



Business Plan and Artistic Policy

2023-2024

- 1. Introduction and background**
- 2. Aims and objectives**
- 3. Funds and resources**
- 4. Recent developments and ongoing initiatives**
- 5. Promotion and evaluation**
- 6. Organisation management**

1. Introduction and background

Thames Concerts (founded in the early 1960s by distinguished conductor Louis Halsey, and referred to as the ‘company’ in this document) is a charitable company which exists to promote and present an annual series of high-quality concerts, workshops and masterclasses in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. Through its connections, Thames Concerts brings world-class musicians to the Borough, and provides an opportunity for local youth orchestras, choirs and soloists to perform. The charity also supports musical education and young musicians via our programme of music and other events, as well through other partnerships within the Borough. The company’s high profile and unrivalled artistic quality for over sixty years within the Borough helps to raise the ‘brand’ and profile of Kingston upon Thames as a cultural destination.

Thames Concerts remains the only long-established company in the Borough ensuring that professional, top-level performances (on a par with Wigmore Hall) may be heard in the Borough at a reasonable price, without the cost of a journey into central London, and the high concert ticket prices often incurred. The charity also offers several attractive ticketing options detailed later in this document.

2011 to 2014 saw several developments for the company, culminating in a reformed and renewed board of trustees/directors, and a move in 2013 to a new home, St Andrew’s Church, Surbiton, a beautiful Blomfield church with excellent acoustics, facilities and access. In 2015 the company introduced morning coffee concerts, promoting young up-and-coming local talent from the Borough’s schools, college and university. So far, many hundreds of young performers have been involved. From 2016 to 2019 the company enjoyed a partnership with the CornerHouse (Surbiton), in presenting an annual series of workshops and masterclasses delivered by Thames Concerts performers, targeted at students from across the Borough.

Thames Concerts is run by a committee of volunteer directors/trustees who bring together support from Patrons and donors, and sponsorship from local businesses. The company receives no local government or other funding. Thames Concerts works closely with several local arts organisations, the Worshipful Company of Musicians, local businesses, local media, local schools, the RBK Arts Office and numerous professional and amateur artistic groups and individuals within and without the Borough. The Thames Concerts brand is trademarked, and since 2021 Thames Concerts has been a member of Kingston Chamber of Commerce.

2. Aims and objectives

Thames Concerts' long-established aims and objectives are:

- To provide audiences the opportunity to engage with and enjoy high-quality music-making by way of the evening and morning series, and the related workshops and masterclasses;
- To recognise and encourage all forms of artistic expression and to reach out and nurture the next generation of artists (since 2013 this has involved a greater diversity of musical genres within each series such as jazz and musical theatre, and new commissions);
- To match resources to what can be realistically achieved;
- To give value-for-money and enrichment to the people of the Borough and beyond through artistic and cultural merit and to play a key strategic role within the local community;
- To reflect, when possible, the Royal Borough of Kingston's cultural aims for the Borough;
- To seek out new and different audiences and further develop the company's audience profile;
- To continue maintaining a firm financial base upon which to operate;
- To develop the Patrons and Sponsors schemes and other sources of engagement;
- To continue to develop good relations with other key artistic organisations locally;
- To develop programming/learning opportunities in partnership with other organisations;
- To continue liaising with and advising other arts organisations in relation to best practice.

3. Organisation (financial and resources)

The resources that the company has are as follows: Financial; Use of Funds; Volunteer Personnel; and modest performance equipment such as music stands and technical equipment.

The company is financed as follows: Ticket sales and donations from events; corporate sponsorship from local businesses; patrons' subscriptions; support (often in kind) from other businesses and arts organisations; donations.

Funds are used for the following: payment of fees and expenses to artists and technicians; venue and equipment hire; administration expenses; printed advertising; website and other on-line media; partnership of other organisations, and maintenance and development of reputation and profile.

The Thames Concerts Treasurer keeps detailed accounts and records for the Charity Commission and Companies House, and presents a financial report to the AGM, and any other meeting as requested. The accounts are inspected by an independent accountant.

