

# INVESTIGATING THE COMMUNITY CHOIR

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The research and written material presented in this thesis is my own original work, and has not been  
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## Chapter One Introduction

The process of industrialisation has systematically eroded a sense of belonging in a society which primarily views people as part of a market economy, rather than individuals. Consequently, there has been an increasing alienation from ways of cultural and musical participation which traditionally had been intimately embedded in a community way of life that is dependent on relationships rather than just the trade of artefacts.

Fuller (1983) cites leading British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott in describing cultural expression as a construct specific to humans, arising from an unnaturally extended childhood where there is complete dependence on the mother. In adulthood culture is experienced as a sustaining rich symbolic life which also acts as an antidote to the disconnection often felt by people in western society. The biology of humans differs from that of other animal species in that humanity creates culture as an extension of the symbolic relationship initially shared with the mother. A child believes in its omnipotence and inhabits an imagined world where there is no separation of the subjective experience from objective reality. The child uses symbolic objects to sustain an imagined life during the transition phase of this separation and it is argued that the aesthetic dimension of cultural expression is a direct response to this encroaching 'reality principle'

*...no human being is ever free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality...this intermediate area as the location of cultural experience...provides redemption from the insult of the Reality Principle (Fuller 1983:16).*

Although musical play is an aspect of this aesthetic of cultural expression, it is a common feature of western societies that occasions to play diminish with the transition from childhood to adolescence with the requisite graduation into adulthood and its associated economic preoccupations (Lohrey 1997). A capitalist society does not predicate that the individual collaborate to survive, rather all indicators point to the need to compete and eliminate the adversary seen in the rise of commercial reality television programs driven

by this agenda, for example Australian Idol, Big Brother, The Block, Survivor and The Weakest Link.

The opportunity for the ordinary citizen to creatively engage meaningfully in musical cultural life is severely limited, although ironically technology has provided a forum for those willing to engage with this medium to promote messages which are counter cultural and subversive to a modern malaise of alienation and disempowerment (Eyerman 2002). It remains unclear whether this new wave of technological engagement allows for genuine contribution to cultural dialogue or whether it too will eventually be controlled by a diminishing number of powerful players, disengaging the ordinary citizen in the process.

The Western economic system manufactures music where performing artists are elevated above the masses as ‘stars’ required to sell records in commercial deals in order to maintain success and relevancy. Many people in industrialised countries believe they cannot sing because of this inescapable and mostly unfavourable comparison made with personalities promoted as superior and extraordinary beings. However, there is anthropological evidence which supports the premise that ‘all pre-literate peoples engaged in musical activities’ and that ‘music is an innate and universal ability’ (Bailey and Davidson 2002).

It has been demonstrated (Unwin, Kenny and Davis 2002; Rix 2004) that group singing can alleviate social isolation delivering psycho-physiological benefits which act as an antidote to the alienation that often accompanies modern western life. In Western culture art is elevated above the masses and therefore places “the artist in an exclusive world – a world which can usually only be observed in a museum, gallery or concert hall. Because it does not serve a community or a tradition, such art need not be responsible to any community or tradition,” whereas in societies such as African traditional cultures individuals are selected to develop mastery of a given skill which serves a community purpose rather than for personal hubris (Barnwell 1992:56).

The choir serves a community purpose in western society and parallels can be made with non western traditions which view group singing as an expression of social balance and harmony. Choir repertoire generally expresses music reliant on diversity in harmony and rhythm and can therefore be viewed as a metaphor for creating a whole sound made up of differing individual parts (Barnwell 1992). The black gospel tradition has influenced the growing interest in *A Cappella* style of singing songs complex in harmonies and rhythms where expression is robust and energetic, rather than controlled and restrained. This style of singing draws from the spirituals; anonymous songs sung by slaves who utilised the songs of their Christian oppressors to encode meanings of escape and freedom (Wright and Edward 2002).

Community choirs draw from a repertoire steeped in Christian tradition which can signify extemporal, non-specific spiritual analogies of release from psychological burdens. Community singing in the west has conventionally been a place to “express unconditional love, of being free from resentment and recrimination, from the burdens of history or anxieties about the future: of being, simply, and for the moment, free” (Lohrey 1997: 182). Community choirs drawing from these historic and cultural foundations can communicate messages of transcendence to those participating as either member or listener (Unwin, Kenny and Davis P 2002).

