

Minutes of the Pink Singers Open Meeting

Sunday 18th October 2009

- Agenda:
1. Singing religious/sacred music (suggested by Daniel Brennan)
 2. Changing the description of the Pink Singers from 'gay and lesbian' to 'LGBT', to be more inclusive (suggested by Oliver Gilbody)
 3. Formal concert wear (suggested by Karin Read)
 4. End of year accounts (presented by Simon Wilkinson, treasurer)
 5. Proposal to pay the Chair (suggested by Andrew Francalanza)

Chair: Mark Winter

Minutes: Jenny Cranwell

1. Singing religious/sacred music

Before the debate began, Mark explained the following:

- a) In the past, the choir had a long-standing policy of avoiding all religious/sacred music and this policy was overturned six or seven years ago. The choir has since performed a variety of sacred/religious music;
- b) The outcome of the debate will not change the current season's repertoire.

Daniel clarified his proposal to avoid religious songs that are sung in the first person, citing the example of two songs by John Rutter in the current repertoire (*For the Beauty of the Earth* and *Look at the World*). An atheist, Daniel likes the vast majority of religious pieces that the Pink Singers perform but is strongly against singing to god in the first person, as if grateful to something he does not believe in: 'a fantasy that has been used to justify open hatred of homosexuals'. Daniel also feels that involving a children's choir in the performance of the two Rutter songs would amount to indoctrination: 'implanting the insidious "god" notion into the heads of young minds, when we should be giving them a sense of open-minded celebration of our individual and communal strengths as human beings.' Daniel also suggested that he (and others who also feel strongly against singing the two songs for these reasons) be allowed to demonstrably remove themselves from the stage before the songs are sung.

During the ensuing debate, the following points were made.

Songs often tell a story which the singer cannot relate to on a personal level. This does not necessarily detract from the beauty or enjoyment of the music.

It might not be a good idea to impose limitations on the type of pieces that the choir will sing in future, as everyone has a different perspective.

Music engenders an emotional response – there will always be songs we like, songs we don't like. However, the choir works in a collaborative environment.

Singing with a children's choir would be a positive thing for us.

We are a community choir, we cannot ignore that religion plays a part in our community. In every religion there are people fighting for the rights of gay believers.

There are atheists within the choir who would not wish to give up singing beautiful religious choral music. They put the 'god' issue aside, enjoy the music and take possession of the songs in a performance context.

One member said she sang religious music as a child and did not feel indoctrinated by it; another said she'd had the opposite experience and was later rejected by a religious choir for being gay but nevertheless enjoys the religious music we sing.

Religious music is propaganda but we need to put it in context.

Allowing people to leave the stage before the Rutter songs would not give a good impression.

Allowing members to leave the stage before singing a religious piece they feel strongly against has been tried before, 8 or 9 years ago when the choir had a policy of no religious music. It was not a problem for the rest of the choir (the majority of whom remained on stage) and was limited to just one or two songs in period of about four years. There is no reason why it could not be allowed for the Rutter songs this season.

People should be allowed to leave the stage if they feel strongly about these songs and if it's been done before without causing a problem. We can't always please everyone – or even accommodate everyone – but the effort should be made to accommodate when possible.

We need to broaden our audience. Our repertoire is chosen at least partly on the basis of what our audience might like to hear –they are paying for tickets, after all.

Save criticism of pieces until after the performance. The 70s Dance Party medley last season was heavily criticised beforehand but the performance was amazing.

It is understandable that singing a song written in the first person, that is incongruous with the singer's beliefs, would provoke an emotional response against it. However, whether one is singing a religious piece in the first, second or third person, the essence of it remains the same.

Outcome/action points: It was agreed that the choir would retain its current policy of singing religious music and would perform the Rutter songs with a children's choir (subject to availability). Beyond that it was clear only that the committee would need to reflect on the points raised during the discussion and resolve any outstanding points.

2. Changing the description of the Pink Singers from 'gay and lesbian' to 'LGBT'

Oliver suggested that the description LGBT (or LGBTQ: lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/questioning) would more accurately reflect the choir's membership and might encourage more people who are bisexual/transgender/questioning their sexuality to join us than might otherwise.

The following points were made:

We are already inclusive and do not need to change.

This is not about changing the choir, it is about changing how we describe ourselves as a truer reflection of who we are.

We need to be clear who we are and not give the impression that we are excluding people.

It is common practice to use the description 'LGBT'. It is widely understood what the abbreviation means.

One new member expressed surprise that we do not describe ourselves as LGBT in our tag line as other community groups do.

It would not be possible to spell out the abbreviation in the tag line but our publicity material generally includes a description of the choir, in which we could make LGBT(Q) clear.

Action (Karen): Take these comments on board and come up with some proposed changes to the Pink Singers tag line and publicity material.

3. Formal concert wear

Karin suggested unifying the choir's formal concert wear by limiting either the range of black outfits or the range of pink accessories worn. A more unified look would make the choir look smarter and would enhance the effect of choreography.

The following points were made:

Individuality is great but can create the visual impression that we are disorganised.

We need a 'fashion guru' to look at the overall presentation of the choir and make adjustments to harmonise our look.

Uniformity can only be achieved by a narrower range of options with black outfit/pink accessory.

Creative use of the pink accessory is one of the best ways of expressing our individuality.

Choice of black outfit is also key to individual expression. It is nice that the ladies have the choice to wear a dress if they want to. It adds to the sense of occasion.

The range of pink accessories has expanded but this is not necessarily a good thing. A pink necklace or earrings, for example, do not have the impact of the fuchsia raw silk accessories that were made for the choir.

It was decided that everyone taking part in the Manchester Amateur Choral Competition should bring their pink accessory to next Sundays' rehearsal for appraisal.

4. End of year accounts

Simon presented details of the choir's income and expenditure over the past year.

Travel: we lost £1000 on group travel booking for the Edinburgh trip and will never be booking group travel again as a result; the 'artistic team' (MD/Accompanist) now have their travel expenses paid for all trips; the choir also pay the UK Concerts Director's travel for UK trips, ditto the International Concerts Director's travel for foreign trips.

Various Voices: the Various Voices stakeholder loans have not been repaid yet but are expected in early November. It is unconfirmed whether we will receive interest on top.

Subscriptions: there are some arrears with membership subscriptions but this is under control; Simon is awaiting confirmation of lower income status for some members.

Subsidies: the amount set for last year's subsidy budget was matched by the subsidy expenditure – money well spent.

T-shirts: the £850 cost for new t-shirts, given free to all members this year, was not budgeted for but was, nevertheless, money well spent.

Concerts: The summer concert expenses were less than budgeted for and the concert made a profit of £890; Ben has secured a very good deal with the same venue (Britten Theatre, RCM) for the concert in January 2010, which will result in lower expenditure.

New budgeting lines: a small advert by Exclusively Eve in the summer concert programme brought in new income and revenue targets will be budgeted for Marketing in future; a budget is also to be allocated for hospitality.

MD/Accompanist/Small Group MD payments: there was an increase in the gratuity payments made to the MD and Accompanist/Small Group Director. Both parties also received a one-off payment of £250, in recognition of the hard work put in last season, which was much busier than usual.

Action (Simon): In future, email the budget sheets to the choir the week before the meeting is to take place, to allow members extra time to look over them.

5. Proposal to pay the Chair

Andrew clarified his proposal to pay the Chair's travel expenses for UK and foreign trips on the understanding that the Chair is obliged to take part in such trips.

It was agreed that the Chair is not obliged to take part in UK or foreign trips away with the choir.

On this basis, the proposal was rejected.

Date of next open meeting: Sunday 6th December 2009