The board believes that thanks to careful ongoing artistic and financial planning and foresight, the company is financially and structurally resilient enough to continue to meet its aims and objectives.

4. Recent developments

Sponsorship/funding: The company was almost entirely reliant on RBK support, ticket sales, and limited funds from an 'Inner Circle' scheme until around 2012. The present Artistic Director recognised the need to develop alternative sources of funding. Since that time strong links with the business community in the Borough have been and continue to be forged, with regular principal sponsors now on board, with tailored sponsorship packages. In addition, the company now attracts considerable support 'in kind' from several partner organisations and individuals.

The modest commissioning grants from the Royal Borough of Kingston ended in 2019, leaving Thames Concerts, along with many other local arts-related charitable organisations, devoid of local government financial support. Thames Concerts remains grateful for the guidance and support it still receives from the RBK Arts Manager.

Covid-19: Like many other arts organisations Thames Concerts was affected by this pandemic. Some concerts in the 2020/21 Series took place and were sold-out (with strict Covid guidelines enforced, and training given to Thames Concerts trustees and volunteers to support this). Thames Concerts was able to offer generous cancellation fees to all affected artists. The 2021/22 and 2022/23 series were able to 'roll out' successfully.

Friends and Patrons: Recognising that the 'Inner Circle' scheme required review, particularly in view of the move to St Andrew's Church, Surbiton, the committee decided in 2013 to replace the 'Inner Circle' with a new Friends and Patrons scheme, offering privileges to those wishing to support the series more generously. The scheme rolled out smoothly and slowly began to attract significant support. To build on and develop this support, the company has endeavoured, with funds permitting, to increase the number of privileges on offer. In 2017 this included a modest complimentary ticket addition, increasing to free admission to all performances from 2021. The Friends part of the scheme was dissolved in 2019, as most supporters were making their contributions at the Patron level.

Admission/tickets: In 2012 the decision was taken to use one single ticketing source for the series (Ticketweb), together with maintaining the option to purchase on the door at each event. This represents a better use of trustees' time when administering the funds and managing the series. From 2012 to 2016 the overall ticket prices at events were gradually reduced by an average of £3 to £4, making the value-for-money significantly competitive when compared to other major concert series in Greater London and Surrey. The 2019/20 Series saw a modest ticket price increase, to help absorb rising costs and buffer against the loss of the RBK commissioning grant. Several significant ticket incentives have been introduced since 2013 which have led to a drop in funds collected from ticket sales but have increased the diversity in the audience base. These incentives include a 10% discount on advance online ticket sales; free admission to full-time students and under-16s; free admission to accompanying carers of the disabled; and an attractive season ticket option. There are also discounts available to concertgoers at local pubs and restaurants. A contactless payment system was introduced at concerts in 2020 and most audience members now avail themselves of this option.

Venue: St Andrew's Church, Surbiton, has proved to be an eminently suitable home for Thames Concerts. The Parish is proactive in supporting each series, with a reliable volunteer parishioner presence. The interior of the Church is a highly flexible space, allowing for more variety of music-making within each series. The Church has full disabled access and facilities, is close to many major bus routes and the main-line train station and has good free local parking nearby.

Morning Concerts: In 2015 the Artistic Director initiated a series of morning coffee concerts, running alongside the main evening series. These admission-free morning concerts usually take place on the Surbiton Farmers' Market Days. They rolled out very successfully during the 2015/16 Series and have continued successfully since. The concerts help showcase and develop local up-and-coming talent from the Borough's schools, colleges, and music service, as well as the occasional young up-and-coming professional. So far pupils from around 15 local schools have taken part.

CornerHouse: In 2016 Thames Concerts embarked on a partnership with the CornerHouse in hosting a series of workshops and masterclasses to be led by Thames Concerts performers, supporting student performers from across the Borough. The first of these workshops took place successfully in October 2016 and feedback from participants was wholly positive and documented. Since then, there were around three workshops/masterclasses held per calendar year. These events enabled dozens of emerging local student performers to share a platform with internationally-renowned artists, gaining confidence as performers, whilst also learning skills crucial to their musical development, and thus raising artistic standards within the Borough. The partnership drew to a natural close with the conclusion in 2019 of the CornerHouse funding. The company is looking at ways to continue its educational work in this vein.

