



80 Years in the Making

A history of Glen Eira City Choir

by Rosemary Harmer

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The Organising Committee would like to acknowledge the meticulous preparation that Rosemary Harmer has put into the writing of this history. Many hours were spent with old documents, programs and minutes of hundreds of meetings. Thank you, Rosemary, for a thoroughly engaging history of our choir.

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Glen Eira City Choir Inc.

ABN 41 681 163 116

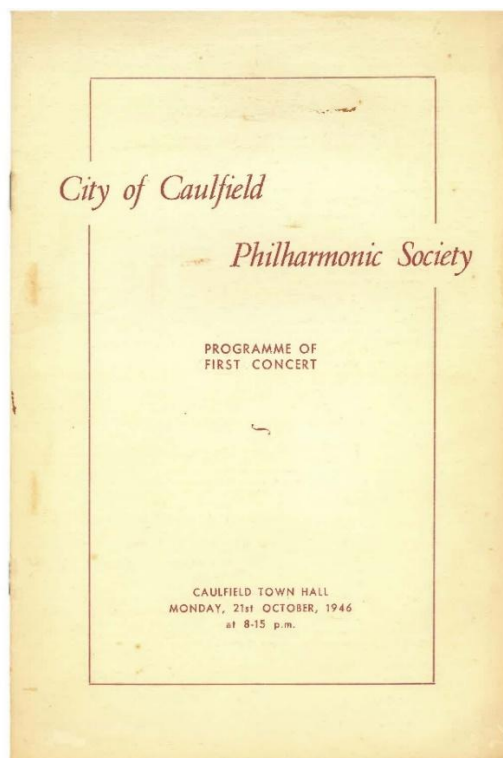
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The First Decade (1946-1956)

The Glen Eira City Choir came into being in 1946 under the name of the City of Caulfield Philharmonic Society. David Plummer, its first conductor, was an energetic man, a talented and well-connected musician, and a leader full of enthusiasm and ambition for his new choir. The original advertisement for members stated that the aim of the choir was 'to foster the love of choral singing and provide opportunities both for our own enjoyment and to help worthy causes.' The repertoire was to include 'part songs, glees, madrigals, folk songs, shanties, choruses, etc., for general purpose programmes. Then, some larger compositions and competition work.' The City of Caulfield Philharmonic Society was a founding member of the Choral Association of Victoria, and David Plummer served as its Vice-President for many years.

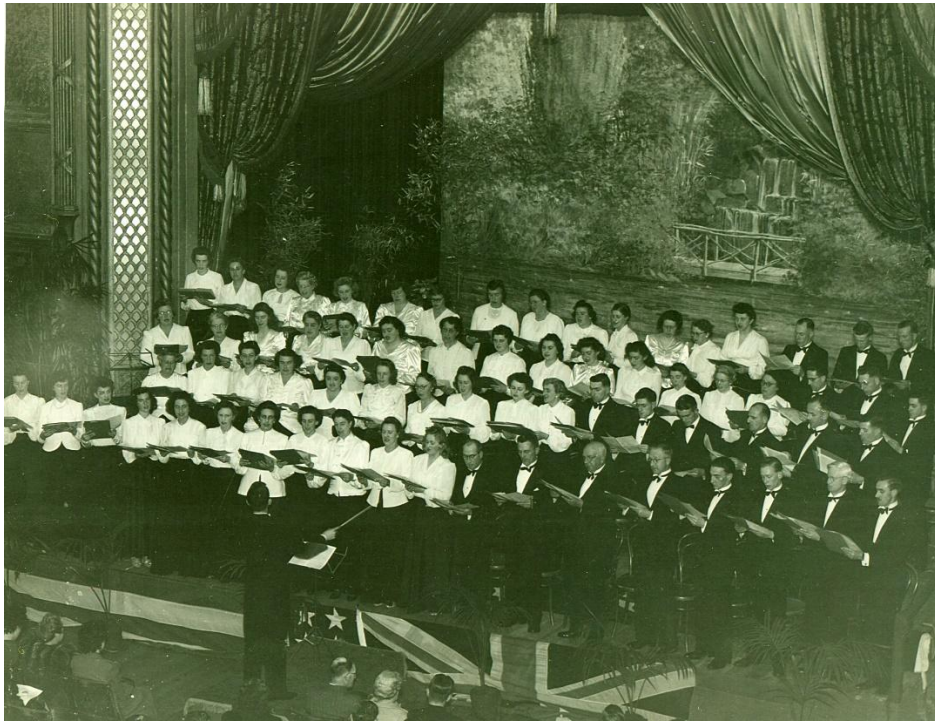
The City of Caulfield Council was closely involved with the choir, providing annual grants, rehearsal spaces and concert venues, and the incumbent mayor was the choir President for much of its history. The annual subscription for choristers was £1/1- (payable quarterly), or 6d per week, and rehearsals were held on Monday nights in the Court Room of the Caulfield Town Hall. Members of the public who wished to support the choir but didn't want to sing, could subscribe to the society for £1/1- per annum, which guaranteed them reserved seats at Subscribers' concerts.



Sixty-nine choristers performed at the first concert on October 25, 1946, the men decked out in dinner suits and black bow-ties and the women in white blouses and black skirts. The concert opened with the National Anthem, at that time, 'God Save

The Second Decade (1956-1966)

the King', and concluded with Parry's 'Jerusalem'. The programme included a diverse range of songs, many of them popular, such as 'Rolling Down to Rio' and 'All Through the Night', as well as piano, baritone and flute solos by invited artists. According to one newspaper article at the time 'the society, diligent in study, wisely guided and progressive in outlook, gave a good account of itself.' A conductor's memo to the choir instructed choristers to sing the National Anthem 'not as a mere formality, but with meaning', and 'Waltzing Matilda' should be 'first gay, then dramatic, then melodramatic – always full of "go"'.



City of Caulfield Philharmonic Society
First concert on October 25, 1946

In this first decade, the choir gave two or three Subscribers' concerts each year, as well as numerous concerts in local churches and halls in support of worthy causes such as 'Food for Britain' and 'Food for Europe', and local charities. The choir sometimes charged a fee for such appearances which brought in much needed income, and regularly performed at the City of Caulfield ANZAC services, and would bring Christmas cheer to patients in local hospitals in December, as well as participating in the Caulfield Council's Carols by Candlelight. David Plummer was keen for his choir to succeed and regularly tested their mettle in the Heidelberg and the Welsh Eisteddfods, as well as other competitions throughout Victoria, frequently winning prizes. Prize money for the Heidelberg Eisteddfod in 1947 was £50 for first place, £15 for second and £10 for third, with an entry fee of just £1. The City of Caulfield Philharmonic Society often joined with other Melbourne choirs for massed choirs festivals, such as the Four Choirs Festival held annually in the Melbourne Town Hall. Also raising the choir's profile were the occasional half-hour ABC radio broadcasts featuring our choristers (which would

boost the coffers at £10/10- per appearance), and when the first Moomba Festival took place in 1955, the choir joined in the massed chorus of celebration.

In post-war Australia, music was hard to come by, having to be ordered from Britain with long delays between placing the order and receiving the goods. Forward planning was paramount! Music was often borrowed from other choirs, and Mr Plummer pounced on the opportunity to purchase music when the Malvern Choral Society was disbanded in 1954.

Between 1947 and 1950, tram and bus strikes were a regular occurrence in Melbourne, which played havoc with choir attendance numbers since most choristers relied on public transport at that time. The first Subscribers' concert in 1950 had to be cancelled when the sixty-day transport strike resulted in such low attendance at rehearsals that the choir was unprepared to perform on concert day.

The choir also had to deal with the perennial difficulty of retaining accompanists, who would leave to pursue stellar solo careers as performance pianists. The other old chestnut was the perpetual need for more male voices. Some things never change, it seems. In the early years, a grand piano had to be hired for each concert, which was a considerable drain on finances.

Queen Elizabeth II's succession to the throne brought other opportunities for the choir to perform. Some members took part in the Pageant of Royalty held in the Exhibition Building in 1953, and when the newly-minted Queen toured Australia in 1954, twenty-two choirs performed at the state reception, our choir being one of them.

1954 also saw the name of the choir changed to the Caulfield City Choir, the original name being considered 'cumbersome for oral and printed use' and 'a waste of time and space'. There was evidence suggesting that the previous name suggested 'highbrow music' to the public and put them off attending concerts.

In 1956, Betty Emms, a foundation member, became the first Life Member in recognition of her 'ten years of wonderful service to the choir in many capacities' including Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. She also represented the choir at the councils of the Choral Association of Victoria and the Four Choirs Festival Committee, and was a 'willing and delightful soloist whenever called upon'.

This first decade of the choir's existence saw it established as a well-known and well-respected presence in the Melbourne musical scene. Its repertoire continued to include popular songs but also expanded into lengthier works such as Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' and Handel's 'Messiah'.

Let us conclude with some sage advice from David Plummer in a memo to his choristers –

If you lose the place, or haven't a copy, or are otherwise befogged --- do the "fish" act. Conceal your plight --- open and shut your mouth with the others.

The Second Decade (1956-1966)

The Caulfield City Choir celebrated its tenth year in 1956 with a party held at the Caulfield Park Bowling Club, and its next decade followed the pattern firmly established during those first ten years. There was only one Subscribers' Concert each year now but, as in previous years, the choir participated in the annual Four Choirs Festival held at the Melbourne Town Hall (given the 'less restricting name' of The Choral Festival from 1965 onwards), entered one or two eisteddfods each year, regularly performed at the Caulfield Council's ANZAC commemorations, Carols by Candlelight and Naturalisation ceremonies, gave several concerts every year at small local venues (for which the choir charged £5/5- per appearance), could be heard singing on a couple of ABC radio broadcasts each year, and cheered up patients at the Convalescent Hospital once or twice a year with song and socialising.

As if that wasn't enough, this decade saw several new ventures entered into, all at the instigation of the ever-energetic conductor, David Plummer. In December 1956, the first Christmas Festival of Music delighted the audience in the Melbourne Town Hall. This was to become a popular feature of the Christmas musical landscape in Melbourne for many years to come. David Plummer had been corresponding with the renowned English conductor, Sir Malcolm Sargent, with a view to putting on a carol concert along the lines of the annual Royal Choral Society concerts held in the Royal Albert Hall in London. A copy of the letter sent to David Plummer from Sir Malcolm praising the new venture was displayed proudly on the back of the programme for the inaugural Melbourne festival.

Caulfield City Choir was joined in this first concert by the choir of MacRobertson Girl's High School, the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Choir and the City of Mordialloc Philharmonic Society. Each of the choirs sang a solo segment and there were items sung by the 'Men of the Choirs' and the 'Women of the Choirs' as well as some by the massed choir. The audience was invited to sing along to a few well-known Christmas carols.

Over the following years these concerts were very well-attended and were an excellent revenue-earner for the participating choirs. Other choirs which took part at times in the festival during this decade included the choir of Catholic Ladies' College, Postal Institute Choral Society, Melbourne Musicale, Box Hill Choral Society, the Frankston Branch of the CWA, and Orpheon Choristers, but Caulfield was there at every performance. Often the concerts were enlivened with some of the performers acting out Christmas stories. On one memorable occasion, the Box Hill Choir conductor became a very creditable Good King Wenceslas for the duration of that carol, and was ably assisted by some children of one of the choristers.

For the festival, the Melbourne Town Hall was always decorated with Christmas trees, and in 1958 Tom Floyd, from Caulfield City Choir, designed and painted an

imitation stained-glass window, and the annual report notes that 'through the discreet use of lighting on this window and the decorated Christmas trees, some impressive effects resulted'. Tom Floyd was an active member of the choir, serving as Bass Representative and Vice President and regularly chairing committee meetings. He even presented a talk on watercolour painting as part of a programme to add more social activities to the choir's year. This multi-talented man was made a Life Member in 1961 but sadly died three years later following a long illness.

Another of David Plummer's bright ideas was the establishing of a Folk Song Festival in 1961. This was held again in 1962 and 1963 but there is no record of it continuing beyond this date. The 1962 festival was amusingly titled 'Music from the many works of Anon' and included American folk songs, negro spirituals, sea chanties and British folk songs.

