

**The AESS has had an extremely active and successful year. The highlight, of course, was the presence of Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Gloucester at the final of the Patricia Routledge Prize last May at the Royal Academy of Music.**

**Despite a long day involving much travel, Her Royal Highness stayed for over four hours and spent much time talking to competitors, judges and members of the audience. Her Royal Highness, and her lady in waiting, Mrs Wigley, also chose the winner, who was Elizabeth Toye, a RAM student. The competition was superbly organised by Stephen Miles and I thank him for this and for forwarding all sorts of information to a group of members with email. There are still about 40 members without access to email and I have written to them assuring them that all major information will always be posted to them. They miss out on smaller items of news and I have asked if they have any friends or relatives to whom the AESS could email, which should eventually reduce the cost and time involved in regular postings .**

**This year's competition will be on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May at 6.30pm at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. As many members are aware, the prize money this year and for the following four years has been raised by Patricia Routledge to £5000, an extremely generous gesture. Judges this year include Marilyn Hill Smith and Howard Wong. I would like to thank the judges for both our competitions, including those who come to the preliminary rounds. None has asked for a fee because they think that the unique format of the AESS competitions is important for improving the all-round performance skills of young artists.**

**In the summer, the Association sponsored two previous winners as per the rules of the competition at the time. I went to both recitals. Rhona McKail sang beautifully, especially in the Vaughan Williams 'Blake' settings with**

**oboe. This was in Chelsea. I later heard Iestyn Morris sing in an English song series at Tardebigge, organised by AESS member Jennie McGregor Smith, in which he sang Butterworth 'Shropshire Lad settings and Britten's Abraham and Isaac canticle with Nicholas Mulroy.**

**There was a marvellous 'sell-out' celebration in September of the music of Betty Roe – the only way to obtain a seat was by performing in the concert, sponsored by the Association and the West London branch of the ISM. Virtually all of the AESS committee did so and the programme was wonderfully organised by Marian Lines, whom I would also like to thank for her work on the Newsletters. Betty fully deserved the tribute and played for many of the performers. Betty has been a staunch committee member for five years, as laid down in the constitution – plus a few more!**

**The Newsletters, with much other information, are now on the website. I would like to thank Matthew Dickins for not only creating and updating the website but for charging us so little for his time and trouble - only £99 this year. Please look at the website - there are links to many of our corporate friends – Jackdaws, Concordia, the English Poetry and Song Association and the Association of Teachers of Singing.**

**The Catherine Lambert Junior Song Prize was held in November in the Wathen Hall of St Paul's Boys' School. Catherine was there and I again take this opportunity of thanking her for her sponsorship and that of Coral Gould. The prize was won by Mary Galloway from St Paul's Girls' School. Heidi Pegler, the Director of Music at the Girls' School and an AESS member, was an enormous help with the booking of St Paul's at a greatly reduced cost and she has also arranged for this year's final to be at the Girls' School. I hope that Birmingham Conservatoire will host a preliminary round of the competition this year. The final and the first rounds will be held on Sundays this year as**

**several Conservatoires found it difficult to release competitors on a Saturday. Carolyn Richards again organised the event splendidly and thanks go to her. Judy Hildesley, our secretary deserves thanks not just for that role, but for providing her house for the preliminary round of the Prize. I am giving a masterclass later in the year at St Paul's and at the Birmingham Junior Conservatoire, to fulfil the terms of the Junior Recital winner's prize as laid out in the prospectus.**

**The AGM approved the 'tidied-up' constitution that I had revised last year and I am pleased to say that this was approved by and lodged with the Charities Commission. Sue Field, our treasurer has a larger workload than previous treasurers, providing information for the Commission, in addition to looking for ways of earning any interest for AESS money in today's financial climate, and I thank her for her work.**

**Patricia Williams as you will all know, is a formidable membership secretary, especially when subscriptions are overdue! –or even when they are due –which is today!!! Her membership lists are immaculate and I thank her for those. We have almost 170 members, including honorary life members and past winners. Please encourage others to join.**

**I would like to thank all the committee. Those I have not mentioned are Stephen Varcoe, your vice chairman, Sarah Leonard and Marie Hayward. All work voluntarily and continually endeavour to raise the profile of the AESS in their Music Colleges and at concerts and other events. We have had no nominations for new committee members or a new chairman! So perhaps when we proceed with Committee elections, a member might wish to save time by proposing a group re-election, as last year. Please think about sitting on our committee, however, as any Association needs change for its development. One officer who has**

resigned is Sally Croft, our recording officer, who has looked at the accounts for us – as laid down by the Charities Commission. I would like to thank her for her work.

The AESS has a growing membership and a healthy bank balance. The committee often discusses ways of making the Association more regional and more social. Views are welcome on this. We are still hopeful of publishing the last three editions in ‘The Century of English Song’. I know that I say this every year but one day I will receive a costed proposal and then it will move forwards. I am very pleased that the Association will have a high profile in this year’s Association of Teacher’s of Singing Summer Conference. AESS Member Liza Hobbs, currently AOTOS chairman, asked if the winner of this year’s Patricia Routledge Competition could also give a recital during the conference on Friday July 10<sup>th</sup>. This has been included with the application form for the competition. AOTOS and the AESS will co-fund the recital. The AESS has also been offered space for publicity. I had already been invited to give a short talk to the conference about suitable repertoire for teenage boys on the same evening, so I will be on hand to promote the Association and try to increase membership! Future events in addition to those mentioned earlier, which are in the planning stage, include Professor Robert Saxton talking about setting words to music. This will probably be in Oxford and will hopefully have “live” musical examples. The committee is working on a speech event, or even day as it is felt that the ‘speakers’ part of our organisation’s title has been a little neglected. The first in a possible series of ‘Unsung Heroes’ concerts, with Armstrong Gibbs as the subject, is being researched, in conjunction with the Armstrong Gibbs Society. Any other ideas or suggestions are, of course, welcome.