



# **Bedfordshire Festival of Music, Speech & Drama 2020**

## **Notes & Lines**

### **The Chairman's Annual Report**



## Notes and Lines 2020

It is my pleasure to write my first Chairman's Report after what has been a whirlwind first year for me in this new role. Beginning with the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in September and ending the 2019/20 cycle with Covid-19 wreaking havoc in our lives, it really has been a year to remember. I would like to begin my report by wishing all of our supporters, volunteers, Friends and performers good health and I hope that you have all managed to keep safe and well during these unprecedented times.

We were extremely fortunate to be able to complete the Festival in March before the country went into lockdown. Covid-19 was just beginning to take hold in early March and we implemented a number of initiatives to keep our volunteers safe during the week. Had the Festival been a week later then it would have been a very different story. We are well-aware that many of our colleagues at other Festivals around the country were not so lucky.

The first Saturday of the Festival is Choirs day. It is always a highlight with the Corn Exchange auditorium being filled multiple times with performers and audience. This year was no exception. Twenty choirs plus a record number of eight Community Choirs thrilled our audiences with uplifting performances throughout the day. Another highlight of the Festival is our Celebration of Music from Schools, which takes place at King's House each year, a venue particularly favourable for the Special Schools for whom a number of their performers have mobility, access and safety issues. We are indebted to the organisations who provide support and assistance, both financial and professional, to ensure this important event can take place. Thanks particularly to Bedford Music Hub for providing the live band to accompany the performers and Soundsmiths who work with the Special Schools using their unique technology to allow those students with particularly challenging special needs to make music with their peers.



I am extremely fortunate to have an amazing team to support me on the Festival Committee. Each member has a role to play behind the scenes and they work tirelessly throughout the year to ensure the Festival can take place. I would like to thank them all for their ongoing support, encouragement and patience as I navigated my way through my first year as Chairman. Special thanks also goes to our Festival Secretary, Alix Smith, who does a brilliant job for us managing the Festival. We could not do it without her. With her efficiency, attention to detail, expertise and good humour she is a joy to work with.

Since the last AGM, the Festival was presented with the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service by HM Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis at a ceremony at the Swan Hotel. The event was attended by our volunteers, Committee members and supporters who were treated to afternoon tea, music and some Shakespeare to thank them for their commitment and support over the years. We are extremely proud of the award and the recognition it represents for our army of volunteers, without whom the Festival simply could not take place each year.

The Festival's financial situation remains relatively healthy for now, thanks to our Friends, both individual and organisations, to whom we are extremely grateful. We, however, must not become complacent. The recent Covid-19 situation will pose additional challenges for us this year. With so many funding bodies now only providing assistance for project-based events, the Festival requires funds for its ongoing running costs. Therefore, one area we will be concentrating on developing in the next cycle will be seeking new sources of funding and growing our group of Friends. As a Committee, we are keen to move towards being as self-sufficient as possible and less reliant on our donors. However, there is a fine balance between this and ensuring that the Festival is as accessible and available to the widest cross-section of our community as possible, whilst maintaining the high standards of which we are so proud. The Bedfordshire Festival remains one of the largest and most efficiently run Festivals in the country and we do not want to compromise this reputation.

The 2021 Festival, as you know, was to mark the Centenary of the Festival, the first one taking place in 1921. Sadly, however, the Committee took the decision in September to postpone the Centenary celebrations until 2022, in light of the continued uncertainty surrounding the Covid-19 virus. It was an extremely difficult decision to make, but the Committee felt that they would prefer to delay the celebrations for a year and be able to mark the occasion in the way it deserved, and was originally anticipated, to be. At the time of writing, the Committee is exploring alternative ways we may be able to have some sort of performances in March 2021 in keeping with government guidelines and social distancing. We will keep you updated. In the meantime, planning is in earnest for the Centenary celebrations in 2022 which we are all very much looking forward to.

I would like to conclude my report by thanking everyone involved in running the Festival; the Committee and Secretary, our President and Vice-Presidents, Stewards, dedicated teachers and performers, adjudicators, accompanists and our Friends and supporters who work so hard to maintain the high standards of our Festival.

I hope you all keep well. Please stay safe and I hope that by the time we hold our AGM in summer 2021 the worst of the virus will be behind us and we can look forward to moving our Festival into its next century.

**Julia Smith**  
Chairman

## Festival Secretary's Report 2020

The 2020 Festival saw another extremely successful and enjoyable week of performances.

The entries overall have increased again this year by over 200 from last year's total with more bands and groups than we've had in recent years as well as increased entries in our higher-level music classes. It was fantastic to have 7 piano recitals and 5 string recitals! Speech and Drama classes were popular as ever. The year 6 verse speaking class received over 100 entries and had to be split into 5 separate classes. Huge thanks to Viv & Malcolm Redford whose timetabling skills were much appreciated as always.

We are continuing to work closely with the Bedford Music Hub and are planning to collaborate with them more closely in future years to have a showcase concert for the local hub groups. This will provide a platform for them to perform and will also bring more local parents and teachers to the Festival.

It was lovely to see so many choirs on the first Saturday of the Festival with adjudicator Jane Wilkinson. We had a total of 10 choirs in the morning session, 11 in the afternoon and a busy evening session with 8 Community choirs and 4 choirs competing for the Harding memorial Bowl. We had quite a few new choirs and schools performing at the Festival for the first time and I received some lovely emails saying how organised everything was and how good the stewards were at putting the performers at their ease.



I am continuing to try and increase the Festival's presence on social media and in the press, assisted hugely by Louise Harris who has much experience in PR and lots of useful local contacts. With her help we have had articles published in the local newspaper and our Chairman Julia interviewed on local radio during Festival week which was an exciting addition to her first year. Following the interview I received a number of enquiries from people wanting to learn more about the Festival which was wonderful!

The Celebration Day class at King's House was a success with performances from Pilgrims School, St John's Special School, Ridgeway Special School, Weatherfield Academy and Chiltern School. We were once again very lucky to be joined by some musicians from the Bedford Music Co-op who accompanied and lead the group songs at the end and we are very grateful for the support of the Bedford Music Hub who provided the musicians. We have been offering this class free of charge for the past couple of years and we hope that this will enable more schools to be able to take part and get involved with the Festival.

The Gala Concert was once again a real treat with some amazing performances in both the Music and Speech & Drama sections. We really were spoilt for choice this year with all of the talent on show during the week.

**Alexandra Smith**

Festival Secretary



# 2020 Gala Concert Winners

The Bedford Choral Society Cup and Prize presented by Diana Shooter, Chairman of Bedford Choral Society following their performance

**Bel Canto**

Melville Prize for the Most Promising Performer at the 2020 Festival

**Leo Little**

Elaine Bonas Prize for the Most Promising Young Singer at the 2020 Festival

**Andrew Blake**

The Swan Hotel Rose Bowl for Music

**Jessica Ellis**

The Jane Whitbread Cup for Junior Speech and Drama

**Redford School of Speech & Drama Junior Group**

The Woodfine Lousada Challenge Cup for Junior Singing

**Athena Gallagher**

The Hans Freyhan Salver for Piano

**Thomas Mattin**

The Borough of Bedford Challenge Bowl for Senior Speech and Drama

**Alex Felice**

The Eglinton Challenge Bowl for Senior Singing

**Becki Holmes**

The Woodfine Lousada Prize of £250 for the most outstanding Musical performance

**Jessica Ellis**

The Woodfine Lousada Prize of £250 for most outstanding Speech & Drama performance

**Redford School of Speech & Drama Junor Group**



















