Endcliffe Orchestra: Chair's Annual Report 2025 - 2026

Another busy and rewarding year for our orchestra. We have performed four concerts, successfully bid for funding, maintained our full strength as a symphony orchestra, delivered our third Composing Competition, made a successful move to a new communications system for the orchestra utilising WhatsApp, progressed the development of our new website, soon to be up and running, made three submissions to the Making Music Awards for the first time ever, and embedded a very happy and successful relationship with our Musical Director, River Edis-Smith.

Our concerts this year have been something of a departure for us in terms of repertoire, which has been adventurous, exciting and challenging. We have been encouraged by River to think outside the box, and tackle pieces which I think would not have been considered by most of us a few years ago as 'do-able'. But we have done them, and done them with considerable brio and some success. I think this is a reflection of our growing confidence, as well as attracting and keeping some excellent and talented players. It is also a tribute to River's belief in us and his ability to convey that belief along with his detailed and rigorous (some might say breathless!) rehearsal style which we clearly respond to very positively as an orchestra.

We have also established a collaboration with the Sheffield Youth Orchestra (SYO) courtesy of River, and put on a joint collaborative Christmas concert with them in December. It was huge fun, and a great experience to play alongside talented and eager young musicians in our city. We have established a strong connection with the SYO through this concert and are scheduled to run another Christmas concert with them this year. The committee hopes this will embed this concert as a yearly tradition. Similarly we have again offered our Winter Concert in January to local children, playing a short afternoon edited programme. This was another success and again the committee hopes we can embed this as a tradition for the future if players are happy to continue to offer this.

It is particularly pleasing that we are successfully reaching out to our local children with a musical offering; being a community-facing orchestra is part of our USP, and as Chair I welcome further initiatives in this direction.

We have begun to make applications for funding on a more regular basis - this year has seen success with the Gripple Foundation and the Grammar School Foundation. Such success has led to our coffers being rather fuller than usual (see Treasurer's Report) which is both gratifying and helpful in allowing us a more generous budget for expenses, especially for music hire which opens up for us the possibility of hiring expensive music still in copyright and that in turn facilitates a more adventurous programme planning. It has also meant we have been able to support River in his CPD, helping him to access conducting course opportunities from which we reap the benefits.

As part of our community-facing commitment we, once again this year, ran the Janet Altman Composing Competition. Its a lovely activity to be able to offer to local musicians, and gratifying to see the take up and quality of submissions. The two winners, Sam Lake and John Hackett, were deserving of their success, and their entries made an effective contribution to our Summer concert programme. It's likely that we wouldn't have developed this initiative without Janet's generous legacy to the orchestra and for those of us who remember Janet it feels a lasting and appropriate recognition of her commitment to the Endcliffe. We now have to fundraise for this activity but the committee intends, if possible, to make this a biennial event, funds permitting.

Communications across the orchestra have improved! Thanks to a successful trial of WhatsApp we now have a system in which 98% of us engage and a reasonably effective way for the committee and players to share information. As Chair I'm mindful of the downsides identified by some players, but am grateful for the orchestra embracing this development which delivers a big improvement in effectively getting information across from the committee to players and player to player. To put it another way, it's made my life a bit easier!

For the first time the committee decided we should have a go at entering ourselves for the Making Music Awards 2026. We made three submissions - Group of the Year, Musical Director of the Year, and Photo of the Year. To date we have heard that we haven't been successful in the first two categories and yet to hear on the third. There is huge competition of course and a very slim outside chance that we get anywhere, but we felt it was a good opportunity to 'put ourselves out there' and a chance to increase our profile with the public.

We have made good progress this year on building a new website. Again our healthy funds have allowed us to use a professional team and a small sub group of the committee has worked hard with the design company to deliver a more professional and user friendly site, which is planned to be up and running by the new year. We realise along with the rest of the world that social media and our public face is ever more important if we want to raise our profile and continue to expand our audience base. So this year has seen us much more proactive on social media and it has definitely contributed to our increase in audience numbers. It's also really helpful that increasingly players are utilising their own social media networks to spread the word about our concerts. It all helps a lot.

We have experienced very little change in membership this year which really helps with continuity. We have sadly lost some longstanding players, Lewis Noble, our trombonist for many years, who has finally retired, and Lindsay Aitkenhead, our double bass/viola player and joint concert manager, who has moved on to new musical adventures. Tom, our bassoonist, had to resign through pressures of work etc. We are sorry to see them all go, will miss them, and wish them lots of fun in their future music making. We have however been able to welcome new players in their place and extend a warm welcome to them. We're delighted to have you join us.

This year has been the busiest I have known as Chair and there has been a strong upward curve in the amount of work the committee has shifted through. Running four concerts a year instead of the more usual two increases the workload considerably, as does the now regular funding submissions and collaborative work we undertake; for example the Christmas concert with SYO involves several additional meetings between the two committees as well as the actual work of organising the concert itself. The committee has coped with this and works as well as it does because we have had continuity of service over several years for which I am extremely grateful.

As well as the committee I want to say a big thank you to Ralph and River. Both give support to this orchestra well above and beyond their remit and we are extremely fortunate to have such commitment and steadfast input from our Leader and MD.

I want to say a huge thanks to everyone who makes sure this orchestra functions as well as it does; the committee members, along with the many individuals who pick up non - committee jobs, but which are just as crucial for the smooth operation of the orchestra. Given my above comments I want to add a heartfelt request as my final comment.

We will be asking for more non-committee support from orchestra players in the coming year.

We will struggle if we don't get it. And the orchestra wont be able to function or perform as well without it.

I'm probably aware more than most, given how long I have been a member, of who has generously contributed to the work of running our orchestra over the years. This coming year I want to appeal to those members who now have a first time opportunity to make their contribution by picking up on the additional tasks shaping up, or offering to take up some of the peripheral work done by committee members but who need a bit of extra help. An increasingly successful orchestra generates an increasing workload! It would be a profound shame if this trajectory got stalled because we can't supply enough hands for the tasks.

Notwithstanding the above, I have felt privileged to be the Chair of the orchestra for another year, have thoroughly enjoyed it (mainly!) and am hugely appreciative of all the personal support and goodwill that has flowed my way. Many thanks to all.

Chris Scarlett
Chair, Endcliffe Orchestra
September 2026