

Ku Ring Gai Male Choir

President's Report 2010

When I was considering what to include in this report, I decided that I didn't want to just give a list of concerts and other events that have happened over the year. This statistical information is included as an addendum to my report. Nor did I want to say anything about the choir's musical performance – that's for Paul to tell us about.

However, I can't avoid some reference to the Male Choirs Association concert on 14 November. Getting ready for this event did have quite an impact. Apart from the performance itself and the rehearsals on the Friday and Saturday, we had fewer Retirement Village concerts this year, but we had two additional practice sessions with Alpha Gregory. There was also an impact on our repertoire for the year, including having to relearn at least two songs that had different arrangements from the ones we'd been used to.

As for the concert itself, at the rehearsals on the Friday and Saturday just before the concert, I had the horrible feeling that we were in for a complete disaster. Wrong! In the event, the concert turned out very well indeed, and the audience certainly seemed to enjoy it immensely, even if we in the choir, and people like Paul and Grace, could tell that all wasn't perfect.

The choir did extremely well in selling tickets for the big concert. I think that, proportionately, the KMC sold more tickets than any of the other choirs taking part. Some details of the financial results of these ticket sales are included in the addendum.

What I did decide to include in this report was prompted by our first event this year - the funeral of Ted Fryer. Ted was a long-standing and very loyal member of the choir. I had thought that he was the last member who could have been one of the originals (as a returned serviceman from the Second World War) – even though Ted wasn't actually in the choir when it started in 1946. However, we still have one person who could have been an original member, and that's Ern Sharpham.

This reflection led me to think about the changes that have affected the choir over the last 64 years since it was founded and, in particular, during the past 21 years since I joined.

There are still three members of the choir who were already members when I joined - Ted and Tim Moore, and Jim Fergusson, and we've all seen quite a few changes in the past 21 years. Probably one of the most obvious changes is in membership. Lots of people have come and gone, but overall, the choir has grown. When I joined, there were about 30- 32 members and we're now pushing 50 when everyone is there.

Other changes that have occurred included different rehearsal venues; wearing our distinctive uniforms; different accompanists – and I must say we are extremely well served by Grace, as witnessed in many different ways, and not least at the last concert at Lindfield Gardens where she filled in at the last moment when Jenny Bonner became ill. We've also had two changes of conductor/musical director and again I think the choir was extremely fortunate to find Paul when we did.

We've also had changes to the sort of concerts that we've been involved in. When I joined, we sang almost exclusively at retirement villages - now we've been performing several concerts each year at other places. (The first major event was instigated very successfully by Dick Glover in 2002.) We've built on that foundation with concerts to raise funds for ourselves, as well as to support fund raising events by other charities. And we've had two events with the Orange Male Choir, as well as two major concerts with the MCAA.

Another change has been in the guest artists who join us at concerts. When I started, we had Meg Fox - who was a great entertainer, thoroughly appreciated by the audiences. She was soon joined by Wendy Dalton who sang lots of songs that were particularly enjoyed by the audiences at the retirement villages. These were the only two ladies to perform with us for many years. Now we're enjoying having other artists who bring a greater variety of music - and often a more professional approach and performance - in their parts of the programme.

There's been a change in the style of leadership. Jim Waters was a good choir master, but he wanted to, and did, run the choir virtually single-handed. When Paul took over as musical director, he made it clear that he didn't intend to become immersed in organisational aspects, so this has meant that the Executive Committee has had to assume a more active role. I want to return to this topic later.

The last thing I want to mention is our repertoire. The general style hasn't changed significantly but we have introduced many new songs, and some of the songs that appeared in our programmes 21 years ago haven't been sung for a long time. I do feel that our standard of singing and presentation have improved a lot under Paul's direction, and it's very obvious that we all need to learn our musical parts and words as soon as possible, because our performances are so much better when we all WATCH THE CONDUCTOR!

That's largely in the past. It's pretty obvious that further changes are almost inevitable, and at least some of these changes will have financial implications.

When I joined, the subscription was very low - only \$5 a year - but our outgoings were also extremely low - virtually nil, in fact. Now, our costs are much higher and many of the costs are completely outside the control of the committee or members. Next year, we'll be facing even higher costs for the rehearsal venue at St Swithun's. (Although it must be said that the increase for 2011 will not be quite as much as we had originally expected.) The hall itself is very suitable for us in its location and size. The piano doesn't seem to be too bad, and we have the very valuable facility of being able to keep our music storage cupboards in the same building. Also, the cost does seem to be comparable with similar venues. But, if anyone can identify another place that would meet our needs and can be had for a lower cost, please let a member of the Executive Committee know about it.

These extra costs will have to be met somehow. The obvious way is to increase the annual subscription. While it may not be necessary to do this immediately, we need to be aware that the subscription may have to be increased sometime in the not too distant future. That is, unless we can increase our income in some other ways.

One possible way to increase our income is to perform more fund-raising concerts for ourselves, but the times most favoured by audiences for such events tend to be at week-ends and, in the past, the choir hasn't been too keen to increase the number of week-end concerts. Also, bigger or more frequent fund-raising concerts would inevitably cause more organisational work and may well also raise other problems.

Something else that we are looking at is to produce another CD next year. The problem with producing a recording is that we incur costs before we can have any chance of making a profit. The last CD did make a good profit, but we will all have to make an effort to sell copies quickly to recoup costs and then contribute to our other expenses.

On quite another topic for change, there has been some talk about the choir becoming bigger. This does bring potential problems e.g. the need to buy more uniforms and more copies of music (more costs!). It also raises the issue of being able to accommodate the choir at some of the retirement villages – and we had a good example of that problem at the last concert at Lindfield Gardens in November 2010. If we do grow much beyond our present numbers, will there be a case for having a smaller, more select, choir at some concerts? And could a move to selecting a choir also mean that we would need to audition people for being in the concert group or joining the choir in the first place? This is something that the choir has not done before and there does seem to be a feeling against auditioning.

Finally, future changes will need people to be on the Executive Committee. At the moment, there are some people, notable Terry, John and Jim, who have been doing the same job for several years, and they would like a break. Our constitution doesn't place any limits on how long a person can hold any office position continuously. Personally, I would like to see some limits put on the length of time, but that would require a change to our constitution. I encourage everyone to think hard about taking a turn on the Committee – perhaps with a clear understanding of a commitment for a specific period – so that others can have a break.

I want to place on record my appreciation of the work done by the Executive Committee this year. Some things done by committee members are quite visible – such as organising and distributing the music parts and arranging the concert schedules. But there is also a lot of work behind the scenes and I wish to thank all members of the committee for the work they have done this year while I have been your President.

I also want to reiterate our appreciation and thanks for the way Paul has directed our efforts for another year, and I also to thank Grace for her great support at our rehearsals and concerts, as well as the liaison she does with our guest artists in preparing for the concerts. Without them, the choir would be much poorer.

To conclude – whatever changes lie ahead, let's all work towards providing a choir that gives pleasure and interest to its members and enjoyment to its audiences.

25S January 2011

Norman Lees
President 2010