

SSO - background

The Sheffield Symphony Orchestra is an enthusiastic, ambitious and thriving amateur orchestra, with a high standard of playing. It performs some six concerts each year, in and around Sheffield. Four comprise general repertoire for the larger orchestra, while two, more populist concerts, given early in the New Year, have the same programme, combining a first half of light music with a second half of Viennese music.

Our general concerts attract audiences of around 250, often limited by the capacity of the churches in which we play (Sheffield offers a restricted range of performance venues). We believe we have developed a following in these concerts from a discerning public who enjoy listening to works which are rarely performed by professional orchestras visiting Sheffield. The lighter, New Year concerts are also a valuable source of income and are usually sold out. Some of our concerts, Scriabin, "Poeme d'Extase" and Rachmaninov, "piano concerto No. 3" were featured on the Radio 3 programme "Play to the Nation". Some recent reviews of our concerts are listed elsewhere on this website.

Our members vary in age from 21 to 85 and are proficient amateurs. We set ourselves high standards and are willing to tackle difficult, unusual music, allowing the orchestra to stretch itself and develop. Although our players are not formally auditioned they undergo a short probationary period before their invitation to join is approved by the section leader and conductor. While we regularly hire harps and percussion, in some sections we have a waiting list. In the woodwind and brass sections a deputy system operates, intended to ensure a full orchestra at rehearsals.

The orchestra is managed by an active committee, which meets three or four times each year and works in close collaboration with the MD. The unavoidable chores of a performing orchestra are clearly identified, distributed among members and are carried out efficiently.

We rely mostly on the national library system and international publishers for hire of music. However, we also have a small library of more frequently performed works, particularly those played in our New Year's concerts.

Our finances are healthy, with an annual turnover of around £15,000 from ticket sales, members' subscriptions and from our New Year's concerts, one of which is performed for a fee in Chesterfield. We are a registered charity.

The orchestra also thrives socially. We have visited Antwerp and Bad Homburg to perform for our pleasure and that of our audiences. Some members also play in informal chamber groups and in ad hoc orchestras accompanying local choirs. In the spring of 2010 we are planning an orchestra weekend in Scarborough, subsidised by our finances, playing for pleasure, where particularly talented/ambitious members can perform concertos and members can form smaller chamber groups. Concerts are sometimes followed by wind-down parties at members' houses and a hard core regularly repair to the local pub after rehearsals.