



Chair report

Looking back at our 2023/24 season

As I look back on my second year as Chair, it seems to me that ADMS has had another very successful year, both in providing enjoyment and musical fulfilment for members, and (to judge from the warmth of their reception) enjoyment for our audiences. As the host of the winner of the Abingdon Concerto Class, we also provide young people with the opportunity to perform a concerto with us – in March we were treated to a stunning performance of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G by Edward Harris-Brown.

Our past season produced some wonderful performances by choir and orchestra, separately and together. Together we performed a total of 31 pieces of repertoire – probably a record! At Alex's instigation, we evolved the 2023 Christmas concert into a family-friendly Sunday afternoon format, selling out and raising £386 net for the Samaritans – a charity nominated by Alex after the sad loss of his wife Larissa. Although The Abbey Cinema is unable to host us again, we plan to continue the format in December 2024 at St Helens Church.

As can be seen from the following table of audience numbers which Tim Budd has kindly provided, attendance at our four main concerts has fallen slightly compared to the previous season last year. This year we can add the Christmas concert numbers (previously free admission, so there was no easy audience count).

Year	November	Dec Xmas	March (orchestra)	March (choir)	June	Annual total	Friends
23/24	111	151	117	98	121	598	(14)
22/23	147	?	129	115	139	530	(15)
21/22	99	?	114	140 *	47	400	(17)
18/19	130	?	120	90	100	440	(19)
17/18	129	?	113	60	110	412	(22)

* St Matthew Passion, included Wantage Choral Society

Tim's financial reports indicate a near break-even in ADMS's finances for the past season. Separately this year, we've received a second generous bequest from the late Tony Bradley, who played viola for many years and also served as Vice Chair. The committee has agreed to use these bequests to organise workshops for both choir and orchestra, to be run by professional musicians – these should be starting in the autumn when a suitable subject piece from our repertoire is available.

During the year, the committee has agreed what level of reserves are sensible but not excessive for the society to maintain, and this gives the society confidence in being able to cope with the rising cost of venue hire (which could increase further as the new government's policy is to add VAT to independent school fees) and other expenses, which will hopefully stabilise now that inflation has fallen. As well as an inflation-linked review of our professional fees, we've also agreed a new tariff for soloists, depending on the duration of their performance and the preparation needed. Tim's reports detail all this.

Members and venues

Choir member numbers last season were 93, and orchestra 52 – a healthy increase on 2023/24 numbers. High membership numbers are a good thing from the point of subscription income and from ticket sales which members facilitate by inviting friends, family and colleagues along to concerts. However, while new members are always welcome, our size has continued to cause difficulties in joint concerts of fitting choir and orchestra into a concert venue, preserving lines of sight to the conductor, enabling both choir and orchestra to hear and balance each other, and providing a good experience for members and audiences. While separate choir and orchestral concerts will continue at St Helens Church for economic reasons, the committee has spent much time and made many site visits exploring alternative venues for joint concerts, as well as different layout options in St Helens. The only other Abingdon venue believed large enough is Amey Theatre, Abingdon School, and on 3 June we held a joint rehearsal there to explore its suitability for our future Verdi Requiem concert on 14 June 2025. Although neither choir nor orchestra were present at concert strength at that rehearsal, the committee has agreed that it makes sense to perform the Verdi Requiem there, especially considering the additional longer-term benefits offered by Abingdon School such as marketing and promotion of our concerts, box office provision, refreshments etc. However, our fit into that venue is not guaranteed, so please bear with us while we try to find ways to ensure an excellent member experience at joint concerts.

Our professional musicians

As every year, ADMS's 2023/24 success could not have been achieved without the massive contributions of our three professional musicians – our Conductor and Musical Director Alex Walker, Leader Kate Bailey, and Accompanist David Bannister. I know you will join me in sending my thanks to them.

David Bannister joined us as Accompanist in September 2023 but, owing to an increasing volume of work, resigned from June 2024, and we are delighted to welcome Michiyo Machida as Accompanist from September 2024.

Our most recent news is that Alex Walker has been appointed Music Director and Principal Conductor of Henley Symphony Orchestra. This orchestra rehearses on Thursdays, and in order to accept this appointment, Alex has resigned from conducting Thursday choir rehearsals with effect from 21 November. In response to this, the committee has agreed the principle of having two conductors, which many other joint societies do, and a subcommittee is currently working through the process of appointing a conductor for the choir.

