heard anything further. In order to give a much fuller picture and to encourage a 1st Alto to come forward I have attached my latest version of the Voice Rep 'job description' as Appendix 2 to this report. Doubtless all Chorus members will find this interesting background reading as well.



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Seating Plans

An innovation this year has been the circulation of concert seating plans by email shortly in advance of the concert date. I hope that the Chorus has found these to be helpful. However, I should add a cautionary note at this point. I prepare these seating plans from the singing list calculated by the MAR spreadsheets – a recent typical example is illustrated here (it's actually Henry V on concert day when all the people who were 'Borderline' had become either 'OK' or 'Insufficient' at the last rehearsal):

Totals	Sop 1	Sop 2	Alt 1	Alt 2	Ten 1	Ten 2	Bass 1	Bass 2	Totals
OK	24	16	19	13	7	7	18	12	116
OK so far	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Borderline	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Approved by DB	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
Singing List	24	18	20	14	7	8	18	12	121
Apologies/LoA	6	8	9	5	1	3	6	5	43
No Piano Rehearsal	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Insufficient	7	4	5	8	3	3	4	2	36
Totals	39	32	34	27	11	14	28	19	204

Note the numbers of 'No Piano Rehearsal' and 'Insufficient' – 20% of the Chorus who are not on the singing list.

It follows that if a member is not on this singing list there is no provision for them on the seating plan. If anyone is in any doubt whatsoever as to their status on the singing list they should contact either their Voice Representative or me without delay. We are always happy to be able to help. However, Chorus members should, if possible, always check their email inboxes for these seating plans and other late breaking news as late as possible before a concert.

Programme Lists

Another contentious area which always raises queries from Chorus members is the publication of lists of Chorus names in the concert programme. In times past I was asked to produce such lists just a week or so before the concert and it was relatively easy to produce a fairly accurate list of those members expected to be singing in the concert. Nowadays I'm asked for these details as early as three to four weeks before the concert. At that stage I have very little firm idea of who will be singing and who won't. I do produce a list but I accept that it will have people on it who will not be in the concert and it may well also not have people on it who do intend to sing – for example those who have fallen short of rehearsal time and intend to clear their approval to sing with Darius. I regret that in these circumstance, despite my best efforts, the list is always going to be inaccurate. I ask the Chorus to accept my apologies for this but there is little more that I can do to ameliorate the situation.



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It has been suggested that I should submit a list containing the names of all Chorus members but I do not think that that would be a satisfactory solution. As can be seen from the sample singing list above, in that case I would have had to publish a list of 204 names but there would have been only be 121 people (59.3%) on the platform. I'm sure that, in such circumstances, we would get queries and complaints from the audience about not fielding a full team. And what do we do about people who have formal Leave of Absence?

Conclusion

With 8 formal public performances during the year of varying levels of importance and sophistication (together with a number of other less formal appearances) keeping the rehearsal and concert attendance records has been complex – to say the very least. I am very grateful to all members for their forbearance in acceding to my continual requests to sign this sheet or swipe that card. However, I must also take this opportunity to remind members that it is their own responsibility to ensure that their attendance at every rehearsal and concert venue is duly recorded. Failure to do so means that the Chorus records, which are a matter of public information, will be incorrect and the individual's singing record will fall short of his or her actual attendance - which could have an effect on Darius' decisions in the future.

May I also remind members that they undertake to sing in **all** concerts and should attend at least three quarters of rehearsals for each. Please make concert dates a priority and let me know well in advance if you are unable to take part. In the event of an illness or other emergency please telephone me before 11:00 am on the morning of the concert or inform another Chorus member so that I can adjust the seating plan.

My telephone numbers are 0114 230 4815 and 07711 846571 and my email addresses are either john@johnspence.plus.com or membership@sheffieldphil.org. All this information is prominently displayed on the website. For those of you who can communicate on the free BlackBerry Instant Messaging service my PIN is 25E81C1E.

Please also continue to inform me of changes of address and illness of members that come to your notice.

