

SCOTS MUSIC GROUP AGM 25th April 2021 (1.45pm for 2pm)**Draft minutes****Present** (30 members & tutors):

Alastair Cameron, Alex Stuart, Bernadette Kellermann (tutor), Bill Savage, Celia Coulson, Chris Mahony, Colin Graham (tutor), David Francis (tutor), David Stephenson, Edna Wilson (Chair), Elaine Armstrong, Emma Graham, Fiona Tinelli, Gill McDonald, Harvey Sheppard, Helen Quigley, Hellen MacPherson, Iain Hampson, Isobel Sheppard, Jamie Taylor, Kenneth Dickson, Mary McCann, Michael Appleby, Moira Dunworth, Paul McIntosh (Treasurer), Paul Cromey, Ruth Hannah, Shauna Dickson, Susan Kirkwood, Vicky Pearson.

In attendance:

Helen Reid (SMG Administrator)
Sarah Northcott (SMG Interim Development Worker)

Apologies (27 members & tutors):

Alice Yuchan, Alistair Kilgour, Alison Carlyle, Andy Clark, Carole Ross, Caroline Barden, Cathy Davidson, Dan Ross, David Hogg, D Stuart McCorkindale, Carole Ross, Cathy Davidson, Douglas Scott, Elaine Appleby, Elaine Cannon, Fiona Harrison, George Davidson, Hazel Forsyth, Iain Murray, Jan Bundy, Joan Corbett, Jock Maitland, John Martin, Louise Rennie, Nicola McNeill, Rebecca Stevenson, Sarah Glynn.

Welcome

The meeting was opened at just after 2pm by Sarah Northcott (SN), As 'Master of Ceremonies' for this special on-line AGM, Sarah managed the Zoom technicalities in support of the Board chair Edna Wilson (EW).

SN welcomed everybody and noted that the AGM was being recorded for internal use

MINUTES OF LAST AGM

Acceptance of the minutes as an accurate record of the last AGM was proposed, without any corrections, by Colin Graham (CG) and seconded by Vicky Pearson.

Further comments were made on two issues from those minutes.

On Additional Support Needs (ASN), EW said that the Board had started discussion on this but moves towards a policy was put on hold by the onset of the Covid 19 emergency and the ending of face-to-face classes. As part of the action and to assess ASN needs, SN proposed to look at the membership demographic.

SN said that the future of the MacLennan Collection awaited a final decision. Dave Francis (DF) had spoken to Gill about the proposal to house these at The Storytelling Centre as part of proposed Scottish Trad archive. Any such move was put on hold after flood damage in the Centre. It is about to re-open and DF will have another look at the potential storage capacity. However, there is an issue that some of the items in the Collection are not particularly rare, and in legacy formats (vinyl albums and CDs).

CHAIR'S REPORT (Recorded)

The report from the chair was presented as a video recording by Edna Wilson (EW). The full written version '*Chairs Report for AGM 2021*' was also made available via the SMG website.

EW noted that at the time of the AGM, following the earlier resignation of Steve Byrne and with Sarah Northcott (SN) acting as Interim Development Worker, the Board's most pressing issue was making a permanent appointment to this role. However, this work was overtaken by the need from early in March 2020, during Term 2 of the 2019-2020 year, to respond to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. Expecting to have to plan for just a few months of abnormality, the Board cancelled the remaining Term 2 classes, the fundraising ceilidhs and the student concert. Sadly, this all took place during the year that marked the 30th anniversary of SMG (initially as part of the Adult Learning Project) in which it was planned to celebrate with multiple events over the year.

Recruitment of the new Development Worker had progressed as far as shortlisting and some interviewing but, as it was going to be difficult for a new person to be integrated into the running of SMG at this time, the process was put on indefinite hold and later abandoned completely. Fortunately, SN was persuaded to continue in her position of Interim Development Worker. EW expressed the Board's tremendous gratitude to her and also to Helen Reid in the SMG office for both working so hard to keep SMG going smoothly during this period.

EW noted that the Board's concerns were to secure SMG's survival whilst providing some support to members and tutors. Financial recompense was offered to students for classes that had to be cancelled, tutors were given some compensation for loss of income and SMG produced regular newsletters to keep its community informed. Some tutors also made arrangements to continue their Term 3 classes online.

It became clear that the autumn classes of the 2020-21 teaching year would have to be moved online but it wasn't known how students would cope with this. In fact, many more signed up than had been hoped and we were able to help any students who had problems with online access. Unfortunately, all of the normal beginner classes had to be cancelled as these typically require tutors to be in close contact with individual students and their instruments. An upside of the new arrangements was that around 30 students from well beyond the normal Edinburgh catchment joined online classes - from other parts of the UK and from some other countries.

