



OUR CHOIR – 80 YEARS IN THE MAKING

The Fourth Decade (1976-86)



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.

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'.

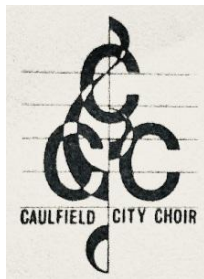
During Douglas Heywood's time with Caulfield City Choir, several new ventures were entered into. One of these was a Devonshire tea served after the middle-of-the-year concert of lighter, popular music. This became a favourite with audiences and helped fill the choir's coffers. The Christmas concert now 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. Joan Shewan took over at the piano 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.

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.
