



Annual report 2014

Chair's report

I look back on my first year as chair of DSO with mixed feelings. It was a privilege to take over from Russell Ashley-Smith, who had demonstrated how to motivate the orchestra in a way which I am sure we would all like to be able to emulate. Once again, DSO has presented three very successful concerts. Our audiences have been good, our membership numbers are healthy and our finances are sound. Our relationships with our venues - the Elmgreen School and All Saints Church - have continued to be very good. Once again, we have carried out a number of outreach activities, at the Elmgreen School and the Herne Hill Festival, which show the orchestra working with the wider community.

It was therefore an unwelcome surprise when our conductor, Tom Hammond, decided after the final concert of the season to announce his resignation from the orchestra. We had had three very good years with Tom, during which time the orchestra has had many very enjoyable and successful concerts. Tom was a strong supporter of our outreach work and was instrumental in developing our relationship with the Croydon festival. I always found Tom an enthusiastic, open and encouraging person to work with. We wish him every success in his future career.

We have been very fortunate in being able to appoint Leigh O'Hara as interim conductor for the first two concerts of the new season. We know Leigh from previous occasions when he has worked with DSO, including the very successful concert in November 2013. I am confident that Leigh's input will help us continue to develop over the coming months. It will be for the committee 2014-15 to put forward proposals to the membership for the appointment of a permanent successor to Tom Hammond.

We are grateful too for the continuing work of our leader, Paula Tysall. The DSO's string section is now both numerous and strong and an important element in our musical success.

Repertoire and performances

Last autumn's concert, which was conducted by Leigh O'Hara, featured a performance of Mendelssohn's violin concerto with the excellent young soloist, Sadie Fields, and a guest appearance by the Pauline Voices, a choir made up of members of St Paul's Girls School. It was a real privilege to play the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the vocal numbers and the spoken chorus. I hope we have more opportunities to perform with vocal groups in future.

In the spring, we were fortunate in once again working with Matthew Sharp, this time in Dvorak's

Cello Concerto. The other piece in the programme, Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony ('The Pathétique') was a genuinely emotional experience and a tribute to Tom Hammond's work.

In our final concert, we played music about Spain (by non-Spaniards - Rossini, Rimsky Korsakov, Bizet and Lalo). The violinist Amanda Lake returned to play with DSO again, this time as the soloist in Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*.

Outreach

Ishani O'Connor and Ian Finn continued DSO's work with students from the Elmgreen School (The TonES) during the year. The work was led on the school's side by Sarah Rivett. Those students who chose to create compositions under Tom Hammond's guidance with cellist Matthew Sharp played their pieces at our March concert. The rest of The TonES performed as an ensemble at two of the school's own concerts. Ishani O'Connor regretfully left the project at the end of the summer in order to begin a full-time Master's course. I would like to thank Ishani for her work with TonES over the last 3 years, and Ian Finn for his continuing support for the project. In the coming months we will be discussing with the School how best to continue the work under new leadership.

Members of DSO formed a chamber orchestra to take part in a collaborative project with the pupils of Lambeth Council's Tippett Music Centre on October 19th 2013. They met to rehearse a new piece written for the occasion by DSO member Alan Taylor, based on musical effects and motifs suggested by the pupils. Called *Music for an Imaginary Film*, it aimed to take the audience through a journey of mystery, suspense, and drama. The pupils loved the project, and the audience were stamping and hollering at the end - a rewarding experience for everyone involved.

There were no entries for the Young Composers Award last academic year, but the competition will be offered again this year, concentrating on local schools and colleges. Closing date for entries will be brought forward to February 2015 to avoid potential conflict with the exam season.

Once again, we are grateful for the gift in memory of Philip McKenna which allows us to fund outreach work at The Elmgreen School and the YCA.

Membership

Numbers remained steady again this year. We had 46, 53 and 47 members in the three terms respectively against 46, 49 and 50 in 2012-13. As in previous years, we are fortunate in having strong membership in all sections, and in our continuing ability to attract new violinists.

Members were involved in a consultation during the year using the online platform SurveyMonkey. 34 members took part in the vote on repertoire (74%).

Venues

We continue to be 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. We were very pleased to learn that All Saints Church has acquired a concert standard grand piano. We plan to feature it in our concert in summer 2015.

Twitter

During 2013-14, we have further developed the DSO's twitter presence. Our follower base has doubled to over 200 followers. Twitter has been successful in raising awareness of our concerts and we know of at least two new members who joined after finding us through Twitter.

In line with the plans we previously outlined, we have continued to build online relationships with other orchestras, music organisations and relevant publications. Our follower base now includes national media outlets (the Daily Telegraph's music desk and 'The Classical Source'), local publications ('Around Dulwich' and 'Brixton Live') and the Richmond, Bromley, and Kensington orchestras.

Our most successful Twitter campaign was for the March 2014 concert. We received 18 retweets, which lead to 1,467 direct views of tweets that gave the details of the concert, and 14 link clicks through to the concert page of our website.

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 despite a relatively expensive concert in the summer term. Our reserves, not including the educational fund, at the end of 2013-14 are £3,573, having been £2,645 at the end of last year. Our aim is that reserves should be at a level roughly equivalent to the maximum extent of our liabilities at any time. We will continue to manage the finances of the orchestra with this in view.

During the year, the committee decided to increase the cost of tickets for concerts. The previous increase (from £8 to £10) was in 2010. We believe that this is the right thing to do to secure our financial position while continuing to promote rich and varied programmes with excellent soloists.

Running the orchestra

As chair, it falls to me to thank all those members of the orchestra who have contributed to our continuing viability and success as an organisation during the year. The committee (who are also our trustees) have given me strong support in my first year. They all have individual contributions, whether in fixing, concert management, publicity, website management, outreach and finance. Non-committee members have also done essential work - not least in making the tea at rehearsals. Special thanks go again to Jo Duggan for excellent work on producing our programmes and fliers and to Nicky Jackson and Tessa Crilly for nobly organising the hire and management of the orchestral parts for all rehearsals and concerts.

Prospects for next year

In the coming year, I have every confidence that we will be able to put on some notable performances. We have excellent soloists - flautist Emma Halnan, who is a Croydon Festival prize winner, violinist Philippa Barton and the pianist Mario Mora, whose performance will be supported by Making Music. I am also greatly looking forward to the vocal contribution of singers assembled by DSO's Ruth Mitchell for Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music*.

I am very keen that we are able to appoint a new permanent conductor soon. That will be essential in developing the long term future of the orchestra, including our outreach work.

Caroline Annesley
Chair