



OUR CHOIR – 80 YEARS IN THE MAKING

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.

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.

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, and the choir held a celebration for her, presenting her with a sculpture in honour of this considerable achievement.

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.

