

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023-2024

It has been another successful year for the Friends of St Mildred's Church. In addition to running the ever popular Summer Garden Party on a beautiful August afternoon as a thanks to all our loyal supporters in the Vicarage Gardens, our Committee organized six musical events, all of which were well supported and of outstanding quality, achieving a total surplus in excess of £5000. Most important of all, we passed the milestone £200,000 mark of monies raised by the Friends for the upkeep, restoration and beautification of the Church, since we were first established 10 years ago.

The first of the year's six concerts took place on a damp November evening, delivered by the London Adventist Chorale. The London Adventist Chorale was formed in 1981, bringing together and developing the latent talents of singers from various Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Throughout its years, the choir has made a strong impact on the choral world internationally through its moving performances, combining, as one music critic put it, 'discipline with fervour'. Its repertoire has included music in Hebrew, African-American Spirituals, close harmony, and Western choral music from the Renaissance through to new commissions.

The Chorale's performances have been witnessed by tens of millions world-wide on stage, screen, recordings and radio appearances. The choir has performed in most of the UK's major performance venues and now it was the turn of St Mildred's! The beauty and intense spirituality of the Choir's unaccompanied singing in St Mildred's with its characteristic sound modulation and close harmonies was mesmerising, climaxing with The Lord's Prayer, rendered a capella – unaccompanied - almost as a whisper. Nobody in the audience whether of faith or no faith, could have failed to be moved by this performance.

The second concert took place in December and was delivered by the Benenden Chapel Choir, from Benenden School. This disciplined and highly musical group of girl choristers gave an excellent rendition of Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols which has become one of the best loved Christmas choral works. The girls parading silently onto the stage as the singing began and leaving the stage in similar fashion as the singing ended added a dramatic subtlety to the performance, and the audience loved it! The pleasure was two-sided, Benenden Musical Director Edward Whiting writing:

We really enjoyed ourselves, as I hope you and the audience could tell. It was lovely to sing for such a good crowd, and the girls were on a real high coming back to school.

An additional pleasure for the audience that evening was a rendition of Claude Debussy's Arabesque by the highly talented young harpist Rosanna Rolton. Losing no time we rapidly booked her for a full solo concert in May 2024 which was well attended, and a delight to the eyes and ears of all those fortunate enough to be present. The concert even included a whistle stop exposition of the history of the harp! This concert was followed in June by the return of Bukolika pianist Anna Szalucka, accompanying yet another Polish musical virtuoso, the violinist Jaga Klimaszewska in a concert of classical and romantic music, appealing to all tastes.

Our season also included two full evenings of Jazz cabaret style by the Benoit Viellefon Hot Club and the Kate Daniels Sextet. Both bands were old favourites of FOSM stalwarts and their evening performances were full of eclectic sound and high audience appreciation. Benoit Viellefon's band included the rare appearance of the Romanian superstar jazz violinist Rares Morescu, a one time protégé of Stéphane Grappelli

We will enter 2025 with a new Chairman, as my term of office comes to an end after this year's AGM. It has been highly enjoyable and a privilege to serve FOSM in this role. I wish my successor, whom you will elect today, the very best fortune. Our Treasurer, the inestimable Malcolm Kneller, will also be retiring this year. I wish to thank him sincerely for the tremendous amount of work he has put into this post and the careful, steady and wise control he has exercised over our financial progress. He will bequeath to his successor books in excellent order.