

**SCOTS MUSIC GROUP AGM**, 2pm, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Virtual meeting via Zoom.

Draft minutes

**In attendance** (32 members + 2 staff)

Donald Wilson, Gill McDonald, Celia Coulson, Nicola McNeill, Hellen MacPherson, Elaine Armstrong, Helen Quigley, Paul Cromey, Patricia Santer, Ruth Hannah, John Culbert, Susan Owen, Myles Lobjoie, Shauna Dickson, Kenneth Dickson, Susan Kirkwood, David Stephenson, Sandy Frain, Madeleine Brand, Fiona Harrison, Christine McIntosh, Allan Sturrock, Jane Culpán, James Moffat, Ruth Hannah, Mary McCann, Edna Wilson, Paul McIntosh, Bill Savage, Jamie Taylor, Colin Graham, Thelma Good, Neil Ingram

Helen Reid (SMG Administrator)

Sarah Northcott (SMG Interim Development Worker)

**Apologies** (32 members & tutors)

Janice McClements, Iris Howitt, Susie Musgrave, Mary Stafford, Iain Murray, Anne Capanni, Dan Ross, Douglas Scrimger, Elaine Cannon, Louise Rennie, Grace Macdonald, David Hogg, Fiona Tinelli, Cathy Davidson, George Davidson, Susan Streater, David Francis, Bernadette Kellermann, Ian Addis, Sheila Capewell, Helen Roy, Brian Johnstone, Joanna Cameron, Sylvester Leyland, Lorna Leyland, Shelagh Kinnings, Bob Brough, Vicky Pearson, Dave Francis, Emma Graham, Chris Craig, Edi Rack

**Welcome**

The virtual meeting was opened on Zoom at just after 2pm by Sarah Northcott (SN), As 'Master of Ceremonies' for this special on-line AGM, she explained that EW was legally in charge.

SN introduced board.

SN welcomed everybody, including the board members. She explained that she was acting as MC although Edna Wilson is chair. She explained the Zoom protocol as the meeting was virtual and noted that the AGM was being recorded for internal use.

**Minutes of last AGM**

There were no questions or comment and acceptance was proposed by Colin Graham and seconded by Donald Wilson.

**Chair's report** (recorded)

The report from the chair was presented as a video recording by Edna Wilson (EW).

EW noted that in this third calendar year of Covid 19 Sarah Northcott (SN) is still doing sterling work as SMG's 'temporary' development worker and Helen Reid (HR) continues to make sure that everything happens efficiently.

To reduce overheads office accommodation has been reduced to one room, The Iain McLennan Collection of CDs, LPs, books and minidisks which were gifted to SMG have now been moved to the Scottish Storytelling Centre and various instruments (given by members and others) have been given to Music Broth, a low-cost instrument library in Glasgow.

In the teaching year 2020-2021, virtual classes included fiddle, piano accordion, guitar, whistle, smallpipes, ukulele, 5-string banjo, mixed instruments and singing. Two song workshops and two 'Day of tunes' were also held. Being online, these variously drew interest

beyond Edinburgh and the UK taking Scottish music and song to people who would otherwise not have had the opportunity.

In the year 2020-21, student numbers held up well compared to previous years though some students are waiting for the return of in-person classes. More worryingly, in the teaching year 2021-22 there has been a further drop in online student numbers and this is concerning for SMG's future. In some cases, classes with low numbers have been combined. SMG's policy is that class fees should cover all costs except in circumstances where it wants to encourage a new class to develop. With a view to post-pandemic life, SMG has tried to maintain smaller classes.

Regarding SMG (and partner groups) in the community, EW noted

- Corrina Hewat took over from Robyn Stapleton as Sangstream (affiliated with SMG) musical director and the choir continued weekly practise via Zoom. They produced a video and began live meetings again last autumn.
- Ceilidh Caleerie started to meet up again before Christmas, and are continuing regular Zoom rehearsals just now and look forward to getting together again soon.
- A Zoom session suggested by the late Pav Verity that included ex-students of SN's Tuesday morning class and members of Balerno Buskers began to meet on Zoom in June 2020, and this is still going strong with about 20 people indicating an interest and a repertoire of over 280 tunes!
- No Café Ceilidh sessions have taken place since the start of the pandemic but it's hoped that they will recommence when participants feel that it is safe to do so.
- The cancellation of the regular St. Bride's ceilidhs has had a considerable negative impact on SMG's finances and SMG is looking forward to their reinstatement.
- Nigel's Allstars (from his mixed instrument class) have kept in touch with each other and recently started rehearsing again.
- Many of the 40 or so Caleerie Buskers have been getting together on Zoom on an approximately weekly basis and are also hoping to be playing together in person before too long.
- Unfortunately, no funding was secured for Inspire Community Music and it was wound up in 2021, although there is still potential in the future for similarly focussed work by SMG.