EW said that the usual Stramash at the end of Term 1 was replaced by the posting of group photos and in some cases by class videos recordings of tunes. To raise additional funds and to bring students together, two special workshops were organised and were oversubscribed. These were A Day of Songs in November (tutors Kris Drever, Alison Burns, Bella Hardy, Ellie Beaton, Dawn Hartley and Quee MacArthur) and A Day of Tunes in March (Gary West, Sarah-Jane Summers, Mike Vass and Ian Lowthian). Mary McCann also organised Zoom singing classes with her leading by phone. EW added that further one-day or half-day workshops are planned.

EW noted that the SMG members in many groups who usually go out into the community and raise money for SMG have been unable to do so during the pandemic but have continued to practice in whatever ways possible for the return of live playing. She added that as a self-funding organisation, SMG is grateful for their donations as well as from other individual donors. SMG also continues to sell song and tune books. A new book is in preparation and SMG T-shirts are available via the website.

EW expressed how SMG's luck in having supportive, creative tutors from the forefront of Scottish cultural life, resourceful and dedicated staff, in Sarah and Helen, and a membership that had supported the Board and staff at all times. She also thanked ex Board member Mac Walker for helping with the website, which had been particularly important at this time, and Liz Blair for her continuing services as bookkeeper.

Finally, EW paid tribute to departed friend, cellist, SMG stalwart and supporter of the Inspire project Heather Harbinson. Her warmth and life will be remembered whenever Heather's Waltz, specially written for her, is played.

Discussion relating to the Chair's report

Alastair Cameron thanked the Board for "keeping things together in an incredibly trying year" and a written message from Nicola McNeill thanked SMG tutors, staff & board saying that she "really appreciated the extra work this had meant for tutors".

FINANCE REPORT (Recorded)

Treasurer Paul McIntosh (PM) provided his finance report as a pre-recorded video. Two documents were also made available via the SMG website: *Finance Report for 2019/20 for AGM 2021*; and *SMG Annual Report & Financial Statement – 2020 signed accounts*.

He noted that, as SMG's financial year runs from 1st July to 30th June, that the latest audited figures were for the year 2019-20 which ended in June 2020. Up until the start of March 2020, this was a normal year for SMG but then, due to the impact of Covid-19, severe changes had to be implemented. The remaining Term 2 and all Term 3 classes were cancelled and there were no, income generating, ceilidhs after that of February 2020.

The overall 2019/20 income of £93.4k (all figures rounded), compared with £133 in 2018/19, and consisted of class and membership fees, donations (£3k, higher than usual) and a grant (£350 from Lothian and Borders Piping Society to support the beginner smallpipes class). Many students also generously chose not to take the offered reimbursement of fees for the cancelled last few weeks of Term 2.

The overall expenditure of £105k, compared with £128k in the previous teaching year. This cost reduction was largely due to the period from March 2020, when SMG's office work moved out of the Eric Liddell Centre, venue hires were cancelled and tutor travel expenses ceased. These reductions were greater than the new costs such as for Zoom licences and business mobile phones. After the decision was made in March 2020 to cancel the remaining two weeks of Term 2 classes, the Board decided to pay tutors the remainder of their fees for that term and to also make compensatory goodwill payments for the loss of their Term 3 teaching income.

PM summarised SMG's resulting year-end financial position for 2019-202 as a deficit of £12k over the year. This compared with surpluses of £5k and £15k for the preceding two years. SMG thus finished the financial year with its reserve ('cash in bank') reduced to £45k.

PM noted that, particularly in the light of Covid-19 emergency, SMG was in the fortunate position of having adequate financial reserves and that the long-term policy has been to keep back an amount equivalent to the cost of six months of normal operation.

Finally, PM noted that from the experience so far during the Covid-19 lockdown, the 2019/20 year-end £45k reserve, which was expected to have reduced by a further £10k by June 2021, would allow continuing internet-based teaching for a further two years.

Discussion relating to the finance report

Chris Mahony asked about the financial position with regard to maintaining future SMG classes. PM replied that the June 2020 reserve was £45k and in now June 2021 is forecast to be around ~£35k. The Board was “concerned but not over worried”.

Mike Appleby (MA) asked how the reserves are banked. PM said that the funds are kept in a very low-interest Bank of Scotland (BoS) account. MA asked if it would be worth moving to a longer-term investment in ethical funds which currently perform better than other funds. PM said that had discussed this with BoS. Setting up accounts for charities is “extraordinarily tricky” but he could look at it. MA supports this idea.

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

EW thanked two Board members who had retired since the last AGM. Colin Graham did very valuable work on the risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and greatly helped SMG to respond to the emergency in a positive way. Eoin McIntyre gave valuable thoughts and ideas to the Board and was a “stalwart” of the fund-raising ceilidhs at St. Brides Centre. His recent move to much further away from Edinburgh made his continued involvement impractical.