I should also remind members that, in the event that they do not complete the required three quarters of rehearsals, I do not have the power to waive the requirement under any circumstances. This can only be done by the Music Director on direct application to him.

John M Spence
October 2011



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APPENDIX 1

	S1	S2	A1	A2	T1	T2	B1	B2	Concert Total	
29/9/2010										
Songs of Praise at St Oswald's (Sound)										
Attended	24	19	12	14	4	3	12	10	98	
Total available				Figures not available						
%age										
2/10/2010										
Songs of Praise at St Oswald's (Vision)										
Attended	21	17	9	9	2	2	9	9	78	
Total available				Figures not available						
%age										
4/11/2010										
Elgar – Dream of Gerontius										
Attended	34	32	27	24	7	11	21	19	176	
Total available	35	32	28	25	8	11	22	20	181	
%age	97.1	100.0	96.4	96.0	87.5	100.0	95.5	95.0	96.7	



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	S1	S2	A1	A2	T1	T2	B1	B2	Concert Total
12/12/2010									
Christmas Concerts – City Hall									
Attended	30	26	21	23	8	10	19	16	153
Total available	36	32	30	27	10	11	25	21	192
%age	83.3	81.3	70.0	85.2	80.0	90.9	76.0	76.2	79.7
25/2/2011									
Mozart - Requiem									
Attended	29	25	26	20	9	11	21	17	158
Total available	36	30	30	26	12	12	24	19	189
%age	80.6	83.3	86.7	76.9	75.0	91.7	87.5	89.5	83.6
21/5/2011									
Verdi – Requiem; Leeds Town Hall									
Attended	20	20	16	14	6	5	6	11	98
Total available	37	38	32	26	11	13	11	18	179
%age	54.1	52.6	50.0	53.8	54.5	38.5	54.5	61.1	54.7
3/6/2011									
Walton – Henry V									
Attended	24	18	20	14	7	8	18	12	121
Total available	37	31	32	26	11	13	24	17	191
%age	64.9	58.1	62.5	53.8	63.6	61.5	75.0	70.6	63.4



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APPENDIX 2

Voice Representatives

The role of the Voice Representative (who may or may not be a member of the Chorus Committee) was defined a few years or so ago after Darius had voiced the opinion that it would be unfair to peremptorily exclude someone from singing in a concert for 'insufficiency of rehearsal' if they had not had some prior warning that they were in danger of slipping into 'insufficiency' before it actually happened. This arises because it has always been a requirement in the Chorus' constitution since its foundation in 1935 that members of the Chorus must attend 75% of rehearsal plus all those (such as a piano rehearsal and orchestral rehearsal) which are deemed by the Music Director to be compulsory.

However, neither Darius nor the Committee wished the policing of these requirements to seem to be done in an arbitrary or unsympathetic manner. It was always felt, quite justifiably, that my predecessor Miriam Gilchrist was very good at having 'a quiet word' with members when necessary but this was contingent upon the fact that she quite literally knew everybody in the Chorus (including, famously, their Chorus numbers). However, Miriam did confide to me that she knew that there were people who 'got away with it'. She also privately admitted that she was absolutely terrified of having to exclude someone from singing in a concert and that she had never actually done it. (I have done it once since I took over).

Clearly it was going to be impossible for a new Membership Officer to be able to know everybody from the off as well as Miriam did and to keep in such close touch with every member of such a large Chorus. The Committee felt strongly that this close liaison was something which could be achieved much more effectively by someone from within each section who would know or could get to know her colleagues much more easily. This then became the rôle of the Voice Representative; to act as the representative both of the committee and of the Membership Officer and to be able to relay information of perhaps a more personal or confidential nature back and forth.

There are seven Voice Representatives and the function they fulfil has been an outstanding success.

