

# Armagh City Choir AGM

## Chairperson's Report MAY 2025

Welcome to our AGM for 2025 and thank you for attending in person. The AGM gives us time to look back over our year together, to appreciate our achievements and to spend time together outside of the constraints of our usual rehearsal time and the stress of the performance evening.

While the choir officially started on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept 2024 with our first rehearsal, preparing for the start of this year began in June 2024 with the first meeting of the new committee. Even before that meeting it became clear that there would be bad news for the choir, as due to family commitments it was realised that David B who had been elected Vice Chair last year, could not take up the role as Chairperson this year, as is usual and unfortunately you had to endure myself acting up as chair as I had been elected Vice Chair at the same AGM.

Many things were discussed at the first meeting and among those were ideas to find more ways to publicise the choir and our concerts. The first idea was to start to use Eventbrite, the committee researched that idea and agreed that it was worth a trial. Our concert of The Armed Man, a Mass for Peace became our first concert on Eventbrite and because of the success we believe we will continue to use this as a method of promoting the concerts in the future.

The next idea was to do more on Social Media Platforms and to that end a sub-committee was formed to look into employing someone, in a professional capacity to film us and make small films-clips to upload to these platforms, to let people know the type of music and standard of performance they could look forward to at our concerts or indeed if they wanted to come and sing with us. With the approval of the Committee, we contracted this work to Sophianne D....d, who made a couple of video clips for us to promote the concert and finally came to record the full event in November 2024. It was a learning curve for all of us, and we all hope it will prove beneficial to us in the future. In addition to Sophie's work, we also benefited from the work done for us by Timothy F....r, who for one so young, made an excellent effort at a promotional film-clip, showing us and the orchestra in rehearsal for the Armed Man and including dynamic effects.

Formal term started this year without our usual accompanist, Rodney who due to illness could not be with us. We were fortunate to find a replacement in Shauna who very soon made herself part of the Armagh City Choir Family and eased our pain over Rodney's absence.

Our first term began with rehearsals for the Armed Man, which in a break from our usual traditional Christmas Concert was to be performed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Karl Jenkins, the composer. The concert itself was a

huge success, with the excellent Orchestra and our wonderful Soloist, Daisy Bevan it received a rapturous reception from a near capacity audience.

We then moved on to our participation in Armagh's Georgian Festival, as Maggie H succinctly put it "A step back in time celebrating Armagh's rich Georgian Heritage through festive activities, market stalls and fun for everyone" We contributed to the festivity on the 30<sup>th</sup> November by singing carols for Georgian Day and I understand it was well received as usual but I was unable to attend for family reasons.

Choir began for the new term in January 2025 with the news that we could participate in the BBC's Big Sing! All while preparing for our Spring Concert of the Faure Requiem and Vivaldi Gloria. For those of you who did join in the Big Sing under County Armagh Choir conductor at the event and our own Musical Director Michael, I am sure you agree it was a big success. It was an excellent opportunity to meet other people with the same interest in making music together and the combination of all those voices for the two songs that all the county choirs sang together was particularly uplifting.

In March, after the mix up over dates with the Golf Club, we had our major fund raising event, the Table Quiz and while the attendance was not quite as large as in other years, it was as much fun as ever thanks to our excellent Quiz Master and his charming assistant, Audrey. Thankyou to everyone who provided prizes for the Raffle. More funds were also raised by the separate raffle of the two beautiful pictures between choir members so a special thanks to Mabel and Alan for the donation of their artwork.

Just after the Quiz we received very troubling news that our application, for funding to help with the expense of the Spring Concert to ACBC Borough Council, had been turned down. We were informed that we were ineligible as we were thought to be "Promoting Religion". You will all remember the evening I made the announcement at choir and the devastating effect the decision could have had on the future of the choir. With the able assistance of our Musical Director and Patricia McA one of the original members of the choir (*She joined as a babe in arms by the way*), we contacted the Council and after emails, telephone calls and a face to face meeting, members of the funding section of the council admitted it was their error and we were awarded funding for the concert, to great relief and much rejoicing after all the stress beforehand.