Regarding its tutors, EW emphasised that SMG is fortunate that these are all musicians and singers of the highest quality, providing inspiration and encouragement to students. SMG wishes Rachel Walker (fiddle) and Ailis Sutherland (smallpipes) well after they left at the end of Term 3 in 2021.

Regarding the SMG office, EW noted that development worker, SN, has been working from home but coming into the office when appropriate whilst administrator, HR, is now office-based. Over last summer a new website was set up by Mac Walker, a former SMG Board Member and IT professional.

EW gave special thanks as follows:

- Longstanding volunteer bookkeeper, Liz Blair, is continuing at the moment but it's hoped that a replacement can soon be recruited so that she can retire.

- As well as creating the new website, Mac Walker has also helped with urgent IT problems and helpful advice.
- Mary McCann has raised funds for SMG by running several song workshops, on Zoom and in person.
- Thanks to all who have donated to SMG funds since the start of the pandemic.

On future projects, EW said that SMG is planning more online and in-person workshops in 2022 and noted that a new tune book, in the early stages of development, will be SMG's fourth with the tunes suggested by classes.

EW paid tribute to several musical friends who remain in the thoughts of SMG, its students and tutors:

- Multi-instrumentalist Peter "Pav" Verity died in October 2021.
- Concertina player and multi-instrumentalist Simon Cooper died in September 2021.
- Fiddle and mandolin player Margaret Littlewood died in July 2021.

Finally, looking to the future, EW noted that the Covid 19 shutdown in Spring 2020 was easier to implement than getting back to in-person classes, workshops and events. New virus variants appear quickly and make significant impact on the best laid plans. Though it has helped us through the pandemic, some are becoming tired of playing music on Zoom. This has led to a significant drop in numbers signing up for classes especially recently. However, many are not quite ready to meet up in person and there is a significant issue with venues, especially for evening classes. The low-cost James Gillespie's High School venue is not available yet and it's not known when this might change.

EW noted explained that the SMG Board was trying to work through this problem and asked for patience whilst it tries to find a reasonable and viable solution that suits everyone.

### **Discussion relating to the Chair's report**

Trish Santer announced that in September two SMG members, Sue Sellar and Eoin Macintyre had got married in a lovely service at the House for an Art Lover in Glasgow.

Mary McCann emphasised that her song workshops could not have been done without the help of the SMG staff.

Shauna Dickson said that Sangstream has continued to meet in person at Morningside United Church although it has generally been difficult to find suitable venues. Most members appreciate singing in person even with masks.

### **Treasurer report (recorded)**

Treasurer Paul McIntosh (PM) provided his finance report as a pre-recorded video, the main points were as follows.

In the financial year up to June 21 (FY21) SMG suffered a deficit, but not as large as in the previous year when, with the onset of Covid, we had to cancel almost all activities in the last two weeks of Term 2 and all of Term 3. This year we were able to run a full online programme as well as some workshops.

The accounts show the income and expenditure for FY21 along with comparable figures for the previous year, FY20. FY21 income was just over £100k and the final deficit just under £2k – compared with income of £93.4k and deficit of £12k in FY20.

Although the collected FY21 membership fees were a little lower than in FY20, the income from class fees were higher because of the lost teaching weeks in FY20.

FY21 Term 1 bookings were down to 386 from 464 in the FY20 but roughly the same number of classes were run.

Donations were slightly up and merchandise brought in around £200. We were unable to have the usual fundraising events such as ceilidhs, and there was no income from the various busking groups.

£1200 was spent on upgrading SMG's website. This work was contracted out and started in FY20. It is now finished and the cost is being capitalised over 4 years.

Gift aid from membership fees is usually recovered retrospectively for the previous FY. After the cancellation of the last few weeks of FY20 Term 2 classes, students had been asked to donate their fees, where possible. This was cleared with HMRC and an additional £1200 was recovered making a total gift aid income of £1800.