1957 saw the debut of the Caulfield Youth Music Festival, a competition for local school choirs (and in later years, solo singers and instrumentalists as well) sponsored in its entirety by Caulfield City Council but organised and presided over by Mr Plummer. Caulfield City Choir would often perform at this festival and choir members would assist in the running of the event. Schools reported that 'music has become a more enthusiastic part of school life as a result of this annual festival.' There was no festival in 1958, but from 1959 to the end of this decade under the spotlight, the Youth Music Festival saw sometimes as many as sixteen local schools taking part. In 1963, Caulfield City Choir assisted in the establishment of a similar festival for Moorabbin schools, and performed some items on the last night of this new festival.

1957 was also the centenary of the City of Caulfield. David Plummer was appointed Director of Music for the centenary celebrations, and took on this role with his usual energy, enthusiasm and with a head brimming with musical ideas. Indeed, it was as part of the city's celebrations that the first Youth Music Festival was conceived. Mr Plummer also created a Centenary Choir, which included Caulfield City Choir, local singers, and church choirs from the area. This choir performed in Caulfield Park on a beautiful afternoon as part of an open-air festival of celebration.

The Caulfield City Choir was in high demand during these ten years and Mr Plummer was proud to declare that the choir 'is regarded as one of the leading choirs in Melbourne'. The choristers would sometimes sing at a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (or PSA), an occasional, but charmingly-named entertainment, which took place mostly at Wesley Church. The PSA's, originally founded in Britain in 1870, were very popular in the first part of the twentieth century in Melbourne, and included concerts, talks, dances, etc., but with a main focus on social reform. The occasional one still pops up today.

This decade witnessed several important events locally and internationally to which the Caulfield City Choir contributed. They are:

1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, the first Olympic Games to be televised live around the world. Twenty-nine members of the choir (chosen from those who hadn't performed for the Queen's visit in 1954) sang in the Olympic Games Choir at the Solemn Opening to the games in the Melbourne Town Hall, performing the 'Olympic Hymn' and Parry's 'Blest Pair of Sirens', accompanied by the Victorian Symphony Orchestra. Caulfield choristers also sang at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

The **1959 Purcell Commemoration Concert**, celebrating the composer's tercentenary, was performed in the Melbourne Town Hall, Caulfield City Choir being joined by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works Choir, the Orpheon Choristers, organist Norman Stringer, and the strings of the Zelman Memorial Symphony Orchestra. The programme covered the whole range of Purcell's works from the charming rounds and catches (a type of round or canon) to anthems, and excerpts from 'Dido and Aeneas'.

The **1964 Subscribers' concert** recognised two important commemorations - the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and the 100th anniversary of Stephen Foster - with music suitable to both celebrations.

1965 - The Churchill Memorial Concert in the Myer Music Bowl. Caulfield, along with regular running mates, the Postal Institute Choir and the Sandringham City Choir, accompanied by the RAAF Band under the baton of Squadron Leader Hicks, performed music closely associated with Churchill's England, to honour the statesman who had died in January. David Plummer was compere at this event.

The Beatles, the Kinks, and the Rolling Stones all toured Australia during this time and there were several royal visits. The Sidney Myer Music Bowl was opened in 1959 and a year later Dame Joan Sutherland was made Australian of the Year. There was nuclear testing at Maralinga, the Vietnam War, the opening of the ABC studio at Ripponlea, and the arrival of the miniskirt! The debut of television in 1956 prompted David Plummer to say that this would cause many choirs to feel nervous of the future, but added that he felt that television 'would not appeal to those who were actively-minded'.

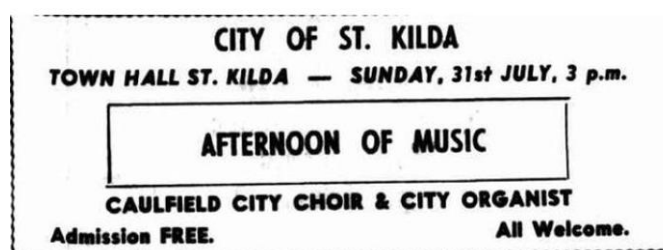
In 1956 there were 70 members of the choir but by 1966 this had declined to 46, well short of Mr Plummer's hopes of seeing 100 singing members. Annual subscriptions were 25/-, and the Council grant had risen to £125 per annum. Bernard Law remained the pianist throughout this decade with David Plummer the conductor. Betty Emms was now efficiently filling the dual role of Secretary/Treasurer.

During the thirteenth Annual Meeting of the choir, in April 1959, David Plummer declared that he 'felt assured that a happier choir did not exist in Victoria'.

The Third Decade (1966-1976)

In 1966, its twentieth year, Caulfield City Choir performed in a staggering (and possibly, exhausting) twenty-one appearances. At the opening to the Moomba Festival, on a balmy evening, they joined the Box Hill, Sandringham, Postal Institute, and Dandenong Male Voice choirs and the RAAF Band in a concert of Gilbert and Sullivan excerpts, a programme they repeated later that year for the choir's Twentieth Anniversary celebration in the Caulfield Town Hall. The Council gave support for this anniversary concert which was attended by a large audience of people associated with the choir over the years.

St Kilda City organist, the delightfully ecclesiastically named R.E.V. Church (Reginald Edward Victor), invited the choir to provide a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon (PSA) programme at the St Kilda City Hall. The choir later performed a special Christmas programme at another PSA at Wesley Church in December.



Among the more serious classical works tackled in this exceptional year were Haydn's 'Creation', with the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society (RMPS) at the invitation of the ABC and under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent (who sadly died later that same year and was greatly mourned by the choir). There were two concerts of Handel's 'Messiah', again with the RMPS and this time conducted by Sir Bernard Heinze, renowned Australian conductor, who was made Australian of the Year in 1974 for his services to Music. Seven members of Caulfield City Choir joined the RMPS for a performance of Bach's 'Mass in B minor', also with the RMPS and led by Swedish conductor Gunnar Staern.

As well as taking part in these classical works under the batons of illustrious conductors, the choir continued to perform at council ceremonies, the Youth Music Festival, the Choral Festival (previously the Four Choirs Festival), Carols by Candlelight, the Christmas Festival of Music, and to bring Christmas joy to the local hospital patients.

Possibly as a result of so much public exposure in 1966, but also due to a newspaper advertising campaign, 1967 saw choir membership increase from 46 to 79, edging closer to David Plummer's aspirational target of 100. This year's performances included Smetana's 'The Bartered Bride' (with other choirs and the RAAF Band) before a good audience on a cold night at the Myer Music Bowl, Haydn's 'Seasons', and Handel's 'Messiah', both in the Melbourne Town Hall with the RMPS. It was in this year that the first issue of the choir newsletter, Minim, was published.

The Third Decade (1966-1976)

TENORS
AND SINGERS
for other sections of
Caulfield City Choir
will be welcomed at practices on Monday nights, 7.45 p.m., Caulfield, Town Hall.
"Bartered Bride" now being prepared for concert, August 11th. Enquiries: Sec., L. Bradford, 58 1641; Asst. Sec., Mrs. D. Franklin, 92 6409.

'Bride' in Caulfield

Caulfield City Choir will give its second concert in the Caulfield Town Hall within nine weeks on Wednesday, August 11, at 8 p.m.

The choir will present Smetana's "The Bartered Bride," with soloists **Bettine McCaughan** (soprano), **Alan Angwin** (tenor) and **Morris Williams** (bass). Accompanist will be **Sadie Brown**. **George Hadwen** will conduct.

Tickets: \$1 adults, 50c children, from choir members or Miss Betty Emma, 15 Kooyong Road, Caulfield, 56-7179 or at box office. Group concessions for more than 10 adults.

Due to Mr Plummer's numerous commitments outside choir activities, it was decided to appoint an Assistant Conductor. George Hadwen got this gig and, with the further appointment of an Assistant Pianist, rehearsals were able to be divided for the first part of the practice session allowing sectional work, before the whole choir came together for the remainder of the rehearsal time. St Margaret's Church was used as the extra venue in this instance.

This decade saw the introduction of regular social activities including the monthly post-rehearsal cuppa and the annual movie night fundraiser. The ladies' uniform of white blouse and black skirt was replaced by a long blue frock and matching jacket. New members were constantly being sought through newspaper advertisements and cards placed in local libraries and shop windows, and the Council even agreed to include a notice advertising the choir with its annual rates notices mailout. In 1970 choir numbers reached a record 86.

The advertising campaign seeking new members extended into the Brighton area, and, in 1974, further cementing ties with Brighton, St Andrew's Church invited the choir to sing Handel's 'Messiah' and on another occasion, to give a performance of 'The Wheel of Religion', the music composed by Ian Thomas, organist and Director of the Choir at St Andrew's, to the words of William Blake. The choir had already performed the premiere of this work in St Paul's Cathedral in 1973 with the composer at the organ, a performance that included trumpets, trombones, cymbals and soprano, tenor and bass soloists.

In 1970, the first of the ABC's Prom concerts was held in the Melbourne Town Hall. Caulfield City Choir joined the RMPS in singing Beethoven's 'Choral Fantasia' and Dvorak's 'Te Deum'. The idea behind the Prom concerts was to attract a younger audience to a variety of good music. To this end the Melbourne Town Hall was tizzied up with, in the words of music critic, John Sinclair, 'balloons, coloured lights, artificial smoke', and 'with the young audience sitting on the floor, the atmosphere was refreshingly carefree'.

This concert format was adopted by Caulfield City Choir for its own performance later that year. It was held in the Caulfield Town Hall and seems to have replaced the Subscribers' Concerts. Caulfield's Prom was designed to appeal to a wider

The Third Decade (1966-1976)

audience, with a less formal setting and atmosphere, and featuring popular songs through the ages, with performances by instrumentalists and solo singers to add variety. These Prom concerts continued as a staple of the choir's annual appearances for several years.

In September of 1971, and after nineteen years of loyal service, the choir's pianist, Bernard Law, resigned due to ill health and was presented with an engraved silver salver and a set of crystal wineglasses in appreciation not just of his accompanying, but also of the numberless services he rendered the choir over the years, not to mention his lending his tenor voice to the choir's ranks when called upon.

In that same year, Mr Plummer took a very well-earned five months off, leaving George Hadwen as Acting Conductor in his absence. Jim Ogden took on the role of Assistant Conductor during this period. George Hadwen conducted one Prom concert and Smetana's 'The Bartered Bride' with the choir dressed in peasant costumes, both in the Caulfield Town Hall, before David Plummer returned from his holiday in August. At the AGM in 1973, Mr Plummer said that the Caulfield City Choir was the oldest civic choir and the envy of other cities, and he praised the enthusiasm of the choristers.

In 1973 the choir had begun preparing Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', but had to halt proceedings when the RMPS, from whom Caulfield had borrowed the music, asked for the return of their scores as they intended to perform the work themselves. In the place of the abandoned 'Elijah', the choir decided to have a Prom concert with a variation, half the programme being a Prom and the other a concert version of Bizet's 'Carmen'.

The search for new conductor began in 1975, when David Plummer, after 29 years of dedicated and energetic service, announced his intention to retire from the position. Several very well-qualified musicians applied for the job which was eventually bestowed upon the New Zealander, Murray Brown, who had relocated to Australia a few years before. In his letter of application, Murray Brown comes across as a well-qualified, modest man with a good sense of humour.

David Plummer's final concert with the choir he had nurtured from its beginnings, was a mixed programme, with some Haydn and Bach, some sea shanties and folksongs, madrigals and negro spirituals. The concert concluded with Parry's ever-rousing 'Jerusalem'. In his 29 years at the helm, Mr Plummer had moulded the choir into a well-respected contributor to the Melbourne musical landscape, and was granted the title of Emeritus Conductor.

Murray Brown's first concert, in the recently revamped Caulfield Arts Centre in December 1975, was 'Music for Christmas', and included Britten's 'A Ceremony of Carols' along with traditional and modern Christmas fare.

And so, as this decade draws to a close, we see the end of one era and enter another which will prove to be far less stable than the three that preceded it.

