



**Bedfordshire
Festival of Music,
Speech & Drama 2015**

Notes and Lines

The Chairman's
Annual Report

Notes and Lines 2015

It is a considerable pleasure to report upon the 2015 Bedfordshire Festival. Over eight days in March the halls at the Corn Exchange complex came alive through some truly wonderful performances.

This year we also utilised for the first time facilities at Kings House which were a considerable improvement for our friends from the Special Schools where considerations of access and safety are paramount. We shall be retaining this facility into 2016 as we believe the greatly improved access will encourage more schools to participate in this wonderful celebration of music making.

Over the Festival we welcomed some 3500 visitors through the door as spectators and over 3100 as performers on stage. We were particularly encouraged by the number of choirs entering this year. The Corn Exchange was full four times on the first Saturday. This stretched our logistical and staffing abilities to the extreme, however, we ran on time and with good humour.

Each year I am greatly indebted to our dedicated and hard working Committee of volunteers without whom the Festival could not function. Their work runs throughout the year with only August providing some respite. I must also thank our Festival Secretary Julia Smith whose dedication to the task is unwavering. It is Julia (assisted by husband Simon) who has enabled the Festival to become such a leading light in the festival movement in terms of computer led administration. We constantly receive compliments from adjudicators regarding our procedures, organisation and preparation. A reputation we intend to maintain looking into the future.

This year our funding support has remained consistent from Friends, however, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the assistance we have previously enjoyed from some organisations has become more selective. The trend is clearly towards bodies funding 'projects' rather than general expenditure. We have worked hard to contain costs whilst at the same time wishing to maintain our reputation for the quality of our facilities and visitor experience.

We will be reviewing our budget for the 2016 Festival making sensible changes where this is possible. We will also need to address our 'income' which may result in some increases to performer fees. We remain committed to the lowest possible door entry price in order that the widest possible cross section of the community we serve can access our event.

In closing I pay tribute to all involved with the Festival; our Stewards, dedicated teachers and all supporters who work so hard to inspire performances of such high quality.

In anticipation of 2016, best wishes to you all.

Jonathan Keep
Chairman

Festival Secretary's Report 2015

The 2015 Festival cycle began with a new, fresh appearance for the website and Festival publications. The Festival now has a social media presence, on Facebook and Twitter, and during Festival week in particular, there were many tweets, re-tweets and Facebook posts from schools and performers who wanted to report their successes as the week progressed. The Committee has identified the need to keep up-to-date with advances in technology and as the world of social media grows and becomes an increasingly more important means of communication in today's society, it is crucial that the Festival taps into this resource to promote, advertise and engage with our audiences and performers.

Staying with technology, 2015 saw the completion of the first full cycle of using the new CRM and online entry system. The Committee was extremely pleased with how well the system worked and received some very encouraging feedback from users. As a result, the Festival now has much stronger foundations to build upon and extend the database.

Each year the Federation of Festivals requires the Committee to submit a feedback form which includes a request for the number of performers, entries and state schools participating each year. This always proves an interesting exercise as it allows us to compare figures from year to year, identify trends and single out particular disciplines which require help for boosting entries. This year saw an increase again in the Speech and Drama entries, but a decline in music entries, despite an overall increase in entries altogether (around another 70 more than in 2014 to be precise). Interestingly, though, the number of music performers taking part was significantly larger than in the Speech and Drama disciplines, due to the musical groups and choirs which participate in the music classes. In the Community Choir class for instance there were two choirs each with 80+ members!

The choir classes continue to be increasingly popular from year to year, with 30 choirs in total performing on the first Saturday! It was wonderful to see 5 choirs in the Community Choirs class which was a new class for 2014.

We were also pleased to see so many music groups taking part. Highlights included the Samba Band who provided an interesting (and loud!) accompaniment to the Year 10 Verse Speaking class in the neighbouring Howard Room, and the percussion group who performed in the dark with luminous drumsticks!

Following a decline in the number of Special Schools participating in the Festival in 2014, we consulted with the teachers to find out what we could do to improve their experience of the Festival and encourage them back. As a result, there were many changes to the format of this class in March. A request for the schools to feel more inclusive resulted in the class being opened up to mainstream schools as well. Some Special Schools brought groups from their 'sister' mainstream schools and also Ursula Taylor School Choir performed. Music for Bedford Borough provided a band to accompany two songs which all the performers sang together at the end of



each session. More importantly, the classes were held at King's House which was much better suited to their particular needs. We will, as a result of its success, be repeating the same format in 2016.

In the Speech and Drama section of the Festival, 2015 saw an increase in the number of Creative Performance and Group Poem entries, so group performance is a growing trend in all aspects of the Festival. Verse Speaking and Prepared Reading classes continue to be most popular. 2015 entries in these disciplines were again increased on last year. There were two new classes for 2015: Radio Play and Television Report which were both well supported. The Radio Play class in particular worked really well and is being considered for inclusion in the 2016 syllabus also. There were also significantly more entries in the Write and Speak a Poem and Write and Read a Story classes in which entrants perform their own original pieces of work.

Looking forward to 2016, there is still a lot of work to do with developing the new Online Entry System to improve the experience of its users. Plans for the website include the inclusion of a photo and video gallery. And preparations have started on the new syllabus, for distribution in September.

Julia Smith,
July 2015



2015 Gala Concert Winners

The Woodfine Lousada Prize of £250 for the most Outstanding Musical Performance at the Gala Concert:

Jim Cooper

The Woodfine Lousada Prize of £250 for the most Outstanding Speech & Drama Performance at the Gala Concert:

Logan Jones

The Eglinton Challenge Bowl for Senior Singing:

Robert Akerele-Miles

The Hans Freyhan Salver for Piano:

Flora Charatan

The Swan Hotel Rose Bowl for Music:

Jim Cooper

The Borough of Bedford Challenge Bowl for Senior Speech and Drama:

Logan Jones

The Woodfine Lousada Challenge Cup for Junior Singing:

Logan Jones

The Jane Whitbread Cup for Junior Speech and Drama:

David Adeyemi

Bedford Choral Society Cup and Prize:

Uppingham Children's Choir

The Melville Prize for Most Promising Performer at the 2015 Festival:

Olivia Benjamin