With the agreement of the original donors, around £2k of funds from the wound-up Inspire project were also transferred to SMG.

The combination of the recovered gift aid and Inspire funds significantly reduced the anticipated FY21 deficit to around just £2k.

### **Discussion relating to the finance report**

- David Stephenson asked if gift aid can be reclaimed. SN said that it can't be reclaimed for payments which attract a benefit such as with membership fees but can be reclaimed for donations. PM confirmed with this.
- Nicola McNeil asked about the average value of donations from busking and other groups in the past. How much income of this sort is SMG missing? PM: In the last 'proper' year, a total of around £2-3k was raised for SMG by such groups.
- John Culbert said that there was a possibility of lower class fees for pensioners although many are on private pensions. SN quite a lot of students add top-up donation.
- David Stephenson was surprised that gift-aid can't be reclaimed on membership as he was sure that other organisations do this. PM replied that the reason for this is that we offer a discount on class fees for members. Over three terms, the discount can add up to £50 or more, whereas gift-aid is ineligible when the benefits are worth more than around £25.
- Trish Santer said that, for playing at the market, Balerno Buskers would receive £20 from Balerno Village Trust. They also collected up to £20 in a bucket, so contributing up to £40 to SMG each time.
- Thelma Good noted that some organisations have received grants from bodies including Creative Scotland during Covid for re-opening activities. Has this been explored? PM replied that at the start of Covid SMG found that as it is not a frontline service, had reserves and was not in immediate crisis it was deemed not to be eligible. This year PM has been having another look in case this has changed,

looking at a number of loans and grants websites without seeing anything relevant. He noted that SMG still has sufficient reserves.

- Neil Ingram said that Creative Scotland were giving some grants last year, in one case to Biggar for an outdoor concert with mainly local amateurs. He didn't know if such funding is still available this year. Thelma Good pointed out that some grant givers such as Esmee Fairbairn have not been able to deal out money during Covid, so some money may be available. SN pointed out that applying for grants when it is not part of the core activity requires considerable staff time.

### **Election of directors**

No new nominations for board member were received but SN pointed out that directors can also be co-opted between AGMs if anyone should wish to stand before the next AGM.

The re-election of the current directors Edna Wilson, Paul McIntosh, Fiona Harrison, Helen Quigley, Hellen MacPherson, Bill Savage and Jamie Taylor was proposed by Nicola McNeill and seconded by Trish Santer.

SN thanked the board for their work and for agreeing to continue.

### **Other questions and comments**

Donald Wilson (based in North America) thanked SMG for welcoming people into the organisation and for opening up to people who have nothing like it near to them.

Celia Coulson, from outside of Edinburgh, wondered why student numbers on Zoom were falling off. Her experience of Zoom has been wonderful. Do you know why people not continuing? SN spoke of the recent student survey which asked if people would be signing up in Term 2. A fair minority said that they were fed up with Zoom or were increasingly fed up with it. Some have probably now found ways to meet up live. Colin Graham replied from the perspective of a tutor. If we went back to school tomorrow, he would lose 20% of the students who have joined thanks to technology. If he did an end of term stramash, he'd need to find a venue with wireless continuity. A lot of people joined during the first and second Zoom terms and then some people went back to doing other things. He said that it is really hard to be a tutor on Zoom. Compared with a live class where he knows what to fix, he can't see hands or hear how students are playing. On Zoom there is a constant need for reassurance. His song sheets look nothing like they did a year ago, as he has learned how to give this extra guidance by putting more information on paper. Zoom has been tremendous for those who couldn't otherwise join classes and has kept SMG going but it's a very tiring tutoring vehicle and needs lots of extra tutor preparation time.

Fiona Harrison, a Board member, said that she goes to three classes but she would rather that it was face to face. In two of the classes, numbers have been going down. In the third, they are going up but it's not clear why. The formats are different for each of the three, so it could be to with that. The Guitar class numbers have grown to the maximum. Four out of 15 are from 'worldwide' places. The problem is how get back to face to face.

SN: The office could do research on those who didn't join the Zoom classes. Will they come back? She did a quick tutor survey before Christmas on hybrid classes. Some responses were very positive but others preferred either Zoom or face to face but not both.

