

Maidstone Symphony Orchestra

Playing Members Bulletin – January 2010

At the MOS Committee meeting which was held on 19 January 2010 a number of issues relating to the playing membership of the orchestra were discussed, and whilst it was generally felt by those players who were present and the conductor that MSO is a contented and happy orchestra, the fact remains that we can never be sure what playing members' opinions are unless they tell us.

Similarly, we suspect that there are many ways in which individual players could contribute to the publicity of the orchestra, or to getting more people to come to concerts, or to finding new sponsors or patrons, or a variety of other useful functions, but in most cases we are simply not aware of them.

In short, it is apparent to me as the new Chairman that we need to develop communication within the orchestra, and to foster a community spirit. We have decided therefore to follow a number of new initiatives, and this bulletin represents the manifestation of the first of them.

Improving Communication

I believe it is important that players should have some idea what is being discussed at Committee, and that we should strengthen your sense of involvement in the running of the orchestra. From now on, I will therefore issue a bulletin after each Committee meeting which will let you know some of the things discussed and some of the decisions made on your behalf.

At the same time I would encourage you again to talk to your Player Rep, or to email me directly, if there are issues which you want to raise, or questions which you wish to ask.

We have agreed that we should start to have players' meetings two or three times a year at least – and the plan is to hold them at 7.00 or 7.15, before rehearsal on a Thursday. The rehearsal may start at 7.45 on those evenings and end at 10.15. The plan is that we have open discussions as an orchestra about issues raised. If there are sensitive matters it will better to raise them with your Player Rep, but it would be good to think that we could address most of your concerns in such meetings. We will let you know when the first of these is planned.

Finances

Much of the discussion at the Committee meeting was related to the financial position of the orchestra. Those of you who attended the AGM will have some idea of the state of play, but in stark terms, MSO has about £14,300 in the bank, and no significant income is expected until the season ticket sales for the 2010/11 season in August and September. Our Treasurer estimates that we will run out of money shortly after the next concert, and at that point we will need to turn to the Friends of MOS for a loan. The Centenary season is likely to generate further losses – perhaps as much as £20,000 on present audience numbers. FoMOS itself has limited resources, so action is required now and for the foreseeable future to turn the financial situation around.

There are some grants and patronage promised to us for the Centenary season – Novello have granted £1,000 towards the McCabe commission, and Cllr Dan Daley has pledged £1,000 as a patron, while Dr Brooks and his wife are sponsoring the Emma Johnson concert to the tune of £500.

We are planning an Auction of Promises, as you know, and Stuart Garden has agreed to organise a sponsored playathon. These will no doubt generate useful funds, but the key to long term prosperity remains audience growth.

Audience Development

Everybody has a part to play in getting people along to our concerts. If we could sell around 175 more tickets for each concert, much of our problem would be solved. The Ticket Secretaries reported that just 4 – yes, **4** – tickets had been sold for the February concert. The edition of *Crescendo* which will go to the audience at that concert is clear about the scale of the problem and exhorts them to get people along to concerts. That same responsibility falls on us, and this problem is not simply going to go away.

All ideas are welcome – some of those already given include giving commissions to charities, youth groups, schools, churches etc if they can sell tickets on our behalf, getting businesses to buy tickets for their own use, or for us (or them) to give away, and even paying players commissions for selling season tickets. If you can help in any of these ways, I will be happy to talk to you about how to go about it, and what we can offer to supporters.

Repertoire

The programmes are set for 2010/11, but thereafter we are all clear that the repertoire will have to be scaled down, and we will have to ensure that our programmes are commercial. This is not where we want to be – as players we all want to be able to play large scale works, slightly less well-known works and perhaps even challenging works. We do not want to have to be looking at a more affordable level of soloists. We do not want to start losing players because they do not like enough of the programmes we choose, but the fact is that we need to play music which will please an audience.