The Fourth Decade (1976-1986)

We now enter a mini Dark Age in the choir's history, with gaps in the records caused by mould damaging some documents beyond redemption. The main victims were Annual Reports and Committee Minutes but enough of these survive to give us an outline of what was going on during this decade, and more details can be gleaned from surviving concert programmes.

At the end of 1975, at the age of 33, Murray Brown had taken over the reins from David Plummer. In his letter of application for the position of conductor, Mr Brown had confessed to a liking for a broad range of music, 'depending on quality, from plainsong to heavy rock'. The concert programmes from his time at the helm reflect this. While no heavy rock appears, in a concert with the title 'America!', in honour of the United States' bicentenary, we find negro spirituals, plantation songs, ballads, works by Stephen Foster and Aaron Copeland, and Broadway musicals (Assistant Conductor, George Hadwen, was the soloist in 'Ol' Man River'). There was also a segment of the concert devoted to Randall Thompson's 1932 work, 'Americana', where music was written to text taken from The American Mercury newspaper, including 'a leaflet from the Women's Temperance Union, extolling the virtues of natural fruit juices'. A similar selection of items was performed in the 1977 concert bearing the title 'Fascinating Rhythm: an evening of American Jazz and popular music', with the addition of contemporary blues, and compositions by Jerome Kern, Cole Porter and the Gershwin brothers.

In the programme for 'Just a Song at Twilight: an evening of Victorian parlour entertainment', a concert performed in May 1977, Murray Brown sets the scene as follows: '... the obligatory parlour piano resounding to the strains of Mendelssohn, Tosti or Spohr, accompanying sonorous baritones and sweet sopranos or banished to silence while a well-scrubbed urchin timorously recites improving verse to his admiring family.' He further notes that 'the passions expressed in verse and song were virtually the only outward manifestations of the baser instincts considered proper in polite society'. The fare for this concert included some Tosti, Gilbert and Sullivan, some madrigals, and a cornucopia of songs popular during the Victorian era such as 'Daisy Bell' and 'The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.'

The choir performed Handel's 'Messiah' with a nineteen-piece orchestra in December 1977, and here Mr Brown's programme notes are equally full, informative and entertaining. 'Well-intentioned but misguided editors, including no less than the composer Mozart, have adapted the work for the sound expectations of later generations, obscuring the clean, spare lines of the original.' He adds that Caulfield City Choir 'will attempt to redress these distortions and present the work with the modest forces used by the composer himself; an orchestra comprised mainly of strings and double reeds, organ continuo and a choir of forty'.

We shall have to farewell Murray Brown at the end of 1977, but perhaps one more quote from him before we welcome the next conductor. On the back of a programme describing the choir and seeking new members, he says 'All you need is a voice. Only in choral music can you perform music by the great composers without the necessity of extensive technical preparation'. Choristers everywhere cannot but wholeheartedly concur.

Ian Lee stepped onto the podium in 1978 and we see Lucy Verstegen named as choir accompanist for the first time. The surviving documentation shows two of the concerts performed this year; a 'Choral Concert', which included songs from movies and musicals, as well as works from Rossini, Gounod, Mozart, Haydn, Purcell, Thomas Arne and George Dyson, plus 'Oranges and Lemons' and 'The Oak and the Ash'; and in December, 'A Festival of Christmas Music' with well-known Christmas anthems, carols and part songs, and favourite traditional carols for the audience to join in singing.

1979 saw the first of many collaborations between Caulfield and the Camberwell Chorale and Camberwell Camerata Orchestra, the last two both under the musical directorship of Douglas Heywood. He and the then accompanist of the Camberwell Chorale, Joan Shewan, will both feature prominently in our history for many years to come. The combined choirs and orchestra performed Handel's oratorio 'Israel in Egypt' at the Camberwell Civic Centre in May.

Future collaborations between the "Three C's" included an 'All Beethoven Concert' featuring that composer's 'Mass in C Major' as the main item. This was performed in 1980. In the following year, with the ranks swelled by the Victorian Boys' Choir, it was the turn of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', and in 1982, Mozart's 'Requiem'. The 'Elijah' of 1981 proved so popular with audiences that it was repeated with the same cast of characters the next year, as an extra concert in the calendar. While Douglas Heywood conducted these performances, Ian Lee, Caulfield's conductor, sang the tenor solo in all of them.

During Ian Lee's tenure, the choir continued to perform three subscribers' concerts each year. There was one 'serious' concert (a major classical work, with the Camberwell Chorale and Camerata Orchestra) in the early part of the year, a lighter concert in the middle, and a Christmas concert in December. The choir would continue to assist at civic functions, give mini-concerts at local venues when requested and carry on with the tradition of Christmas singing at the convalescent hospital.

Ian Lee tendered his resignation at the end of 1982 because he was taking long-service leave the following year. He had led the choir for five years and delighted audiences, not just by his conducting, but also with his lovely tenor voice. Indeed, he continued to sing tenor solos in Caulfield concerts in the years to come.



Douglas Heywood

In 1983, Douglas Heywood took charge of the baton, initially only to help out for a year, but later becoming the permanent conductor. He was described in an article in *The Sun* newspaper as 'a mild-mannered teacher and lecturer who lives a 25-hour-day, an eight-day-week'. For the remainder of this decade, and beyond, we see this whirlwind of a man in action. Not only did he add the Caulfield string to his already full bow of musical directorships, but during this time also created the Victorian Concert Choir, which performed once each year from 1983 until 1999, in the Melbourne Concert Hall (later renamed Hamer Hall). Any chorister who

wanted the chance to sing in this great auditorium had the opportunity to do so for the sum of \$10. Many Caulfield choristers joined the 300-voiced throng, including Colin and Sue Polites, and Rob Faulkner. The concerts were very popular with audiences too, making them a profitable, and therefore readily repeatable, enterprise. Major works which featured in these concerts included Mozart's 'Requiem', Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', Haydn's 'Creation' and Verdi's 'Requiem'.

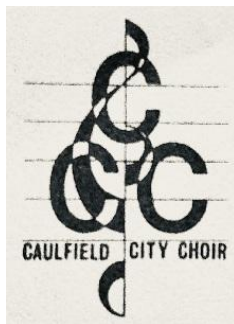
During Douglas Heywood's time with Caulfield City Choir, several new ventures were entered into. One of these was a Devonshire tea served after the middle-of-the-year concert of lighter, popular music. This became a favourite with audiences and helped fill the choir's coffers. The Christmas concert now took the form of the 9-Lesson Carol Service, with nine local churches asked to supply one narrator each to read one of the lessons. They were also asked to present a tableau, in costume, to illustrate their lesson. And, of course, there was audience participation in singing well-known carols.

Other ideas included, in 1984, an Instant (or Spontaneous) 'Messiah', where the audience joined with the choir to sing the words; tutorial classes in 'Musical Literacy through Choral Music' to begin in 1986 and be held in the hour before the weekly choir rehearsal. They would be led by a senior music student, with Douglas Heywood assisting from time to time, and would cost \$40 for the ten-week course; the offer by Lucy Verstegen, the accompanist (and Assistant Conductor) to organise a smaller daytime choral group which would rehearse twice per month and perform at local venues, as a way of giving back to the community in gratitude for the Council's annual grant to the choir. Unfortunately, Lucy was forced to resign as accompanist at the end of 1984 for financial reasons, though she continued to play the piano for the Day Choir. Joan Shewan took over as choir accompanist from 1985.

Douglas Heywood's son, Thomas, regularly performed piano and violin solos at the choir concerts from the age of ten. Thomas has gone on to become a very talented and well-known organist and has the claim to fame of being the first Australian organist to make a comfortable living from playing the King of Instruments.

The Fourth Decade (1976-1986)

In the latter part of this decade, the committee was occupied a great deal with several matters – ladies' dresses, a new logo for the choir, and a photograph of the current choristers. The issue of the ladies' dresses took over a year to resolve and involved many surveys of choristers' likes and dislikes, much buying of fabric samples, and numerous alterations of the made-up dresses. Sadly, after all this effort, the new dresses only featured on concert stages briefly before the ladies' concert attire was changed again. The quest for a choir photo was similarly beset with problems. The ladies' dress issue delayed proceedings since the photography session was put off until the ladies were all in possession of the new garb. Then, when arrangements had finally been made for the choir to assemble at the chosen outdoor setting, rain stopped this particular play, and it was suggested, somewhat resignedly, that a photo should just be taken at the next concert.



The search for a new logo was also a protracted affair. Local schools were approached and asked if their students would like to create a logo for the choir, the chosen design to net the winner \$50. Though many schools expressed interest, only Caulfield Grammar came up with any entries. The new logo (designed by Richard Williams, and shown here) subsequently appeared on all choir correspondence, advertising and on a concert banner.

Choir numbers remained fairly steady throughout this decade, at 45-50 choristers, and rehearsals took place at St Stephen's Uniting Church in Balaclava Road from November 1979, the Council's redevelopment of the city offices causing the need for a new venue. In 1985 we have the first mention of a Trading Table (goods for sale donated by choir members to raise funds for the choir), a tradition still followed in 2026.

And so, as the choir's fourth decade draws to a close, we see things humming along in a most satisfactory manner.

The Fifth Decade (1986-1996)

The choir's fifth decade did not start well. The 1986 performance of Verdi's 'Nabucco' on the 11th of May, at the Camberwell Civic Centre, with the Camberwell Chorale and Camerata Orchestra, made a loss of \$1200 (\$4000 in today's money), with each choir expected to take their share of the loss. This caused some mutterings about the viability of continuing with these combined concerts.



However, a joyous celebration of Caulfield City Choir's 40th anniversary, took place on the 7th of September, at St Stephen's Uniting Church Hall, in Balaclava Road. Titled 'Caulfield's Forty Years of Song', the concert promised 'a programme of nostalgia – favourite melodies and appealing choral items specially chosen from the Choir's comprehensive repertoire to compliment these 40th Anniversary celebrations'. Forty-one choristers took part in the concert and two previous conductors played cameo roles; Ian Lee, singing tenor solos, and Conductor Emeritus, the one and only David Plummer, conducting Handel's 'Silent Worship' and Parry's 'Jerusalem'. Thomas Heywood, now twelve years of age, performed both violin and piano solos. The music was followed by a celebratory afternoon tea. And, the much-anticipated choir photo was finally taken, the ladies in their glamorous full-length teal-blue dresses and the gentleman in black trousers, white shirts and teal-blue cravats.

The committee was busy updating the constitution in order for the choir to become an incorporated association, and in late 1986 at an extraordinary general meeting, this was approved by the members. So, 1987 began with the choir proudly sporting an 'Inc' after its name. Margaret Glasson, who was later granted Life Membership, took on the role of Secretary in November, and Lucy Verstegen retired from her position as pianist for the Day Choir due to ill health. A new uniform for the ladies was mooted – a skirt and blouse – and investigations commenced. Dorothy Stanley-Low, who joined the choir in 1973 and played a long and active role on the committee was granted Life Membership in June 1987.

The concerts for that year began with Verdi's 'Requiem' in May, at the Camberwell Civic Centre, with the Camberwell Chorale and Camerata Orchestra. The concert-programme had a cardboard cover and six double-sided pages, the luxuriousness of this item explained by the large number of advertisers who had been persuaded to chip in and have their businesses featured. These included a furs and leather boutique in Swanston Street, a Collins Street store selling the same type of merchandise, The Chocolate Box, The Organ Centre, Westpac Bank and Brash Holdings, owner of numerous music stores. For the first time, there was enough room in a concert programme to list the names of the choir members, and we find there Sue and Colin Polites. Sue is a current member of the choir in 2026 and originally joined in 1981.

'Victorian Lollipops' was the title of the September 1987 concert, and promised 'favourite melodies and ballads from the Victorian era'. Among these were 'Rose of Tralee', 'Show me the Way to go Home', 'The Old Grey Mare', and 'By the Light of the Silvery Moon', many of which invited audience participation. Afternoon tea was served after the performance. The Camerata Orchestra accompanied the choir in the December concert of Handel's 'Messiah' at St Stephen's Uniting Church, a 'spontaneous' performance with the audience singing along.