### **Research Aims**

Community singing appears to be a modern growing phenomenon (Tattam 2003). This study is interested in the reasons why people choose to join community choirs and why they sing at all.

The areas under investigation include the personal, social and educational aspects of community choir activity. Linked to this is the investigation about the level of musical ability which is necessary for a group of people to begin a community choir. It is apparent from the research in this area that this growing trend of musical expression in the Australian population is being activated by a level of musical engagement accessible to all sectors of the community, and that the rewards are more ethereal than easily quantifiable.

The personal aspect of belonging to a community choir under scrutiny looks at the play/fun, empowerment, health and spiritual areas of community choir life; the social incorporates community, political and cultural perspectives; and the educational views enquire into issues such as musical training and technical skill development.

The study looks into the reasons why people sing, as this is an activity which in modern industrial western societies has largely been relegated to the 'gifted' and all others who engage in this activity are either favourably or otherwise compared to the paragons held up by a consumer culture. The research also aims to reveal more about why people join community choirs, as interest grows in this western cultural form of musical engagement.

Due to my own experience of instigating and directing a community choir, I have premised this study on the idea that community choirs are generally a democratic union of people which may begin with vague structural hierarchies and this notion has been addressed in the questionnaire.

### **The Community Choir Director as Researcher**

The study's focus comes from my own experience as choir Director. My earliest experience of community engagement was as a teenager singing in the local church youth group, inspired by clergy riding on the cusp of the consciousness raising 60s giving the youth within their jurisdiction free reign to sing songs from the Beatles, Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Cat Stevens songbook. This, in spite of the murmurings from the conservative back pews of the congregation, preferring the organ to amplified vocals, electric guitars and drums.

My experience of belonging to choirs has been one of a solo trip taken in tandem with others, where the musical/social interaction between members shaped the personal and larger experience. When I came to live in Sydney, I answered Tony Backhouse's call for Australia to wake up to the joy and exhilaration of community singing which was followed by Jill Brown and Steven Taberner's continuing passion and fervour in the community singing cause.



I missed being part of this sustaining musical activity and early this year advertised in our local country paper for people interested in forming a community choir. A number of diehards responded and over the ensuing months we have attracted others and our choir continues to be a thriving interest.

I am drawing on my own experience of directing this choir and members who in the majority have had no previous experience of belonging to any communal musical activity, were given the opportunity to participate in this study. Therefore, I bring to this research my own personal background as a singer and also Director of a community choir.

For the purpose of this paper I will be referring to the choirs I am investigating as 'community choirs' for the simple reason that on the whole these vocal groups are comprised of non professionals and in many cases untrained singers and therefore represent the interest singing holds for the wider community, rather than membership being restricted to a select elite. The terms 'Musical Director' and 'Coordinator' will be abbreviated to 'Director' in this thesis because of the wider meaning inherent in the role.

This chapter provides a foundation for this study of how I see grass roots community activities such as group singing responding to the alienation often experienced within western industrialised society. The research aims are outlined and the chapter gives a perspective on my role as researcher, singer and choir Director. The second chapter examines literature pertinent to community singing regarding the personal implications of group singing and the choir in relation to the broader social and cultural framework within which it operates; repertoire of the choir; educational perspectives of vocal skills development and structural perspectives such as examination of the Director's role. Chapter Three discusses a methodology for the study, followed by an analysis of the data in Chapter Four with findings reached. Chapter Five concludes with a summary of the findings and makes recommendations.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter draws on literature pertinent to community singing. It outlines the role of community singing, framing present practice against an historical backdrop. The choir is viewed as a social phenomenon in how it is placed within a wider context and issues regarding repertoire, how community singing affects the individual choir member, choir structure and the role of the Director are discussed. This chapter also includes aspects of my own experience as community choir Director.

### **Community Singing**

Eyerman (2002) analyses the complex relationship between culture and politics underpinning the evolution of social movements and the formation of collective identity. Music can articulate and fuse a group together strengthening solidarity in confronting repressive authority as it objectifies a movement in making it visible as it represents views free from censorship by the dominant culture. Myth through symbols, rituals and rites bond adherents to a message on a subconscious rather than rational level and is influential in shaping collective behaviour.