Helping to run ADMS

During the year, we welcomed onto the committee Sue Hurst as Vice Chair Orchestra (after a long and valued contribution by Jane Carr), Rosie Bruce as Orchestral Librarian (after a long period of dedicated service by Penny Smith) and Jeanette Thomas as Concert Manager (after a shorter period run by Claire Giacometto). Many thanks are due to all committee members and also to a fleet of supporting (non-committee) volunteers, without whom the society could not function. Forgive me if over 30 of you are too numerous to mention individually, but all (I hope) are listed on the "Contact us" page of the website www.adms.org.uk/contact-us/. I want to extend my personal thanks to each and every one of you for your positive and valued contributions to the running of ADMS.

I'd also like to add a particular thank-you to Kevin Mosedale (trumpet) for volunteering at the last AGM to take on the coordination, compilation and production of concert programmes. Kevin has also agreed with his employer Radley College for them to undertake and fund the printing of programmes as a form of sponsorship – hence the Radley College advertisements you may have noticed.

The presence of such effective support has enabled me to take on a more strategic role, championing the member experience for all members, and looking to the future of the society. This coming season, I need to step further back from detailed operations.

Concert programmes 2024/25

Programmes for our forthcoming season are already on the website with dates and venues – and included in the AGM pack – I hope all members will find many pieces of interest to rehearse and perform.

As always, please think of the website www.adms.org.uk as the master source of up to date information on concerts, rehearsals and many other aspects of ADMS. I update the website whenever there's a change – including when I receive details of changes to rehearsal schedules.

AGM 9-9-24 and committee 2024/25

A discussion at June committee made me believe that all current committee members are willing to continue for our 2024/25 season. If this is not the case, please let me know immediately at chair@adms.org.uk.

According to our Constitution, any member is entitled to stand for election at the AGM, irrespective of whether a role is already occupied, or someone is already standing for a vacant role. If there is something you think you could and would like to contribute and/or are intending to stand for election, please email me before the AGM at chair@adms.org.uk.

The AGM is on Monday 9 September 2024 at 19.30 at our usual rehearsal venue: The Manor Preparatory School, Faringdon Road, Abingdon OX13 6LN. I hope as many members as possible will be able to attend, and look forward to seeing you there.

I hope you are all having a good summer. If there's anything on your mind – things you think are working well which we should keep doing, or things you think could make ADMS even more successful – please let me know.

Geoff Bushell
Chair 2023/24
chair@adms.org.uk
01235 818848

ADMS Choir 2023/24

Report from the Vice Chair (Choir) Pen Gresford

The 2023/24 ADMS season started with an incredible and terrible jolt as we learned of the death of Alex's wife Larissa at the beginning of September. How difficult it has been for Alex and Lev and the commitment Alex has shown – and the stoicism of Lev – has been remarkable. Our thanks and appreciation to them must not be underestimated.

We welcomed David Bannister as our accompanist, and also taking over the Choir conductor reins in many instances. He has been aided by some wonderful accompanists – David Hyland, Malcolm Pearce in particular – who've managed to step in when we've needed them. Very many thanks to them – and so we were able to keep things moving and singing.

Our concerts for the year have been very enjoyable and successful for both choir and orchestra with some terrific joint and choir alone music making. Audiences have been good and appreciative, and we have welcomed Jeanette Thomas as our new concert manager – thank you very much Jeanette.

A brief summary of concerts follows and then some additional and important developments relating to the **Choral Director and accompanist**.

November – joint Choir and Orchestra

What a feast – Brahms Song of Destiny, Bruckner Te Deum – both fantastic 'sings' and the cheerful and lyrical Dvořák 8th Symphony. As always we had the most wonderful soloists in Eleanor Broomfield (sop) Hannah Bennett (mezzo), Andreas Bigom (tenor) and Michael Temporal Darell (baritone). Having singers of such quality enhances our own performance and we welcome them.

Christmas concert

Here we tried a completely new format – and what a success. In the Abbey Cinema we saw families as well as our traditional audience converge to enjoy a lively concert of carols and storytelling with music – Peter and the Wolf and Coates Three Bears narrated by Neil Foster. It was ably hosted by the Cinema staff – huge fun for all. We will be doing something similar this year but in a different venue.

Spring Concert March – Choir)

This was a great walk around French 19-20C choral music with a bit of Mozart thrown in. Fauré, Duruflé, Saint-Saëns, Dupré all contributed to an eclectic and uplifting programme and finishing with the mesmerising Duruflé Requiem. The additional joy was the playing of James Brown with some magnificent organ interludes. The organ in St Helen's Church rang out with his brilliance and boosted us all to sing our hearts out.

