

# *Donaghadee Male Voice Choir*

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT SEASON 2022 – 2023**

Good evening everyone and welcome to our first (almost) post-Covid AGM.

The survival of the choir through three very difficult years, when our opportunities for practice and performance were very limited, has been inspiring. This has been possible through a number of factors, including the leadership and dedication of David McAlpin and his committee, the hard work of Michael Pritchard our indefatigable Honorary Secretary and the musical direction of Norwood Steele, who led the choir after the departure of Ivan Black. However, most of the credit is due to you, the members, who continued to support the choir despite having very little practical return on your investment. Thank you all.

It has been a great honour to serve you as Chairman. When I took over from David, he had been in post for a marathon three years, during which he put in the graft and had little benefit from it, except for the satisfaction of doing an excellent job. We had, through death and illness, lost a number of much-valued members. The age profile of the choir was also on an upward curve. It was therefore essential to embark on a recruitment drive and this was my first priority. To do this, we ran a number of open evenings to attract new members. These were promoted in the press, through leafleting, through our social media channels and by personal contact. Although the first one had to be postponed owing to the sad death of Her Majesty the Queen, overall the initiative has been very successful and our numbers are once again creeping upwards. This is evident in the turnout for practices and the numbers on stage at our performances. I know that the incoming committee intend to continue with these efforts and I'm sure that you, the members, will give them every assistance.

Our season began early on a joyful note with Emma's wedding in Portico in July. Sadly, our next appearance was at the funeral of Gibson McCann in August. Then, with an emphasis on recruiting and bringing on new members, we practiced hard during September and October, until Emma had to leave us temporarily for maternity leave. Once again, Norwood stepped into the

breach and took over as musical director from mid October until February, when Emma was able to rejoin us. Norwood led us into our three Christmas engagements in December, namely the turning on of the Christmas lights in Carrowdore on the 10th (where Emma visited us with her new baby Nina), then the Carol Service in aid of Shelterbox in 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church, Donaghadee on the 11th and finally to Bangor Abbey with Julia Hutchinson (nee Clarke) on 16<sup>th</sup> December. We are most grateful to Norwood for his leadership and guidance during that time.

Regarding performances, the aftermath of Covid left us short of church engagements, the bread-and-butter of our public appearances. These engagements help us with practice in deportment and the confidence to stand up and sing in front of an audience. However, the churches were quite understandably cautious in encouraging full-throated singing at first. In the coming season, we are working towards supporting many more church services.

In 2022, the choir celebrated 90 years since its foundation. This occasion was marked by a gala dinner at Clandeboye Lodge, where members, their guests and friends of the choir enjoyed a good meal and a convivial evening. Another strand of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary was a concert. This was originally scheduled for October but was postponed until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 so that Emma could take part and to give us more time for rehearsal. The concert also was dedicated to the members who had died during Covid and whose funerals we were unable to attend to give them the customary choir send-off. In addition, it raised a substantial sum of money for the Storehouse NI charity. The venue was the Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church in Bangor, which is an excellent venue, seating an audience of up to 600 (although perhaps a bit cramped onstage) We were supported in this concert by Donaghadee Community Choir, Bangor Ukuleles, clarinettist Gillian McCutcheon, soprano Helenna Howie and our own Ivan Black. The concert drew nearly a full house and I have received many compliments regarding the variety in the supporting artists. It was a great return to public performance for the choir. Ivan had a busy night and preceding weeks, as our usual accompanist Stuart Tanner was unavoidably absent owing to the illness of his mother in England. Ivan came back to accompany the choir, not only at the concert but in the weeks of practice leading up to it and we are most grateful to him for this.

Several of our new members joined us on stage for the first time at this concert and we were delighted to welcome back Sam Campbell, in recovery from long term Covid illness.

Having come second by a short nostril in the male voice section at Bangor Festival in 2022, we returned this year to compete in this category and also in the sacred music section. I am pleased to report that we won the male voice category and also performed creditably in the sacred music, although beaten to first place by two really excellent ladies' choirs. Bangor Festival showed that the choir is back on song and can now field 50 singers. It was evident that the impetus of competition sharpened everyone's attitude and enthusiasm.

This year could not have been the success it has been without the input of many people, to all of whom I extend my thanks. I wish to particularly mention Emma, who has juggled maternal duties with those of Musical Director very successfully. Emma's easy but firm leadership and her exacting musical standards have made practices highly enjoyable. As mentioned above, Norwood's contribution as assistant Musical Director has been immense, not to mention his incorrigible role as Department Officer and we are most grateful. Michael Pritchard is a tower of strength and where would we be without him? Dave Ayre has quietly shouldered most of the burden of looking after the hall, inside and out. Outside the committee, Norman Willis has continued to run the website, which is now a very useful musical learning resource. Ian Houston manages our Facebook page and is also our group photographer of choice. Hayden McClenahan has taken over as music librarian and has been recognised through receiving the Stanley Robertson Memorial Trophy earlier in this meeting, and has put matters on the archive and organized it splendidly. Many others have put in time and effort on behalf of the choir and I am very grateful to all of them.

In conclusion, during the past year, the choir has clearly recovered its mojo and is ready to cement its reputation as the leading male voice choir in Ireland. I hope that the coming season will see us carrying out many more engagements, increasing our membership, and that we will once again go touring. Tours bring the choir even more together and help new members get to know old hands. I am grateful for the honour of serving as your chairman

and wish the incoming chairman and committee every success in the season to come.

Finally finally, before I end I have one task to undertake. Over the 90 years of this choir there have been many, many legends who achieved that status across many, many avenues and anecdotes. Memories invoke legendary status to incredible servants of this choir and I wish, on your behalf, to highlight and install another one. I have already made reference to his role in looking after the choir after Ivan departed and Emma was appointed. In actual fact he has kept this choir going and together on many occasions. Add to that his meticulous directions as department officer over many many years.

To that end I wish to present Norwood with a photograph which is not for his living room wall but for the choir wall, as he now joins the legends. This is a reflection of respect and in appreciation by us all for what you have done over the last few years and beyond. You are a true DMVC MAN!!

Ed Wheeler.

June 2023