

Issue no.42 September 2010

Amici news

The newsletter of The Amici Singers
The Amici Singers is a Registered Charity No.277766

Reflections on the Summer Concert at Dunton Church

Dear Douglas,

Thank you very much for your email. Yes it was a great concert and it really was wonderful to see both choirs singing together and with the finale at the end...next time we have to plan for an encore!

The thought that struck me, was that music has no age, and singing especially. With your voice as your instrument you could sing as long as you have breath. I hope that the experience of having sung with the Amici's will give the girls inspiration to see singing as a lifelong gift. I know that the girls did enjoy themselves and I will try to get some feedback for you too when I see them next.

I am glad that you were happy. I was concerned about the lack of the older girls, but feel that these girls did themselves proud and this ebb and flow of school choirs is an opportunity for other girls to shine and develop (and something that I will just have to get used to and ensure that I create opportunities for the younger girls).

I have taken a few photos which I will send on to you so you could pass them on to the right people but I won't be able to do that just yet as it is one of those very busy weeks for me...I will try for the weekend.

I know that they will remember and reflect on their experience including the orange moon which was quite spectacular...

Next time we will organise the bus to pick us up later so we can have more time mingling at the end. (Grumpy driver!)

From my position it was really great to see the conductors in full flow...great!!!! And the Amici's are a great group of women. I hope we do get to work together again in the future.

Best wishes,

Lyn Newell (Deputy Head and Manager of the Maria
Fidelis School Gospel Choir)

*A metronome is a vertically challenged person
who lives in the city.*

Douglas, you got there before me!! I just wanted to thank you so much for "enabling" me to take part in the concert!! I really thought the Corn Exchange was my last, and that was pretty good but Saturday evening waswell!!!!!!!!!!!! I'm speechless!!!!!!yes.really!!!!!!!!!!!!..... I do hope I wasn't too much of a nuisance. I tried not to be, and Doreen, Anne and Joan were wonderful. I felt so cared for It was great talking to the Maria Fidelis folk. Yes of course it was me who told them about their French émigré connections. I'm surprised they didn't know Yes, what an audience! So many ex Amicis dotted around in it!! Again thank you for so many years of music making, remembering not only Amicis but your visits to Haynes School, the Child Education concerts, even the one at Shefford, which Marion Roberts remembers as well..... do you?!!..... Almost half my long life time!!..... With much love Barbara Sunderland

Dear Douglas,

A big thank you to you too for making it possible for us to have such a great day. I really found those kids and their achievement inspiring, and Karen a very special lady. I'm very much looking forward to us being able to go down and sing with them sometime soon.

I would love to get some of that music into our village church! What a difference it would make.

I wish you and Carole a very restful and refreshing summer break and look forward to September.

My very best wishes, Sally Lawman

Dear Douglas,

Thank you for your email. It is always so helpful to get feedback from you and I'm glad it went so well. As you've often said - we are only as good as our last performance so I'm always mindful of and enormously grateful for any advice you share with us. It was interesting to learn how you grade the choir.

I've enjoyed the term thoroughly and what better way to end than with last night's concert. I think we sang all my favourites last night (I've never found one I haven't loved) and I'm always floating back to America when we sing *Shenandoah*. My friend was in the audience last night and said how enjoyable it was. I just can't wait till September - there's so much to look forward to! Thanks to the Amicis my hobby has turned into a real passion!

With very best wishes

Karen Love

PS: Just wanted to let you know that I have just had feedback to say how much my friends, who had never been to one of our concerts before, enjoyed the concert last night and they too would have loved an encore of "Chatter with the Angels" - Excellent!



for your **DIARY**

AMICI DIARY DATES

2010

Thursdays - 2 September – 9 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday 9 October

CD recording 1.30-6.00pm (bring tea-time snack

Sunday 10 October

Car Boot Sale. Please bring goods for sale by Thursday 7 October or, at the very latest, to the recording on Saturday 9 October

Saturday 4 December

Christmas concert with Gamlingay Village College Choir at Gamlingay Village College

Rehearsal 2.00-5.00p.m.