Of course, if we can generate a bigger audience now and through the Centenary year we should be able to avoid this situation. Equally, if we can limit the necessity for extra players – either by encouraging more players to join, or by ensuring that the levels of commitment to every concert mean that we do not need to fill gaps in our own ranks – we can consider larger works.

Commissioned Music

It could be argued that some of the financial problems are of our own making, in that we have commissioned two pieces of new music for our Centenary. One of these – the Malcolm Riley – is very inexpensive, but the McCabe is a considerable investment.

Those of us who voted in favour of the commissions believe that it is the right thing to do. Maidstone Orchestral Society / Maidstone Symphony Orchestra will celebrate its 100th season in 2010-2011, and the concert in March 2011 will be almost exactly 100 years since the first concert.

As one of the finest community orchestras in the country, MOS will celebrate this achievement with a gala concert, which will feature our President, John Lill. However, we also wish to look forward to another 100 years of orchestral music in Maidstone, and this desire is evidenced firstly by the inclusion of Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, aimed at a younger audience, but also by the commissioning of a major new orchestral work. John McCabe is a highly respected composer, and we will gain a new and unique work for orchestral concert performance.

We believe that there will be three principal benefits to MOS:

1. Confirming our status as a leading community orchestra by commissioning new music from a major composer.
 2. Demonstrating to our audience that we are artistically and musically adventurous, with the hope that we may attract a new audience (and new players) in the process
 3. Challenging the musicianship of the playing members of the orchestra, and giving them an enhanced pride in their membership of an orchestra which is capable of commissioning and performing a major new work
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MOS should be proud to have commissioned a new work of this stature, and in a wider context, the exposure of the players and audience to new music will be important in encouraging and permitting further broadening of the orchestra's repertoire to include more new music.

The work will be published by Novello, and available for hire, and John McCabe's work has a strong track record in terms of performance and recording. On that basis it is very likely that the work will benefit from further exposure.

Music Sponsorship

A unique opportunity arises out of the McCabe commission. I have agreed with Novello that they will allow us to sell "sponsorship" of the orchestral score and each part, and that they will print on the first page of the part (or score) a short inscription dictated by the sponsor. This will be on every part printed, as part of the typesetting for that part. So for example, the second horn part could be inscribed "Sponsored by Chris Gibbs", or perhaps with an in memoriam dedication, and that will be on all second horn parts published. The sponsor will also receive a copy of the first page of the part, signed by John McCabe and Brian Wright, to frame, and acknowledgement in the Gala Concert programme and elsewhere.

This opportunity is being offered to players and the committee only in the first instance, but it will be broadened to the wider membership, audience and all comers in March. The price is £75 per part (a real bargain for the string parts, where there are multiple copies!) or £150 for the score. I will produce a list of the available parts for you to sign up for at the Sunday rehearsal on 31 January.

Competition – Win Cash

The friends will also be running a competition, with a cash prize of 25% of the entry fees. The more entries there are, the greater the prize, and we hope to attract thousands of entries. For £1 a go, all you have to do is calculate the number generated by multiplying together your estimated number of complete bars in each of the two commissions, and the nearest to the correct answer wins. The range of possible answers is probably around 60,000, so there is plenty of scope. Details of this will be published very shortly - and I'll level with you: what we want is for every player to have at least 5 entries. If you do that, the prize will be at least £75, and somebody has to win it! However, we are hoping to get the prize nearer to £500, and we will be asking you to spread the word.

Summer Social

David King, our much-respected Vice President will be 90 in April, and he has suggested a repeat of his 80th birthday bash, where the orchestra had a social event, rather like the Christmas party (but bigger) where players played chamber music and sang. He sees it primarily as a celebration of the orchestra (with which he has been very closely involved for many years), but also as a celebration of 10 more years of his own involvement. The date is vague at present – in the summer, after the World Cup probably – but we need to know how many players are interested in principle, and how many would be able to contribute musically. Please let your Player Reps know.

Chris Gibbs

Chairman

21 January 2010