1988 saw the Day Choir disbanded, and a recruitment drive for school-leavers and 'other young singers' to join the choir. Douglas Heywood decided to reduce his workload by attending alternate choir practices, his wife and choir pianist, Joan Shewan, to conduct the others. The major work that year was Haydn's 'Creation' at the Camberwell Civic Centre with the usual suspects. In September, the 'Celebrate'88' concert at St Stephen's featured British folk songs, such as 'John Peel' and 'Bobby Shaftoe', popular songs, such as the theme song from the movie 'Exodus', 'The Impossible Dream', 'The Happy Wanderer' and 'For All We Know' (the latter made popular by the Carpenters), and the now teenaged Thomas Heywood on violin and piano. In the December concert, 'The Glory of Christmas', the choir performed Vivaldi's 'Gloria' as well as an assortment of Christmas carols.

In 1989, discussions were still ongoing with regard to the ladies' uniform. The membership was increasing but there was still the perennial shortage of men. The 'Caulfield Contact', a local newsletter, was in the bad books for altering wording and thereby changing the meaning of articles submitted by the choir for publication. It was also failing to include some of the notices of upcoming concerts and there was much to-ing and fro-ing of correspondence between the choir secretary and the editor on these matters.

The collaborative venture with the Camberwell contingents this year was titled 'Music for the Family', probably in an attempt to bring in a larger audience and avoid the losses of past concerts. Faure's 'Requiem' sat alongside negro spirituals and plantation songs, Mendelssohn's 'Hebrides Overture', Mozart's Flute Concerto, and Grieg's Piano Concerto (featuring Thomas Heywood as soloist). At Christmas, Vivaldi's 'Magnificat' and selections from Handel's 'Messiah' joined the traditional carols. The choir also sang carols at the Chadstone Shopping Centre, and was paid \$100 for its trouble.

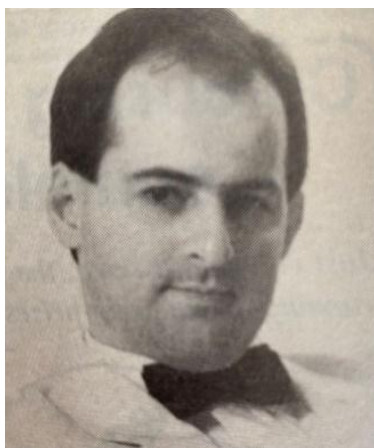
By 1990, the choir had sixty members and thoughts were turning to a signature tune for the group, 'something familiar and well-known' or possibly a verse written by a local school child put to music. Over the next few months, suggestions included Schubert's 'To Music', 'It's a Grand Night for Singing', and 'Sing, Sing a Song'. Appealing though this idea might have been, it seems it never got off the ground. On the thorny issue of ladies' uniforms, a waistcoat was suggested, and this seemed to garner support, as a teal-blue waistcoat appears in later years in choir photographs, teamed with a white shirt over a black skirt or trousers.

1990 started out with the combined choirs and orchestra performing Armenian-American Hovhanness' 'Magnificat', and the world premiere of Symphony No.1, 'Unsung Heroes', by British-Australian composer, Michael Easton, a work in six movements, 'each inspired by some aspect of the Great War', for soprano and baritone soloists, chorus and orchestra. The two contemporary compositions were balanced by Beethoven's 'Emperor Concerto', with sixteen-year-old Thomas Heywood at the piano.

A choir member, who was unable to sing in the September (variety and afternoon tea) concert, but sat in the audience, observed that 'the choir didn't watch the conductor enough; the finishing of words, especially 's', was bad; some items sounded insecure in places; in all parts there were individual voices noticeable at times' - perennial problems plaguing community choirs.

At the beginning of 1991, the committee wrote to Douglas Heywood, concerned about the viability of the combined concerts, given the financial losses. Whether or not prompted by irreconcilable differences, Douglas Heywood formally submitted his resignation 'at a date to be fixed after consultation with the choir'. He was farewelled at a dinner supplied by choir members held on June 19.

And so, the search began for a new conductor. There were five applicants for the position, and each applicant was to conduct the choir for thirty minutes on May 13, the works chosen being 'Drink to me only with thine eyes', a Bach Chorale, and something from Handel's 'Messiah'.



Kevin Purcell

On May 15, Kevin Purcell was granted the position, and conducted his first concert with the choir in September. 'The Spring Concert' (with afternoon tea) consisted of 'great opera choruses and other favourites', the other favourites being selections from musicals and 'What a Wonderful World'. Classical guitarist, Slava Grigorian, and the quintet Hot Oz, provided the non-choral part of the programme, while the opera choruses were enhanced by the presence of soprano, Narelle Gillie and contralto Catherine Olley. The December concert was Mozart's 'Ave Verum', 'Vesperae Solennes de Confessore', Flute Concerto in D, and Bassoon Concerto, plus sing-along Christmas carols.

In his conductor's report at the Annual General Meeting, Kevin Purcell said that he thought the choir was 'not aiming high enough in its presentation and should do much to raise its public profile'. Perhaps with this in mind, he expressed a wish to perform Vaughan Williams' 'Sea Symphony' with an orchestra which would cost \$3000. He was even willing to put his annual fee towards the presentation. He requested that a blackboard be provided for his use during choir practices but upset the committee when he said he was not available to conduct at the council's Carols by Candlelight. Maybe not a propitious beginning.

1992 was a chaotic year. Kevin Purcell prepared the choir for a combined concert in Camberwell (conducted by Douglas Heywood, and featuring works by Horovitz, Mussorgsky and Vaughan Williams), but his sudden verbal resignation in August, in order to take an overseas study tour, saw Peter Leech step in to fill the breach. The new recruit conducted the 'Spring Concert' in October, a programme of popular musical ballads, madrigals and spring songs, and sang two Robert Schumann songs as a baritone.

The 'Celebration of Christmas' concert at the Caulfield Arts Complex included choruses from Handel's 'Messiah' and incidental music from his 'Alceste', as well as popular carols arranged by Rutter and Willcocks. The Handel Bande were the supporting artists.

Despite the upheaval, this year saw choir membership increase to over sixty-five, and John Dunham, who had only recently joined the choir, began what would become a long and illustrious career as choir treasurer. To finish the year off in style, some choristers participated in the GTV9's broadcast of Carols by Candlelight on Christmas Eve at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.

Peter Leech continued to guide and nurture the choir in 1993. He was described as 'a very fine musician with the necessary temperament and dedication', and was praised for his 'methods of teaching, attention to detail and never-ending patience.' He conducted the choir in May in an evening concert titled 'Hear My Prayer', which included romantic German lieder and oratorios by Schubert, Mendelssohn and Haydn. The September concert, 'An Alpine Spring' (with afternoon tea), featured Elgar's 'Songs from the Bavarian



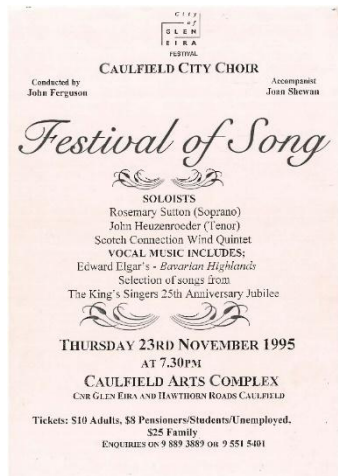
Peter Leech

Highlands' and Vaughan Williams' 'Folk Songs of the Four Seasons'. Sixty-nine choristers took part in the Christmas concert, 'Unto us a Child is Born', singing popular Australian and English Christmas carols, and Bach's cantata 'For unto us a child is born' as well as excerpts from his Christmas Oratorio.

Sadly, this was to be Peter Leech's final concert with the choir as he resigned to take up a position in Adelaide as Director of Music at St Peter's Anglican Cathedral. As he farewelled the choir, he said that he had 'many beautiful memories of our music making together' and expressed the hope that 'this enthusiastic group of choristers would long continue to enjoy and provide entertainment at this high level'. It seems that although his time at the helm was short, it was also sweet. The husband of a chorister videorecorded the Christmas concert and the proceeds from the sale of the videos were donated to the choir.

And so, 1994 began with yet another search for a conductor. Four candidates applied for the position which was offered to John Ferguson, an expat Brit with a strong background in instrumental and choral music. He was proficient in French horn, harpsichord, voice and conducting and was Director of Music at Scotch College as well as an AMEB examiner for brass instruments. The Scotch Connection Wind Quintet, comprising teachers from Scotch College, including John himself, often contributed to choir concerts in the next couple of years, as did the Glen Pro-Musica Chamber Orchestra and a jazz ensemble from Scotch, both of which John Ferguson conducted.

At the end of his first year with the choir, in his conductor's report, he was critical of the venues used for concerts, the restriction of funds available for engaging supporting soloists and orchestras, and of the practice piano, but was delighted with the emergence of some young singers (in 1995, three choristers turned twenty-one within twenty-one days of each other) and pleased with the improvements in sound, sight-reading and the way the choir coped with a variety of music styles presented throughout the year.



During his time wielding the baton, John Ferguson introduced African folk songs, selections from the King's Singers 25th Anniversary Jubilee, Swinging Bach, and Gilbert and Sullivan into the choir's repertoire. Works by Pergolesi, Wagner and Lennon & McCartney put in appearances alongside classics such as Haydn's 'Creation', and the choir continued to participate in Council (its name now changed from Caulfield to Glen Eira) ceremonies and celebrations. Unfortunately, by the end of 1995, John Ferguson felt he didn't have the necessary time to commit to the choir, and so resigned as conductor and the hunt was on again.

The choir's fifth decade ends with the appointment of Jenny Mathers as conductor, and its sixth decade begins with a new name, Glen Eira City Choir Inc., and a new logo.

The Sixth Decade (1996-2006)

Caulfield City Choir Inc did not officially become Glen Eira City Choir Inc until July of 1996, and so the first concert to celebrate the choir's 50th anniversary year, on the evening of June 3, was under the Caulfield name. This concert, titled '50 Golden Years', was a collaboration with the South Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, which was also celebrating fifty years of existence. The choir's contributions to the programme were Vivaldi's 'Gloria in D Major', Schubert's 'Holy, Holy, Holy', Brahms' 'O Schöne Nacht', Fauré's 'Cantique de Jean Racine', Verdi's 'Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves', and Rutter's 'For the Beauty of the Earth' and 'A Gaelic Blessing'. The orchestra opened the concert with Copland's 'Fanfare for the Common Man' and performed Franz Schubert's 'Unfinished Symphony', as well as accompanying the choir. Guest soprano, Lisette Wesseling, sang two solos as well as taking the solo soprano role in the Vivaldi, alongside the alto soloist and new choir conductor, Jennifer Mathers.

Jenny Mathers, proficient in Voice, Piano and Clarinet, was, at the time, Musical Director at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School, conducting four school choirs and various instrumental groups, as well as playing clarinet in the Grainger Winds Symphony and singing with the Ensemble Gombert and Tudor Choristers. She was to be conductor of the Glen Eira City Choir (GECC) for one year only, having accepted an invitation to study for her Masters of Music at Florida State University in the United States in 1997, majoring in choral conducting. She did express interest in returning to conduct the choir in 1998, but this did not eventuate. Jenny's first concert with our choir concluded with a rousing chorus of Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance No.1' performed, no doubt, with considerable gusto by the two fifty-year-old music groups.

As well as performing two other concerts in this year, one with lighter music and the other, Christmas-themed, the Glen Eira City Choir marked its fiftieth birthday with a sit-down afternoon tea at Tudor Court on October 20, with a string quartet providing light entertainment. David Plummer, the choir's founder, who sadly died later in the year, was a guest of honour at the afternoon tea and was later presented with a video of the fiftieth birthday celebrations. Gold-rimmed commemorative glasses were given to all attendees. It had been hoped that these glasses would proudly bear a new logo for the newly-named choir. A designer had been commissioned to develop the logo but unfortunately illness and other delays meant that by year's end there was still nothing to display on programmes and choir documents, or, indeed, on commemorative glasses.