Concert 7.00pm

Wednesday 8 December

Carol Concert for Banardo's at St. John's Smith Square

Thursday 9 December

There will be an extra rehearsal as we will not start back until 13 January. This is because the church is needed on 6 January for 12th night celebrations.

2011

Thursdays - 13 January – 14 April

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday 26 February

Rehearsal at Trinity Methodist for USA choir

10.00am-12.00noon and 1.00-3.00pm.

Please bring your own packed lunch

7.30pm Amici dinner at John O'Gaunt

Thursday 21 April – Sunday 1 May (arrive in UK 2 May)

10th tour of USA

Thursdays 5 May – 30 June

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Thursday 19 May

AGM then rehearsal at Trinity Methodist

NB: Start time will be 7.30pm

Thursdays 1 September – 1 December

Rehearsals at Trinity Methodist

Saturday 3 December

Christmas concert Venue tba.

Summer Concert Special thanks

Dear Beverly,

I want to thank you and all the committee for arranging such a wonderful concert last evening. What a fantastic audience! I thought we sang really well (not sure what Douglas thought!) and the girls' choir was very moving and thoroughly enjoyable. Have a lovely summer break! I look forward to joining the Amicis once again in September.
Love Doreen

from Beverly

I would also like to add my thanks to you all, and some in particular, for their help with the concert on Saturday. A particular thank you to Christina Burt and her family for their help at the tea in the village hall, even calling extra family members to help with the clearing up at the end, it was a tight schedule to get everything done, hall locked up - had to wait a while for Karen to do her hair! - and be back for the start of the concert! But we made it.

Also to Ronnie for purchasing the refreshments and having them delivered to the Church, and all with a bad back! Ibuprofen is a wonderful thing.

As we are becoming to expect, Pat with lightning speed put together the accounting so that we are clear how much money went or is going where from the money raised.

Where would we be without our publicity officer/ door person? George did a wonderful job publicising the concert and organising the seating etc. With such a wonderful turnout, the logistics were complicated!

A special thank you to Douglas and Carole. Douglas was there early on Saturday morning, planning to help with moving pews, fortunately this had already been done by the church members, but there were other movements to be made. Also, what an experience he provided for us all. All the hard work composing, planning and bringing it all together has given us one of life's rich experiences. As they always say, behind a successful man....., which brings me to Carole. Behind the scenes she is not only designing and printing tickets and posters, but also supporting the planning of the event quietly oiling the wheels.

Although looking forward to a relaxing summer, I'm already looking forward to us all meeting together again in September and working on the new music Douglas will have prepared for us. Have a good summer Kind regards
Beverly

Dear Douglas,
 How good it was to hear that you considered last night's concert 'lovely'. I would certainly agree with you!! One of my guests (who is actually a neighbour) put a note through my door today whilst I was out asking when the next concert is - she had apparently thoroughly enjoyed it and can't wait till the next one.
 It was also good to hear you considered most of our singing was at the top of the second division. (The only thing is when you speak of divisions I think of football!! Ugh!!) I think you have said that before so it's good to know we can still be there. We wouldn't be there if it wasn't for you Douglas so thank you and thank you again.
 I hope you and Carole have a great summer too.
 Best wishes to you both,
 Jenny (Baglin)

Hi Douglas
 Excellent concert on Saturday; a feast of music thoroughly enjoyed by my Mum and me!
 It was a good variety of musical styles certainly.
 The Amicis have such a unique sound and quality and once again the Elgar and *Shenadoah* were the highlights for me!
 It was interesting to hear the Somerset collection in comparison to the Bedfordshire songs; some similarities and some contrasts!
 As for the Maria Fidelis they were outstanding! Awesome, inspiring and so full of energy!
 So we had a great night out!
 Best wishes
 Anne Wright
 (the accompanist of St Mary's Singers. The mention of the Bedfordshire Songs refers to the *Bedfordshire Folk Song Suite* that I wrote for St Mary's Singers which was performed in their Summer concert the following week-end)

