

Board Matters

Number 41. Our update for members about the activities of the Board and governance of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Issued in place of EDS magazine, Summer 2020.

English Dance and Song

With regret, we have made the decision not to publish a June edition of EDS. We look forward to returning in the autumn,

and are making plans to publish extended editions of EDS in both September and December.

This expanded edition of Board Matters serves as an update on our ongoing activities in these exceptional times.

From the Chair

Greetings from rural Norfolk. I do hope that you are keeping well – in mind as well as in body – in these strange times.

I must start by announcing the retirement of the great Shirley Collins as our President. On behalf of everyone at EFDSS I offer grateful thanks to Shirley, who for twelve years has served the Society with dedication and been such an inspiration to so many. We are pleased to offer a short tribute overleaf, and we are preparing a more comprehensive interview for the September EDS. (We have every intention that this next edition will appear as scheduled – and perhaps public health advice will have changed sufficiently for us to include at least some information about actual live events within its pages.)

In the meantime we are learning to rely on our memories, and on digital substitutes for the live experience. But so many of us are accustomed to finding consolation in spending time with friends, and particularly in enjoying music or dance with them. These pleasures will surely once again become part of everyday life. Our Education colleagues have been working hard to move many classes, courses and youth activities onto the

internet, as you can read about inside. But for events that simply must take place face to face (or hand in hand), there can be no adequate substitute. We must be patient...

There can be no denying that EFDSS, along with so many other arts, cultural and heritage organisations, is facing exceptionally uncertain times. We have lost all expected income from what would have been a busy programme of gigs celebrating the birthday of Cecil Sharp House, and all our hires income too.

Our everyday charitable work is hugely subsidised by hiring out Cecil Sharp House when it is not being used for folk activities. Our provisional accounts for the year ending 31 March 2020 show income from hires of the building of over £430,000 – substantially more than any other source (membership fees, for example, were under one third of this). Hires dropped to zero in mid-March and we are predicting only £20,000 for the whole of 2020-21.

Suddenly, our planned break-even budget is projected to become a giant loss by April 2021. And this is assuming that many events will be running again from January.

While we are hopeful of some additional support from Arts Council England, we still predict being in a much-weakened financial position when we are finally able to resume in full, having had to draw down nearly all of our free reserves to meet our losses. We would not then be able to do the work that we know people want and need, and for which EFDSS exists.

So this is a direct appeal for support.

If you are able to help us through this crisis by making a donation, large or small, it will be very gratefully received. Or perhaps you could help us in the longer-term, by remembering the Society in your will. You can find more details on the back page.

Undoubtedly the crisis will have long-term impacts throughout society. But all of us at EFDSS, Board and staff, passionately believe in the vital importance of keeping EFDSS strong – able not only to survive but to thrive in continuing to preserve and promote English folk dance, song and music well into the future.

Thank you, and keep safe.

Lorna Aizlewood Chair

Thank you to Shirley Collins

Shirley Collins, MBE and Gold Badge holder, was elected the fourth President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 2008. Her long association with EFDSS dates back to 1950s, when she moved to London from her Sussex birthplace and started folk song research at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library. Shirley has appeared on the stages at Cecil Sharp House numerous times, most recently for her own 80th birthday concert in 2015 with Billy Bragg and Eliza Carthy.

Since becoming President Shirley has supported our work through her advocacy

and by attending EFDSS events. In 2012 she wrote about EFDSS' 'My Croydon, My Song' schools project: "I attended the performance at Fairfield Halls this morning, and just want to let you know how much I enjoyed it... the achievement of the EFDSS team was considerable."

In 2013 Shirley was guest of honour at the launch of The Full English digital archive, where she literally pressed the button to launch this incredible archive of 11 seminal collections of folk material.

And it not just publicly that Shirley has

supported EFDSS. She has also helped behind the scenes, particularly with fundraising efforts, encouraging donations and legacies from members and providing endorsements for funding applications.

We are most grateful for all her work and encouragement over the years, and we wish her the very best for the future. EFDSS is now on the hunt for a new President to fill some pretty big shoes.

There will be a full interview with Shirley in the autumn (September) edition of English Dance & Song magazine.

View from the House

Well, what a funny old state of affairs! In the middle of March we closed Cecil Sharp House to the public, the first time the building has been closed since 1940. Since then my view has changed from the gardens of Primrose Hill to my neighbours' houses across the road in Twickenham.

Our 90th anniversary celebrations have collapsed like the proverbial tower of cards as special gigs by Peggy Seeger, Show of Hands, Oysterband and Kate Rusby – who was due to give two performances on the birthday itself – have had to be cancelled. I think the birthday year may need to continue to June 2021!

'Furlough' and 'Zoom' have become common parlance. No doubt as this altered reality continues, Zoom will join our vocabulary along with other brand names such as Hoover, Google and Velcro.

