

Welcome to the 2010 Annual General Meeting – please make sure that you have signed in –so that we have a complete record of attendance. The tradition set up a few years ago, of having entertainment before Dinner is again happening. This year, following some general hints that we were neglecting our speakers side, there will be a dramatic presentation from Rosamund Shelley, Marian Lines and Marilyn Cutts and of course our guest speaker will be actor, Gabriel Woolf. Jean Hornbuckle has again organised the Dinner tickets, menu and special diets and I thank her for her work. The charges for this venue have risen over the years and we do now need 50 at the Dinner to avoid paying a booking fee for the room as well. This can be a struggle. This year for instance the date coincides with the AOTOS hosting of the European Voice Conference and we have several members who belong to that organisation. This hall suits all our needs for the day but if members have any knowledge of other suitable venues we should consider them. We always need to have music or speech that does not require the piano, as there is now an extra charge of £200 for using it. I will return to the subject of charges later. During my travels on behalf of the AESS in the past year I have pencilled in the girls of the Milton Keynes Youth Choral to entertain us in 2011 and the boys of St.John’s Leatherhead for 2012.

On behalf of the Association I wrote recently to Dame Cleo Laine, expressing sadness at the death of Sir John Dankworth and I also wrote to Nicholas Hytner, congratulating him on his knighthood. He responded most warmly to that message.

The AESS has had another high profile, active and successful year. One of the major happenings was the offer by Courtney Kenny to sponsor an intermediate prize to the tune of £2500, for at least the next four years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his interest and support of the aims of the AESS and to thank Eileen Price

who suggested the idea to Courtney. As you know she has always been a staunch supporter of the Association and sat with Courtney and Marilyn Cutts on the panel for the first Courtney Kenny Award last Sunday and both will be with us for Dinner tonight.

The event last Sunday, held at Tonbridge School was won by Angharad Lyddon from the RAM. Many entrants were students of our members and we are hopeful that this Intermediate competition will find a big response from our members in future, as it is the age-range that many of them teach predominantly. I was there to announce, page turn, make tea, co-ordinate and facilitate and I am grateful to Stephen Miles for doing all the initial work for the event as well as starting to promote the 2010 Patricia Routledge Competition due in May. The AESS now has three competitions annually. The age-ranges have been amended slightly and the Catherine Lambert Prize is for those aged 13-18, the Courtney Kenny, for those 18-23 and for the Patricia Routledge 23-32.

We are delighted to have such prestigious sponsors and to have three nationally recognised competitions. I would say however that there is much work involved in finding judges and venues for two preliminary rounds and a final for each competition and co-ordinating the often rather late wishes of the many entrants. As I said in the last newsletter, I am always asking colleagues, who have terrific experience and fine performing careers, to work for us for expenses only and I feel they should be offered more, but this would mean charging more to enter and charging audiences to listen. It might soon come to that however. I take this opportunity to thank all who have sat on competition panels over the past year for expenses only. I would also like to thank, Judy Hildesley, The Birmingham Conservatoire, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Leeds College of Music, St Paul's Girl's School, Whitgift School and Tonbridge School, all of whom hosted finals and preliminaries for no charge whatsoever. Unfortunately, and this may be a sign of things

to come, despite having the winner of the Patricia Routledge Prize last year, the Royal College of Music, whose turn it is to host the event, responded very late to our requests for dates and then made a charge of £500. I did write to the Principal pointing out what had always happened in the past and that we felt that students should always be encouraged to attend, which is why we did not charge an entry fee, but my long, considered argument, which I read to the committee was brushed aside in two sentences of email. It did lead to a RCM circular to all staff saying that any booking at the College now had to be paid for, so we are not alone. It is marvellous to have sponsorship for prizes but there are many hours of voluntary work and many expenses involved in actually administering them. At present I look for venues and judges and Stephen Miles administers two competitions and Carolyn Richards, the third. There is always another one along now as soon as a final has been held. As well as this of course, we do not want to be seen as an Association that only has competitions and the committee are always working on workshops, masterclasses and concerts for both speech and song as well as trying to carry out their day jobs so I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the entire committee for the work they do. We do need active, computer literate members who are willing to take on an area of responsibility and who can work independently in the main. Membership and funds have grown significantly but we need to maintain growth, increase publicity, and continually promote the Association. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Marie Hayward, who has had to step down from the committee, for all her support over the years on panels and in concerts. I hope that she will still feel able to play an active part in our future events. I shall write to her, as she is unable to attend today, on behalf of the Association to thank her for her work and enclose a small gift. The committee therefore has a vacancy but as well as that we need to co-opt keen volunteers for specific tasks.

The Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition was superbly organised by Stephen Miles last year and we were made completely welcome by the Guildhall School. A large audience enjoyed a very high quality of performance and any one of the top three singers could have been worthy winners. Patricia Routledge was there and presented the prizes. Later in the year, the AESS co-sponsored a recital by the winner John McMunn for an 'English Song' slanted AOTOS Summer Conference. Many AESS members were there either giving lectures or as audience members and thanks are due to Lisa Hobbs, whose idea it was, during her time as chair of AOTOS to have this link with the AESS. I introduced John and promoted the Association and also gave a lecture on 'Songs Boys like to sing' – which could have been, as I said, quite a short talk!

I was invited to give masterclasses at two institutions of winners of the Catherine Lambert Prize, St Paul's Girls School who provided the 2008 winner and a month ago at St.John's Leatherhead where the winner of last years Final in November, Thomas Payne, studied. Again the Junior Competition was finely co-ordinated by Carolyn Richards who received much help from Heidi Pegler, AESS member and on the music staff of St.Paul's Girls' School, who spent much time ensuring that our visit there was stress-free. I was unable to be there and so I thank our AESS treasurer, Sue Field, not only for all her work on our behalf this year, but for standing in for me on that day.

Our major concert of the year was the brainchild of our excellent Membership Secretary, Patricia Williams. She had the idea of having the first, in what could become a long running series, of 'Unsung Heros' concerts and chose Armstrong Gibbs as the subject. This was a highly successful concert that brought together so many of the aspects of the AESS. It was good that the concert was held in Essex, where

Armstrong Gibbs lived, as we like to be regional where possible. The programme celebrated the poetry of Walter de la Mare as well as songs and gave us links with The Armstrong Gibbs and Walter de la Mare Societies, who also took part. Armstrong Gibbs' daughter Ann was there and Walter de la Mare's grandson, Giles and a large audience heard nearly 20 AESS performers sing or speak or talk and there were also contributions from students and the young singers of the Milton Keynes Choral, courtesy of David Kirby Ashmore . Patricia, played read, organised, made tea, gave out tickets, took money and cleaned up afterwards and deserves much praise.

Marian Lines has continued to produce excellent, informative newsletters and every snippet of information now reaches members with email in a flash from Stephen Miles electronic group. We try to keep our non-email members in touch with the major happenings of the year but it would be wonderful if they had access through a relative, neighbour or office to an email recipient who would pass information on.

Subscriptions are now due of course. We use all our funds to support the administration of the competitions and to promote AESS events such as masterclasses, workshops and concerts. I am grateful to two members, who for the third year have sent a donation of £250 with their subscription and to others who have send smaller sums and one who, through the generosity of Catherine Lambert continues to give her payment for lessons with Catherine to us.

The Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition Final will be on May 12th in the evening at the RCM. It is also likely that there will be a tribute to Madeleine Dring organised by AESS members Ro Hancock Child in Chichester in October, with AESS members taking part. I am sure that Pat Williams also has another 'Unsung Hero'

for us to enjoy up her sleeve. In our efforts to be nationwide Jane Highfield and I are organising for her to give a masterclass with a possible concert at Chethams School in Manchester, with students coming from across the region and I am also keen that we are able to hold a drama workshop with Giles Abbott as this was tried at the end of last year but had to be cancelled due to a low take-up, possibly due to the time of year.

Thank you for coming to this AGM. Please do all you can to encourage like-minded people to join. I have had a letter from past treasurer Don Manning, who is most gratified by the rise in membership – it was down to 13 he recalls, not that many years ago, and by the work being done to encourage communication by our now ‘high –profile’ Association. He did send a slight shiver down by spine with his PS however which said ‘ what are you doing for the Centenary in 2013’ I leave that thought with members.