

# MINUTES

## The Berlioz Society ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Berlioz Society,  
Held on Thursday 18 June 2020  
at 5pm, remotely via Zoom

### Present:

Alastair Aberdare (Chairman)	Pierre Achard	John Anderson
Diana Bickley	Anne Bongrain	Adrian Brown
Michael Brown	Jonathan Burton	David Cairns (President)
David Charlton	Anne Dolbey-Jones	Linda Edmondson
William Edmondson	Ed Elsey	Olivier Feignier
Christopher Follett	Martin Grossel	Terry Heard
Simon Jones (Notes)	Shelagh Marston	Humphrey Norrington
Peter Payne	Helen Petchey	Philip Petchey
Martin Price	Adam Ridley	Julian Rushton
John Sims	Lucie Sims	Molly Skardon
Nicholas Snowman	Alan Taylor	Jenny Toomey
Martin Toomey		

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies were received from:

Jim Hart	Jean Hayes	Gethin Hopkin
Natividad Jimenez	Gareth Jones	Robert Keer
Mark Noble	John Ogden	Christopher Price
Charles Shaw		

### 2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM, HELD ON 4 APRIL 2019, AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 2.1 The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the previous AGM.
- 2.2 8.1 referred to the massed choir event planned, in conjunction with Young Voices, as part of the Berlioz 150 commemorations. This event had already been moved to 2022 for logistical reasons, and may yet be postponed again, depending on how Young Voices are affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.3 4.3 says “Katy Hamilton and Leanne Langley both looked at his visits in 1851” when this should read “Katy Hamilton and Leanne Langley both looked at his visits in the 1850s”.

### 3 SECRETARY'S REPORT

- 3.1 Membership of the Society remains fairly constant, around 200 members. Currently there are 208, of which 16 joined in 2019 and 34 have not yet renewed their subscriptions.
- 3.2 The June meeting at Sir Adam Ridley's began with some historic recordings of Berlioz pieces recorded between 1902 and 1931, followed by a superb performance from Andrew Berkley of Raff's Piano Fantasy on themes from Benvenuto Cellini, and ended with Julian Rushton speaking illuminatingly about Berlioz's Last Will and Testament.
- 3.3 The Festival Berlioz, held annually at La Côte-Saint-André, commemorated the 150th anniversary of Berlioz's death with the theme "Le roi Hector". Attendance was over 38,000 and there was also a three-day International Berlioz Conference. A six-metre-high Trojan horse, carved by local enthusiasts, dominated the main square.
- 3.4 Performances included *La Prise de Troie* conducted by François-Xavier Roth with the Hector Berlioz European Youth Orchestra & Choir (conservatory students playing period instruments) along with the Orchestre de Paris Chorus; *Benvenuto Cellini* with John Eliot Gardiner and his Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and Monteverdi Choir; and the festival was rounded off by an impassioned performance of the *Symphonie fantastique* by François-Xavier Roth's Les Siècles Orchestra.
- 3.5 Sadly the current Coronavirus crisis has led to the cancellation of this year's Festival. However, the Festival for 2021 has just been announced, "Berlioz ou le retour à la vie", running from 17 to 31 August.
- 3.6 The 2019 Members' Weekend in November again commemorated the 150th anniversary year of Berlioz's death. Tim Ashley opened with an impassioned talk about Berlioz the radical, followed by Gunther Braam revisiting the Berlioz iconography, introducing us to portraits uncovered since his last talk in 2003. At the end of the talk Gunther was presented with the Society's medal, by David Cairns, in recognition of his tireless work researching the portraits of Berlioz and contemporary reports of his reception in Germany.
- 3.7 David Cairns explored the connections between *L'Enfance du Christ* and *Les Troyens*, and kindly signed copies of his new book "Discovering Berlioz". The final event of the day was "From Naples to Rome: Berlioz's Return Retold", a reconstruction by Hugh Macdonald of the episode in 1831 described in the Memoirs. This used letters by Berlioz and a journal discovered by Marianne Tråvén in the Swedish State Archives kept by one of the two Swedish soldiers who were his companions. The letters and diary entries were read by Malcolm Sinclair and Gunther Braam.
- 3.8 A member, the conductor Pat Miller, has since pointed out possible in-joke of Berlioz's – the character Polydorus in *L'enfance du Christ* is named after one of Priam's sons in the *Aeneid*.
- 3.9 The day concluded with Peter Bloom introducing *Les Mémoires d'Hector Berlioz: A New Edition, A New Commentary*, via Skype.
- 3.10 In his after-dinner speech at the Montague on the Gardens Hotel, Nicholas Snowman, co-founder of London Sinfonietta, general director (Arts) and later Chief Executive at the Southbank Centre, general manager of Glyndebourne Festival Opera and director of Opéra national du Rhin in Strasbourg, remembered highlights of his varied career.

- 3.11 Opening Day 2, Julian Rushton asked “Berlioz's overtures: introductions or stories?”, followed by Adrian Brown on the Requiem, the Te Deum and *L'Impériale*. Alastair Aberdare interviewed David Cairns, and later spoke about the coming events for Berlioz 150. The events were punctuated by a selection of vintage recordings of Berlioz pieces.

#### **4 TREASURER'S REPORT**

- 4.1 An abbreviated set of accounts were issued with the last Bulletin, together with some explanatory notes.
- 4.2 2019 was another satisfactory year financially for the Society, with a surplus of £2,876. Much of that surplus (more than £1,700) came somewhat unexpectedly from many members paying their 2020 subscriptions soon after receipt of the membership renewal invitation.
- 4.3 Most of the balance came from a surplus on the November Weekend meeting. The committee realises that relatively few members can attend the Weekend meeting and it should not therefore be subsidised from the subscriptions of all members. Costs are largely fixed – hire of premises and fees paid to some of the speakers - and breaking even depends on the number of members attending. The programmes that we have put together under the leadership of Helen Petchey have proved attractive and enough members have attended to enable us to make small surpluses in most years.
- 4.4 The Society continues to help fund projects that fit in with its objectives; last year that meant making £500 available to the Berlioz 150 Schools project.