I thoroughly enjoyed myself yesterday and wish we had done an encore of *Chatter* ..for a moment I thought it was going to happen! Best wishes
 Denise

Some 'front of house' comments

Dear Douglas,
 You are no doubt inundated with e-mails today....so here's another. Went to Church this a.m. Saw Clair Short's daughter (STM) and asked after her Mum - doing very well - she went to a FANTASTIC concert in Dunton last night. "Glad she enjoyed it" yes, it was marvellous, terrific -" I know, I was in it"! My West Indian friend of 40 years was very moved and joined me in chatting to the girls afterwards - some did not know that "countryside" existed or houses with gardens - all living in high rise flats. She elicited their origins by asking where their grandparents came from - Nigeria, Sudan, Algeria, etc all very diverse. I caught one girl running her finger over a stone window-ledge and looking at it, then doing it again. It's not dirt, it's age I told her and she grinned.
 Congratulations to you all on the organizing side, a lovely event.
 Barbara Bunce

Dear Douglas
 Thank you for your kind words. I enjoy what I do for the Amicis. They are truly a 'great bunch of Ladies' who seem to have found the secret of being serious about their music and having fun at the same time. The concert was a great success and you have every right to be proud of the Amicis
 It was a packed house. I only had to let 2 people in at half price!!
 Regards and best wishes to you and Carole
 George

Dear Carole and Douglas,
 I really enjoyed hearing the choirs sing on Saturday night. You all worked very hard to rehearse the lovely songs. You are all very talented and have beautiful voices.
 Thank you for the tee shirt. I will try to wear it when I help at Front of House. Have a lovely summer.
 Best wishes
 Gail (one of George's front of house team)

Dear Douglas,
 Thank you for yet another wonderful concert!
 I really appreciated having the folk song suite cut into two parts; ten songs are rather taxing for my poor knees! And as I love all of the folk songs, I could enjoy them to the full.
 Many thanks for inviting The Maria Fidelis School Gospel Choir, they were truly inspiring, giving us real hope for the future. Of course they are so fortunate to have Karen Gibson to lead them. What a fireball of inspiration! I loved her warming up session, but don't think I could physically respond!
 Best wishes to you and Carole for a successful summer. Love to you both.
 Doreen

Dear Douglas
 Thank you so much for last night; it did have a touch of classic Amici-ness about it. Lovely to end our first 'Trinity year' with such a special concert.
 I thought it was rather moving to see the reaction of the children from Maria Fidelis. They came into church looking somewhat stunned, but as Carole and I were reflecting, walking back to the cars afterwards, arriving at Dunton was probably quite a culture-shock - and to be confronted by a bunch of white (mostly middle-aged++) women in green polo shirts, singing Elgar, must have compounded that feeling. However, music has such a potent power to break barriers; it was really lovely that they did relax and realise how much we appreciated them too (a good tea helped as well!)
 Also, Trevor was such a joy. His improvisation for "Chatter with the Angels" was stunning and the session with Vaughan (?) at the end was brilliant!
 Sad that's one's over...but lovely there's more to come.
 Thank you so much again for making it possible for us to have the joy and privilege of singing together.
 Much love
 Elizabeth

LATEST NEWS ABOUT MARIA FIDELIS SCHOOL GOSPEL CHOIR

Maria Fidelis Convent School Gospel Choir News

September 2010

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your words of encouragement since watching our win on *Songs of Praise* earlier this year when we won the BBC Senior School choir of the Year 2010. We were overwhelmed by and grateful for the support that we received. We collated all the good wishes we received and shared them with the girls, their families and the school community. It was very humbling to motivating to realise that our singing really does touch and inspire people and we are hope to continue to be able to do this. It was also very encouraging and helped the girls realise what they can achieve through dedication and hard work. You may have realised the choir loves singing and performing gospel music and is like a big family; it enables girls from all year groups to sing praises, learn and grow together. As a result of being members of this choir our girls have learned to aspire for excellence in all aspects of life and education. They have developed their capacity for teamwork, leadership and a positive attitude to face challenge; respect and honour for themselves and others. They are good ambassadors for the school and for young people. Through their passion and enjoyment of singing gospel music they demonstrate that young people are capable of achieving excellence.

