



Chairman's Report for the AGM, 28th January 2022

2021 was a year of challenges but also one of growth for Howdenshire Music. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact on our activities but we found new ways to adapt to the ever-changing situation. During 2021 we presented one online concert, seven live lunchtime concerts and a live Piano Day event. 1098 people attended our events in person and we also had many thousands of online viewers on our YouTube and Facebook channels. 2021 has also been our first year as a registered charity, which has been an extremely positive step for the project.

From May 2021 our monthly free lunchtime concert series was able to resume in person with live audiences, in accordance with a full Covid risk assessment. The return of live music was a very welcome development, both for the project and for our audience members. We also organised a successful live Piano Day event in October, with four free concerts throughout the day and on-site refreshments provided by Howden-based cafe That Tea Room. The lunchtime series was opened by international pianist Julian Jacobson, Professor of Keyboard at the Royal College of Music, and the calibre of performances remained high throughout the year. Our contacts within the music sector, including with other concert promoters and conservatoires, continue to grow and to allow us to reach out to professional performers. We also continue our commitment to pay musicians fair fees in accordance with the Musicians' Union pay scale. The goodwill, talent and dedication of our artists has been an integral part of the success of the 2021 concert series.

The 2021 series featured a wide variety of instruments, from violin and piano to less well-known instruments such as oboe and french horn. We encouraged musicians to present accessible programmes, including popular classics as well as less well-known works. This, along with brief accessible programme notes, enabled us to widen audience members' knowledge and appreciation of different musical instruments and classical music repertoire.

2021 also saw a special focus on the piano, as we celebrated the new FEURICH grand piano acquired by the project in 2020. We continue to have a very good working relationship with the FEURICH piano company and they promoted our concerts on their website and social media channels. The piano is the project's most valuable asset and we continue to have an excellent working relationship with our piano technician John Tordoff, who has maintained the piano to an extraordinarily high concert standard throughout the year, including fitting a Piano Life Saver system to guard against fluctuating humidity and temperature, as well as a new A frame. We also continue to have a very good relationship with Howden Minster, our concert venue to whom we are very grateful, and have now established an official financial footing with them which will help to safeguard the future of the concert series.

Audience engagement throughout the year was high, with most of our events operating at full (Covid-safe) capacity. We received predominantly positive audience feedback from a survey at our first concert of the year. All of our concerts remained free of charge, accessible and inclusive, with a range of age groups attending from children to people of retirement age. Our concerts were also accessed by audience members with dementia and other health issues. New friendships have been forged and people's wellbeing has been improved through attending our events. Local businesses have also benefited from increased footfall from audience members visiting their premises.

The introduction of an online booking system for our concerts proved a constructive step, allowing us to manage audience numbers in a Covid-safe manner and also enabling us to grow our email mailing list. We did not produce a series brochure this year, due to the uncertain climate created by Covid. However, a three-page feature in the Yorkshire Post helped to raise our profile, as did regular smaller concert features in that publication and in the Goole Times, and we continue to maintain good contacts with both newspapers.

Engagement with Howdenshire Music via our website and on social media also was strong and these channels continue to be useful online promotional tools. They also continue to allow audience members to engage with our online concert videos if they cannot attend in person. In October we engaged audiovisual engineer Steve Brookfield to record our concerts going forward, using the project's existing equipment. This has freed up committee members from the task on concert days and provided an enhanced quality of concert video. Concert videos have also proven to be valuable promotional assets for performers' careers, fulfilling our aim of supporting emerging young professional musicians.

As well as being used in every concert, the project's grand piano and recording equipment were also used by a number of local music students to record graded and university exams, as well as by Howden Minster and Howden Junior School. This continues to fulfil our aim of providing community musical resources, and has been especially significant during lockdowns when students were unable to attend live exams in person.

Our financial situation remained healthy throughout the year, with grant funding received from Howden Town Council, Arts Council England, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Rotary Club of Howden, Howden Joinery, Ambache Charitable Trust and the Arnold Clark Community Fund. Donations from audience members at our concerts also continued to play a substantial part in our finances, and our newly-acquired charity status has enabled us further increase revenue by claiming Gift Aid on donations.

I would like to thank all of our committee members so very much for their hard work and efforts in service of Howdenshire Music during the last year. The pandemic made concert planning more difficult than usual and the constantly changing situation meant that we had to reshape our events at short notice throughout the year. However, our incredible committee rose to every occasion. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful team of volunteers who helped with front of house at our events this year - Anne Mephram, Janet Wise, Gwen McHugh and Paul Thompson. Many audience members commented on the friendly welcome they had received at our concerts.

We already have a very exciting programme of events in place for 2022 - here's to another successful year of music.

Steven Goulden
Chair