



Charity Registration Number: NIC108830

TRUSTEES' REPORT 2023-2024

The 2023-2024 year proved to be another successful season for Ards Choral Society, seeing a substantial growth in choir membership, whilst still maintaining focus on musicianship, comradeship, social and local relevance and supporting new and upcoming talent. Committee objectives for the year included a desire to expand the remit in the growth of the choir, the promotion of concerts in the wider area using various social media platforms and liaison with outside organisations to promote these aims.

One highlight of the year was the very successful *Celebration of Christmas in Words and Music* which not only presented some challenging Christmas music which Ards Choral Society had rarely focused on in its 77-year history, but also resulted in a sell-out performance with a strong social dimension. The concert took place in the Queen's Hall Newtownards and guest performers included Mary McCabe (Soprano), Aaron O'Hare (Tenor) and Enzo Gowdy (Piano and Violin and North Down Rotary Club's Young Primary School Musician of the Year, 2023). The narrator was Walker Ewart.

Music for the Easter Concert, Rutter's challenging *Requiem*, combined with Passion Music from Handel's *Messiah* and some lovely new pieces by Will Todd and Dan Forrest provoked much emotional response among members of the audience in St Mark's Parish Church, Newtownards and, indeed, inspired the concept of a concert of smaller pieces around a theme of reflection or meditation, thereby shaping this year's forthcoming *In Paradisum* concert, also to be held in St Mark's on Thursday 6 March 2025.

The return of our traditional Supper Theatre Concert in May 2024, with its twin foci of celebrating 100 years of Walt Disney Corporation and the 100th anniversary of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, featured two new artistes, Naomi Smyth and Mark Leeman, along with Gillian McCutcheon and young Cavan on clarinet, was thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated by all, audience and choir alike. The wine and cheese refreshments were also welcomed by the Queen's Hall audience of 170!

One of the biggest successes of the year, however, was the large-scale development of the use of social media platforms for publicity purposes and for recruitment. This resulted in significantly increased choir membership (to 70 members) and outreach to a much wider range of audiences. Work completed on Society archive materials, dating back to its origins in 1947, sorted and donated to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, can also be highlighted as another form of publicity and community outreach with photos, written materials and financial ledgers now on display for the general public. Outreach and making links with other organisations and groups remains a priority for 2024-25.

In conclusion, 2023-24 was very busy, rewarding and challenging year for all at Ards Choral Society and sincerest thanks must go to the Musical Director, Ian Bell, and accompanist, Joanne Cruise, for their huge respective contributions to weekly rehearsals and concerts, sharing freely their special and unique talents. Similarly, the Chair and Committee have worked tirelessly to ensure the successful running of events throughout the year, but above all, thanks must go to the choir members themselves who work hard every Thursday evening at rehearsals and whose dedication and commitment continue to ensure the longevity of the Society.