Eyerman finds that technology has also been responsible for one of the most dynamic changes to have swept through industrialised countries. The ideological foundation of these musical subcultures and global communities is the easy accessibility of a medium with universal cross-cultural audiences which has “revolutionized social and cultural movements...This has become a multimillion-dollar industry in Sweden, which is a world leader in the distribution of white power compact discs, sold primarily through the Net...Sweden and Great Britain are two of the top countries in distribution of white power music” (449). This “white” music backlash can be seen as a reaction to the social and political role that non-white music has played in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequent displacement from conventional seats of power which now require reinvention so as to maintain relevancy.

Eyerman and Jamison (1998) discuss how traditional multi ethnic songs encode meanings which become cross-generational and serve to mobilise political movements. The tensions inherent in traditional songs of dissent are reconstituted and inform new waves of musical genres which carry political meanings of social resistance.

Cultures which are deeply rooted in tradition find musical expression in collective singing. South Africa has been a rich source of inspirational community singing rising up from people oppressed under the apartheid regime. Seroff (1990) outlines an historical account of the prevalence of four part harmony in South African choral music traced back to touring African-American musical companies in the 1890s. From this influence and mixed in with the hymns taught by white missionaries Zulu industrial workers formed quartets which displayed a hybrid of traditional Zulu and Western elements with harmonies having much in common with American community-based quartets in the pre-gospel era 1926-31.

Music which embodies subversive social and political messages can draw a community of participants in solidarity giving voice to those who have become marginalised from mainstream social, political and cultural engagement. *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (Hirsch 2002) is a film documentary which traces the role that singing has played in South Africa. The film portrays that country's struggle against apartheid where singing is a traditional tribal form of expression used to convey messages of power, mesmerising and confounding the enemy: "Legend has it...that before the first shot was fired in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the British commanders ordered their regiments to let the approaching Zulu impis finish the song they were singing - before war broke out in earnest" (Majola 2003:

[http://www.southafrica.info/what\\_happening/arts\\_entertainment/amandla.htm](http://www.southafrica.info/what_happening/arts_entertainment/amandla.htm)

downloaded 10 September, 2004). The process of dispossession, urbanisation and consequent labor migration in South Africa has seen a shift in how the varying tribal groups which now inhabit alien urban environments have organised choral competitions dating from the 1930s which serve to express regional and group identity (Erlmann 1998).

Community singing draws on a repertoire of songs that spring from oral traditions passed down over generations which mutated and evolved each time they were sung. Songs in pre industrial societies and also in many non-Western cultures today are not associated with individuals, but rather belonged to the entire community and chronicled the everyday ordinary stuff of life which anybody contributed to in singing and thus composing (Armstrong 1992).

Community singing bonding people in a sense of social unity and purpose is believed to have provided the impetus for Switzerland's modern structure as a democratic state. The Berlin *Singakademie* was established in 1787 after court musician Carl Friedrich Fasch began conducting singing classes for wealthy bourgeois wives to supplement his income which had been seriously dented by the Seven Years War and within four years the academy accepted men. Over the next 40 years similar choirs sprang up throughout Germany, Switzerland and later in France, Austria and England (Lohrey 1997).

Exploring why people sing in Australia, Lohrey finds that a vast number of people she interviews recount negative childhood experiences of being told that they cannot sing. She focuses on unaccompanied community singing and gives anecdotal evidence of how people's lives have been changed by singing publicly. In support of Lohrey's exploration, a study commissioned by the Australian Music Association (*Australians' Attitudes to Music* 2001) found that musical practice extending into adulthood is closely related to attending the educational system and also receiving private lessons. A substantial percentage of those surveyed responded that they stopped playing after compulsory lessons at school ended. The majority of people surveyed started playing a musical instrument from between 5-11 years and this was mostly due to parental influence. Forty nine per cent of those surveyed continued playing into adulthood which correlated with responses regarding childhood private lessons. An inference can be drawn which corroborates Lohrey's findings in that indifference to negative childhood music education experiences can impact on later adult musical non engagement.

Globally there has been a growing trend in the popularity of community singing due in part to the commercial success of the style and the media's interest in the changing *A Cappella* scene. The American doo wop and barbershop quartet forms of unaccompanied singing have been overtaken by contemporary styles which feature the voice imitating rhythmic and timbral qualities of instruments notably by performers such as *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, *Take 6* and *Bobby McFerrin* (Eichenwald 1997).

