



SUPPORTING &
CHAMPIONING
VOLUNTARY MUSIC

No 15 - October 2009

CPC NEWSLETTER

Concert Promoters' Committee

www.makingmusic.org.uk/cpc

IN THIS EDITION

- Leeds Conference impressions by Stephen Leeder
- Promoters' AGM and Welcome to New Members
- Programming Survey report by Berkeley Ranby
- Mike Bonsall gives a profile of Douglas Music, Parbold, Lancs

(Please send your own society profile in 600 words to b.ranby@makingmusic.org.uk)

LEEDS CONFERENCE

I was convinced that this event would be a minority interest and that perhaps 30 Choir and Club reps would be present. Had I made a mistake in signing up for the Conference? You will realise that I had not had dealings with Making Music before and guessed correctly that I must be a new member. Nearly 200 delegates attended and this allowed a wide variety of discussion groups in the afternoon session so it was possible to find a topic relevant to any Club or institution. Delegates proposed the subjects for our conversations so all one had to do was rush to the allotted venue to be one of the eight permitted. I was a teacher for all of my earlier life and used to the organisation of such sessions but I had to admire Miles Harrison in this role. He had 15-20 minutes to persuade us to propose 20 topics and then organise ourselves into groups - no problem!

I was given to understand that there had been a strong choral component to Making Music conferences in the past and I was persuaded to attend only after careful questioning of Sarah Rogers. This is a significant issue in view of the distances travelled. I represent a Music Club and am not involved in performance. My concerns are quite different from those of a choir although we share problems of attracting younger members. The morning was divided into 3 sessions and there was a clear alternative to choral workshops.

Margaret Murphy gave an agent's view of how Clubs might benefit from using an agent rather than making private contracts with musicians. Convincing, certainly, but not quite as easy as it sounds. There is a great deal of work to be done to find musicians at the right price point for any particular Club. Many smaller Clubs have to use musicians at the start of their careers in order to keep the costs sufficiently low whereas others can book more readily through an agent. This session has, however, given me the impetus to explore the agent option and perhaps I will be pleasantly surprised.

Contd. on p3

Promoters' AGM

The Promoters' AGM was held at the Leeds Conference. George Wolfe was confirmed as Network Co-ordinator but no other nominations received for the three committee places or role of Chairman. Are people too modest or just too busy? The discussion of highlights of the past season created good recommendations and are listed on our website www.makingmusic.org.uk/cpc

Welcome New Members

A Touch of Brass
Weston Music Society
Churchill Music!
Forum London Composer Group
Border Marches Early Music Forum
Ross Primary Schools' Choir Festival
SEFAN
Udbhav
Stowmarket Concert Society
West Suffolk Young Musician
Norton Music Festival
Ribble Valley Jazz & Blues
Breinton Recital Society

Please make sure that you request your additional copies of the Concert Promoters' Network brochure at:

<http://www.makingmusic.org.uk/html/620.shtml>

PROGRAMMING SURVEY

The programming survey in autumn 2008 was held to find out:

- about the diversity of promoting members' programming
- members' comments on the Concert Promoters' Network brochure
- what category of artist they booked.

The survey was sent to promoters' Concert Organisers and to MM Reps for promoters without a Concert Organiser. Overall there were 186 responses which is 46% of the promoters circulated. A summary of the method adopted was given in the last CPC Newsletter (available at our web site www.makingmusic.org.uk/cpc) and the full report is also available on our website.

Background

52% of the responses were from chamber/instrumental societies and the remaining 48% included festivals, mixed, jazz, African Music and organ recitals. 50% presented 6 or less events per season and 69% of respondents input a web address.

Promoters' Diversity?

These questions were aimed at finding out what other repertoires were presented in addition to their principal repertoire and what were promoters' experiences with them.

Although 83% had a principal repertoire of western classical music, the respondents also presented other types of music:

- 32% also present some jazz
- 32% also present some light classical
- 20% also present some world/ethnic/folk music
- 12% also present music theatre
- 9% add a wide ranging repertoire
- 4% also present rock/pop
- 13% also present early music/historical dance/Scottish traditional/ sacred or tango-gypsy
- But 22% present only their principle repertoire.