Our year singing culminated with our recent concert of the Vivaldi Gloria and Faure Requiem. This year we were able to return to sing in Saint Malachys Church after an absence of some years. The concert was well attended, and this year's attendees included our Lady Mayor Sarah Duffy and Alison Beattie from the Council Grants section. We were very grateful to the Lady Mayor for taking time out of her busy schedule to attend our concert and from speaking to her there she seemed to really enjoy the evening, as did Fr Barry Matthews the Administrator of Armagh Parish with responsibility for Saint Malachys Church.

On a beautiful sunny, almost summer evening, could there be any better way to spend your time than listening to such glorious music in such surroundings? The concert was a great success, in the responses on the evaluation forms when asked what they liked best, the audience comments included :-

*Good choice of programme, Quality of the choir & soloists, All brilliant, and Everything the challenge, the acoustics, repertoire, soloists etc*

All of this was enhanced for the Armagh City Choir family by Rodney's attendance and we were all so glad to dedicate the performance to him.

We have had our sorrows this year as well as our happy times. Sadly I have to note the death of Brian Woods, a stalwart of the Bass line for many years along with Steve Hartley and Billy Greenaway. While he lived in Magherafelt he rarely missed a practice and was always first to arrive on Wednesdays, despite weather. Brian also provided complete staging for Choir performances. All hand built by himself, set up and dismantled on the day, and fitted into a horse box which he towed to and from concerts. A lovely, quiet-spoken man, he had a fine singing voice, and strong supporter of choir, coming to performances even latterly when in a wheelchair.

We have also had Rodney's absence and illness to cope with this year but it was wonderful to see that he was well enough to attend the quiz and the Concert where I think he enjoyed his evenings. We are all thinking of him and keeping him in our prayers.

No one can do this job alone, it takes a great team working away behind the scenes. No one knows how much work is involved in running the choir until you are on the committee, and you see the hours that members put in to keep the choir running smoothly and the challenges they overcome to do so.

*(ASIDE - A PLEA TO JOIN THE COMMITTEE IN THE FUTURE TO KEEP THE CHOIR RUNNING*

*Especially as we approach our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary)*

I want to thank the team for all their work:-

Patricia for all the work on the staging and seating plans, and dealing with the complications presented by the differing venues, in her own understated way.

Jenny, Maggie and Patricia, for completing our grant applications to the local council and the unsuccessful one to the lottery funding. Even when the funding is awarded the work does not stop, after the event there is as much work to do again in vouching that the money was properly used for the purpose it was allocated to us.

David Braziel, while he thought he might be able to have a quiet year this year, he was always on hand for IT assistance, designing the flyers and programme covers.

Roger, while no longer our assistant conductor is always there with his calm and helpful advice and for producing our beautiful concert programmes.

I still forget that Eleanor is no longer our Treasurer, but I am sure you will agree that Dominique, while having those big shoes to fill, has risen to the challenge admirably.

With special thanks to Kathy our outgoing Secretary for all her years of hard work and dedication to keeping our records and us all up to date with our commitments for choir.

All the other members of the committee, for their help and support during this past year.

Thanks also to Shauna, for accompanying us each week, and trying to slip in a little accompaniment even when we were supposed to be singing without it.

Finally all our thanks to Michael, our wonderful Musical Director. During the rehearsals and on the evening of the performance in the Ulster Hall for the BBC Big Sing, many of the other “Armagh” singers expressed their appreciation of his talents as a conductor and when we said proudly, he was our choir conductor, we realised that we were so very lucky to have him, with his ear for detail and the ability to bring out the best in us for the performance but all in such a relaxed and friendly manner. (You will notice I have said nothing about his ‘jokes’)

Dated 21<sup>st</sup> May2025

....., *Julie McBrien*.....

Julie McBrien, Chairperson