



Annual report 2013

Foreword by Tom Hammond

The 2012-13 season was my second at the helm of DSO; a year in which I feel have learnt a lot about the orchestra, and in which we've seen some notable successes.

In November concert we had the pleasure of welcoming both a living composer - James Francis Brown - and the dedicatee soloist, Catriona Scott. Both were delighted to be involved with DSO. In the end the combinations of unfamiliar music in one programme proved quite a challenge, but led us to think more about future programmes and rehearsal structure. After Christmas we tried out a new schedule. Although I know for some the later nights aren't ideal, especially in the dark Winter months, but I have certainly felt the benefit of that extra 15 minutes, helping the rehearsals feel less rushed.

We have a super season to look forward to in 2013-14. Exceptional soloists and what I hope will prove interesting, challenging but achievable musical peaks to scale in the coming months.

I also welcome the audience that we're developing via our project with Elmgreen School, The TonES. We need to continue, develop and promote this scheme because not only is it a philanthropic statement on behalf of DSO in a time when music education in the state sector has been pretty much decimated by successive governments, but it is proving of great direct benefit to *us* by bringing in new audience members.

I'm so grateful for the work of our dedicated committee, and I hope they all realise how much they're appreciated. This year, it must be noted and trumpeted that Russell will step down after a period as Chair in which he has proved thoughtful, personable, effective and unfailingly good-humored. Russell has done so much for DSO, we will miss him in that role but look back with gratitude.

Very sadly, as many of you will now know a recent soloist and also winner of the Croydon Music Festival competition on 2011, Felicity Smith, passed away suddenly in the Summer. It's tragic to lose someone who was so talented, and who had so much to look forward to. We're grateful that one of her legacies will be the performance she gave with us in 2012 of Elgar's *Sea Pictures*. Our thoughts are with Felicity's family and friends.

Chair's report

The year has seen the orchestra in good health, with continuing strong membership, sound finances, good community outreach work and some very good performances from a wide range of composers. It was also a year when we learned about where we can improve as an orchestra, which is a sound base for future success.

The orchestra is grateful again for Tom Hammond's enthusiasm and encouragement, and we are very pleased that he will be continuing as our conductor for 2014. We also continue to benefit from Paula Tysall's contribution as leader. The strength of our string section is in very much a tribute to her work.

Repertoire and performances

Last autumn's concert included the first London performance of the concerto for clarinet and strings, 'Lost Lanes and Shadow Groves' by James Francis Brown. It was a great honour for the orchestra to play the work with the composer in attendance, and a valuable learning experience for those who played in it. The concert also included performances of Sibelius' 3rd Symphony and Vaughan Williams Fifth Symphony, supported by a grant from the VW charitable trust. We are grateful for that support. All in all, this was a very demanding concert which made exceptional demands on the orchestra. and we subsequently took steps to increase rehearsal time for future programmes.

The two subsequent concerts included appearances by Matthew Sharp, playing the Schumann cello concerto, and the Croydon Festival solo prize winner, Anna Harvey, singing Grieg's Six Orchestral Songs.

The orchestra showed again its ability to play the core repertoire with enthusiasm and accomplishment.

Outreach

The DSO's Outreach Project at the Elmgreen school, 'The TonES', is now in its second year. The Project is funded jointly by DSO, using the the Philip McKenna bequest, The Marks Trust and the Elmgreen school. This year, the school has chosen to invest £1,505 in order to sustain the project for longer and to benefit more students. The Elmgreen school's financial commitment to the project is proof that they value the project's impact on their students. As a result of the project, music GCSE was offered in 2012 for the first time.

This term's sessions, led by Tom Hammond, have begun in a very positive mood with new and returning students who will play their instruments in The TonES' ensemble. Up to twenty-five

students attend the sessions. The first session was useful to assess the range of instruments the students play, their musical abilities and ambitions and where their preferences lie in terms of performance, composition or both. The school's Head of Music, Sarah Rivett, is very keen to set up a school orchestra and sees the TonES as a foundation for it. We are also keen that the students develop skills in reading and writing music, learning basic rules that they can use in the future. Over the past year we have worked guest musicians, such as cellist Matthew Sharp, very successfully.