*A Cappella* has come to classify any music which is sung by the unaccompanied voice. The Italian term *A Cappella* was originally applied to early 17<sup>th</sup> century choral music. Music historians later reconstructed a view that the Christian fathers banished instruments associated with the devil and secular music, permitting only the human voice as the pure vehicle for worshipping God and as a result the common belief arose that *A Cappella* is any style of unaccompanied singing (Backhouse 1995). According to Jay Warner's *Billboard Book of American Singing Groups* (1992) the term 'acapella' was coined by Irving 'Slim' Rose, "a record company owner looking for a catchy new word to describe his release of some unaccompanied tracks by the Nutmegs" (Backhouse 1995:169).

African American quartet singing has provided the bedrock on which the modern style of *A Cappella* singing is founded. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the barber trade was generally held by African Americans and there is strong evidence indicating that the white secular Barbershop style of quartet singing grew from these origins (Backhouse 1995).

The repertoire of modern *A Cappella* community choirs is placed within this historical context. Black Gospel music has influenced the evolution of secular popular music and more recently the growing interest in *A Cappella* community singing. Black Gospel is spiritual in content, drawing on a specific history of singing practice reflecting a time of injustice and oppression. Africans transported as slaves to the New World in the 1600s utilised the Christian songs of their oppressors in spirituals which coded messages they were unable to openly transmit. The Northern states symbolised the "Promised Land" and from the 1830s escapes were directed by a secret network of people and places known

as the Underground Railroad. “Negro spirituals like “Steal Away”...had double meanings, serving as code songs that conveyed plans to escape the yoke of bondage. The phrase “steal away” thus meant absconding; “Jesus” and “home” symbolized the yearned for freedom in the North; and the words “I ain’t got long to stay here” meant that flight northward was imminent” (Wright and Edward 2002:1).

The African American musical tradition is inherently multidimensional created under conditions of control and domination. *We Shall Overcome* evolved from two gospel songs typical of slave “sorrow songs” where the words are ambiguous and the meanings are multidimensional. “I will overcome” and “I’ll be All Right” are seen as coded messages in which Protestant theology dictated that the individual is the site of redemption. The song evolved from carrying a message of hope with sacred and secular connotation, to overt cultural political expression when it was adopted by the black Food and Tobacco Workers Union in the 1930s and 40s where the “I” became “We”. “The politics here are contained in the memory and the message, not in the “we” created through collective singing” (Eyerman 2002:447-448).

Black religious quartet singing, a subgenre of black gospel music, became popular in the 1920s as community-based church oriented unaccompanied singing which continues to flourish. It is an oral tradition due to the singers having no formal musical training. The two distinct folk and jubilee styles thrived concurrently between 1920 and 1950, distinguished by harmonic and rhythmic variations and were confined to specific geographic locations. The gospel style of the 1950s succeeded the folk and jubilee quartets as it was more universal and is the era when the black religious quartet reached its peak in popularity (Dent 1997). Black Gospel music is subdivided into a number of genres historically beginning with the Spiritual, Concert/Arranged Spiritual, Jubilee, Hymn and Gospel Song (Backhouse 1995).

The documentary film *Too Close To Heaven: The History of Gospel Music* (1997) traces how black American gospel music transitioned from religious, congregational style singing to secular popular music. In the 1980s and 1990s “Rap music has signified the

rise of a generation still rooted in tradition but shaped by a new set of values and informed by an ever-changing technology. They have given up the melody and gone back to basics with the rhythm. The rhythmic song-speech of the African *griot*, Black preacher and Black orator are all there...”(Barnwell 1992:57).

Four part harmony was almost certainly introduced by white missionaries and black minstrels touring South Africa and Polynesia. These cultures have strong choral traditions which in turn have influenced the repertoire of western *A Cappella* choirs. In the late 1800s the African American choir the Virginia Jubilee Singers toured Africa and Australasia causing a sensation and were responsible for the many choirs which formed in their wake. Solomon Linda’s Evening Birds recorded “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” (*Mbube*) which became such a hit that it soon came to refer to the whole style: strong bass, falsetto solos and I-IV-I-V7 chord pattern (Backhouse 1995). Joseph Shabalala founder of *Ladysmith Black Mambazo* is recognised as Solomon Linda’s successor, refining the earlier four part harmony to what is now known as ‘iscathimiya’ meaning ‘tip toe guys’ reflecting the ornate movements which accompany their songs.