MFGC has had a very busy and successful year. Performances have included Catholic Children's Society and the Catholic Association for Racial Justice at Westminster Cathedral; the Hyatt Churchill, Marylebone; the US ambassador's residence for Martin Luther King Day.

Our highlight has undoubtedly been winning BBC *Songs of Praise* Senior School Choir of the Year Competition 2010 which has opened many opportunities for the choir.

We were invited to perform with the Amici Singers in Dunton, Bedfordshire, to sing at the Business in the Community Awards and to perform as a guest choir at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, Wales.

We are also very privileged and honoured to have been chosen by the Catholic Education Service of England and Wales to sing for His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during his state visit to the UK in September. We will be the only secondary school singing at the education event, *The Big Assembly*, where we will sing from our own repertoire and lead the congregational singing for the participants; 3,000 young people from schools from across the United Kingdom. As you can imagine this is an amazing and exciting opportunity and also a great responsibility.

We are featured in two more BBC *Songs of Praise* programmes. The first, a programme celebrating involvement in the Papal visit was screened 12 September on BBC1 at 5.30pm. We also sang live on Premier Radio in the morning. The second programme will be screened on 17th October for *Children in Need*. We hope you will be able to watch and listen.

The Papal visit, including *The Big Assembly*, was broadcast live by the BBC, ITV and Sky, and was also streamed on the papal visit website: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/>

The Big Assembly was at 10.15 on Friday 17 September.

On behalf of the choir and Karen Gibson our conductor, I would like to thank you once again for your words of encouragement and support. I hope our news is of interest to you and that you will be able to continue to follow us on our journey.

Yours sincerely,

Lyn Newell

Assistant Headteacher, Maria Fidelis Convent School FCJ

Vibrato is used by singers to hide the fact that they are on the wrong note.

A conductor is someone who is adept at following many people at the same time.

Q: How many choir directors does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Nobody knows. Nobody ever watches the choir director.

Q. How many sopranos does it take to change a light bulb?
A. Four--one to change the bulb and three to pull the chair out from under her.

Philippa's and Christina's visit to Guatemala in the summer break

We arrived in Guatemala City on the 29th July after what felt like endless travelling. We could hardly believe it was still the same day, but of course, with the time difference, it was! We were glad when we reached Antigua and our hotel! The first day (30th) was spent unwinding from the long journey. We had an opportunity to visit the market, and do some shopping. In a team of 5 girls this was undoubtedly a good opportunity!

In the afternoon we paid a short visit to the disabled hospital, Hermano Pedro. This is the "best" facility that the Guatemalan's have. People say if their children are born with any disability, "never mind, send them to Hermano Pedro." we didn't have time to do much more than look on that day, but we returned later on in the trip.

The following day (31st) July, we were taken to meet Thelma, who has a ministry for adults with learning disabilities. A local pastor called Mephy was teaching 5 of these men to run and compete in a race with everyone else. We had a wonderful time sitting with the parents of these men and getting to know Thelma, Mephy and his family.

The Sunday morning 1st August saw us sitting in Thelma's church for half of the service, until we had been introduced. Thelma was keen for us to be there because she would like to organize a workshop for her church in the future. Then we took a quick exit and scooted off to Mephy's church where we did a workshop on how to include people with disabilities in their church and community.

