

## Friends of Southampton Youth Orchestras Annual General Meeting

### Chair's report November 2011

The past year has been a varied one for FSYO and included our 40th anniversary in January. In terms of music making it has again been one of excellence with players gaining in proficiency and experience and culminating in very enjoyable concerts for parent and other supports. The junior string ensembles gave concerts at the end of the autumn and summer terms with some excellent ensemble playing and soloists. SYCS played at Cantell, in Totton with the Wind Band and at Turner Sims; SYO at Turner Sims, Thornden and at St Mary's for the Leavers concert. The highlight of the year was of course the Pyramid concert in March which is a real celebration of the progression children make through the orchestral structure. For many current and ex-SYO members the Pyramid concert was their first experience of hearing a large orchestra and provided both inspiration to them to achieve their proficiency to audition for SYO and the knowledge that this could be done by achievable steps. The children played excellently, and with help from many people, the concert ran very smoothly and finished on time!

SYS had their usual weekend at Avon Tyrell and this year SYCS went to Ravenstor near Ashbourne, raising money for a local charity and on the return getting an excellent write up for their lunchtime concert from the music critic of the Leicester Mercury. FSYO was again pleased to support this trip by subsidising the cost for every participant.

While concerts are the main source of income for the ensembles, through ticket sales, raffles and refreshments, other fundraising has included a sponsored silent rehearsal by Purcell strings and our usual provision of several teas for a Romsey Bridge club. We were also successful in our application for a Community Chest Grant and received £750 towards music this year and £100 to improve the library shelving.

Rising hire prices have meant that profits on concerts at Turner Sims and Thornden have been reduced this year, the summer concerts doing little more than meeting costs. FSYO has therefore taken the decision to increase ticket prices at these venues after holding them at the same level for several years. By encouraging friends and neighbours to come to concerts, we can support and encourage the players as well as raise funds for the 'extras'.

FSYO joined parents and players in saying goodbye to Phil Batten at the end of the summer term and wishing him well and earlier in the year congratulated Pearl Mace on being awarded an MBE for services to children's music in Southampton and Hampshire. We also marked the changes to the string ensembles by thanking Zoe Hunting for her many years with Holst strings – and its predecessor orchestras, Christa Porter for her time with Elgar strings and Bev Geen and Vanessa Jarvis with Purcell and Finzi strings. Thank you to all the Directors and their helpers for their tireless work with our young people.

I would like to thank all of this year's committee for their time and hard work over the year in many different ways and to thank those parents who help in the various orchestras, whether committee members or not. Particular thanks go to Claire Thompson as secretary and to Miyuki Archibald who has supported Roger Bradley in his role of Treasurer. We are extremely grateful to Roger for agreeing to stand as Treasurer last November and for the huge amount of hard work he has put in. Also stepping down this year are Clare Wikeley, Alison Niblo, who has other commitments (though she has promised to continue to help with concerts) and Linnet Evans. Linnet has put in an enormous amount of work over a number of years on the

music library, the newsletter and the website. We have been extremely fortunate to have someone with the skills to build the website in the first place and to maintain it both technically and in terms of content. She is going to work in the background for a while completing some technical modifications and will be pleased to talk it all through with her successor. Thank you, Linnet. Thanks as always go to Peter Gosney and to Alex Pope for transporting instruments, though Peter has not had quite as far to take them as in the last few summers!

We all know we are facing a challenging time ahead. It has been well publicised that funding from Southampton City Council ceases in April and I'm sure Alita will talk about some of the plans for youth music in Southampton and about potential alternative sources of funding. It is interesting to look at what is happening in other local authority areas where similar cuts are being made:

- Some parents' groups, such as in Aberdeen, have had to campaign fiercely to retain their orchestras
- Some authorities, such as Kent County Council and Portsmouth are well advanced in setting up Music Hubs as outlined in the Henley Report, involving many different local bodies working in partnership
- In some areas groups are independent from local authority provision.

As Friends of the youth orchestras, our prime concern is the support of the Southampton orchestras, the provision of opportunities both for our children and for future generations and the enhancement of facilities as needed. The FSYO constitution states:

The aim of the Society shall be to advance the musical education of students at schools and colleges in the Southampton region, by the provision of facilities and funds for the Southampton Youth Orchestras which are not normally provided by Southampton City Council.

In an uncertain future, we wait to see quite what our role becomes, what we can do as parents and how we need to work to continue to achieve those goals.

We were grateful to Alita for listening to parents concerns in the summer term and responding to our request for a meeting in which these could be aired. Topics ranged from ensemble changes to individual music lessons, In2Music and funding uncertainties. The autumn has seen a restructuring of the orchestras pyramid and we have welcomed the First Steps ensembles to the FSYO structure as well as the new Elgar and SYS ensembles. I know this will also come up in the Treasurer's items as we need to seek approval to reallocate the pots of money held by some of the groups.

Finally, the committee believes that we need to have a strong Friends organization this year and, if you are still hesitating about joining the committee, I would urge you to do so. There are some specific jobs to be filled but we also need members to represent the range of ensembles and to reinforce the support for them. Southampton in recent years has been noted for its outstanding music provision and our message to Southampton City Council, to those involved in planning youth music services in Southampton and to other parents is that we care about the youth orchestras; we believe it is important to have strong provision where young players are nurtured, given opportunities, encouraged to develop, to achieve what they might not consider possible and to fulfill their ambitions. It needs to be enjoyable – something to get up for on a Saturday morning – or go to after school: the memories,

friendships and skills of those who have been through the orchestras over many years bear testimony to the achievement of all these things and must encourage us to work to continue to support those who seek to provide them.

Sue Wilkins  
November 2011