

Annual Report for The Peninsula Choir 2015 - 16 September 6th 2016, Maxwell's Courtyard.

This has been another busy year for The Peninsula Choir, but we have a core stability in our membership and numbers remain constant at around 30 - we said goodbye to two members, and welcomed two more. However, over the course of this year it has become clear that we need to be a little more cautious in welcoming new members, and to that end will now have a process at the end of their first practice to assess their ability and suitability, thus avoiding awkward situations further on in the year.

On the Committee, Cheryl Williams stood down, and we elected Deirdre Roddy and Jeanie Martin. At Christmas we were very sad to say goodbye to Mike Yeomans who had been our pianist for the last two years, but was retiring due to ill health. However, we were extremely pleased to be able to recruit Emma Morgan in the Spring term, who has proved to be not only an excellent pianist, but also an accomplished singer, and therefore a member of the Choir in both capacities. This is the first time we have had an 'employed' pianist. At the start of the year we had decided to lower our fees from £4 to £3 per session, but decided to leave this, even though we now have an additional weekly expense; the effect of this will be reviewed at this AGM.

In September, some committee members met with Sharon Maloney from Making Music. She is the new N.I rep and was here to meet all members to get a picture of our activities and see how Making Music could be of service. She promised a series of workshops in the summer but these did not materialise. But from our discussions it became clear that we would be required by law to register with the Charity Commission, which we are now in the process of doing.

Our focus for this term was on fixtures for the Christmas period, which included The Gateway Club in Newtownards, the Carol ship, as in the previous year, visits to Ard Cuan and Barrhall Care homes, and we also sang at Kircubbin Lights Switch-on and afterwards in Maxwell's, where many people joined our carolling. In addition we were invited to sing at the Cross-Community Carol Service in the COI Portaferry which was a lovely experience as the church was full and the acoustics very good. We got a lot of very positive feedback from this event. As usual, we enjoyed all of our engagements, although the Carol Ship was held on the old ferry and it was a bit of a squash, but good fun. We also held our own small Christmas Concert for our friends and families, followed by mince pies and punch. We were invited to the Wilson's in Ballyhalbert again for a Christmas wind-down, and it was a lovely way to end this busy term.

So we entered the Spring term with plans for a Midsummer concert on the theme of Folk Songs from the British Isles. It was a pleasure to be learning new folk songs, some familiar, some quite new, and to realise that these will just add to our library of pieces that can be used for all sorts of occasions. We also welcomed two new members, one of whom was a student from Switzerland, and she proved to be a very useful addition to the 2nd sopranos.

In February, several choir members took part in the Belfast Philharmonic Come and Sing. More of us go every year, and we all find it a really uplifting experience, even though much of it is very challenging for those who don't read music. But we do have the confidence to go to this event and participate fully; and to be part of a huge choir for one day is such a thrill.

During this term we were asked to sing as part of an evening Service for Carrowdore Presbyterian Church. We filled two slots with four sacred pieces and received much praise and thanks for our contribution. Afterwards a member of Donaghadee Male Voice Choir approached us and after some conversation we decided we might think about working together in the future. What an honour that would be! But it is a measure of the quality of the work we are producing now, and very encouraging to be so well thought of by such a prestigious Choir.

Amidst all the hard work of rehearsals, we also look forward each Spring to Donna's Seed Swap in March. This annual event has been tremendously popular and effective in terms of fund-

raising; in fact, over the last four years it has added over £1200 to choir funds, so special thanks indeed to Donna, and to her sister Martine, who bakes wonderful cakes for the hungry gardeners after the exhausting work of deciding which plants to take home. Sadly this may be the last of these events, as Donna has moved and may not be able to host this again. But it might pop up elsewhere! The Pub Quiz – our other main fund-raising event – is normally held in June but this was not possible with The Saltwater Brig, so it has been deferred to September 23rd 2016.

As the third term got under way, we practiced even harder for our concert, which was to be held in Cloughey Presbyterian Church. The line-up of musicians consisted of a young flautist, Ruth Clarke, Paddy Craig our percussionist again, Astrid King, a professional violinist and friend, and Emma our pianist. Folk Songs from the British Isles was held on June 18th and was a great success. The church itself has wonderful acoustics, the audience was enthusiastic, joining in with gusto when it came to their turn, and during our short interval, Astrid and Emma electrified us with No 6 of Bela Bartok's Romanian Dances! This happy evening concluded in the Hall with refreshments and many, many compliments. Our charity donation for this event went to First Responders.

This was our final meeting as a choir for this year but forward plans continue. We have been booked for a wedding in Carrowdore in August 2017, and in August a small group sang for the wedding reception of Christine Jendoubi's son, held in their garden in Portaferry.

This has been another happy and successful year for the Choir. We receive nothing but praise wherever we go and our name is now quite familiar around the Peninsula. The strength of the choir owes a lot to the camaraderie that has been building over the years between members, so that a rehearsal may be hard work but everyone supports each other in their work. A very special mention goes to Cheryl Williams who has taken it upon herself to play/record/email all the parts of the pieces we learn, and this is a huge help to those who do not read music. We are also flexible and can respond to a request to perform, with the right number of singers for the occasion – be it a dozen or the full choir, and with appropriate material.

So we look forward to another joyful year of fruitful singing and I would like to thank everyone involved with, and supportive of this Choir, for all we have experienced this year.

Bee Kupicha, Choir leader, Committee Chair. September 2016