We started by introducing the team members. Hannah is a youth worker in her church which has a lot to do with people with disabilities, and is also a sports coach. Marie and her Daughter Lindsey are Occupational Therapists. Christina and Philippa have been best friends since Christina was born 18 years ago. She will be going to Oxford Brookes University this year to study music. Philippa is 21 years old and have been blind since birth. Christina gave the greatest example of how inclusion can just become a way of life, because she has naturally always included Philippa in everything. Philippa gave her testimony and experience of growing up as a blind Christian in a sighted world. We also did some parachute activities with the group, including showing how a bible story could be taught using it.

The people at Mephy's church said they enjoyed the workshop very much and that it gave them useful and practical ideas to use when we left.

For the next 3 days, 2nd 3rd and 4th August, we were at New Life School, half way up a volcano in a little village called Santa Maria de Jesus. This was a school Marie and Philippa had visited on the trip last year. There are 80 students there, all with learning or physical disabilities of varying degrees. It is run by Judy and Amy. They demonstrate God's love in an amazing way, not only running the school, but doing great work in the community as well. We were able to spend time with the teachers, Marie Hannah and Lindsey giving them practical tips about how to help some of the students who had more unusual behavioural problems to cope with. We also spent time with some of the children. Last year the parents of a blind girl with Cerebral Palsy

had come to our workshop for the parents at New Life. After meeting them last year Philippa was delighted to find that the young girl Yamalin, had started in the kindergarten class. It was a joy to spend time with her and get to know her.

During our time there, a mother with a baby who had hydrocephalus came to the school. She bought the baby to Amy and Judy because she was very ill. The shunt, which had been put in soon after her birth, had not worked. This meant that her head was 56cm round, but her face and body were tiny even though she was 6 months old. It was the mother's first child, and her husband had abandoned her when the child was born. The baby was suffering now and was too weak to move much. Mum asked us to pray that the Lord would take her home so that she wouldn't suffer anymore. It was one of the hardest and happiest moments in our lives. It was so sad, and yet a privilege to be there and a joy to know that the God, who had bought this mother to that decision, had given us all a certain hope of life after death. The words of the hymn Blessed Assurance were so appropriate for that occasion that we stood by the door and sang them, before leaving to give mum and baby some time alone. None of us expected the child would survive the night, but the last we heard before we left Guatemala was that she was improving slightly.

Judy took us to 2 schools while we were with her. One was a Christian school. They started off with the wrong attitude, saying that their building didn't allow them to accept disabled students since it was inaccessible. However after we explained and demonstrated that it wasn't necessarily the building that was the main stumbling block, but peoples attitudes, and showed them that change is not always needed, sometimes adaptation is enough, we saw a definite change of heart. At the end of our session, the head master sat down and gave them a long talk about changing their attitude in that school. He said that in future they would accept disabled students.

The next school was a bit more challenging. Since Through the Roof is a Christian charity, we give the biblical basis of disability everywhere we go. Teamed up with parachute bible stories, action songs, and Philippa's testimony, it is a very Christian based programme. However, at this school, we were asked not to talk about religion any more after giving the biblical basis. A bit of a hard task since Philippa still had to give her testimony. Philippa said, "I can't even give my experience of being a blind person without mentioning God. He is my life, and therefore I can't separate him from It." so after a prayer with the team, she stood up and said that, and said that she made no apologies for mentioning God.

The next day we were with Steve from Love the Child in San Lucas. He took us back to Hermano Pedro, this time to spend some time with the young adult men. We did parachute activities with them, and just spent time with them. Steve asked Philippa to sing to them, and after a few seconds wondering what she could sing off by heart, she sang Seek Ye First The Kingdom of God. This proved to have been God's choice, since hallelujah is the same in English and in Spanish, and the boys were able to join in.

In the afternoon we enjoyed visiting the children at the

orphanage. Some children, who had been there last year, were still there. Including Hannah, a 13 year old girl with Brittle bone syndrome, who is very small, but talks fluently in English and Spanish. It was very special to see her again, and to spend time with the children. The baby who Philippa held last year called Diego had been reunited with his family, after a year of being separated from them by an illegal adoption, which was wonderful to learn.