Summer concert 8 June

Bravo!! An Opera Gala. What a treat to sing these glorious and familiar choruses from the repertoire – AND in Italian – and be supported by the most stunning soloists and the panache of the Orchestra. It was a lovely warm colourful evening, a truly engaged audience and we all had fun. Our soloists brought energy and humour – completely engaging in the spirit of the event and acting (with glasses raised) as well as singing. Andreas joined us again and Jillian Finnamore was glorious and glamorous. Though we may have smiled as we rehearsed Nessun Dorma, it was great to sing and not remotely football crowdish! And I'm sure we're all still marching along to Aida and swaying to Casta Diva. Thank you also Angela Rae for being our language coach.

Developments and new faces.

Accompanist.

Unfortunately, David Bannister has had to resign from his role as our accompanist after a happy and fruitful year. He has been offered a greater role as Choir and Music Director at St John's College, Oxford and felt he could no longer continue in his role with us. We have enjoyed his musicianship and skills and sensitivity as an accompanist and stand-in Choir conductor, and wish him well in the future.

Fortunately, we have been able to secure Michiyo Machido to take over the role. She is known to many of us, is a sensitive and most accomplished musician and pianist, and we welcome her into the ADMS fold. Thank you Michiyo.

Choosing a new Choral Director

You will have read in the Chair's report that Alex will be leaving his post directing and conducting the Choir. He has been appointed Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Henley Symphony Orchestra. From mid-November 2024 he will no longer be available to conduct Thursday choir rehearsals and consequently will have to be replaced in this role (at least) by that date. although he will continue working with and conducting the Orchestra.

A special meeting of the ADMS committee met following Alex's announcement and decided to retain AW as orchestra conductor and appoint a choral director.

A selection committee is now working on advertising and interviewing for the post. We aim to have the new director in place for the Christmas concert. There is quite a bit to work out. We will keep everyone informed.

Keeping the show on the road.

Lois Smith and Ursula White have been fantastic in charge of the all-important refreshments with a team of willing helpers.

Victoria Adams continues in her key membership role and an enhanced and important role as Choir Rep. Steve and Debbie Clarke are now dealing with tickets but thanks to Peter and Jane Smith for all their hard work over the years. Mark Peters is taking on a great role with publicity (and with Sue Hurst from the Orchestra), Tim Budd is our careful treasurer, Cornelius Grotjahn our librarian. Tina Plenderleith writes the scholarly and accessible programme notes. We're also incredibly grateful to Kevin Mosedale (orchestra, trumpet) for assembling and printing the programme. Thanks to all.

Membership

Choir membership at Summer Term 24:

Sops: 31

Altos: 17

Tenor: 15

Bass: 11

We had four new joiners in September, two in January, and one in April.

Choir numbers fluctuate as people sometimes choose not to sing for a term but then return (or sometimes not!). There has been one expression of interest over the summer break so far.

A great year with some challenges which we've overcome with energy and determination and some wonderful music making. We all look forward to 24-25 with all sorts of exciting music to sing and new musicians to take us forward.

Pen Gresford
Vice Chair – Choir
ADMS.

ADMS Orchestra 2023/2024

Report from the Vice Chair (orchestra), Sue Hurst

We opened our season with an excellent joint concert of Brahms, Bruckner and Dvořák. Our March orchestra concert was perhaps a little ambitious with the Ravel Piano concerto, but it was a great opportunity to be able to tackle such a challenging piece and the Orchestra performed with great gusto and energy. Our soloist Edward Harris-Brown was unbelievably talented and I'll never forget the encore he gave by improvisation on keys called out from members of the audience. He will go far and ADMS are part of his journey into greatness. Our Opera Gala concert was a wonderful, inspiring and very rewarding concert and the audience continue to show great enjoyment, support and appreciation of our concerts.

Since I've taken over from Jane as Vice Chair in November, I have been welcomed and supported by the committee and all members of the orchestra. Thank you for that. Our Christmas concert stands out as being very special last year. It was an experiment as I'm not sure we have put on a concert like that, at least not in my time with the orchestra, and it was a huge success. Not only did we bring in a new young audience, we played fun pieces and experimented with The Abbey Cinema as a venue. This concert took a huge amount of planning so thank you to especially Geoff and everyone else involved. It's a shame that the Abbey Cinema cannot be a venue we can use in the future, but it was a good experience to play in the venue and we have learnt that Children's concerts work, both in reaching out to a younger audience and also financially, so I'm really pleased to be able to say that we will be performing another Children's Christmas Concert this year – more details to follow.