The next question asked why people departed infrequently or not at all from their principle repertoire. Several possible options were offered and people ticked as many as were relevant, so the percentages do not add up to 100. The reasons given were:

- 56% think members prefer no change
- 28% know members prefer no change
- 31% have too few concerts to risk it
- 10% never depart
- 8% have tried and failed
- 7% have no knowledge of alternatives

24% gave other reasons that included

finance, and noting that other groups in their area cover the alternative repertoire.

20 groups responded to the offer of support in expanding their repertoire and their information has been passed on to their regional/national committee and Regional Development Officer.

Of those who had **departed occasionally** from their principle repertoire:

- 81% found it had attracted a new audience
- but 60% said the new audience did not come to their other events
- 75% found that their traditional members still came
- and 63% felt their traditional members enjoyed the alternative repertoire.
- 45% did not know whether their traditional audience would come if they used a different venue or time.

42% would not consider organising an event **outside** their normal season but 29% would.

Comments on the CPN brochure

An encouraging 30% of respondents use the brochure either every year or about every 2-3 years. But 24% never use it and 20% skipped the question.

Many of the 55 helpful comments anticipated a later question. A surprisingly large number, 10, were new to MM and so not yet taking full advantage of schemes. Seven prefer a different type of artist, a further two use bigger names but only three blamed the price of artists and a further three prefer their own arrangements. Two use the Scottish Tours Book instead and two work on a different time scale.

80% of respondents did not want **additional**

categories of artist in the CPN brochure. But 20% did.

On balance it would appear that cost is important; quality of artists is probably OK and some would like more diverse artists.

Among the additional comments, there were suggestions to:

- Allow the artists to be booked beyond the season covered
- Produce the brochure earlier (2)
- Include larger groups
- Have more programme choice

Category of artist booked?

The most popular types of group were:

- string quartet and solo piano coming way ahead of
- piano trio, ensemble-strings and duo-strings;
- the next group are ensemble-mixed, vocal solo, string trio and vocal group.
- followed by early music, ensemble-woodwind, duo-woodwind;
- then come guitar, unusual, jazz (traditional)
- and then ensemble-brass, world, other jazz and piano duo.

Also booked were: Brass band, Chamber choir, anything interesting that avoids hiring a piano (3), school groups, percussion group (2), harp (3), piano 4et, piano 5et.

37% took the time to comment and happily 47 were complimentary - thank you!

- 3 would like it a whole season earlier
- 4 still feel the artists cost too much
- 1 wanted more Scottish artists (but 2 used the Scottish tours book instead)
- 1 suggested a clearing house for bookings on the web (*yes, we are working on this idea for a re-vamped website- Ed*)
- 6 said it was not applicable to them as they only joined for PRS and insurance - but they took the trouble to respond.

The Committee is very grateful to the large number of promoters that spent time filling in the survey in a very constructive way. We hope to be able to act on the responses and improve the service accordingly.

Berkeley Ranby Acting Chairman

Leeds Conference Contd. from p1

Northern Chords is a small music festival run by young musicians. Everybody associated with the Festival is young and this includes help at the door as well as financial advisers. The entire room was receptive to this presentation but it made us all aware of the difficulty of making a musical career. Luck plays a part in all areas of life but only ferocious hard work will get a small music festival off the ground.

The age issue just mentioned became relevant in one of the afternoon sessions where we pondered the problem of finding new and young members. One obvious conclusion was that to aim at really young people would not bring results but perhaps we should target 40 year olds who have sown their musical wild oats and might wish to consider a new alternative. We really need working people because they bring drive and initiative and a can-do mentality.

After lunch a group of 18 Music Club reps met and we were each invited to name two performers from the recent season who had given memorable concerts. At Rhyl we all loved the cellist Pei Jee Ng and mezzo Daniela Lehner but the real value here was to find out about other Clubs and performers. I am a strong supporter of the principle that I should attend concerts in various venues and then book according to my own judgement but with 13 evenings to organise this is impossible. I now have some excellent opinions from the meeting and am following them up. I will also join the listeners' scheme.

