

Cairn Chorus: Annual Report from the Chair. 2016/17

2016 started very sadly as Annie Winstanley, a wonderful person, friend and dedicated choir member died in March. She loved singing and got right into the moment, constantly moving with the rhythm and making eye contact, smiling, encouraging. We started a book of our memories of Annie for her family and it was filled with wonderful stories. She touched so many lives and is still greatly missed.

Early in the year Kate had been contacted by Jenny Hill from the "Songs of Separation" group with an offer to join them when their tour reached Dumfries. Kate grabbed the chance with both hands, thus starting our first collaboration with D & G Arts Festival and letting herself in for a lot of extra work liaising with Jenny on material, logistics etc. and although the choir was initially daunted by the prospect of working with ten professional and famous women from the Folk/Roots world, we loved the material and worked hard on the selected songs, plus our own set of great material chosen by Kate, who kept on reassuring us that all would be well. When Jenny attended a rehearsal she was suitably impressed and as you all remember, the concert was a sell-out, we had a wonderful time performing with SOS at the Usual Place in Dumfries. The audience were as knocked-out by our performance as they were by SOS and the whole event really raised our profile; wonderful for Kate after all her hard work. High points for me during our rehearsal were: SOS appearing from the "green room" to lean on the back wall and listen to us, and during a joint number- Kate conducting us and one of SOS saying to Kate "Why don't you just conduct us all?"

Next, we opened the Eden Festival on a beautiful June day before collapsing into a summer break.

A group of us sang for the annual Allanton Peace Flag ceremony which was held in September to coincide with International Peace Day and included parading outside to the newly erected henge of Peace poles accompanied by Anna and Peter on Japanese drums-fantastic. Then we were into our rehearsals for "Winter Wassail". I seem to recall five languages playing their part in that programme and a repertoire which ranged from mediaeval to modern in time, classical to Gospel in style and Europe, North America and Britain in space. We also performed at the Catstrand, a new venue for us and one to which we may well be asked to return. Our performance at Loch Arthur provided a surprise as the hall had been set up for their Christmas play- completely different layout and for some of us a terrifyingly high stage. We were worried that very few tickets had been sold for our Moniaive concert in St Ninian's Church, but when January 6th arrived most of the Cairn Valley and its environs turned up and everyone had to be very cosy. The whole evening was a great success. The audience loved the range of material and the use of instrumental pieces/accompaniments by some of the talented instrumentalists who are members of our choir. A wonderful night; super music at the heart of the community and a great start to 2017.

After a short break we gathered to start work on the "Cairn Valley Song Cycle." Our most challenging undertaking to date. This project had been Kate's dream for a good two years and funding from Moniaive Festival Village Creative Place award and our second collaboration with D & G Arts, enabled her to bring it to fruition; entailing another mountain of work which she cheerfully shouldered. Especially commissioned songs on the themes of landscape, people in the landscape –past and present- movement of people including clearances of the past and currently refugees; the concept of "home" and what it

means/represents. Nine composers: all female and several local. Some of the composers have been inspired by material from poets within the community (and the choir) and have furnished us with a beautiful range of musical styles. The Scottish Ensemble got wind of all this and were keen to be involved. They have taken some of the songs and are arranging accompaniments for them, so another challenge will be learning (very swiftly) to work with six professional instrumentalists (of course we work with a professional instrumentalist within the choir; Wendy and her beautiful Clarsach, but she's also one of us and treats us gently.) Our first performance (dress rehearsal) at the "Big Lit" festival was enthusiastically received. We were aided by our own poets, readers and musicians who stepped in to complete the programme. So much talent within this wonderful community choir, we don't need to venture outside it to produce great performances.

I would like to welcome all the new members who have joined us over this year; our numbers have really grown and it is marvellous to have more people discovering the joy of singing with Kate's supportive and encouraging style. I would also like to thank all the committee members for their diligent hard work over the year and as we don't live in Moniaive, for filling John and I in on the workings of the various groups and committees dealing with "Moniaive Festival Village"; also to Peter who's popped in and explained funding etc. and to Wendy for musical input and advice /information about making cds etc.

As I write we have three more rehearsals before the Moniaive gig and although we're all apprehensive, Kate trusts us and has done so much work, and lost so much sleep over this – her "baby" – so we will not let her down. We always astonish ourselves by rising to the occasion and we'll do it again on the 27th May and June 3rd and at Wigton Book festival in September (date for that coming in June.) and of course Sept. 30th in Moniaive for the finale to the Festival Village project. We'll all be word perfect by then! We'll love it all as we always do and look forward to the next project. We are so lucky to have Kate as our Musical Director; not just because of her obvious dedication and passion for the music she brings to us and the gentle way she introduces us to difficult material, but the fact that she refuses to recognise "boundaries" in terms of suitable music. Bring it on Kate; after all we only live once.

Pat Stonell