Ladies' attire again featured in committee discussions in 1996. Initially a peacock-blue scarf was suggested but later changed to a dark-red one. When this scarf first put in an appearance at a concert, a commentator was recorded as remarking on the 'dreadful appearance of the ladies of the choir', apparently due to inexpert tying of these accessories. 1996 ended with another hunt for a new conductor, along with the customary carol singing in the wards of Caulfield Hospital and at the council's Carols By Candlelight.

Before leaving for America, Jenny Mathers assisted in the selection of her successor and had prepared the choir to perform on February 25 in the 1997 Glen Eira Festival, which she had also helped to set up. The Young Voices of Melbourne and the Liron Choir joined with Glen Eira to sing 'Anthem' from the musical 'Chess', and a South African freedom song 'Siyahamba'. Glen Eira City Choir also performed a selection of songs from the King's Singers 25th Anniversary Jubilee.

Peter Mousaferiadis became conductor of the choir in early 1997, and debuted at the Glen Eira Festival mentioned above. Like his predecessor, Jenny Mathers, Peter was a clarinetist. He was also a very busy conductor, directing the Orana Chamber Orchestra, the Hellenic Choir of Melbourne, the Footscray Community Arts Centre Multicultural Choir, Canto Coro (a Brunswick-based community choir) and Souled Out (a gospel choir), and he was a composer of lyric melodies. He was later to conduct the three-hundred-strong Aurora Australis Choir which performed at the Turn of the Millenium Celebration on the banks of the Yarra.

In May 1997, Peter led the choir in an evening concert 'Autumn Tones', which included Pergolesi's 'Magnificat', Mozart's 'Spatzenmesse' and 'Ave Verum' as well as Parry's 'Jerusalem'. The choir was accompanied by the fourteen-member Occasional Orchestra. The new logo finally put in an appearance on the programme of this concert. Letterheads and concert banners were then produced, proudly bearing the updated logo.



Peter Mousaferiadis brought a multicultural touch to choir concerts, even as far as having a Sri Lankan dancer perform at the August concert.

Sixty choristers took part in the Christmas concert 'Flowers of the Field: a Christmas celebration'. Ralph Vaughan Williams' 'Flos Campi' (a suite for solo viola, mixed chorus and small orchestra, described in the programme as 'an exquisite study in pure sound') featured in this concert. Sophie Kesoglidis provided the viola solo and the Orana Chamber Orchestra, the small orchestra. There was also an organ solo from Thomas Heywood along with a wide variety of Christmassy offerings.

1998 began with some disgruntlement regarding the choir's participation at the previous year's council Carols By Candlelight. The main points of dissatisfaction were the lack of rehearsal time and the fact that the choir did not get a mention in the post-carols newspaper write-up. Ladies' uniforms were again under investigation at the April committee meeting, with a uniform blouse suggested. Discussions on design, fabric and colour continued for most of the year until the October committee minutes baldly stated 'investigations discontinued'.

Peter Mousaferiadis married in February and took the month off. George Dreyfus conducted the choir in Peter's absence, and the May concert was a tribute to George and a celebration of his seventieth birthday. In the programme for 'A Date with George', he was described as one of Australia's musical 'characters'. Dreyfus wrote the theme to 'Rush', 'Terrigal', 'Hogan's Flat' and five other works which all featured in this concert alongside Franz Schubert's 'Mass in G Major'.

'Spring into Spring' was a concert of lighter music from musicals, pop songs, folk songs, 'Breezy Bach', 'Sleepytime Bach' and excerpts from Bizet's 'Carmen' in which the 'Flower Song' was sung by the choir's own John Dunham. The Christmas concert included selections from Handel's 'Messiah', organ solos by Thomas Heywood, and solos by soprano Fiona Chatwin, who sang in many of the choir's concerts around this time. In 2005, Fiona founded Villa Musica, an organisation in San Diego that focussed on community music-making and education. She is still its Executive and Artistic Director.

The Glen Eira City Council had provided annual grants for the choir since 1946 and in 1998 provided \$2185 for 'operations', but a note from the council's Arts Liaison Officer indicated that the council would be moving away from day-to-day grants such as this. So, more pressure would be put on ticket sales and fund-raising activities such as the cake stall held in the Elsternwick shopping area in May, which raised an impressive \$345.

The first concert of 1999 was a huge affair. Sixty-one Glen Eira choristers joined with fifty-five from the Box Hill Choral Society, and along with the thirty-piece Orana Chamber Orchestra, presented 'Mozart in C', a programme consisting of four large works all composed in C Major; 'Benedictus sit Deus', 'Coronation Mass', 'Jupiter Symphony' and 'Spatzenmesse'. Box Hill's musical director, Andrew Wailes took on the tenor solos. His fellow soloists were soprano Ellen Bennett, contralto Geraldine Larkins, and bass Jerzy Kozlowski. This concert was performed at the Church of St Mary, Star of the Sea, in West Melbourne and was recorded for broadcast.

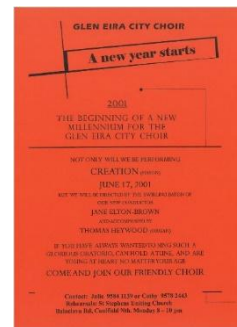
The September concert at the MLC Music Auditorium in Kew was a 'Father's Day Prom Spectacular', the choir accompanied by the MLC Concert Orchestra. On the menu were opera choruses, popular songs, folk songs, songs from musicals and plantation songs. For Christmas, the choir served up twenty-nine separate festive morsels and survived a malfunctioning organ at St Mary's Anglican Church in Glen Eira Road. At Caulfield Racecourse in December, GECC performed along with show-biz 'biggs' Marina Prior, Rhonda Burchmore, Denis Walter and Humphrey B Bear in the council's annual Carols By Candlelight.

The world having survived the Y2K crisis, on the afternoon of Sunday May 28, 2000, in the Glen Eira Town Hall, a programme of Vivaldi, Haydn, Bach and Mozart was presented with Roslyn Carolane at the organ and the choir's John Dunham (tenor) and Neil Barry (bass) among the soloists. Another collaboration and huge production with the Box Hill Choral Society followed in September at St Patrick's Cathedral, East Melbourne. This featured Beethoven's 'Mass in C Major' and the first movement of 'Symphony no. 5' (played by the Orana Chamber Orchestra), and Haydn's 'Missa Brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo', and was also recorded. The concert made a loss of \$1880. Fortunately, the Christmas offering that year, with carols and afternoon tea, made a modest profit of \$501, which went a little way towards alleviating the year's financial pain.

The Sixth Decade (1996-2006)

We farewell Peter Mousaferiadis at the end of 2000 and welcome Jane Elton Brown to the conductor's podium at the beginning of 2001. Jane brought with her a B.Mus, a Dip.Ed and a Master of Music with first class honours, all from Melbourne University, plus twenty-nine years' experience as Director of Music at MLC. During those years she had conducted the MLC Choir in performances with John Farnham in the Melbourne Concert Hall in 1991 and with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa at Werribee Park in 1993, as well as conducting major choral-orchestral works in the Melbourne Concert Hall, Dallas Brooks Hall and St Paul's Cathedral. Jane had retired from her position at MLC in 1999 but continued to conduct the MLC Male Voice Choir and the MLC Old Collegian's Choir as well as taking on Glen Eira. Jane was also an experienced music examiner and adjudicator at eisteddfods and festivals. Her motto was 'striving for perfection' and she approached each song and choral work with the choir methodically and musically and could be quite a taskmaster. Her aim was to encourage choristers 'to gain maximum benefit from rehearsals by studying and following the music and words for all parts'.

Jane's first concert with the GECC was Haydn's 'Creation' performed in June 2001 at the Glen Eira Arts Complex and featuring old favourite Thomas Heywood at the organ and Lisa Anne Robinson as the soprano soloist. This was the first of many concerts at which Lisa would delight GECC audiences with her glorious, rich voice. Lisa still continues her association with our choir and now, as well as performing in many GECC concerts, also runs regular workshops in choral singing for our choristers and the wider community.



The spring concert of lighter music (and afternoon tea) was held at the Southern Community Church of Christ in Cheltenham. The choir's John Dunham sang Ralph Vaughan Williams' 'The Vagabond' and Mozart's 'Dalla Sua Pace' from 'Don Giovanni', and father-daughter duo, Colin and Deborah Polites featured as soloists in a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'The Pirates of Penzance'.

The 'Celebrate Christmas' concert at St Mary's Anglican Church in Caulfield saw Hugh Fullarton, another musician who has continued his association with the GECC, at the organ. In this concert, carols were interspersed with violin solos from Katherine Lukey and snippets from Handel's 'Messiah'.

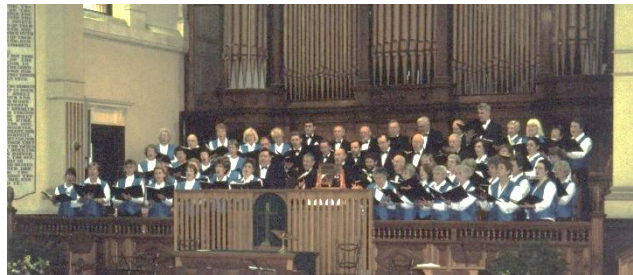


2001 was a financial success with all three concerts making a profit, which was just as well as the council grant was reduced to \$2000 in cash but with an 'in kind' grant of the use of the Glen Eira Arts Complex for one concert, one rehearsal and the moving of the piano. The next year, 2002, saw a deficit of \$1,847, due mainly to the June performance of Handel's 'Messiah', which made a loss of \$1,428. The reduction in the council cash grant to \$1,875 certainly didn't help the bottom line, but at least the same 'in kind' grant as in the previous year was made available.

The Sixth Decade (1996-2006)

The spring and Christmas concerts both made a modest profit and featured several soloists from the choir – John Dunham, Colin Polites, Frank Platford and Jenny Thirtle. Jane Elton Brown, in her annual Conductor's Report, said the choir 'is very proud of Jenny's beautiful voice' and 'is pleased to share her singing with the audience'. Jane also praised the choir's versatility in handling a range of musical styles, and was particularly happy with its 'mastery of the difficult polyphonic work' such as the 'Amen' chorus' in the 'Messiah'. At the Christmas concert, which included J S Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio: Part Two', children were invited to come around the Christmas tree to sing carols, play percussion instruments and receive a gift.

In the first concert of 2003, the choir performed Fauré's 'Requiem' (accompanied by Christopher Cook on the organ), and Vivaldi's 'Gloria' (accompanied by the Stonnington Symphony Orchestra) at the Uniting Church in Oxley Road, Hawthorn.



The September concert in the Glen Eira Town Hall, 'Music from the Highlands', featured Elgar's suite, 'From the Bavarian Highlands', Scottish songs (with Andrew Marshall on the bagpipes) and four songs from 'The Sound of Music', with the audience joining in to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Loch Lomond'. The Christmas programme included excerpts from Britten's 'A Ceremony of Carols' along with traditional carols, some especially for the children in the audience to sing. This year the choir greatly mourned the loss of Colin Polites, who died in November.

There was no cash grant from the council in 2004, and despite all the concerts that year making a profit, the bottom line at the end of the year was a deficit of \$1200. So, the focus really was on fundraising, and among the ideas canvassed were garage sales, cake stalls (with a local quartet enticing potential buyers with music), wine tours, movie nights, and a progressive dinner where food, provided by the choristers, was brought to a venue, and diners paid to come and partake, with ticket prizes as an extra inducement.

The musical delicacies in 2004 began with Mozart's 'Requiem' in June and progressed through 'From Brahms to Broadway' in September, to finish the year with 'Glen Eira City Choir Celebrates Christmas'. Previous conductor, John Ferguson got a mention in the 'Requiem' programme as the provider of the tympani, courtesy of his Scotch College connection.

Choir membership peaked at seventy-four in 2005, but was down to sixty by the end of the year. All three concerts made healthy profits, the 'Spring Choral Concert' alone making \$2,312 with its mix of Purcell, Borodin, the musical 'Chess', 'Old Mother Hubbard – in the manner of Handel', and audience participation in choruses by Jerome Kern. Jenny Thirtle and Joy Jordan from the choir sang solos and Naomi Eager was a guest oboist.