They are:

1 st Sopranos	Katrina Hulse
2 nd Sopranos	Pat Hall
1 st Altos	Vacant
2 nd Altos	Kate Reece
All Tenors	Jim Monach
1 st Basses	Richard Salt
2 nd Basses	David Mortimer



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At this point I should mention that there has been some confusion in the past between the titles of Voice Representative and Members Representative. The former is the correct title for the people being described here. The latter is a Committee member who is elected nowadays by the whole Chorus (under the new constitution) and holds no other more specific office on the Committee.

The Committee's decision also required me to set up an 'early warning' system by which we could identify people who were in danger of slipping into insufficiency and therefore no longer be on the 'singing list'. The respective Voice Representative could then have the intended 'quiet word' with them in a friendly way to point out their position and also to explain that, if they are unable to meet the rehearsal requirements, they do have the option of putting their case directly to the Music Director. If he is happy that they may participate in the concert then they must report that fact back to me directly and the system should be able to cope with restoring them to the 'singing list' in such circumstances.

That system is now designed and in place. It operates by me setting up a fairly complex spreadsheet in MS Excel™ which takes in the attendance data extracted from the registration records provided at each rehearsal and automatically calculates every Chorus member's 'status' with regard to the particular forthcoming concert. Nowadays each of these spreadsheets is named "MAR / name of concert / date of concert". MAR of course refers to Minimum Attendance Requirement and is calculated by me for each concert. Basically it's 75% of the total scheduled rehearsals (except the orchestral rehearsal on the concert day which is compulsory anyway) rounded down to a whole number (except when there are 'half and half rehearsals' when it becomes more complex – but I won't trouble you with that now).

The 'status' categories are as follows:

Status	Meaning
OK	The member has now attended the minimum number of rehearsals required.
OK so far	The member is able to attend the minimum number of rehearsals required within the number of future rehearsals still to take place.
Borderline	The member can still attend the minimum number of rehearsals required but must attend every future rehearsal in order to do so . This is the 'early warning' flag required by the Committee.
Approved by DB	The member has sought and obtained the Music Director's express permission to sing in the concert (see below).
Insufficient	The member has missed so many rehearsals that s/he cannot now attend the minimum number of rehearsals required even if s/he attends every future rehearsal. In these circumstances the member must seek the Music Director's express permission to sing in the concert.
No Comp Reh	Irrespective of whether s/he has sufficient rehearsal attendance s/he has missed a compulsory piano or orchestral rehearsal and must seek the Music Director's express permission to sing in the concert.
Apologies/LoA	The member has indicated that s/he is unable to sing in the particular concert even though s/he may still attend rehearsals or s/he is on Leave of Absence.



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The 'singing list' isn't a formal published list of names as such but is my indication to Darius of the numbers expected to be singing in the concert and is also the basis of the seating plans which I now prepare for each concert.

So that's what's going on 'behind the scenes' so to speak. Where does the Voice Rep come in to all this?

The first job, as I have already mentioned, is to get to know each member of the section. To assist in this I issue a copy of the Chorus Membership details. Each time a new member is admitted by the Music Director I will send them an email, copied to the Voice Rep, welcoming them to the Chorus and mentioning the name of their respective Voice Rep and saying that s/he will introduce themselves in the next week or two. The Voice Rep can then become their 'conduit' for information about the Chorus or for access to any Chorus official to resolve any problem which might arise.

Once a week (hopefully), after I have collated all the data from the registration records, I will send a copy of the latest MAR sheet to all the Voice Reps. They should just have a quick look through their respective page and spot anyone who has a 'Borderline' or 'Insufficient' status and mention the situation to them as outlined above. It could well be, of course, that a reason that the situation has arisen is because either the member has forgotten to register for one or more rehearsals or that I have mis-transcribed the data from the sheets into the software. In any event, the Voice Rep should let me know the result of their conversation (by email preferably) and I will adjust the records accordingly. From time to time the Voice Rep will pick up all sorts of information which it is useful for me to know – such as, for example, someone is going to be away in a few months time because they're having a baby. I can note all this in the records and it saves having to ask questions later. To that end the Voice Rep acts as my eyes and ears.

John M Spence
Membership Officer
Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus
membership@sheffieldphil.org