Trish Santer has had parallel experience from running a folk club. Their online meetings have gone from once per month to once every fortnight - but they lost half of the people who

feel that Zoom is not for them. Sometimes they are put off by need to buy new computer equipment. On the other hand, it's been great to have people from south of the border and from the US.

SN could see the possibility in future of having one-off Zoom workshops with wide geographical coverage.

Madeleine Brand from Nigel's Mixed class and Nigel's All Stars emphasised the importance of proximity and social contact. SN said that she is very aware that we are a community organisation that does music rather than music being the only thing.

Thelma Good felt very thankful to the Zoom tutors. She thought that her own singing had improved as an individual if not as a choir member. Also, they often would not be able to get into Edinburgh for live classes as much during winter.

Jane Culpan is also in Nigel's class and the Leslie's slow-session group, and as a university lecturer is doing blended teaching. It's a different way of teaching. She suggested that we can never go back and have to embrace on line, blended delivery. Advantage in both types.

SN said that mixed instrument classes are different to individual instrument classes, and that part of what her classes do online is work on material for future in-person performance.

Fiona Harrison, said that, looking elsewhere, The Sage has a big music programme and has gone back to some live classes whilst also having online classes with perhaps 50 people in them. Maybe such big online classes don't make much difference for the tutors. If SMG did something similar it might enable it to increase the number of students.

Shauna Dickson said that Sangstream is mostly practising face to face but is trialling hybrid sessions with the Zoom people muted as observers or bystanders.

Nicola McNeill, on blended approaches, said that the Tuesday morning group have had some in person classes and wondered if occasional live classes could be a carrot to attract people to online classes. Colin Graham thought that if we gave students that promise that they will actually get to eat carrot, say twice per term. Perhaps tutors and groups could arrange these independently of SMG by paying a small amount extra. SN said that she has been thinking along those lines. If on Zoom with people from further afield, could get a live Zoom of in-person classes and have lesser second-tier payment. Colin pointed out that a lot of churches are now equipped for live streaming of services. Elaine Armstrong (on chat) pointed out that if a venue were booked on a rolling basis it could be shared between different classes. Sue Owen spoke of her experience running a choir where people would come long distances for occasional live sessions.

Mary McCann said that her singers recently went back live to a church hall. They had to take Covid precautions and everyone took lateral flow tests before coming, but nearly everyone said it was lovely to sing together again. As summer comes, they will be able to go outside. Venue costs are a problem. Grants may be available for groups that cater for a particular need and people might put money in a tin for this.

SN thanked everyone for their contribution and noted the idea of recording live teaching sessions for people who couldn't be there. She then announced a morning of tunes to be held on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February with harp-player Wendy Stewart looking at tunes from SW Scotland, fiddler Iain Fraser with tunes from the Borders, and concertina player Alastair

Anderson with Northumbrian tunes. Also in March, she is planning a 'Come and Play Together', big-band, afternoon.

Nicola McNeill asked about returning to classes at James Gillespie's High School. SN said that there is no news from the member of staff who deals with this and pointed out that the school is much cheaper than other venues.

Fiona Harrison noted that her husband teaches on adult education night classes which were held in schools, pre Covid. The programme is just starting up again but they are using community centres and it could be worth SMG finding out which ones are being used for this.

James Moffat lives in the south of England and is in three SMG classes. These have made masses of difference to him during lockdown. He would certainly be prepared to travel to Edinburgh for live sessions once he's confident of travelling by train again.

Trish Santer said that Balerno Folk Club has not yet gone back to meeting up live but they hope to do so soon. However, they don't want to lose the things that they've gained from having online meetings and plan to run one online meeting every month to keep contact with the new people.

SN emphasised that SMG is always open for comments and suggestions. She, HR and the board will be looking at all possibilities.

EW said how much all of the ideas are appreciated and thanked everyone for these.

SN's final thought was that she is looking at the possibility of big fund-raising event for SMG. She will be asking a few people along to an ideas kick-off meeting. Please send any such ideas to her or to the office. She finished by saying that she is hoping to keep seeing as many possible on Zoom but soon, hopefully, also in person. She thanked everyone for coming and for their support throughout the year.

Madeleine Brand expressed thanks to SN, HR and the Board.

There were no further motions from the Board or from the membership and formal business was concluded by SN at 15:32.

(JT 06/02/2022)