

## DIDCOT CONCERT ORCHESTRA

### Didcot Town Council Grant Aid report – February 2023



Founders Jackie and Geoff Bushell are very grateful to Didcot Town Council for agreeing in August 2022 to provide grant funding to support the orchestra's 2022/23 season. This has enabled the orchestra to continue bringing tuneful classical music to Didcot people.

### **A new orchestra for Didcot**

Realising that the rapidly growing town was bringing ever more orchestral musicians and potential concert audiences to the area, the founders felt it could now sustain its own concert-giving orchestra and become a cultural destination for classical music. Founded in 2017, DCO brings together 55 players every October, February and May to give Sunday afternoon concerts at Cornerstone arts centre, playing to audiences averaging 150.

### **Aims**

The aims of the orchestra are to:

- Enable people in Didcot to experience high-quality classical orchestral music, without needing to travel to London or Oxford, at an accessible price,
- Give musicians in the Didcot area the platform to enjoy a high-quality, semi-professional standard of performance – by inviting and auditioning players, and through the support and encouragement of professional string section leaders,
- Perform popular classical music focusing on the Romantic era,
- Offer new experiences to both audiences and players by including in each concert at least one "rare gem" that is very rarely, if ever, heard in the public concert hall,
- Contribute to the wellbeing of the local population by facilitating the health improvements which have been shown to come from involvement in classical music.

## A financial challenge

DCO is a not-for-profit, charitable, unincorporated association, underwritten by its founders. The orchestra is reliant upon business sponsors and private benefactors to augment its income from ticket sales and occasional grant aid in order to cover the not inconsiderable costs of rehearsal and concert venue hire, music hire and copyright fees, professional player and soloist fees, programme printing and publicity.

In DCO's six concerts before it was forced to pause during the pandemic, the average deficit per concert was £230, which was underwritten by the founders. On restarting in May 2022, DCO faced a suddenly very adverse financial position, caused by three main factors:

1. Audiences were initially down 30%, both because of audience caution in meeting in public, and because of the rapid increase in the cost of living. This affected income from ticket sales.
2. DCO's concert venue, Cornerstone, had been closed for two years. On reopening, it felt unable to offer the same financial deal as before, meaning that DCO's share of total net ticket sales revenue fell significantly.
3. The adverse trading conditions of 2022 led to two of DCO's five commercial sponsors pulling out, and at the same time made it difficult to find replacements.

The combination of these three factors led the forecast concert deficit to increase to an average of £860 for each of the 2022/23 season concerts – £2,580 for the whole season. At this level, with no guarantee that the losses would not increase further, the founders were uncertain whether the orchestra could continue. The founders then approached Didcot Town Council's Finance and General Purposes Committee and were very grateful to receive in August 2022 a grant of £2,580 to cover the forecast shortfall in DCO's October 2022, February 2023 and May 2023 concerts. DCO is currently seeking additional sponsors for the post-grant season from October 2023.

Pre-pandemic audiences (for the first six concerts) averaged 155. In the 2022/23 season so far, audiences were 138 and 188 – the latter approaching a sell-out. This gives us confidence that DCO's concerts are much appreciated by Didcot residents.

## The benefits of the grant

Founders Geoff Bushell (conductor) and Jackie Bushell (clarinet) say that *"Didcot Town Council's generous grant has enabled DCO to weather three adverse financial challenges in the current 2022/23 season, and to continue to perform classical music for the benefit of the people of Didcot"*.

Here's what audience members have said about DCO:

- *"A really impressive group of musicians"*
- *"This was a truly magnificent performance"*
- *"Great sounding orchestra"*
- *"A really fine body of players"*
- *"A joyous, confident and utterly compelling rendition"*
- *"I wasn't expecting such a high quality performance"*

DCO's next concerts are on 14 May and 8 October 2023, and 4 February, 19 May and 6 October 2024.



### Further information

- [www.didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk](http://www.didcotconcertorchestra.org.uk)
- [www.facebook.com/didcotconcertorchestra](https://www.facebook.com/didcotconcertorchestra)

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