The re-election of current directors Edna Wilson, Paul McIntosh, Fiona Harrison, Jamie Taylor and Helen Quigley was proposed by Alastair Cameron and seconded by David Stevenson. New members Helen MacPherson and Bill Savage were proposed by Colin Graham and seconded by Vicky Pearson.

MA welcomed and thanked the new board members and SN also welcomed new board members.

OTHER QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

None

There were no further motions from the Board or from the membership and Formal business was concluded at 14:48.

Follow-up discussion on returning to face-to-face classes.

SN gave a numerical summary of SMG activity since the first lockdown and the move to web-based teaching. The issues involved in returning to face-to-face teaching included social distancing, sizes of classes and the difficulty of getting enough people into the James Gillespie High School (JGHS) classrooms to make it economically viable. She invited discussion to get a feeling of how members and tutors felt about coming back together.

(S): student, (T) tutor

Nicola McNeill (S) email comment: 'personally I would be happy to attend in person as I will have had two vaccinations, as long as there is some distancing and the Covid numbers are well down. However, I appreciate that this is not possible to predict with accuracy and I would be happy to continue with online teaching in the hope we could meet in person in January, assuming the school permits classes'.

Mike Appleby (S): Singers greatly looking forward to face-to-face classes but there is also the possibility to meet outdoors.

Fiona Fraser (S): Champing at the bit for face-to-face. Appreciates that wind instruments may need larger room, but it's easier for string instruments. Great to meet up outdoors.

Colin Graham (T): Students ask each week and some have reached their 'Zoom limit'. The face-to-face issues may be very different for different members of a class. Some may not want to be travelling on public transport. The classroom has to be very well ventilated. We could have very small classes which would not be viable. People have different attitudes to risk. He thought that face-to-face in classrooms is unlikely until 2022. In general, Zoom has proven to be better than expected, but the required extra tutor hours means very hard work for them.

SN: Certainly a one size fits all solutions is not possible. But very good to have feedback.

Chris Mahony (S): Agrees with Nicola McNeill, because on phone she doesn't feel part of class, and can't hear well.

Mary McCann (T). Came across organisation that managed live classes and sent out on Zoom. Best of both worlds. Small live class and people taking part in Zoom. Regarding teaching by phone, she taught the two workshops with her on phone and class on Zoom and people liked this, but she doesn't propose more teaching by phone.

Edna Wilson (S): Whatever we decide, there could be a mixture, such as meeting up for a face-to-face once per term. Thinks we will be on Zoom for quite a while. Fun Fiddle in Portobello have done things on the promenade, but weather not great. Good to have ideas to break up Zoom classes.

Colin Graham (T): It would be fine to do things informally in gardens or parks but, if under SMG would need to think about insurance.

Bernadette Kellerman (T): Agreed with hybrid model which is appealing from a tutor perspective. Commuting (like she would have to) from Glasgow would need public transport. She split her teaching sessions into an alternating mix of one-to-one classes and Zoom-for-all classes. She's happy to show this idea, which seems to give more space to students, to other tutors.

SN: Different classes will have different needs.

Celia Coulson (S): In Fiddle 4 class. Although she misses playing together, the Zoom lessons have been fantastic, extremely well prepared and supportive. Would prefer if that continues until we can properly meet as a group.

Bill Savage: Will we have more waves of Covid-19? On Zoom, you get also people from other geographical places and that momentum is likely to continue and build up.

SN: We lost around 60 people on going to Zoom classes but gained around 30 from other places.

Alastair Cameron (S): Some had found that learning new tunes on Zoom had been good, but would be good to meet together to put tunes together. His group did this with tunes learned during lockdown and six of them then played together in a park.

SN: Going back to face-to-face may be harder than going into lockdown.

Dave Stephenson (S): Even if we can hire classrooms in the autumn term, wouldn't be able to have the same number of people. Could hire a few venues and have classes take turns to have a live session.

Mary McCann (T): A hybrid model (face-to-face and Zoom) could keep all online workshops to have 1000 people.

SN: Looked at where people in each class were located. They were evenly spread.

Mike Appleby (S): Venues might let out rooms at lower rates as they might be keen to have the business.

Gill McDonald (S): With return to face-to-face, we might lose risk-averse people but, as government regulations allow music to open up, people who are less risk-averse might choose to join other face-to-face groups that open up earlier. We wouldn't want to lose members by being too cautious?

Colin Graham (T): It's hard to teach lots of students on Zoom and you can't see their instruments. It's exhausting.

Elaine Armstrong (S): She thoroughly enjoyed Sarah's Zoom classes but others hate being online. In schools they have done blended learning with options for face-to-face. Live face-to-face slots would add 'wow' factor.

Bernadette Kellerman (T): Thanks for keeping it all going. It really means a lot to have something to look forward to when live gigs have dried up.

The discussion finished at 15:24pm.

EW: thanks to people organising the online sessions and to the Board.

(JT 29/4/21)