

# Plymouth Philharmonic Choir: Structure, History and Future Direction

## Plymouth Philharmonic Choir

### Background

Plymouth Philharmonic Choir was founded in 1970, evolving from the Plymouth Choral Society. Over time, it has grown to become one of the largest and most recognised choral societies in the Southwest of England.

### History

Since its establishment in 1970, the choir has built a strong reputation for delivering high-quality choral music to both the local community and wider audiences. The group's commitment to excellence has been a hallmark throughout its history.

### Growth

The choir has expanded considerably and now boasts over 110 members. Its performances frequently feature world-class professional soloists and musicians, further enhancing its status and musical impact.

### Mission

The main aim of the choir is to share the joy of large-scale choral music with a wide audience. The group has received considerable acclaim for its performances and continues to strive for musical excellence.

### Leadership and Strategy

The choir was led by Christopher Fletcher as Director of Music for 29 years, until his resignation in August 2025. Following his departure, the Committee organised two focus groups of choir members in September 2025 to shape our future strategy. One issue highlighted was the lack of communication among members across different voice sections. To address this, 11 volunteer leaders were appointed to lead diverse groups, encouraging better interaction and unity.

The first focus group explored the choir's strengths and areas for development, while the second focused on the qualities needed in the next Director of Music. A document summarising suggestions for our future strategy was made available, with key messages around expanding the choir's repertoire and recruiting new members.

Pete Cook, one of our bass singers and our Deputy Director of Music, acted as interim Director of Music for the Autumn Term. Dr Paul Foster will take up the role for the Spring and Summer Terms of 2026.

Dr Foster composed "The Lodestone of Love" for the Mayflower 2020 celebrations, intended for performance by the Choir with a full orchestra. However, the concert was postponed due to Covid, and the only suitable venue, Plymouth Guildhall, has

been closed for major refurbishment. The Guildhall's re-opening is uncertain, so our concerts are currently held at the Minster Church of St Andrew, which cannot accommodate a full orchestra, and so restricts programming options.

Delays in the Guildhall's reopening have caused frustration, as concerts have had to be rescheduled. The choir hopes the venue will be available by Autumn, enabling Dr Foster to conduct "The Lodestone of Love" and Faure's "Requiem" with the permanent Director of Music starting in January 2027. For now, Minster Church of St Andrew is booked for Autumn Term 2026, with plans to move the "Lodestone" concert to the Guildhall as soon as this is possible. This may necessitate the permanent Director of Music starting in the Autumn of 2026 and subsequently taking a term break to allow for the "The Lodestone of Love" to be performed.

## Future Strategy

Themes emerging from the focus groups included the idea of a Christmas event. The Autumn concert is typically held at the end of November, and there are historically no further choir meetings until January. The Committee is keen to work with the Director of Music to organise a Christmas concert or event, which may be scheduled on a weeknight.

The choir is also considering new approaches to attract members. Open rehearsals are held on the first Thursday of each term, promoted on social media and through member invitations. Despite these efforts, the choir experienced a decrease in membership after Covid, prompting a review of its profile and balance.

One initiative under consideration is an annual choral scholarship scheme for young people aged 16–25. Applicants would audition, with reading music being non-essential but pitch accuracy required. The scheme aims to create a cohort of 10–12 students, who would receive vocal coaching before joining in with Thursday rehearsals and participate in concerts. The hope is to retain 20% of participants each year, gradually improving the choir's demographic balance. Successful students would be offered free choir membership and would additionally benefit from free tuition and collaborative learning.

The Director of Music may oversee the scholarship scheme, depending on their interest, with additional remuneration provided for this responsibility.

## Non-Auditioned Choir

Feedback from focus groups highlighted the importance of PPC remaining a non-auditioned choir. Members value the opportunity to learn from each other and are committed to maintaining this inclusive approach.

## Committee

A new Committee was formed at the AGM in October 2025. The current members are:

- Catherine Teague (Chair)
- Janet Perks (Deputy Chair/Website Admin/Safeguarding Lead)
- Anne Marie Smith (Treasurer)
- Michael Hall (Concert Secretary)
- Pat Brodie (Membership Secretary)
- Jenny Hart (Voices' Rep)
- Judith Blake (Fundraising/Secretary designate)
- Teresa Lakeman (Programme Lead and Publicity)
- Glenda Jones (Social Media and Social)
- Margy Keene (Committee Member)
- Alison George (Committee Member)
- Mandy Kellagher (Minutes Secretary)

## Recruitment Process

The recruitment process for the Director of Music will begin in January 2026, with the closing date for applications set for 9<sup>th</sup> February 2026. Interviews for shortlisted candidates will take place on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February.

Members of the Committee have been asked to either be part of the interview panel (3 people) or the presentation group (3 people). Shortlisted candidates will be asked to prepare a short presentation of 10-15 minutes before their interview. The title of the presentation will be “Suggested programme for Plymouth Philharmonic Choir 2026/2027 Season”. Details of our previous concerts spanning the last ten years are available on the Concerts tab of our website. Please note that the number of orchestra players is limited in the Minster Church of St Andrew.

Following the presentation and interview, two candidates will be invited to conduct a workshop at Woolwell Community Centre on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> April. One candidate will be asked to run the morning session, whilst the other candidate will be asked to run the afternoon session. The sessions should comprise one work not known to the choir, and a movement of a work with which the choir is familiar (possibly a movement selected from “Sacred Choruses”). Travel expenses will be paid for each stage of the selection process.

The choir have already been notified of this date and asked to hold it in their diaries. There will be an informal lunch and the opportunity to meet choir members. Following the workshops, the choir will be asked to vote for their preferred candidate.

It is hoped that the successful candidate will work with the committee over the programme of music for 2026/2027 season which begins in the autumn.

To apply, please email a biography with a covering letter of application to:

[catherine.m.teague@gmail.com](mailto:catherine.m.teague@gmail.com)

If you have any queries or would like an informal chat, then please leave a message for Catherine on 07986 161893 leaving your name and a telephone number on which you can be contacted.

## **The Role**

The role of Director of Music will be on a self-employed basis, with the successful candidate being responsible for their own national insurance and tax affairs. The Director of Music will be invited to all Committee meetings ex officio. In the event that the Director of Music is unable to attend a meeting, then apologies are to be sent to the Choir Secretary prior to the meeting. Rates of remuneration will be reviewed on an annual basis following a performance review.

## **Communication**

There is strong communication to the choir during rehearsal periods. Jenny Hart (or one of her deputies) make notes during each rehearsal on points the Director of Music makes during the rehearsal connected to the music. Over time this forms a “data bank” for how the piece is to be performed and enables choir members to accurately notate their scores. Rehearsal notes are e-mailed after each rehearsal, usually within 24 hours. These notes also contain links to rehearsal websites and other important information. We discovered recently that, although the minutes of committee meetings were on the website, these were not being read by members. We now identify three key points at each meeting and communicate these to all choir members.

## **Social**

It was recently decided that we would aim for one social event per term. A questionnaire is being distributed in January 2026 with choir members being asked to indicate the activities or events they would be interested in, to enable appropriate planning to take place. Whilst there is no expectation that the Director of Music attend events in which they have no interest, participating in at least some would be welcomed! We have also received a number of suggestions from members concerning activities or events which may help to promote the Choir and its activities. The Director of Music's attendance at some of these events would be required and a separate fee would be agreed by negotiation.