Friday 6th August was our most hectic day. We were taken to America Latina School for training teachers, and did 3 2-hour workshops with 30 students at a time. This was exhausting, but rewarding as we could see some of the students really taking on board what we were saying.

Our last 2 days in Guatemala were spent with Steve. This time we went to 2 churches on the Saturday, one in a squatter's village, which was in a garage. It is always amazing to see how in the most unexpected places God will bring together his people to worship him and help each other. The second church was more traditional. We had a group of about 18 young people, and again they said that they found our ideas useful. Sunday was spent at the church with the deaf ministry, which we went to last year. It was nice to see a couple who Marie and Philippa remembered from last time and learn how they were getting on. There were a lot of people at the workshop, and we received good feedback. We were able to stay for the service too. In the evening we were taken on a spontaneous visit to an English speaking church. We were all ready to sit back and listen to the service and relax, when Philippa was asked to give her testimony and both she and Christina were asked to sing. We sang *The Lord's my shepherd*. Nothing could have been better to end our trip on than the lovely service we enjoyed there.

It is such a wonderful and humbling privilege to do God's work, and we hope to revisit Guatemala in the future to see his ongoing works with the amazing people in that country.

Q. How many second sopranos does it take to change the light bulb?

A. The whole section; one to go up the ladder, and the rest to stand around and say, "Isn't that a bit high for you, dearie?"

The choir soloist was practicing in the church by the open window. After an hour or so of singing, she stepped outside for a breath of fresh air and noticed the gardener doing some weeding in the bed of roses nearby.

"How did you like my execution?" the soloist haughtily asked.

The gardener replied, "I'm all in favour of it."

Some tips on how to get the **BEST** out of **YOUR VOICE**

- You can abuse your voice by frequently clearing your throat or coughing. You can overcome some of these problems by drinking water, swallowing slowly and yawning to relax the throat. Gently humming will help you feel the sensation of vocal resonance
- If you have children, a partner, neighbour, in-laws, out-laws, the tax man etc who annoys you don't yell or scream at them. Try to remain calm and relaxed and address whoever accordingly. If you need to attract attention clap hands, sing a comfortable 'Ah' or blow a whistle but don't shout!
- In rehearsal do not try to sing louder than the person you are sitting next to. It should never be a competition. So know your limits about how loud or quiet you can sing, and how high or low you can sing. Some people say that if you cannot sing a high note quietly you should not be singing it at all and there is a great deal of truth in that.
- When breathing in don't tighten the upper chest and raise the shoulders. Make sure that the neck and throat is relaxed. Posture is all important and your abdomen and rib cage must always be in a position to move freely. Your body should always be in alignment and relaxed so that breathing can be as natural as possible
- When the melody goes up and down do not copy the music by moving your head up and down accordingly. Think that your head is filled with helium and keep it nicely balanced and in place without unnecessary movement.
- In rehearsal hold your music up. Do not place it in your lap so that your head moves to look down which will restrict and tighten the throat which will cause poor breath control and tiredness in the throat and body.
- When speaking don't use a low-pitched monotone tone. Make it varied and interesting, allowing the vocal pitch to vary
- Breathe evenly when talking and don't carry on squeezing the last drop of breath out of yourself.
- If you are attending a sports event don't scream out if your hero/heroine wins or scores etc. Cheer by all means but cheer within the limits of your vocal power
- If you are going to speak in public, don't be proud and refuse to use a microphone. Practise what you have to say to avoid those 'ums' and 'ahs.'
- Don't use the voice extensively or vigorously if you are ill. Remember that your body is ill, and that includes your voice, so rest
- Do not whisper thinking you are saving your voice. You are not, as whispering 'slams' the vocal cords together and can do even more harm
- Try to avoid polluted air, cigarette smoke, perfumes, after shave etc and beware of alcohol and caffeine which are diuretics and tend to make you dehydrated