Work placements/volunteers: We are continually looking to increase the opportunities to develop and encourage young talent in the Borough, and in 2016 introduced a student Concert Manager work placement for each series, with the school/college recognising it as formal work experience. The work placement is ongoing. The Artistic Director mentors the work placement. Thames Concerts is in dialogue with other education providers regarding volunteering opportunities for students.

President: Roderick Williams OBE assumed the presidency of Thames Concerts in 2020, succeeding Howard Shelley OBE.

5. Promoting Thames Concerts and evaluation of the organisation

The Board of Trustees/Directors of Thames Concerts recognise that all arts organisations must embrace and adapt to the ever-changing artistic climate and its needs, and Thames Concerts has modernised significantly in its profile and operation since 2012. This has included a completely new website, a Twitter presence, refreshed 'branding' and logo, and increased presence on other social media and arts sites too numerous to list here. Thames Concerts continues to undertake advertising and promotion as a means of communication and promotion of its activities to the Borough and beyond. The series is publicised in local publications (such as The Good Life), together with various other websites and newsletters, as well as in libraries and in commercial premises throughout the Borough. Each series has a brochure print-run of circa 2200, distributed Borough-wide. In 2017 the charity further cemented its position by successfully registering and trade-marking Thames Concerts with the Intellectual Property Office.

Thames Concerts recognise that evaluation of activities is an important aspect of any organisation, and this is addressed by continually monitoring and reviewing every event. Overall data collection has improved significantly since 2012, with monitoring and recording of audience demographic at each event. Detailed feedback forms are actively used, and the comments analysed and acted upon where appropriate. A substantial and increasing email list is used effectively.

Thames Concerts prides itself on a 'personal touch' with our audiences, with general email enquiries to the company responded to usually within 2 to 3 hours by the Artistic Director or Company Secretary in person. There is also a sizable and proactive volunteer committee presence at each event.

6. Organisation management – Board of Directors/Trustees (2022 to present)

Thames Concerts is managed by a board of volunteer directors/trustees who all bring artistic and educational experience to the company, detailed below. The Board is continually looking for new membership to build on this foundation and develop further resilience and capacity. The Board is notable in that almost all members are long-term local residents, with a good knowledge of the social and ethnic demographics of the Borough. They are well-placed to support the company's future ambitions. Several have taught across the entire educational sector, with experience in further and higher education; special needs education, pupil referral units, adult education, housebound learners, young offenders, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), U3A, and so on. All are aware of the importance that music plays in enhancing the educational provision within the Borough and beyond. Many of the Board are active as either professional or amateur musicians. They fully support the vision and role of the Artistic Director, and the goals set out in the present document. The Board meet approximately every two to three months.

President – Roderick Williams OBE (appointed 2020) Distinguished baritone, composer and recording artist, working internationally.

Vice President – Tom Higgins (appointed 2015) Professional freelance conductor, pianist and artistic director, working internationally. Artistic Director – Teddington Summer Music.

Vice President – Jamie Walton (appointed 2015) Professional freelance cellist, working internationally. Artistic Director – North York Moors Chamber Music Festival.

Chairman – Stephen Thompson (appointed 2013) SMT-level teacher with over 20 years' experience in special educational needs. Amateur guitarist.

Artistic Director – Ben Costello (appointed 2012) Professional freelance musical director, pianist, singing teacher and Federation adjudicator, working internationally.

Company Secretary – Vacancy

Treasurer – Raymond Roberts (appointed 2019) Retired, with a financial services background.

Trustee – Annie Brine (appointed 2013) Retired SMT-level teacher with decades of experience of Inner London primary education and special educational needs.

Trustee – Tim Hendy (appointed 2013) Professional piano technician and musician.

Trustee – Caroline Tate (appointed 2014) Professional freelance painter and educator.

Trustee – Josephine Bobbitt (appointed 2019) Legal services background; amateur singer.

Trustee – Nigel Bobbitt (appointed 2019) Retired engineering draughtsman; amateur singer.