

CYGNET SINGERS 35TH BIRTHDAY

Text of the historical summary written and compiled by Margot Bertoni,
Amanda Wojtowicz and Judy Younger, and read by Paddy Riley
at the Cygnet Singers' "Souvenirs" concert,
Carmel Hall, 23 June 2019.



Happy Birthday, Cygnet Singers! We are thirty-five years old this year and celebrating our birthday in the best possible way, with music and singing, with many good wishes for the future, with cake and delicious things to eat and above all, sharing this special event with each other, with friends and family, and with our wonderful audience.

With the passing of each year it is pleasant to look back on our time as a Choir, to remember the songs and the music, the many highlights we have experienced, the friendships made, the fun of rehearsals, the knowledge we have gained, the joy of singing a completed programme followed by the challenge of learning new songs to be shared with our audience at the next concert.

The songs and readings which are a part of our concert today have been chosen by everyone in the Choir by means of a voting process from a list of our favourites taken from programmes over the past ten years. They are the songs and poems that have given us pleasure, which have special memories for us and which we sing with enthusiasm and enjoyment. They are our 'Souvenirs'. We hope you will enjoy them too.

So come with us while we reminisce a little on the past, on our history, a few of our special songs and memories and some of the things that Cygnet Singers have achieved over the past thirty-five years.

In June, 1984 when Derek Nichols persuaded a group of people from Cygnet and the Huon, many with no prior musical experience, that singing together was fun and at the same time could make a significant contribution to the community, no one could have imagined the extent to which Cygnet Singers would develop, nor what would be achieved.

The very first production was a Music Hall performance in November of that year, as part of the celebrations marking Cygnet's 150th year anniversary. This was the beginning of a tradition of participation in community events that continues to this day.

Alan Cato became Musical Director in 1987, by which time Cygnet Singers had established a reputation for their entertaining concerts, as well as for singing

with other groups. About this time a small group was established within the Choir called The Cygnet Chorale, which worked with Mary Coatman to develop a repertoire of concert items and core programmes for community events.

From a rather humble but enthusiastic start and under a variety of Music Directors, the Choir expanded rapidly during the years that followed and began to meet the exciting challenges of a range of musical experiences.

A successful, fully staged performance of John Gay's 'The Beggar's Opera', some songs from oratorio and opera in conjunction with the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra and an 'Old Tyme' Music Hall were followed by excerpts from Handel's 'Messiah' and Mozart's 'Requiem'. From that time the wheel has turned full circle as we will again be performing those wonderful choruses from Handel's 'Messiah' at the end of this year in the Cygnet Town Hall, with a guest soloist from the Conservatorium of Music and a String Quartet of young musicians who are part of the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra. This continues Cygnet Singers' tradition of providing performance opportunities where possible for a wide range of young musicians, both soloists and chamber ensembles.

It is always a joy to combine with other choirs and to get to know people with similar interests, both from Tasmania and from other parts of Australia. From 1994 to 2001 Cygnet Singers joined with The Friends' Singers and Spring Bay Singers, under the direction of Rod Grosvenor, in an ambitious series of Three Choirs Festivals, which introduced the Choir to the enjoyment of participating in larger choral works. When Dianne O'Toole became Music Director in 2001, a conscious effort was made to extend these links with both choral and instrumental groups.

In 2003 Cygnet Singers experienced a particular highlight singing with combined choirs in the TSO's Concert Series performance of Finlandia in the Hobart Federation Concert Hall. The Choir has sung with the Lindisfarne Riverside Arts Club Choir, the LA Singers, the Chillingham Choir from NSW, Loose Canon Chamber Choir and Southern Voices, who have invited us to join them again as guest choir at their 20th birthday celebrations later this year. In April this year, we joined the visiting Sydney Male Choir as their guests for a concert held at Ranelagh.

We have invited many guest artists to perform with us, all of whom have added variety and enjoyment to our concerts - the Tasmanian Youth Choir, the Channel and Huon Ukelele Mob and the Swan Quintet, to name only three. In 2008 Christmas Carol services had a delightful addition to the event with the playing of the Hobart Handbell Choir. We have enjoyed listening to instrumentalists playing flute, oboe, harp, double bass, cello, piano, percussion, recorders and a rousing timbrel group with energetic moves and perfectly co-ordinated tambourines. At the end of 2017 we travelled to the Tasman Peninsula and joined with The Peninsula Singers, sharing a happy day of music with them.

We have also enjoyed a close connection with the Huon Valley Concert Band over many years, working with them at community events and sharing joint concerts. In 2009 a concert with the Band was entitled 'A Celebration of Music in the Valley', neatly summing up the purpose and pleasure of both groups.