The Sixth Decade (1996-2006)

The June concert of 2005 was a performance of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' at the Auburn Uniting Church in Hawthorn. Some male singers from Star Chorale joined GECC for this concert, and the Star Chorale Chamber Singers performed the trio 'Lift Thine Eyes', while Jenny Thirtle (soprano) and Elizabeth Kenway (contralto) from GECC performed as soloists in 'Holy, Holy, Holy'.

For Christmas, saxophonist Jason Xanthoudakis entertained with works by J S Bach as well as a couple of lively, virtuosic modern works, 'Beat Me' by Barry Cockcroft (1996) and 'Caprice en forme de Valse' by Paul Bonneau (1950). The choir sang excerpts from J S Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio' and there was the usual carol singing for the children, the choir and the audience.

2005 also saw the choir's Constitution changed, a massive job undertaken by John Dunham. Up until this time, the incumbent Mayor of Glen Eira (and Caulfield, before the name change) had been the President of the choir, chairing choir AGMs or sending another councillor if unable to attend personally. From this point on, under the new Constitution, the choir would elect its own President, and in 2005 John agreed to take on the role. The year ended with a healthy surplus of nearly \$2000, which would have pleased President John in his additional role as Treasurer.

This was also the year that Margaret Glasson retired from committee work. At this point she had been in the choir for thirty years and had served on the committee for most of that time in positions including Vice President, Secretary and Librarian. She was a tireless worker on behalf of the choir, assisting in organising choir functions and volunteering her house for committee meetings in addition to her elected officer roles. She was made a Life Member and continued to sing with the choir until 2013.

Sixty-five choristers performed Mozart's 'Requiem' in April at Auburn Uniting Church to start off the choir's sixtieth anniversary year, 2006. The Melbourne Sinfonia provided the accompaniment to both the choir and to Joannes Roose (the Sinfonia's conductor), who soloed on flute in J S Bach's 'Suite in B minor for Flute and Strings'. In addition, Hugh Fullarton played two organ solos. There is an unfortunate misprint in the concert programme which gave the Glen Eira City Council the credit for the 'Requiem' rather than the Glen Eira City Choir.

By this sixth decade, the names of many of the choir's current members have appeared on concert programmes; Sue Polites, Alla Turlakow, John Dunham, April Blackwell, Iris Felstead, Valerie McDonald, Hazel Wilson, and Stuart Allen.

The Seventh Decade (2006-2016)

The choir enjoyed a period of stability in its seventh decade under the expert eye and directorship of Jane Elton Brown, who had also at this time taken on the role of Music Director at MacRobertson Girls' High School. Seventy-five choristers sang in the 60th Anniversary Concert at the Glen Eira Town Hall auditorium on July 9, 2006, performing eighteen separate items, the composers ranging from Thomas Morley, through Mozart, Sibelius, Carl Orff and César Franck, to John Rutter. Nine choir members sang solos. The concert was divided into three sections, each encompassing twenty-years of choir history and presented by John Dunham, Stuart Allen and Joanna Leslie in turn. The performance had opened with Parry's 'Jerusalem' and finished with John Rutter's arrangement of 'When the Saints Go Marching In'. It was followed by afternoon tea where choristers mingled with audience members.

The then Mayor of Glen Eira City Council, Cr David Feldman, provided a message of congratulations on a milestone reached. This was printed in the concert programme. The current choir President, Penny Paton, had joined the choir in time to perform on this special occasion.

Accompanied by the Concertanti Orchestra, eighty choristers sang in the December concert, a performance of Handel's 'Messiah', seeing the choir's seventieth year out in style. The soloists were soprano Judith Dodsworth, alto Kerrie Bolton, tenor Christopher Busietta and bass Ian Cousins. This concert took place at the Auburn Uniting Church in Hawthorn. This venue was the one favoured for the first concert of each year. Most of the Christmas concerts during this decade were held at St James' Anglican Church in Glen Iris.

Jane Elton Brown was a great believer in encouraging the talent of individual choristers and, over these ten years, the following choir members sang solos in concerts: Julie Emmi, Christine Culliver, Joanna Leslie, Jane Shelton, Jenny Thirtle, John Dunham, Greg Gal-On, Adrian Mill, Chris Sinclair, Elise Ness, Maggie Romain, Deb Polites, Simon Gaites, Helen Norman, John Hay, Simon Randall, Martin Drerup, Nolene Prince, Heather Aumann, Eteri Litvak, Karin Otto and Michael Skillington.

Regular soloists from outside the choir who took part in choir concerts during this decade were Peter Mander (tenor), Kerrie Bolton (contralto), Ian Cousins (bass), Judith Dodsworth (soprano), Paul Hughes (bass), and Lisa Anne Robinson (soprano) who was welcomed back after spending several years delighting audiences in the United Kingdom. Christopher Cook and Hugh Fullarton were regular contributors on the organ, performing solos as well as accompanying the choir. Hugh also conducted concerts in 2008 and 2012, and Stephen Stanke stood in for Jane Elton Brown for one concert in 2009. Catherine Pendelich conducted the spring concerts in both 2014 and 2015 (and sang a solo, 'Dona, dona', in the 2014 concert 'Salute to Life and Liberty'). But all other concerts were directed by the indomitable Jane Elton Brown.

Joan Shewan, who had been the choir's rehearsal, and often, concert accompanist since 1985, retired in 2015 following a period of ill-health. Over those thirty years, Joan's impressive talent was much appreciated by both the choristers and the procession of conductors who had worked with her during that time. When illness prevented Joan from accompanying the choir, her position on the piano stool had been filled by either Sue Goessling, Bruce Macrae, Denise Grocke, Jodie Lockyear, Philip Walsh or Judith Dodsworth.

The Glen Eira City Council continued its support with an annual 'in kind' grant of the use of the Glen Eira Town Hall auditorium for two rehearsals and two concerts, reducing to one of each by the end of the decade. The Bendigo Bank also awarded small cash grants on a regular basis during this time, and generous donors helped keep the choir afloat financially.

Fundraising efforts contributed greatly to the choir's bottom line. There were Cuppa Nights on the first and third Monday of each month, where a gold coin donation entitled a chorister to a hot beverage, and cakes and biscuits provided by other choristers. Once a month the Trading Table operated, April Blackwell overseeing this enterprise for a time during the seventh decade. There were movie nights, progressive dinners (the 2012 dinner made a staggering \$1,780), a winery visit, stalls of crafts and produce at the concert venues and local markets (Kathy Hope and Cathy Pearce were both organisers of these during this period), Bunnings' sausage sizzles, and raffles. Recordings of choir concerts on CD (the 2005 'Elijah', 2006 'Messiah', and all three 2007 performances) were sold at the May 2008 concert for \$15 each. Some concerts made a profit, others a loss, but careful management of the finances and the diligent fundraising activities of choir members ensured the choir remained a going concern.

The then President, Hazel Wilson, also took on the role of Publicity Officer and worked tirelessly to promote the choir in local newspapers and newsletters as well as via local radio. Hazel also organised choir dinners at the Marine Hotel in Brighton and arranged for concerts to be advertised via real estate boards. In



2012 Irene Havryluk-Davies rallied the troops to make decorations for the choir's entry in the Holy Trinity Community Christmas Tree Festival, a tradition which continued for many years. One entry, 'Music in the Round', featured baubles wrapped in sheet music. The 2014 tree 'A Cracker of a Christmas' was decorated with Christmas bonbons made from sheet music, carefully crafted by choir members. Christine

Culliver, the then Vice President, worked with Irene for this entry and was a very active and effective member of the choir committee, among other things, sourcing fabric and sewing ladies' scarves, and organising movie nights.



The Seventh Decade (2006-2016)

Regular rehearsals continued on Monday nights at the Caulfield Indonesian Uniting Church (previously known as St Stephen's) in Balaclava Road, and the choir performed at council ceremonies (ANZAC Day and Australia Day) and at the annual Carols by Candlelight.

Three concerts were presented every year of this seventh decade, following the pattern set in previous years. The first concerts were serious classical works, the second, selections from musicals and popular music, and the third, mixtures of classical, popular and traditional Christmas music. A gold coin donation afternoon tea was a feature of every concert.



Among the 'serious' works performed during this time were Fauré's 'Requiem', Schubert's 'Mass in C', Beethoven's 'Mass in C', Haydn's 'Creation', J S Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio, Part 2', Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', Handel's 'Messiah', Mozart's 'Requiem', and Charpentier's 'Midnight Mass', and there were excerpts from Dvorak's 'Mass in D' and Vivaldi's 'Gloria' as well as items from operas.

Some concerts stand out as different. Before the 2008 performance of Beethoven's 'Mass in C' (which was accompanied by the Stonnington Symphony, its Artistic Director at that time, the one and only Benjamin Northey), harpist Alannah Guthrie-Jones performed six pieces covering a wide range of musical styles, from Handel's 'The Harmonious Blacksmith' to Deborah Henson-Conant's 'New Blues'.

The 2015 concert 'Meandering Through Time', conducted by Catherine Pendelich, was held at Ormond Uniting Church and its printed programme included notes on what was happening in Australia and the world in the year in which each song was written.

Lighter music in concerts during this period included show tunes, Beatles' songs, Gilbert & Sullivan, folk songs, songs from the war years, sea shanties, and madrigals. Christmas concerts featured excerpts from Handel's 'Messiah', Benjamin Britten's 'A Ceremony of Carols', Christian and Jewish blessings, and carols from Australia and other countries all over the world, as well as traditional Christmas carols with audience participation.

The Seventh Decade (2006-2016)

Jane Elton Brown noted in her 2010 Conductor's Report that she appreciated that the choir is a community choir with higher standards of performance and that it enjoys performing a range of musical styles. She added that there was a good balance between long-standing and newer members and that the choir valued a friendly atmosphere. In 2011, Jane was awarded an OAM for services to music.

Much of this decade was spent without a designated Concert Manager and there was always a shortage of male singers, especially tenors. Around 2011, concert attire changed again. Gone were the ladies' aqua vests. Both men and women wore white shirts over black pants or skirts, with a red scarf for the ladies and a red tie for the gents. The men also wore a black jacket.

Fifty-nine choristers sang in the first concert of the choir's seventieth year, held in June at the Glen Eira Town Hall auditorium, and bearing the title 'The Music Lives On'. It showcased music performed by the GECC over the previous seventy years, covering a wide range of musical genres and featuring soloists from the choir from the past fifteen years.



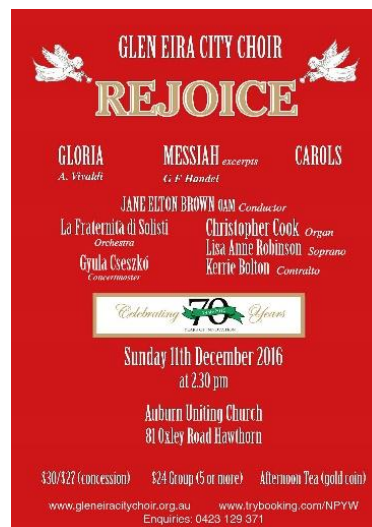
Current choir members who performed in this concert were Judi Aldridge, Margaret Reimer, Betty Spencer, April Blackwell, Helen Cliffe, Iris Felstead, Denise Grocke, Kathy Hope, Penny Paton, Hazel Wilson, Jeremy Paton, Stuart Allen, John Dunham, Sam Bateman and Michael Skillington.

The current choir logo was created during this seventh decade.



The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)

The eighth decade has been an unusual one in the choir's history. 70th Birthday celebrations, which had begun in June 2016 with 'The Music Lives On' concert, concluded in December with 'Rejoice', a programme of Vivaldi's 'Gloria', excerpts from Handel's 'Messiah', and Christmas carols. This concert opened with the audience and choir singing three carols accompanied by Christopher Cook on the organ. The fourteen-piece chamber orchestra La Fraternità di Solisti accompanied the choir in the Vivaldi and Handel. Artistic Director (and a violinist) of La Fraternità, Gyula Cseszkó, had assumed, incorrectly, that he would be conducting the entire performance. Jane, however, was firmly in control of all proceedings and the orchestra had to adjust to a choral style of conducting.



