



CHAIR REPORT 2024

In terms of entry numbers, the upward trajectory noticed in 2023 continued into 2024 especially in piano, speech, South Asian music and South Asian dance with 2 full days in the first three of these disciplines and South Asian Dance on the cusp of needing that extra day. There were some unsolicited glowing comments received from parents and teachers – particularly referencing the value of our workshop-style music classes - which was very welcome and heartening. However, entry numbers for strings were modest, for guitar, very disappointing and for harp, non-existent.

The exciting part was realising the extent of our influence in that we had performers entering who lived far from Croydon – even from North Wales – and the diploma music classes, where performers can present their full and uninterrupted 35-minute recital, which due to the uniqueness of such a class within festivals, attracted performers from considerable distances. In the drama classes we had a group of teenage actors from Kent who entered because they “had heard of the friendly atmosphere at Croydon”.

The 2024 festival marked the end of the first year of Rachele’s administrative help and her contribution has been invaluable, as has the contribution of the small contingent of regular helpers who loyally support us at both the festival and Gala Concert: without them nothing could happen, and their input should not be taken for granted by everyone else who participates in the festival. However, we desperately need more such help because the 2024 festival was a serious strain on our resources with 3 venues being used and no available support should there have been any emergency.

The lack of sufficient help on the day continued to be a worrying theme so a date in February was announced to our 1000+ list of subscribers for a meeting of anyone interested in helping. There were 11 positive responses but, sadly, only 4 of those interested parties turned up for the meeting. The regular request for help that has appeared in all programmes for the past 3 years continues to gain zero responses, which is very disheartening and concerning.

Subsequently, one of that quartet of new helpers has impressed with his input and interest to the point that, at the 2024 AGM, I would wish for Members to vote for the proposal that Arun Chatterjee becomes a new Trustee and assumes the role of Vice-Chair. This move will help to alleviate my concern for the festival’s well-being and uninterrupted journey should anything happen to me as Arun will serve as the link of knowledge between myself and successor. Several others have been asked to become further involved but, as in the past, have declined due to other commitments. Such responses come with the implied notion that they believe that I have the time to do several people’s jobs within the festival when the ideal for all is if the workload is shared.

Alongside welcoming and recommending Arun to you I am also introducing Laura McHale who has also accepted my invitation to become a Trustee. Laura is a keen supporter of CPAF and can be seen throughout the speech sessions supporting her speech school's students and all involved in that discipline. Her expertise and knowledge will help us keep abreast of trends and thinking within the world of speech teaching.

As we are reinstating – at long last – All England qualifying dance to our portfolio of disciplines it is also important to have a Trustee with awareness and expertise in Dance on our Board, as we have had in the past. Due to the impending size of the dance section, albeit only run every alternate year, I would like members to accept both Lucy and Louise Rodgers as Trustees with their dance expertise.

The Trustees, in their July 2023 meeting, had decided that we should continue to hold a Gala Concert in the Ashcroft Theatre in late May and the 2024 event was an undoubted artistic success and, arguably, the best that we have promoted. Certainly, it was the most diverse in that we had performers from primary school age to senior citizens and, aside from very high-quality instrumental playing, reciting, acting, dancing and singing, we had a wonderful 12-year-old sitar soloist from Wembley, a very polished young piano trio, a 30-piece string orchestra from Bromley and a large and very powerful rock band from Southall. However, the audience numbers were extremely disappointing and, of the 19 groups of performers only 3 expressed thanks for the opportunity to appear at such a prestigious venue so, not only was a lot of money lost on the event but the “taking us for granted” attitude was far from rewarding!

On a positive note, as we had been forced to cancel the Concerto Competition there was, unlike the 2023 Ashcroft event, less strain on the volunteers during the day, and we saved £1100 through not needing to hire a second piano.

During Spring we were approached by 2 dance teachers and through their energy and expertise we have made arrangements for the dance to be reinstated within the festival and it will happen every other year, starting in 2025, primarily geared towards All England qualification so we are, after a 7 year gap, fully back to normal and hopeful of the prestige and financial returns that will accompany this reinstatement. Certainly, the number of subscribers to our mailings has increased once it became known of the dance re-starting. It is intended to hold the group dance sessions at the Ashcroft Theatre on May 24/25 weekend and the solo sessions during the following 6 days at Royal Russell.

The syllabus and online entry system for the 2025 festival was launched in September with modifications in Speech, South Asian Music and South Asian Dance, while the May session of Dance will have its syllabus launch early in 2025.

Together with you all, I look forward to continuing the increase in support, awareness and standards during 2025.