



January 2023

Report of the committee for 2022

This annual report summarises the activity of Strings Attached during 2022 and includes the Coffee Concert series 2021/22

In October 2021 Coffee Concerts resumed at the Attenborough Centre at the University of Sussex, after the restrictions on gatherings of large numbers of people imposed during the worst of the Covid pandemic were lifted. This was appreciated by the strong audience who returned in increasing numbers as the season progressed. The concert hall and its surroundings are popular with the audience, many of whom live outside Brighton and are pleased to drive and park easily on Sunday mornings. The work of the staff, led by Andrew Comben and Amanda Northcote-Green, who regularly support these concerts and ensure that the mornings run smoothly, is much appreciated by us all.

The series of six concerts provided quite a variety of ensembles and repertoire. There were two concerts given by Joanna MacGregor and the Brighton Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble, both of which included Twentieth Century music alongside earlier repertoire. The Brahms Horn Trio, who played in December and comprise Huw Watkins, pianist/composer, Benjamin Baker, violin, and the prize winning horn player Ben Goldsheider, featured two of Huw Watkins' compositions. In recent years the committee has considered the repertoire offered in Coffee Concerts and suggested to staff at Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival, who organise this concert series, that our audience is strongly in favour of contemporary works and music written by women. Programmes should ideally place such pieces among more standard chamber repertoire, thus offering the audience a possible challenge as well as familiar music. Progress has been made in this direction and we are grateful to those who engage the chamber music groups and who ensure that as a result the repertoire keeps growing.

The other groups which performed for us in the 2021/22 season were the Adelphi Quartet, the Maxwell Quartet and the Mithras Trio.

One feature of the Coffee Concerts is the freesheet issued at each concert by Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival which gives full programme notes. These sheets have been written, for the most part, by Chris Darwin. We are very grateful to him for this considerable body of work. Very often the performers remark on these programme notes and are most complimentary. Each concert is reviewed and a written piece is uploaded to the Strings Attached website. We have been very pleased to accept the offer made by Michael Wilkinson, a long time member of Strings Attached and experienced writer of classical music reviews, to write these. They are archived at the end of each series. Andrew Polmear had for some time written the reviews but with reluctance stepped down when his hearing lost clarity. The Strings Attached newsletter, however, continued to be written by Andrew during the 2021-22 season. The newsletter is sent just prior to each concert and occasionally outside the concert season and offers Strings Attached members details of not only the impending Coffee Concert but a list, compiled by Chris Darwin, of other chamber music events in the local area, with links to their websites etc. Members can also download the programme notes in advance of the Sunday morning concerts and prepare themselves for the music to be heard. This is especially useful if there are new pieces or unusual arrangements to be heard. We are most grateful for all Andrew's work over the years on keeping our members engaged via the newsletter.

The Strings Attached website is managed and maintained by David Botibol who has assisted us in this way since Strings Attached was set up. Much of his work is unseen by those looking at the website. David uploads programme notes, reviews and newsletters and is a source of fairly arcane information on other websites that we occasionally need to look at. We are most grateful for David's work and are also very mindful that he responds quickly to any queries or requests from the committee.

The Cavatina scheme, which offers those between the ages of 8 and 25 free tickets to the Coffee Concerts, continues to raise a challenge to those of us hoping to extend the audience to include this age range. Schools and colleges have been approached and music teachers in Sussex reminded of these concerts in good time to book tickets. However, only a small number of Cavatina seats were taken up during the 2021/22 series. Any ideas on how to reach out to a younger audience would be very much appreciated.

The membership of Strings Attached has slowly revived since the worst of the Covid pandemic. Some people interrupted their membership through the two difficult years but have now rejoined; those who have yet to do so would be most welcome. We have welcomed back long established members and also some new audience members who have expressed interest in joining Strings Attached. The generosity of members with their subscriptions and donations enables the work of building and maintaining the audience and the committee recognises this.

The Autumn of 2022 brought two major changes to Strings Attached. In September, after a very short illness, Andrew Polmear sadly passed away. An account of his work and an appreciation of his contribution to Strings Attached can be found in the October newsletter No 71 on our website.

In November 2022 Mary McKean stood down as Chair, a position she had held since the establishment of Strings Attached. She and her husband John McKean, both founder members of Strings Attached, have left Brighton and moved to the West Country. An account of Mary's work on behalf of the membership can be read on the home page of the website. We wish them well in their new life and look forward to welcoming them back to the occasional concert.

Looking ahead, we understand that the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre with all their public spaces and artists' facilities is nearing completion. The whole experience for concert goers will be greatly improved and at long last Brighton will offer performers an upgraded experience. We are looking forward to returning to the Corn Exchange for the Coffee Concerts and building our loyal audience in Brighton and Hove.

If you would like to find out more about Strings Attached or make a donation towards our work, please contact us at info@stringsattachedmusic.org.uk.

The committee met four times in 2022. In between meetings, work continued by email.

We had 65 members as of 31 December 2022.

Current Committee: Helen Simpson (Chair), Christine Moon (Treasurer), Margaret Polmear (Secretary), Guy Richardson, Betty Skolnick.

Helen Simpson (Chair)