There have been two performances of pieces featuring the students at DSO concerts. In November 2012, the students wrote music for three commissioned short films created by Ishani O'Connor, based on the theme of Nature. The films were located in landscapes on the students' doorsteps – local parks, nature reserves and gardens of South-East London. In March 2013, DSO member Alan Taylor contributed his composition expertise and developed 'The Elmgreen Overture' – a piece based on a collection of musical ideas given by the students. This was a contemporary ensemble piece, with hints of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony which the DSO was playing. The students performed the piece along with their own music which they had developed cellist Matthew Sharp.

Volunteers from the orchestra work with the TonES in after school sessions, coordinated by Ishani O'Connor. Michael Brooks and Ian Finn give their invaluable time, advice and support to the project, as did Robin White, Tessa Crilly, Caroline Annesley, Maxwell Sainsbury, Russell Ashley-Smith and Sarah Bort during the year. We are keen to encourage more volunteers from DSO to join the project on an ad hoc basis so that we can widen its scope both in instruments and ideas.

The winner of the 2012 Young Composer's Award, which offers a prize funded by the Philip McKenna bequest for a composition by a student studying up to A level, was Zoe Ibbotson, whose piece *Sea Storm* was performed at the summer concert.

Membership

The number of members remained at a similar level to last year, with 46,49 and 50 in the three terms respectively (2011-12 was 46,52,47). Recruitment to the violins has remained strong. Our biggest need now is for more double basses, but we can still accommodate more violins and violas too.

Members were involved in two consultations during the year using the online platform SurveyMonkey. 38 members took part in the vote on repertoire (78%) and 36 (69%) in the consultation on rehearsal times.

Venues

Once again, we are grateful for successful collaboration with our rehearsal venue, the Elmgreen School and with All Saints Church. Particular thanks go to Mike Kirby and Milko Georgiev at Elmgreen and to Wendy Stephens, Parish Secretary at All Saints.

Twitter

During 2013, the DSO committee agreed to build a greater presence online. During the summer months, Hannah Northern began tweeting on behalf of the DSO in order to gain more followers and eventually increase attendance at concerts. In addition to providing DSO orchestra and concert updates, she aims to share content that will be relevant to followers. We also hope that we can demonstrate that the orchestra is not just local to Dulwich, but to Tulse Hill, Herne Hill, Brixton and beyond.

Hannah aims to build online relationships with other local orchestras and organisations such as Making Music so that they will help to promote our concerts to their followers. The DSO follower base is gradually expanding but one of the best ways we can ensure success is through retweets that lead to new followers. If any DSO members are already on Twitter, follow @dulwichsymphony and share our updates with your own followers.

Summary of financial position

We have continued to be prudent in managing the orchestra's finances. As a result of careful expenditure on extras, music hire and soloists, and in the choice of repertoire, the orchestra's finances remain in a good state. Our reserves, not including the educational fund, at the end of 2012-13 are £2644.50, having been £158.95 at the end of last year. We are consequently able to maintain subscriptions and ticket prices at the same level as now in 2013-14.

Running the orchestra

An organisation like DSO only functions because of the voluntary input of members many of whom assist with various tasks and have readily responded to my requests for help. In particular I would like to mention the work of the librarians, Nicky Jackson and Peter Watkins, and also Jo Duggan who has edited the programme plus those members who have contributed material to the programmes over the year. I must also, on behalf of the orchestra, express my appreciation of the hard work of my fellow officers and committee members managing the orchestra and carrying out many tasks in support of the concerts and rehearsals.

Prospects for next year

2013-14 promises to be another good year, with a strong programme including November's concert of classical repertoire conducted by Leigh O'Hara, the return of Matthew Sharp to play Dvorak's cello concerto in the spring, and a concert of music influenced by Spain in the summer. DSO musicians will again be supporting the Lambeth Music Service input to the Herne Hill Festival, and there is a strong outreach programme with the Elmgreen School.

If there is one area which I think is particularly deserving of attention from a developmental point of view, it is in publicising our concerts and growing the audience. Our audiences will certainly continue to be largely built around people who know the musicians, and we are grateful to all those friends and family members who have supported us over the year. But we also need to become more systematic in using local and social media, in distributing flyers and posters and in building on our outreach contacts as a source of possible future support. I am sure these are issues well known to all amateur music societies, but the importance for the future health of the orchestra of a good following can't be exaggerated.

This will be my last report as chair. It has been an honour and a pleasure to be associated with DSO in this capacity, and I wish continued success to the orchestra and to my successor.

Russell Ashley-Smith
Chair