



OUR CHOIR – 80 YEARS IN THE MAKING

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 (seen here) 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 performed 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.

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 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 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.