Fundraising efforts continued throughout the year. A High Afternoon Tea in May raised \$800 and in July, for \$20 admission plus supper, choristers and friends enjoyed the silent movie 'A Sentimental Bloke' to musical accompaniment at Holy Trinity Church, Balaclava. Choir members were asked to contribute slices and cakes for the supper. The very handy sum of \$610 was made from this venture.

The committee had wanted to bestow Life Membership on Joan Shewan, in recognition of her long and excellent service to the choir from the piano stool, but the Constitution did not allow a non-financial member to be awarded this honour. A Certificate of Honorary Membership was proposed in its stead.

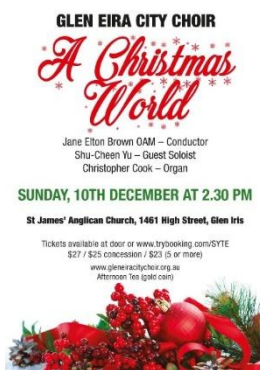


2017 saw a change in the usual order of the concerts. A 'Variety Concert' was the first cab off the rank in May, with guest tenor, Roy Best, singing two sets of three songs, and Sue Goessling, now the choir's regular rehearsal pianist, accompanying. John Dunham sang 'Beautiful Dreamer' and the choir performed motets, opera choruses and excerpts from Orff's 'Carmina Burana' and Gilbert & Sullivan's 'HMS Pinafore'. In the latter, the audience joined in singing 'Sweet Little Buttercup'. They also lent their voices to Brahms' 'Lullaby' and helped belt out Parry's 'Jerusalem' to finish the concert.

The major work for the year, 'The Creation' by Haydn, was performed in October at Auburn Uniting Church. Lisa Anne Robinson, soprano, Peter Mander, tenor, and Paul Hughes, bass, were joined by sixty-three choristers, Glen Eira's numbers boosted by choristers from Monash Chorale and Star Chorale who had had to

commit to attending all rehearsals before the concert. Christopher Cook provided the organ accompaniment. Heather Cameron, a Glen Eira chorister, in a letter following this concert, praised Jane's conducting, noting that she focussed on the whole, giving her attention equally to all performers whether soloist, chorister or organist. Heather finished by saying that she had sung in many such works, with conductors from around the world 'and can honestly say that Jane was as good as any I have come across'.

The choir had borrowed copies of 'The Creation' from the Sunshine Coast Choral Society and choristers were urged to be vigilant in not marking their copies in any way. Only one failed to comply, marking the copy with highlighter thereby forcing GECC to fork out for a replacement copy!



St James' Anglican Church in Glen Iris was the venue for the end-of-year concert, 'A Christmas World'. Christopher Cook manned the organ and Shu-Cheen Yu provided soprano solos – 'Panis Angelicus', 'Rejoice Greatly' (from 'Messiah'), Laudate Dominum, and Stephen Adam's 'The Holy City'. For an encore she delighted the audience with a Chinese love song, 'The Swallow'. Christmas songs from around the world filled out the remainder of the programme, with audience participation in selected carols.

The choir had a relationship with the Music Lovers' Society through the then President, Hazel Wilson. For a time, GECC would offer complimentary tickets to the Music Lovers' Society for our concerts, and they would reciprocate with tickets for theirs. When the MLS finally disbanded in 2017, they donated their 1926 Steinway grand piano to the GECC. The piano was kept at the back of the stage in the Glen Eira Town Hall auditorium and wheeled out for concerts held there. It later had to be sold when the Town Hall requested that it be removed from the premises.

Sue Goessling, the rehearsal pianist at this time, possessed an impressive resume. She had an extensive career as a pianist and accompanist for a wide variety of concert-work, as a rehearsal repetiteur both for opera productions and choral works and as an audition accompanist. She was also a piano and classroom music teacher. She had worked with the Victorian Boys' Choir and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society, and was the official accompanist for Opera Australia's Victorian Schools Touring Company, as well as playing for shows, corporate functions, weddings and the like - a talented and versatile pianist indeed.

She was due to play in the choir's April 2018 concert 'By George', but as Denise Grocke (our current concert manager) describes, 'Sue Goessling fell on broken glass the night before the concert and severed a tendon in her left hand. We were

able to find a replacement, Jodie Lockyer. Jodie sightread the accompaniments because we didn't have time to get the music to her. In addition, Sue was to play the Etude #1 of Scriabin, a fiendishly difficult work. Jodie accessed the music on her iPad and thrilled the audience by playing it note-perfect at the normal (fast) speed! It was truly an incredible performance by Jodie.' When Sue was unable to play at rehearsals, Linda O'Brien or Yvonne Carr took her place at the piano. The 'Georges' in the 'By George' concert were Bizet, Gershwin, Handel and Dreyfus, and Judith Dodsworth sang soprano solos from each composer. The performance took place in the auditorium of the Glen Eira Town Hall and was attended by George Dreyfus himself, celebrating his ninetieth birthday.



In September that year, at Auburn Uniting Church, fifty-four choristers performed Fauré's 'Requiem' and excerpts from Haydn's 'Nelson Mass', with Christopher Cook on the organ and soloists Lisa Anne Robinson, Kerrie Bolton, Peter Mander and Paul Hughes.



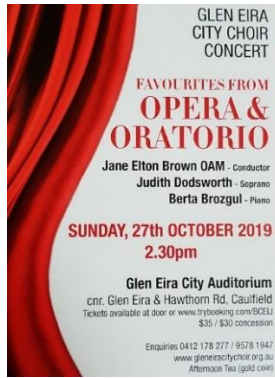
'The Spirit of Christmas', the end-of-year concert at St James' Anglican Church, Glen Iris, featured Christopher Cook on the organ and Judith Dodsworth as guest soloist. John Dunham and Nolene Prince from the choir also sang solos. During these years, Helen Funston often performed as a tenor in the choir due to the perennial shortage of males.

2019 was Jane Elton Brown's last year with the choir after nineteen years of masterful conducting. It was also the year that our current rehearsal pianist, Berta Brozgul began her working relationship with the GECC. Born in South Africa, Berta



migrated to Australia at the age of twelve. She received a Masters degree with highest honours from the Mozarteum in Salzburg and has won numerous prizes throughout her career, including a major prize in the 2015 Lev Vlassenko Piano Competition. She has performed as a concerto soloist with the Queensland, Tasmanian and Melbourne symphony orchestras and was accepted into the Australian National Academy of Music in 2016, with which she is currently a member of the Associate Faculty.

The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)



She regularly accompanies solo instrumentalists and performs with chamber groups as well as performing solo herself. In the October 2019 concert, 'Favourites from Opera and Oratorio', Berta played Rachmaninov and Chopin solos as well as accompanying the choir in excerpts from a wide range of operas and oratorios. Judith Dodsworth was the guest soprano. A new sponsorship program had resulted in financial support for both Judith and Berta for this concert.

In the June concert, there had also been sponsors for the four soloists (the same four who had sung in the previous year's September concert). The choir added Fauré's 'Cantique de Jean Racine' and Brahms' 'How Lovely is Thy Dwelling' into the mix and each soloist also sang an excerpt from Handel's 'Messiah', Pergolesi's 'Stabat Mater', or Haydn's 'The Creation', before choir, soloists and Christopher Cook on the organ embarked on Mozart's 'Requiem', one of Jane's favourite works.



Jane's final concert as conductor with the Glen Eira City Choir was held in December at St James' Anglican Church in Glen Iris, with sixty-four choristers to sing her farewell. Christopher Cook accompanied again on the organ and Lisa Anne Robinson was the guest soloist in a concert of Christmas fare. At the end of the concert the choir sang Rutter's 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You' before Jane was presented with a sculpture which represented, in three dimensions, her belief in 'Reaching for Perfection'. She was also granted Life Membership of the choir. Then, everyone launched into 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' before enjoying a celebratory afternoon tea, browsing the Christmas stall and hoping to win something in the raffle.



When COVID-19 reared its ugly head in early 2020, lockdowns and contact restrictions created ongoing uncertainties and made life very difficult for the choir committee. In November 2019, Elena Varshavskaya had auditioned for the role of choir conductor and in December was welcomed into the fold. But only four rehearsals had been held in 2020 before the first of many lockdowns halted concert preparations. There would not be another official GECC concert until June 2022.

Three of our choristers were to have sung Mozart's 'Requiem' at the 2020 Distinguished Concerts International New York, and four to have performed Handel's 'Messiah'. COVID put an end to that, and it wasn't until 2023 that Michael Skillington and Irene Havryluk-Davies finally went to New York in April to sing the Requiem, and John Dunham and Kathy Hope were at Carnegie Hall in November to participate in an abridged version of the Messiah.



Elena Varshavskaya had graduated from Moscow State P I Tchaikovsky Conservatory with Honours, majoring in Choral Conducting. She had experience both as a chorister and a conductor having sung in international choral music competitions and festivals and conducted the chamber choir 'Lad' in successful tours of Greece, Germany and Finland. Lad also received gold and silver awards at the 5th International Johannes Brahms Choir Competition in Germany in 2005. Elena joined the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus as a chorister in 2010 and became the Musical Director of Bendigo Chorale a year later. She was also conducting a community choir 'Nostalgia' and the Choral Studio *Harmony* Children's Choir. She brought with her an extensive musical knowledge as well as a delightful sense of humour and an ability to beguile the best out of her choristers.

In March 2020, due to the COVID lockdowns, the committee sent a letter to the Caulfield Indonesian Church, where rehearsals had taken place for fifty years, advising that the choir had decided to suspend operations. The choir continued to pay a nominal fee for hall hire for the rest of 2020, despite not being able to use the space. A small retainer was also paid to Berta and Elena during 2020. A letter was sent to choir members, asking for donations to help pay for the retainers for Elena and Berta and the hall hire as there was no other source of income until rehearsals and concerts resumed.

The choir, like a lot of the world, discovered the joys of Zoom during COVID. The 2019 AGM was held in June, 2020, via Zoom, as were all committee meetings at the time. From August that year, fortnightly choir gatherings were held using Zoom to encourage choristers to stay connected during this strange and difficult period. Choir members spoke about their lives and came to learn more about each other, the committee, Elena and Berta through this medium. Online quizzes added to the fun. Choir numbers at these Zoom sessions varied between fifteen and thirty. A dinner was held in December, with appropriate social distancing, of course.

As Melbourne continued to drift in and out of lockdown, it was impossible for the committee to plan for concerts. Instead, they had to turn their talents to creating COVID-Safe policies for when lockdown restrictions eased. Angela Alomes joined the committee and used her considerable IT skills to run the choir website, something she is still responsible for today. Denise Grocke, who'd worked with John Dunham previously on concert management, took on the role by herself and has continued ever since with precision and expertise, drawing on her comprehensive knowledge of the music world to the great benefit of the choir.

There were discussions on a change of rehearsal venue, given the need to take into account the recommended social distancing between choristers. When the Caulfield Indonesian Church raised its hall hire charge markedly in 2021, Holy Trinity Church in Balaclava and St Andrew's Church in Brighton were considered as alternative venues. A rehearsal was held at each venue and a survey of members decided the matter in St Andrew's' favour.

INFORMATION YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID SAFE REHEARSALS.

There will be COVID Marshalls to ensure your safety. We are required to wipe down points of contact e.g. door handles, tables & space chairs before your entry.

1. The indoor venue must be well ventilated with windows open at all times. (Fans are not recommended.)

You will need to:

2. Use Hand sanitizer (provided) at entry.

3.. We must physically distance at least 2 metres from each other. This will be marked out and chairs placed for this. We will be using a QR code to record attendance.

Otherwise it would be 4 metres spacing.

4. Short rehearsals - 1 hour only from 8pm-9pm WITH NO BREAK. We have allowed ourselves 30 minutes before rehearsal for setup & cleaning. We may be able to start earlier with practice.

5. Sing gently to avoid the spread of droplets, rather than full voice.

6. Bring your own drink bottle. No food or drink can be shared.

7. The toilets will be closed. (because of the additional cost of cleaning after each rehearsal.)

8. You will be asked to wipe down your chair after rehearsal with a wipe provided. Stacking needs to be done by 2 people only.

