

## **KU-RING-GAI MALE CHOIR**

### **PRESIDENTS REPORT – 2007**

My fellow choristers, ladies and other gentlemen, I am pleased to present my report for 2007.

Events in 2007 were largely influenced by plans that were initiated in 2006. I refer to the proposal to produce a CD that was initiated last year. Such a decision was significant and contentious and took many months of gestation, discussion and review before the choir became committed to taking this step. Notwithstanding the disappointments in the quality of the CD produced several years ago, the committee were confident that in 2007 success would follow with a strong commitment from the choir, an excellent recording engineer in Mal Abel and a sound room of quality in the Killara Uniting Church.

It was agreed that the CD recording would be made later in the year when we would be singing at our best. This not only influenced the songs that were chosen but focused the choir on this repertoire both in rehearsal and concert performance to an extent not attempted before. Paul, our musical director, spent much time and effort into improving our singing, our ability to sing together and on pitch, to sing softly with good tone and to sing with feeling. I am sure that members will agree that this all came together in the final recording session when the choir's singing was exceptional. When you get home tonight and listen to your CD, I hope that you will all feel proud to be members of your choir.

As over 50% of the current membership have joined in the last 5 years the Committee felt that it was appropriate and timely to undertake a survey of the choir early in the year to see how the choir felt on various issues, particularly relating to a level of desire and effort to improve skills as a choir. The results showed that all choristers felt it important to improve the quality of its singing. Virtually all choristers thought it important to spend time between rehearsals to study the songs and learn the songs sufficient to give full attention to the conductor. Furthermore most members even thought it desirable to meet separately for part practice outside of rehearsals. Such a response was very heartening to the Committee in assessing the probable level of commitment of the choir to the CD and further development beyond the CD.

This question of commitment is very important when considering concert scheduling. The long-standing view that concerts should only be arranged for Tuesday evenings needs to be seriously reviewed if the choir is to continue to improve. Through the efforts of past concert co-ordinators, the itinerary of the choir has included weekend concerts at Macquarie University, Hornsby RSL Club and a third concert either at a Music Club or some other venue. As it is understandably difficult to get good audiences on winter evenings, we need to revisit the question of weekend concerts in retirement villages during the cold winter months. It is recognized that some members of the choir prefer to only put aside Tuesdays for the choir and have absented themselves from the weekend concerts or have attended reluctantly. Provided such members are few in number then the quality of sound in winter will not be significantly affected. The Buckland Springwood Sunday concert this year consisted of 20 choristers, less than half our total number. But gentlemen, even with 20 choristers, the choir performed magnificently well and were enthusiastically received by the large audience and were rewarded with a sumptuous afternoon tea.

In 2007 the choir performed in 13 concerts at retirement villages, 3 of which were on Sundays. In addition, 3 special concerts were performed by the choir; all in weekends. To round off a busy year, there were 3 recording sessions, all on Tuesdays. I personally believe that we need to perform in concerts to improve, and in winter the weekend concert is the best way forward.

A few months before the CD recording sessions began, I made a plea that members attend all rehearsals so that we can be at our peak for the CD. Almost from that day, numbers at rehearsals fell away. Given that we were in winter and there was a flu virus challenging our health, there seemed to be other considerations that were taking out Tuesdays. In my diary there is a line through every Tuesday evening and Margaret respects that commitment. I am sure that other ladies of the choir support such a commitment in respect of their husbands. I believe that if you miss a rehearsal you never catch it up. The experience of that particular rehearsal is lost forever.

Next year in April we will be travelling to Orange to join The Roland Gregory Orpheus Singers in concert. Whilst the details of the concert have yet to be finalized by the respective musical directors, the experience should help to improve our choral singing. I am hopeful that members and their ladies will so enjoy the trip that there will be a general agreement to undertake others in the future. Accommodation and other details of this trip will be provided when we meet together in February next year.

The Roland Gregory Orpheus Singers was one of the choirs that worked to revive the Male Choirs Association this year. Following your decision to join this organization, your choir has been represented at most of the meetings and gatherings organized to date. The main purpose of this group seems to be to organize a combined male choir concert, the first of which is to be held in Canberra in November next year. Our choir will be encouraged to send choristers, as it's the organizers wish to present a massed choir in the style of those put together in UK. So far our representation has shown quiet interest but not commitment.

In July we were approached by Quail Television to provide them with a record of our choir in rehearsal and in concert so that they could consider putting together a pilot of various choirs performing a range of music. Bruce Sharpham volunteered to video the choir and a DVD of quality was put together. Whilst Quail Television decided not to proceed, I believe that this DVD record produced by Bruce is a very valuable historical document of the choir and should be accordingly retained in a secure place. We are most grateful to Bruce for undertaking this work with such skill and with a minimum of fuss.

We would like to commiserate with Grace on the most unfortunate year she has had - first with illness earlier in the year and secondly with her fractured arm. Over the 5 years she has been our accompanist, we have grown to love her as a person, wonder at her piano playing and respect her technical advice on voice production. We sincerely hope that 2008 will be a better year for you Grace. We are very grateful to Beryl Potter, Norma Williams and Sumiko Yamamura who very capably filled in at short notice at rehearsals, concerts and CD recording sessions.

With the retirement of Wendy Dalton, we have been most fortunate in securing the services of Sherie Harris, Ann Finlay and Marlene Vaughan to perform as soloists for the choir in our concerts at retirement villages. The standard of their singing has been exceptional and even at the back of the choir where I am perennially put, I have been thrilled with the music. The glorious voice of Vivienne Powell and tenor Dennis Gillespie entertained us at the Hornsby RSL concert in April and Warren & Karen Fisher excelled as soloists at the Macquarie University concert. We are grateful indeed to these wonderful musicians for lifting the standard of our concerts through their performance.

Undoubtedly the most valuable member of our choir is our musical director, Dr Paul Whiting. Paul has led us with authority laced with humour, severity softened by human understanding and superior musical knowledge and talent tempered by recognition of the musical limitations of us mere mortals of the choir. The great leap forward in the quality of choral singing of our choir is largely due to the persistent and excellent guidance provided by Paul throughout the year. We are greatly indebted to, and thank Paul, for his commitment to lead us and share his great musical talent with us. Paul spent a great deal of time on matters associated with the production of the CD particularly in the studio mixing step that is so important in producing a quality product.

I would like to thank the committee for their wise counsel of all the issues brought before us and I would like to thank the choir for giving me such an easy ride throughout the year. I apologize to Terry Barrett for rarely following his advice at concerts. Like all good Secretaries, Terry gave me little slips of paper at concerts providing essential information in delivering the speech of reply by the President representing the choir. For some odd reason I always seemed to say something different, and on one occasion if you recall, I gave up trying to say anything at all.

It has been a busy year but I have enjoyed working for a choir that is made up of fine men and is growing in choral stature. A choir is a group of people that in striving for choral excellence must subdue all individuality and hone an ability to sing as one. There is no place for prima donnas in a choir where there is one absolute master, the conductor. My hope and wish for the Ku-ring-gai Male Choir is that by the end of 2008, the choir will be singing with one blended voice.

Thank you.

John Middleton