Thank you to everyone who is involved in the running of the orchestra. Not just the committee but everyone whether you have a small or large part to play. Those who volunteer so readily to set up and put back on concert day, those involved with tickets, refreshments, publicity – running an orchestra is a team effort and ADMS have a great team. It's a very rewarding orchestra to play with and be a part of.

Thank you to Alex and Kate, Geoff and Patrick, and in particular Rosie who did an excellent job of getting the Opera Gala music to the players during one rehearsal. That was no mean feat! And Jeanette who has most recently taken on the job of Concert Manager.

We start our next season with Elgar Enigma Variations, Puccini and Coleridge Taylor. We have an exciting season including Brahms 4 and Verdi Requiem.

Rehearsals start on 2nd September at The Manor Prep.

I look forward to seeing you all there

Best wishes for the remainder of the summer

Sue

Vice Chair - Orchestra

ADMS Music Director's Report, 2023-2024

It has been a tremendously successful season for ADMs artistically. Having worked so closely with the society for so many years before, I will always be grateful to each and every member for the incredible support they have shown me during what has been the most difficult and testing of my life. Larissa was taken ill on Monday September 4th, 2023, the day of our first rehearsal, and died just three days later.

I owe a particular debt to David Bannister who, immediately on taking up the position of choir accompanist and keyboardist for the society, very kindly took on the burden of conducting the first few rehearsals of the first term from the keyboard. This allowed me to focus on the immediate aftermath of Larissa's death and to ensure that our son Lev's interests were very fully looked after. I am also grateful to Geoff Bushell for taking on some of the orchestral rehearsals, as Lev and I began to adjust to our new circumstances, trying to juggle childcare requirements and work.

The first concert of the season was a tremendous success. Choir and orchestra performed Bruckner's *Te Deum* with excellent soloists Andreas Warden-Bigom, Michael Darell, Hannah Elizabeth Bennett and Eleanor Broomfield, which was performed by all with great energy and panache. This was followed by Brahms *Schicksalslied*, and sharing this profound work with choir and orchestra in the presence of my son proved particularly cathartic for me. In the second half, we gave a jubilant performance of Dvořák's Symphony no. 8 with some wonderful woodwind solos, fantastic string sound and energetic brass and timpani playing.

For the Christmas concert, we tried a new formula, selling tickets and gearing the programme more specifically towards a family audience. Engaging Neil Foster from *Horrible Histories* and the Teddy Bear theme proved very successful amongst the audience. Performances of Peter and the Wolf and the Goldilocks and the Three Bears Suite proved extremely entertaining as did the choir's contributions of carols and Holst's rarely-performed *Christmas Day*.

In the Spring term, the choir turned its attention to Duruflé's extremely taxing *Requiem*. In addition to Mozart's profound *Ave Verum Corpus*, we prepared a number of shorter works by French composers, including Fauré's well-known *Cantique for Jean Racine* as well as some lesser-known works including Dupré's *Four motets*, Op. 9, and Saint-Saëns *Two Choruses*. We were joined for the concert by organist James Brown, who played with tremendous sensitivity and drew an extraordinary range of colour from the organ in St. Helen's church, as well as two excellent soloists: mezzo-soprano Hannah Elizabeth Bennett, who had performed with us in the Autumn, and baritone Michael Ronan. The repertoire was extremely taxing for the choir, and the tremendous sound they produced in the concert was an incredible achievement.

In its March concert, the orchestra was joined by the extraordinarily talented Edward Harris Brown. After an energetic and characterful performance of Coleridge-Taylor's *Ballade* by the orchestra, Edward joined us for a mesmerising performance of Ravel's G Major concerto. Famous for the virtuosity required of its wind parts, ADMS rose to the occasion giving very committed performance. After the performance our soloist dazzled the audience with jazz improvisations prompted by theme suggested by the audience. In the second half of the concert, the orchestra gave an incandescent performance of Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony, probably the best performance of a purely work we have given.

In June, we were again joined by tenor Andreas Warden-Bigom, along with soprano Jillian Finnamore, for an enchanting evening of music from the Italian operatic repertoire, including a great deal of music by Puccini, including substantial extracts from *La bohème* and *Tosca* as well as arias and choruses by Verdi in an evening that incorporated music that ranged from bel canto to opera verismo. The orchestra played flexibly, sensitively and colourfully and the choir performed with a real sense of theatre. It was an exhilarating evening and a fitting climax to the season.

Alexander Walker, 11th August, 2024.

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Abingdon and District Music Society

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the Abingdon and District Music Society (ADMS) for the year ended 30 June 2024.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the ADMS you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the ADMS accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the ADMS as required by section 130 of the Act;
or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Nicholas J Clarke CPFA

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Date: 6th August 2024