

BANGOR INTERNATIONAL CHORAL FESTIVAL 2024

REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND CHARITY COMMISSION

Our dates for this year's Festival were 25-27 April. Thursday 25th started with our Primary Schools – 12 in all over 4 competitions with the largest entry of 9 choirs in our Primary School over 30 singers class. A most wonderful day ending at 3pm with a short break and restarting at 4pm with our Post Primary School choirs. We had some wonderful school choirs entered including Bangor Grammar Chamber Choir, Carrickfergus Grammar School Choir, Regent House Junior Chamber School Choir and a lovely visit from Holy Cross College all the way from Strabane. Again a fabulous afternoon of music – some amazing performances and an affirmation that choral singing is in safe hands for the future.

A big highlight of the Festival is our Special Schools competitions and on Friday 26th we had the most wonderful morning listening to these amazing children, who have to overcome so many obstacles just to be with us and they gave the most uplifting performances. At Bangor we always provide a lunch for the Special School choirs, so they really enjoy a “day out” feeling.

The evening Festival Concert included visiting choirs from Wiltshire and East Midlands and we knew we were in for great competitions the following day. For the adult competitions on the Saturday we had choirs Altrincham, Scotland, Swindon and East Midlands as well as several new local choirs who entered the Newcomers Class. One of the choirs in this competition was Belfast City Chorus located in HMP Hydebank in Belfast.

Due to their circumstances preventing them from attending the Festival, the Chairperson, Adjudicator and myself visited the Prison on Monday 22

April where the Adjudicator was able to listen but not actually announce any marks at that point. However he did give encouraging comments to the Choir and I can honestly say it was a most uplifting experience for the three of us. HMP Hydebank allowed recording of the performances to be taken and sent to the Festival and so on the Saturday in the Newcomers competition and the Light Entertainment competition, we were able to play the recordings during what would have been the choir's allocated Festival performance time. With permission from the other choirs in these two competitions we then also recorded all of the choir performances and sent these back to Belfast City Chorus so that they could hear the other choirs but also feel that they were part of the Festival. Belfast City Chorus was awarded a Certificate of Commendation.

We pride ourselves on being a fully inclusive Festival and we were so pleased to be able to include this choir, as I'm sure we all know the health benefits of singing and these benefits certainly go a long way in helping the individuals in this choir. We had so many positive comments about their inclusion and performances from other choir competitors, audience members and comments relayed to us from the Prison Governor and Belfast City Chorus at Hydebank. This was a first for Bangor but we're hoping a process that we can continue in the future.

We were very pleased with the number of entries in all competitions especially the Gala Evening competitions – the Light Entertainment and the Open Choral in which there were six and nine choir entries respectively. As you can imagine these two competitions completed a fabulous festival and in each competition it was a local choir who took 1st place – Lagan

Seahorses MVC in the Light Entertainment and Regent House Chamber Choir in the Open Choral Competition.

Adjudicators

Our Adjudicators this year were Darren Day from Belfast and Dexter Drown from Birmingham. Darren is an extremely versatile and sought after musician. He works as a teacher, composer, singer, pianist, and international examiner for Trinity College London. Dexter joined Darren on Saturday 27 April for the adult competitions. Dexter is a distinguished and inspiring choral conductor and choir trainer sharing his love of choral music with singers across the country, having worked as Chorus Director with many well known Conductors, such as Sir Karl Jenkins. Both Adjudicators were very encouraging and positive in their comments to all performing choirs, giving them lots of constructive advice on which to work on for the future. They both thoroughly enjoyed the high standard of performances and are both keen to return in the future.

Finances

Financially we were extremely fortunate to have retained ongoing sponsorship from several of our local businesses as well as local government funding from Ards and North Down Borough Council, paid for advertisements in the Festival Programme, ticket sales and catering income. We are now in the early stages of a Festival rebrand as well as updating our website to make it more user friendly and provide facilities for online entry, data collection and uploading of music if required.

2025 Dates

Our dates for 2025 are 3-5 April. We held our debrief meeting last week and have now began Festival 2025 planning. We are very fortunate to have 4 choirs already planning their trip to Bangor next year.

To conclude, on behalf of the Festival I would like to thank Audrey and Jack Stewart for attending our Gala Evening and also to thank the Federation for their continued interest in and support of our Festival in Bangor.

Festival Committee

Bangor International Choral Festival