#### **5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

- 5.1 As mentioned before, 2019 was a highly significant year for Berlioz. BBC Radio 3 broadcast an excellent Berlioz week in February. Berlioz 150 was officially launched on 7 March and the next day, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, John Nelson conducted a luminous performance of the Grande messe des Morts in St Paul's Cathedral.
- 5.2 The Festival at La Côte-Saint-André was excellent and Berlioz was represented with five concerts at the Proms. The LSO performed three major concerts of Berlioz works under Simon Rattle, Gianandrea Noseda and Michael Tilson Thomas, and the Society had free advertisements in all three programmes. The *Symphonie fantastique* was performed twice in one day by the Aurora Orchestra under Nicholas Collon.
- 5.3 The Summer Event and the Weekend were both great successes, and the Weekend saw the launch of David Cairns' book “Discovering Berlioz”, a collection of his writings on the composer.
- 5.4 The present is dominated by the Coronavirus crisis – hence, among other things, the need to hold the current meeting via Zoom videoconferencing. The pandemic has forced the cancellation of the summer event and also affects the 2020 Members' Weekend, which seems unlikely to go ahead. The Committee will be in a position to make a final decision as to whether it goes ahead or not by the end of September.

- 5.5 Thanks to the efforts of David Cairns, Adam Ridley and Blissett's (our printers), Bulletin 210 was completed and distributed despite the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19.
- 5.6 A current project is an audiobook of David Cairns' translation of the Memoirs of Berlioz, narrated by the actor (and Society member) Malcolm Sinclair as a lockdown project. The entire book is recorded and is being prepared for publication by Cast Iron Radio, after which it will be available to buy via the Berlioz Society website and Glassboxx. This should be in time for the Members' Weekend. Simon Jones is coordinating its production and Chris Follett will work on the publicity. Society members will be entitled to a 20% discount.
- 5.7 The project will be funded by the Society, using a bequest from Michael Wright which we invite members to match. In addition, Malcom Sinclair has kindly deferred his fee until the book has generated revenue.
- 5.8 Sadly, the Society has lost two long-standing and valued members since the last AGM. Michael Wright was Membership Secretary in the 1960s, and compiled a critical list of Berlioz's music and writings. Another great loss, this March, was that of Brian Godfrey, Treasurer from 1973 to 1977 and later Archivist. His huge knowledge and enthusiasm found an outlet in the Berlioz discography in recent Bulletins. He is missed by us all, and our thoughts are with his wife Avril – who will be attending the next Weekend. Tributes to Michael and Brian were included in Bulletins 208 and 209 respectively.
- 5.9 A minute's silence was held for both Michael and Brian.
- 5.10 Alastair thanked the Committee for its work running the Society, especially at this difficult time.

## **6 AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION**

- 6.1 The arrangements for this meeting, and for any future meetings requiring virtual connections, need to be included in the Society's Constitution.
- 6.2 The Committee proposed the following form of words, to be included under Section 9 (General Meetings) of the Constitution:
- 9 (6) In this constitution the expression 'meeting' includes, except where inconsistent with any legal obligation:
- (a) a physical meeting;
  - (b) a video conference, an internet video facility or similar electronic method allowing simultaneous visual and audio participation; and
  - (c) telephone conferencing.
- 6.3 The motion, to adopt this amendment, was proposed by Diana Bickley, seconded by Julian Rushton and passed unanimously.

## **7 ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR THE FORTHCOMING YEAR**

- 7.1 No nominations having been received for any Committee positions, the existing Committee expressed its willingness to serve for the next year.
- 7.2 Nicholas Snowman proposed that the Committee be re-elected. This was seconded by Terry Heard, and passed unanimously by the meeting.
- 7.4 The Committee was re-elected, unanimously, as follows.

• President (and editor of the Bulletin)	David Cairns
• Chairman	Alastair Aberdare
• Vice Chairman	Adam Ridley
• Treasurer	Martin Price
• Secretary (and Website Manager)	Simon Jones
• Membership Secretary	Peter Payne
• Media Manager	Christopher Follett
• Weekend Coordinator	Helen Petchey
• Summer Event Coordinator	Shelagh Marston
• Member (temporarily without portfolio)	Linda Edmondson
• Member (temporarily without portfolio)	Julian Rushton
• Member (temporarily without portfolio)	Diana Bickley

## 8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 8.1 The Committee thanked Alastair Aberdare for chairing the meeting, and for his work throughout the year.
- 8.2 Adam Ridley thanked those members, especially from abroad, who had joined the meeting.
- 8.3 Adam Ridley also expressed his willingness to arrange an event at his West London home at relatively short notice should the current lockdown be lifted.
- 8.4 Adrian Brown had been disappointed, at the otherwise excellent British Museum exhibition “Troy: Myth and Reality”, to find no reference to *Les Troyens* (or to any music relating to the myth other than *La Belle Hélène*). Chris Follett had complained to the Museum about the same thing and was told Berlioz was mentioned in the catalogue. Adam Ridley heard the Museum had tried to acquire the Trojan Horse from the 2012 Covent Garden production of *Les Troyens*, without success.
- 8.6 Alan Taylor asked whether it was possible to receive past copies of the Bulletin. Adam Ridley will be able to help him.
- 8.7 Martin Grossel asked whether digital versions of old Bulletins were available. Simon Jones is working on this and they will be.

The meeting finished at 6 pm.