9. Social distancing must be maintained at all times. You will need to bring a mask.



Information for choristers during COVID

When rehearsals eventually resumed in 2021, choristers paid a weekly rehearsal fee of \$10 instead of an annual subscription. Masks were worn, chairs had to be positioned to allow two metres of spacing between choristers, everyone needed to use the QR Code on entry and a designated COVID Marshall had to check that everyone had the required green tick on their phones or verify that those not using QR codes had the requisite double vaccination certificate. Average attendance numbers at that time were between twenty and twenty-five. Prior to COVID there had been an average attendance of sixty. With no formal concerts to bring in income, costs needed to be reduced. It was decided to cancel the insurance on the Steinway piano.

In December, there was a Christmas breakup at St Andrew's, with friends and family invited to attend a Christmas singalong. A gold coin donation was asked for, and the money was then donated to Motor Neuron Disease, in memory of long-standing choir member, Cathy Pearce, who had succumbed to the disease in September. Cathy, who had served the choir well in many capacities, fundraising in particular, had been granted Life Membership in May.

The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)



The first concert in the post-COVID era was held in June 2022 at St Andrew's, when twenty-three Glen Eira choristers joined with thirty from the Bendigo Chorale to sing Vivaldi's 'Gloria' and a number of short works by Rutter, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Fauré. Christopher Cook accompanied on the organ and Lisa Anne Robinson sang 'Rejoice Greatly' from Handel's 'Messiah'. Lisa was joined by contralto Kerrie Bolton for the 'Gloria'. This concert was repeated at St Paul's Cathedral in Bendigo.

The combining of Bendigo Chorale and GECC for two performances of the same concert each year, one in Melbourne and one in Bendigo, has continued ever since, and Elena Varshavskaya's other choir, Choral Studio *Harmony* Children's Choir, regularly features in our other Melbourne concerts. Indeed, in the October 2022 concert at Glen Eira Town Hall, 'A Palette of Sound', they delighted the audience with a bracket of three songs, and joined with the GECC to sing excerpts from Rodgers & Hammerstein's 'The Sound of Music'. The rest of the programme contained a wide variety of songs from Bach and Vivaldi to Bernstein and Rutter.



Both these concerts made a healthy profit of \$900 each, enabling the Treasurer to heave a sigh of relief after the battering choir finances had taken during the COVID years.

A Christmas concert, which was held in December at Holy Trinity Church in Balaclava, made a small loss.



The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)

In 2022 Hazel Wilson was granted Life Membership for her long-standing involvement in the life and activities of the choir. Hazel had been a member since 2006 and served as President from 2008 to 2021. Our current President, Penny Paton, took over the role in 2022.



This year also saw another uniform change – to black shirts/tops and pants or skirts and red bow ties or scarves.



There were disruptions when Brighton Grammar's building project saw rehearsals move to a smaller hall at St Andrew's, and a malware attack on GECC's website and email system was something everyone could well have done without. Post-COVID there were no afternoon teas at the conclusion of concerts and the choir was no longer taking part in Glen Eira Council's ceremonies or Carols By Candlelight. But choir numbers began to increase as COVID stepped into the background, with an average attendance at rehearsals of twenty-five throughout 2022.



By the end of 2023, this attendance had risen to thirty-five and that year it was business as usual, with Rheinberger's 'Stabat Mater' and Haydn's 'Missa Brevis Sancti de Johannis de Deo' performed in Bendigo and Brighton in May/June. Hugh Fullarton provided the organ accompaniment. Elena's son, Erik Poliak, sang boy treble in Leonard Bernstein's 'Chichester Psalms' and Kate Amos sang Franz Schubert's 'Ave Maria'. John Rutter's 'Gaelic Blessing' was also performed.

The spring concert, 'Birth of the Blues', at the Glen Eira Town Hall, featured many choristers performing solos in pieces ranging from traditional gospel to Gershwin. Berta Brozgul left the audience spell-bound with her rendition of Schumann's 'Scenes from Childhood', nos 1-7, and Elena's children's choir delighted not only with their singing but also their acting in three songs. Umbrellas were raised in Lawrence's 'Listen to the Rain'!



In the Christmas concert at St Andrew's, choristers processed on stage with battery-powered candles, using these lights in a choreographed display during 'Silent Night' and many donned beanies, gloves and scarves to join in a mock snowball fight and catch snowflakes while the children's choir sang about snow. Rutter's 'Gaelic Blessing' and 'Candlelight Carol', Langlais' 'C'était à l'Heure de Minuit', Mary Val Marsh's 'Baby's Born in Bethlehem' and J S Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring' were

performed along with traditional and Australian Christmas carols with some audience participation. John Dunham and Cathy Hope both missed this concert as they were in New York taking part in the Distinguished Concerts International.

Thirty-seven GECC choristers and twenty-seven from the Bendigo Chorale joined forces in June 2024 for a huge production of Karl Jenkins' 'Requiem'. Soprano Lisa Robinson, mezzo-soprano Phoebe Paine, alto Chloe James, pianist Berta Brozgul, harpist Katia Mestrovic, percussionist Grace James, shakuhachi master Anne Norman, Geordie Walker on French horn, and violinist and treble Erik Poliak all joined with the choirs to create a stunning performance of this haunting and beautiful work. The concert opened with Lisa Robinson singing Mozart's 'Laudate Dominum' and 'Alleluia' from 'Exsultate Jubilate'. In preparation for the Jenkins concert, Denise Grocke had held extra part practice sessions prior to regular rehearsals which went a long way towards boosting choristers' confidence. The concert was a 'box office success' with \$10,500 received in ticket sales. But it was an expensive concert to produce, with costs amounting to \$7,400, but a \$3100 profit was not a bad outcome!

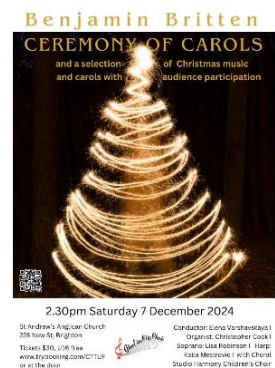


In the break between the Jenkins concert and rehearsals starting for the Christmas one, our regular soprano soloist and choral educator, Lisa Robinson, held a choral workshop for choir members and friends. Lisa is a very knowledgeable and engaging teacher and inspired those who attended the workshop to

hone their vocal technique. Two more workshops were held in 2025 and one is scheduled for October 2026.

During 2024, Treasurer John Dunham, worked very hard on updating the choir's Constitution. The changes were approved by members at a Special General Meeting in October, and meant that the choir could then apply for charitable status, which has since been granted and the choir is now a deductible gift recipient, thanks to John's considerable efforts.

Christmas 2024 was celebrated with Britten's 'A Ceremony of Carols', Bach's 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring' and assorted carols. Lisa Robinson stirred emotions with her beautiful rendition of 'O Holy Night', and Choral Studio *Harmony* Children's Choir delighted and entertained the audience with their bracket of Christmas songs.



The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)

In 2025, the Bendigo and Glen Eira choirs joined together to sing 'Music from the British Isles' in June, opening with the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's 'Messiah' and finishing with Parry's 'Jerusalem'. A reprise of some of the Jenkins 'Requiem' and works from Rutter, Britten, Stanford, Morley and Elgar, along with traditional British songs, provided the filling. Lisa Robinson performed 'Ombra mai fu' from Handel's 'Xerxes' and Rosanne Hunt played the lilting cello part in Jenkins' 'Benedictus' from 'The Armed Man – a Mass for Peace'. Other guest artists were Donna Chung (oboe), Melina van Leeuwen (harp), Robert McMillan (French horn), Grace James (percussion) and Ian Smith (recorder).



The sad news of Elena's mother's death in May meant that Elena was away in Russia for a couple of weeks, returning just in time to conduct the first concert. In her absence, Denise Grocke took up the conductor's baton to keep concert preparation moving forward, proving, yet again, what an asset she is to the choir. Not only does she prepare all the music for the choristers' folders, but she contacts soloists, coordinates rehearsals, and ensures that every aspect of concert management is covered – and can conduct the choir when needed.



Music was sourced from the other side of the Atlantic for the end-of-year performance, 'Celebrating Christmas with Music from America'. Among the spirituals and Gershwin, were the hauntingly beautiful 'Seal Lullaby' by Whitacre and Ola Gjeilo's 'The Rose'. The children's choir sang four Christmas-themed songs and the audience raised the roof of St Andrew's with two traditional carols. Rosanne Hunt wowed the crowd with a dynamic and zesty cello solo 'Julie O' by Mark Summer. The concert finished with the combined choirs singing 'Santa Claus is Coming to Town' and Gilpin's 'Why We Sing'.

In this year, the committee was grappling with storage issues as the choir had been asked to remove music and other choir materials from St Andrew's. The committee also had to develop a Child Safety Policy and a Code of Conduct for choristers and have all members sign their acceptance of the policies. Lisa Robinson's two choral workshops in 2025, delivered with the assistance of her pianist husband, Jeremy Martin, were open to the public and were fully subscribed. Committee member, Geoff Peters, had done sterling work in procuring a grant for the workshops from the Bayside City Council. Chorister numbers had increased to around forty-five by the end of the year, and two extra rehearsals were held in December as preparations began for Mozart's 'Requiem' to be performed in 2026, the choir's eightieth year.



Early rehearsals for Mozart's Requiem

And so, we reach 2026. Choir membership has now reached fifty-five, a good post-COVID recovery. At the 79th AGM held at the end of March, John Dunham was granted a very well-deserved Life Membership. John had joined the choir in 1991 and had been Treasurer for most of the years since then as well as taking on roles of Vice President and President at various times. He had been responsible for more than one update of the Constitution, had worked as Stage Manager and Concert Manager, succeeded in getting the choir charity status and had sung solos in a large number of choir concerts - not only a Treasurer but also a treasure!

Eightieth Birthday celebrations got underway at the end of May with the performances of Mozart's 'Requiem', first at St Paul's Cathedral in Bendigo, then a week later, at St Andrew's Church in Brighton with the combined choirs numbering around sixty-five voices. There had been three combined rehearsals prior to the concert, the first in Gisborne, midway between Bendigo and Brighton, in March, then one in Bendigo in April and the other in Brighton in May. Hugh Fullarton was the organist for both concerts and the soloists were soprano Lisa Robinson, mezzo-soprano Chloe James, tenor Nicholas Sheppard and bass Christian Smith. The concerts opened with two shorter Mozart pieces, 'Sancta Maria' from 'Litaniae Lauretanae', and 'Laudate Dominum' from 'Vesperae solennes de Confessore' in which Lisa sang the soprano solo. Audiences were at capacity for both venues.



The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)



St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Bendigo with Bendigo Chorale



St Andrew's Anglican Church, Brighton



At the time of writing, Glen Eira City Choir is looking forward to a September 'Soiree', where we will gather with fellow choristers, former choir members, past and present conductors, and supporters of the choir over the years. There will be a short concert by current members followed by speeches, refreshments

and cake-cutting, and a chance to view memorabilia from the choir's eight decades of existence and catch up with old friends.

Happy Eightieth Birthday, Glen Eira City Choir Inc, and a big 'Well Done' to everyone who has contributed to its success over the years, whether as a committee member, conductor, accompanist, part rep, or running a market stall, arranging advertising, serving refreshments, organising or contributing to the Trading Tables or movie nights, overseeing the website and email account, taking material to the printers, helping set-up and pack up rehearsal and concert spaces, managing the finances, helping at front-of-house, applying for council grants, chairing meetings, coordinating concerts - and above all, lending your voice to the wonder that is a community choir.

2025-2026 Committee

President – Penny Paton
Vice-president – Geoff Peters
Secretary – Rosemary Harmer
Treasurer – John Dunham
Committee Members:
Stuart Allen
Angela Alomes
Denise Grocke AO
Ali Groh

**The Glen Eira City Choir would like to acknowledge the financial support
of the Glen Eira City Council and its predecessor, the Caulfield City
Council, since 1946**



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**GLEN EIRA
CITY COUNCIL**

The Eighth Decade (2016-2026)



Glen Eira City Choir in Action