With all staff working from home Zoom has become the go-to technology to hold meetings both internally and externally in a bid to keep everything going and continue planning ahead. It will be interesting to see if in the longer term Zoom (other providers are available!) will continue to be used and so result in us travelling less – and saving time, money and possibly the planet.

While activities at the House had to be cancelled, our Education team have

embraced technology and determinedly are running events online. They have managed to keep our adult music making classes going, as well as running the five-day Easter residency for the National Youth Folk Ensemble and continuing activities for the London Youth Folk Ensemble and the Folk Unlimited Ensemble.

Dance, sadly, has been more difficult to continue online. But to mark International Dance Day on 29 April the Education Department published a new resource about hand-holds for social dancing – efdss.org/hand-holds – currently only to be employed with members of your own household, of course.

Not to be out-done, the Library have posted online our highly successful January Library Lecture *There's method in the magic – the theory behind folk magic in medieval and early modern England* by Tabitha Stanmore at youtube.com/watch?v=K2aLvzKnqM8 and we plan to make more lectures publicly available online in the autumn.

These online activities do not replace face-to-face activity but they are enabling people to keep learning and keep engaged, and they allow us to reach people across the world, time differences permitting. Our Folk Educators Group will hold its next Development Day as planned on 19 June via video link. I hope that more of you will be able to join us as a result (for details go to efdss.org/folkeducators).

We very much hope we will be opening Cecil Sharp House soon and can return to face to face activities, but the experience of on-line courses has provided us with some food for thought for further online activity for the near future.

Financially we are being hit hard. We had hoped to be fully operational again from September, but this is looking increasingly unlikely. Thankfully we still have your membership income and our agreed grants from Arts Council England and other providers, but nearly half of our income is generated by non-folk venue hire and events at the House. This income enables us to maintain Cecil Sharp House and the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library as the centre of the English folk arts, and also contributes to the costs of our events and activities across England. A certain amount of government support, together with legacies and donations, will help mitigate some of our losses. We are most grateful to the many ticket holders for cancelled gigs and education courses who chose to take a credit or donate their ticket expenditure rather than take a refund.

So we will continue to deliver whatever activities we can online, and look forward to being fully operational as soon as it is safe – surely in the New Year, if not before.

Katy Spicer

Chief Executive and Artistic Director

Folk learning goes online

Since lockdown began in March, the English Folk Dance and Song Society has been delivering online learning activities for youth and adult learners and participants.

National Youth Folk Ensemble virtual 'residential'

The National Youth Folk Ensemble's residential course took place entirely online in April.

Twenty National Youth Folk Ensemble members met online each day over the week for activities with the Ensemble's Artistic Director Sam Partridge, tutors and pastoral staff. We bookended the week with a group play-along to live recordings from the Ensemble's recent performance at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and we met on-screen every morning for group warm-ups and to set creative tasks for the day.

We saw the week as an opportunity to focus on individual skills development, so each member benefitted from one-to-one tuition and sectional workshops. They also worked through specially pre-recorded workshop videos in their own time.

The Ensemble was introduced to the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library digital archive and encouraged to uncover and interpret tunes from the Historic Dance and Tune Books.

We also explored creative collaboration and music technology. Rob Harbron taught the young musicians how to record, edit and mix music using the program BandLab. The Ensemble then collaborated in small groups to share ideas, arrange their tunes and record their parts, resulting in four new pieces which we hope to expand to the full Ensemble in the summer.

There were many other activities, too. The pastoral team checked in with each young musician, providing extra activities such as clog dancing and nature art to get us all moving around and away from our screens! Photographer Camilla Greenwell gave a talk on how musicians can prepare for a photoshoot and shared images from her recent work. Evening social activities included Sam Sweeney's music quiz and our popular Listening Club, where everyone brings a track to share for communal listening. The tutors all played tracks from their own albums and answered questions.

'Thanks very much indeed for all the incredibly hard work the National Youth Folk Ensemble team must have put in to prepare for last week's remote residential at such short notice. [My daughter] had an inspiring and really fun week, and says she learnt a huge amount. It gave her such a boost in the middle of all the current difficulties' - **Parent**

'It's been really amazing, I'm so glad and frankly impressed that you all managed to put this together, and I'm very grateful' - **Ensemble member**

You can see and hear this year's Ensemble at efdss.org/youthfolk. In lieu of the Ensemble's planned performances at Cecil Sharp House and the Southbank Centre, we have released four live tracks on SoundCloud and introduced each member on Instagram. Thanks to Ensemble member Rowan Collinson, we also have a film of them playing a tune together virtually.

Youth Folk Sampler Days

As this article goes to print, we are making final preparations for free online Youth Folk Sampler Days over May half-term. The days are nominally taking place all across England, in partnership with organisations based in Derbyshire, Gateshead, York, Milton Keynes, Preston, Essex, Wiltshire and Kent.