How can Making Music improve their 2010 conference? Very little change is required but it might be valuable if a range of seminar topics was proposed to members during the year to assess interest. Perhaps we should write in with our own suggestions.

My big regret was that for personal reasons I was unable to stay over for 3 days and listen to the Leeds Piano semi-finalists but perhaps I should try and book one of them instead.

Stephen Leeder

Promoter's Profile: Douglas Music, Parbold, Lancs

Now in its 36th season, Douglas Music aims to bring a variety of international quality music-making to a broadly-based and widely scattered audience from West Lancashire and beyond, while being firmly based within its own community from which approximately half its audience comes. Douglas Music receives no regular subsidies from any source and is dependent on audience revenue. Recently it has received development support for school workshops from Making Music via 'Tuned-in' and the NW Committee Development Grants.

Douglas Music began in the late 1960s with carol singing, then a series of inspirational lecture/recitals by music authority, Joan Burns, in someone's front room. It grew to establish seasons of eight concerts during the winter months, adding Christmas choirs and summer buffets with music to its activities. It made its base in a small 'cosy' hall with a capacity of 100 seats but without a grand piano and promoted classical music from all genres performed by soloists and small ensembles. It actively encouraged young musicians including Peter Donohoe in his student days and Emma Johnson who drew a large audience in the early days of her enduring success. The music and the artist were the focus and little attention was paid to the presentation of either the artists or the event itself. Marketing was a simple membership card and a few posters displayed in local shops, with the occasional entry in the Community Association Newsletter.

By the turn of the century audiences had shrunk to a loyal group of about 35 and in committee talk of the future was done quietly with little certainty of what it might hold. Members set about improving what they could immediately control: house to house leafleting and improving the presentation of concerts with an extended stage, improvised lighting, doing a deal on flowers, giving a free programme sheet including advertising future attractions, and offering refreshments at the

end with the promise of a chance to talk to the artists. Gilbert and Sullivan, a trad jazz night, a Christmas dinner with entertainment and extra talks by members were added.

The events became social and communal, where everyone could see as well as hear; where it was as much about the audience as it was about the music and where the community was welcoming and not exclusive. During this time Douglas Music also got to know about the existence of Making Music North West, its piano as well as the young performers from Making Music's Philip and Dorothy Green Award for Young Concert Artists, the NW Promoters' Conference and the Royal Northern College. Over about four years, a 'virtuous' cycle of increased audiences made possible the booking of more well-known artists, like the return of Peter Donohoe and Noriko Ogawa.

By this time the key policy was established to programme only the best quality artists in whatever genre that the limited funds could afford. This was regarded as essential if trust was to be established between audience and Douglas Music. By 2007 Douglas Music had outgrown its original venue and so decided to move its whole season to Parbold Village Hall with a potential audience capacity of 200. This move was instrumental in supporting the Parbold Community Association's improvement project to upgrade the acoustics, lighting, staging tiered seating and toilets and transform what was a 'bleak' and under-used sports hall. Now, with this just completed, we are anticipating a number of 'full houses'.

No one can tell what will happen next, because this story has not been without its struggles, pitfalls and upsets, but a team of hard-working, busy people, loyal to each other, have seen through this decade of change and they, above all, make Douglas Music what it currently is.

Mike Bonsall

For a large print version of this newsletter, please contact the Editor:
Berkeley Ranby, 25 Damage Lane, Chester CH2 1EL
Tel: 01244 381 995 E-mail: b.ranby@makingmusic.org.uk

Articles may not necessarily represent the views or policy of Making Music.
Copy deadline for next issue: 15 December

Making Music, The National Federation of Music Societies. A company limited by guarantee. Registered in England no. 308632 Registered Charity no. 249219 2-4 Great Eastern Street, London EC2A 3NW Tel 0870 903 3780 www.makingmusic.org.uk info@makingmusic.org.uk