



OUR CHOIR – 80 YEARS IN THE MAKING

The Third Decade (1966-76)



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) night 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.

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 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.