The National Youth Folk Ensemble team will deliver virtual workshops introducing young musicians to folk tunes, techniques and creative ideas. All playing and learning will be done by ear. Players of any instrument, aged 12–18, can book for their preferred Sampler Day date. These events are free.

Folk Unlimited

We had a great spring term of our Folk Unlimited sessions exploring English folk music and dance. Our tutors have created inspiring and inclusive workshops with themes from industrial heritage to rural customs. We are exploring how to take some of this work online.

Folk Education Development Day

Our Folk Educators Group national network will be holding its first online informal conference day on 19 June. We'll be focusing on folk education initiatives in the Greater Manchester area and will be presenting the day in partnership with English Folk Expo, who are based in Rochdale, as well as other friends and partners in the North West and Yorkshire. This event is free, and must be booked in advance.

Adult Learning at Cecil Sharp House

We are working hard with the tutors of our classes and courses at Cecil Sharp House to provide sessions online. Cecil Sharp House Choir and all of our 14 regular Saturday Folk Music Workshop classes have now taken place successfully online. Dance is much harder to transfer, but the Morris Dancing class did have a virtual jig practice and get together.

Board meeting 14 March 2020

The Board met on 14 March 2020 at Cecil Sharp House. Apologies were received from Steve Roud. The remainder of the Board together with the Chief Executive and the Company Secretary was present either in person or by video link.

The Minutes of the Board meetings of 14 September 2019 and 9 November 2019 were accepted and signed as a true record. The minutes of the November 2019, January 2020 and March 2020 GPC meetings were accepted.

The Treasurer reported that with two weeks to the end of the financial year the Society was on course to break even.

The budget for the year 2020–21 was discussed. The details of the budget are confidential, but it was noted that because of the Coronavirus pandemic and Government restrictions there is was uncertainty about income from venue hire and all EFDSS activities at Cecil Sharp House and elsewhere. In view of this uncertainty it was agreed the proposed capital projects will be put on

hold and reviewed later in the year. It was confirmed that the cashflow, reserves and solvency of EFDSS is good. The proposed budget was agreed.

Peter Craik, Marketing & Communications Director, joined the meeting presented a report on EFDSS branding. He reported that the redesigned logo was a success. The change is only to the logo and there is no proposal to change the name of the Society. The Board thanked him for the report which was accepted.

The Chief Executive introduced her report which had been previously circulated. She reported that the Library and Archives Director, Laura Smyth had resigned due to re- location to Manchester, and that interviews for the Library and Archives Director will take place in the week of 23 March. The CE reported that EFDSS has successfully received its BOPA (Body of Person's Approval) which provides us the authority to have public performances by young people eg by London Youth Folk Ensemble and National Youth Folk Ensemble.

The Board agreed revised versions of two parts of the Board Policy Document relating to Gold Badge Procedures and Executive Limitations.

The Chief Executive informed the Board that Shirley Collins had resigned as the President of EFDSS for personal reasons. The Board expressed its thanks to her for her work on behalf of EFDSS during time that she had occupied the post.

Lucy Hooberman who resigned from the Board for personal reasons is now able and willing to rejoin the Board. It was agreed that she should be appointed to the Board with the intention that she should be a member by the June meeting. A motion to confirm her appointment will be put to the 2020 AGM.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 9 June. This is subject to change in the light of Coronavirus developments. It was suggested that the physical meeting could be replaced by a conference call.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General meeting will be held at 11am on Saturday 14 November 2020 at Cecil Sharp House.

Any nominations for election to the Board, or motions to be proposed at the meeting, should be sent by 30 June 2020 to the Secretary by email at

secretary@efdss.org or by post to Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regents Park Road, London NW1 7AY.

The full agenda and list of candidates nominated for the election to the Board will be circulated later in the year.

Note: the date of the 2020 AGM was decided before the current coronavirus situation arose and this notice is given in accordance with that decision. It is not clear whether it will be either possible or advisable to hold a physical meeting. The matter will be considered by the Board at its June video meeting, and an update will be published in the next Board Matters.

Thank you!

In these exceptional and extraordinary times, we are more grateful than ever for your support.

Membership fees provide us with an invaluable and predictable source of income, meaning that we can plan ahead.

We particularly thank those members whose choose to make a monthly or annual donation.

You can join them at efdss.org/donate – or for details email donations@efdss.org or write to us at Cecil Sharp House (post is being forwarded to staff at home).

Would you consider fortifying the Society's long-term durability by leaving a gift in your Will?

To discuss bequest options, or simply for more information, please contact Katy Spicer: telephone 020 7485 2206 or email chief-executive@efdss.org

Registered Office: Cecil Sharp House, 2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY | **Telephone** 020 7485 2206 | **Email** info@efdss.org

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