

## **Chairman's Report: Keith Lowe**

I have now completed three years as Chairman, and over that time I have had nothing but the utmost support from all the committee and all the helpers. It is a privilege to be part of such a wonderful organisation, and I am proud and honoured to be the Chairman of a group of people that are friendly, helpful and committed to the cause, and who unstintingly give of their time to the support of the children and to the arts in particular. We still have our annual quirks to deal with, but at no time do we let them become issues. This is down to lots of hard work by lots of willing people - hard graft but great fun – and I thank you all for your support.

The four days of the Festival were yet again capped by a wonderfully varied, but extremely talented Finalé – and again it takes two special people with special talents to ensure that the Finalé has the right balance. So my special thanks again go to Marie Grant and Pauline Davies, whose careful programming of the chosen Finalé performers made it an outstandingly memorable evening. At the same time, the Finalé was tinged with a certain amount of sadness as a result of Sarah Roache's untimely death. It was therefore wonderful to see both Bill Roache and his daughter Verity attend the Finalé in such sad circumstances. It showed the fortitude of them both. Firstly Verity presented the 'Sarah Roache Memorial Trophy' for the most outstanding performance in speech and drama in the year 9 and under age group and Bill presented his own trophy for the most outstanding performance in speech and drama in the entire Festival. In his own style, Bill paid his own compliment to the whole team of organisers for not just the Finalé, but to the way the four days seem to run so smoothly – to which I add my own thanks.

We also had another important guest at the Finalé – Kathy Stott – the international pianist – who, as a board member, was representing the Hallé Orchestra. As you are all aware we have entered into a partnership with the Hallé to help promote music within the community. The Hallé's vision of encouraging performance and showcasing and nurturing talent is shared by the Festival, and we know that this partnership will complement the Hallé's Education Programme of promoting the enjoyment and understanding of music in all sectors of the community. Kathy's words at the Festival Finalé, exemplified this love of music when she quoted Sir Mark Elder....

*'I can think of no more important task for us as musicians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century than to communicate the power and beauty of music to a new generation of listeners and performers'.*

....something on which this Festival prides itself!! This partnership continues into 2010 with the possibility of a 'Masterclass' following the Festival, to be facilitated by the Hallé, with individual coaching in the morning and group classes in the afternoon. I would like to say a big thank you to two people - Carole Nash for her introduction to the Hallé – Carole is a major sponsor of the Hallé and thankfully a major sponsor of the Festival – and to Claire Dunham who has been instrumental in making it happen. Watch this space!!!!

Yet another year has passed, and we have already been preparing for next year's Festival – the first meeting of the 'Festival' year has already taken place; both syllabus meetings have been completed, and I know that Marie, with the help of Steve Fern, is almost at the stage of completing the syllabus; and we have the AGM today – and this year all before the end of October!! These first few processes in the Festival calendar

set the standard for the rest of the year, and what a standard we will have to keep as the last Festival was yet again an outstanding success, with the standard of performance surpassing previous years.

However, this past year has not been without its challenges. We are all only too well aware of the current world economic climate. As a result it becomes more and more of a challenge to find sponsors to support us. However, where some of our sponsors have cut back in their commitment, others have stepped up to the plate and surpassed their contributions for last year. Last year I said a big thank you to Astra Zeneca for their 9 year commitment to printing both the syllabus and the programme. This year, I give my great thanks to Mark Jones of Emerson Holdings who has now taken on the 'printing' commitment. Mark and the Jones family are major sponsors (and Friends) of our Festival, and this extra commitment has come at just the right time for us. Printing is one of the most significant costs incurred by a Festival, so to have Mark and Emerson Holdings commit to this for the foreseeable future as one of their many contributions to the local community, is very, very welcome.

With the name of the Hallé Orchestra as a major sponsor, I have spent some time in the local state schools promoting the Festival. As a result we already have commitment from local state schools to enter more performers this year, along with a bigger commitment from the local private schools especially in the speech and drama arena. I still have some meetings to attend at other state schools, but it is looking bright for the future of our Festival, and our commitment to 'music for all'.

Every year we have in excess of 1800 young children taking part in our Festival - and only a small number can actually win - it is the entry of all the other performers that make the Festival what it is, so this last year we gave badges to all performers, and stickers to all visitors to the Festival. Each of the performers gave their own outstanding performance, so we wanted to recognise that these children had competed at The Alderley Edge Festival. What we didn't reckon with, was the popularity of these badges. It became a sort of game for those that performed in more than one class, to see who could collect the most badges. I saw one boy from The Ryleys School with nine badges on his blazer. It was a roaring success, a great advertisement for the Festival, and a testament to the idea of Mandy Parr with a big thanks to both Mandy and her husband Nick who contributed both the stickers and the badges - we will definitely be doing the same again in 2010!! It is these small but not insignificant aspects that make The Alderley Edge Festival what it is - it is what gives it its charm and its sense of fun - and what instigates the desire on the performers to come back year after year after year - and come back they do.

Finally, a little reminder!! I know we have yet to have the May 2010 Festival, but just remember that 2011 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of an 'Alderley Edge Festival Society' and we are looking forward to doing something special to celebrate this wonderful event. I look forward to receiving any ideas as to what we can do for this, and I know it seems a long way off, but these things need careful planning well in advance. We have come a long way since 1911, a journey originally taken by a few for the many who love the arts. Long may we continue on that journey, with the belief that the youth of today, like their predecessors, still have something to offer. If we can nurture a small element of the talent that is evidently out there, then our journey has been well worth while. To all of you - committee, performers, and other volunteers - I again thank you for helping us along our way.