Over the years Cygnet Singers have participated in concerts and other events as often as possible in aid of number of worthy causes. We have supported fund raising efforts following bush fires on the Tasman Peninsula in 2013 and the recent ones affecting the Huon Valley this summer. We have sung for senior citizens and at nursing homes, including our own Eldercare (now Huon Regional Care) at Franklin. We have sung in sunshine and also in pouring rain to encourage the walkers in The Relay for Life, and have welcomed new citizens to our Valley with songs at the Australia Day Awards Ceremonies.

For Cygnet Singers' 30th birthday, five years ago, we recorded a beautiful CD called 'The Day's Turn', produced in the Huon Valley by Mike Raine. The money raised was donated to The Hush Foundation, which provides music to help reduce stress and anxiety for children undergoing treatment in hospitals throughout Australia.

At our 30th birthday concert, we were privileged to sing before a very special guest, The Honourable Kate Warner, Governor of Tasmania. Three of our original founding members, Marj Gordon, Adrian Hunt and Barbara Harvey, were still singing with the Choir on this occasion and were part of a small ceremony where a cake celebrating the continuity of the Choir was cut and shared by everyone present.

We have sung at Church services including Lessons and Carols at Christmas,

have been a part of the popular Huon Valley Theatre Company Christmas Carol Concert, and have supported Le Weekend in Cygnet. The Choir also participates in workshops and performances each year for The Festival of Voices in Hobart and the Australian National Choral Association.

Audiences over the years have enjoyed several occasions on which we have had great fun dressing up in costume. Who could forget our own tap dancing star, Mavis Taylor, dressed in silver lamé boots and wings as The Angel Gabriel, Barry Purkiss as the mischievous Little Jack Horner complete with plum on thumb, and Sister Martina in roles as diverse as the coy Little Miss Muffett and the serene Virgin Mary!

The Choir has continued to expand its repertoire to include a wide range of music of every genre with songs dating from the 16th century up to the present time - sacred and religious music, Christmas carols, art songs, opera choruses, folk music, songs from musical theatre, love songs, novelty songs, nursery rhymes and children's songs. And in a number of languages apart from English, including Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Welsh and Zulu.

Our Music Director expects a high standard of performance, but her enthusiasm and expertise are combined with a great sense of humour which often results in imaginative and sometimes quirky programme choices; everything from a chanted weather forecast to a sung recipe for 'Shoo Fly Pie' and a song incorporating the names of all the places in the Valley where members of the Choir live.

As we celebrate our 35th birthday, we look forward with great anticipation to our 40th and beyond. 'Life begins at forty', or so we are led to believe, in which case we can expect a future filled with even more music, fun, friendship and bigger and better performances. We will keep in mind a recent quote that says, 'singing in a choir is cheaper than therapy, healthier than drinking and more fun than working out!'

We cannot conclude this summary of our 35 years without acknowledging and thanking all of our choir members, both past and present, for their enthusiasm and love of singing, our many volunteer helpers who support and assist the

Choir with the running of each and every concert and our Committee members who work behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the Choir in many different ways. For each of us the Choir is a special group to which we belong, where everyone feels welcome and included and every rehearsal and concert is an inspiring and enjoyable experience. And of course, a very big thank you to you, our audience, for your valued and continued support and for the pleasure it gives us to see you each time at our concerts.

The choir currently comprises more than sixty people who are drawn together by a love of singing but whose musical knowledge varies considerably. We are fortunate to have both our Music Director, Dianne O'Toole and our accompanist, Dianne van Tienen. Together they are a formidable team, without whom the wheels that keep our Choir happily in motion would cease to turn as smoothly as they do. Di O'Toole has many years' experience in music education and performance and has been guiding, teaching and encouraging the Cygnet Singers since she became Music Director eighteen years ago.

Di van Tienen has been accompanying the Choir for the last 34 of its 35 years, a truly amazing achievement. Her calm and reassuring presence at the keyboard gives us all confidence and keeps us singing in tune and 'on the bright side of the notes!' Members of the van Tienen family have been involved with the choir since its inception and during the late 1990s, Ben van Tienen was the Choir's accompanist for a period of time. This remarkably talented young musician has composed and arranged music especially for the Choir that has a very special place in our repertoire, including the song 'Sailing' which is a part of today's concert programme.

In compiling this brief outline of the story of Cygnet Singers, only a few of the concerts and a few of the numerous choirs and artists with whom we have shared our celebrations and our growth have been mentioned but there have been many others and apologies are offered to anyone we may have missed. Every contribution, every collaboration is of equal importance and all have added greatly to the music, to our pleasure, to the success of our concerts and to the enjoyment of our audience.

Before we enjoy afternoon tea together, we would like to end our concert today with one more song – a song which is dedicated to you, our audience here

today, and to audiences who have supported Cygnet Singers through the years. We thank you for coming with us on this journey and sharing some of our special memories. We hope that the heartfelt wishes expressed in the words of the gentle and beautiful 'Irish Blessing' will be with each and every one of you – 'until we meet again'.

23 June, 2019