### **Why people choose to sing**

Religion has played a significant role in the practise of community singing which has traditionally drawn on the Christian hymnal. “With the Reformation, popular religious songs and chorales were sung by the Lutheran congregation unaccompanied” (Backhouse 1995:166). More recent research has found that friars practising *contrafactum* (the absence of contrast between 'secular' and 'sacred' styles of music associated with early thirteenth century onwards), frequently introduced religious text to be sung to popular secular songs as have the Salvation Army, on the principle “Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?”. The Red Book of Ossory (Bishop's Palace, Kilkenny) which includes 60 Latin lyrics in two hands of the late C14 is an example of this move from secular to religious text. The Red Book is accompanied by a note:

*Be advised, reader, that the Bishop of Ossory [the Franciscan friar Richard de Ledrede, d. 1360] has made these songs for the vicars of the cathedral church, for the priests, and for the clerks, to be sung on the important holidays and at celebrations in order that their throats and mouths, consecrated to God, may not be polluted by songs which are lewd,*

*secular, and associated with revelry, and, since they are trained singers, let them provide themselves with suitable tunes according to what these sets of words require'* (Wessex Parallel WebTexts: <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/contraf.htm>. downloaded 6 October, 2004).

American Appalachian congregational style singing has also provided momentum to the community singing movement. Indentured servants immigrating to America from Scotland and Ireland settled the poor and difficult environment and the folk songs they brought with them changed to reflect the hardship and struggle of the people who inhabited this remote region. The isolation of the mountain region helped to preserve the sentiments and religious fervour of these songs. This music was influenced by African Americans who brought their particular style of group community songs of work and worship. Industrialisation and recorded sound in the 1920s drew popular attention to the traditional songs of the Appalachian Mountains which eventually gave way to the modern commercial country-western music scene and the individual star system. In recent times the music has reverted back to its roots of participatory folk music (McClatch 2000).

In Australia, there has been a general resistance in the community choral experience of drawing on the heavy religious overtones of Christian inferences prevalent in the repertoire (Lohrey 1997). Malouf (2003) posits that the main difference between the US experience of evangelical proselytising and a more sober Australian approach is due to the American colonies being settled by dissenters of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in a time of passionate English evangelism and religious zeal proclaiming utopian ideals, while settlement here occurred 180 years later when the English and Scottish Enlightenment had tempered the English language of violent and religious fanaticism.

However, there has been an increasing tendency to affiliate religion to the social and political arena as evidenced in the United States (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jesus/> downloaded 11 October, 2004). This has been notable in the 2004 Federal elections when the Coalition gained more power in the Senate by preferencing the newly created Pentecostal Family First political party. "John Howard has personally brokered a deal with the Family First party that



would see the Coalition consult over policy with the Assemblies of God-backed party in exchange for preferences for most lower house candidates across Australia”

([http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/0%2C5744%2C10871947%255E601%2C00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0%2C5744%2C10871947%255E601%2C00.html) downloaded 11 October, 2004).

In February 2004 the Hillsong Church recorded and produced a live worship album at the Sydney Entertainment Centre with over an 11,000 strong congregation led by the Hillsong Music team, and this album topped the Australian charts. “It is very exciting that the worship of Jesus Christ is the most popular music in Australia this week”, Hillsong Senior Pastor Brian Houston said (<http://seven.com.au/news/topstories/99946> downloaded 11 October, 2004). The Australian community singing scene appears to be fertile ground, open to the influence of a conservative right religious movement sweeping our political and social landscape. This shift to a closer union between church and state in western economies can be seen as tapping into the alienation felt by individuals in consumer cultures where basic human needs of belonging and social engagement appear to be addressed by this growing number of religious organisations.

Societies grown out of capitalist economies can be places of alienation and dis-ease where basic human needs of belonging and sharing intimacy with others are not met. Social interaction has only been a recent subject of scientific study. Rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment asserted that individuals freed of the constraints of communal life could lead independent lives without the bondage traditionally required of belonging to a small and intimate primary group. However industrial societies have burdened individuals with the necessity of interacting with increasing numbers of strangers within highly complex and specialised frameworks of social interaction (Forgas 1985).

Community singing is embedded in a tradition of congregational expression and this shared collective experience is an activity which can draw individuals together who normally would have very little in common. Reagon, founder of *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, speaks of her childhood experience of belonging to a church community which created a space of song where the congregation “helped ‘raise’ the song into its own life”

(Reagon 1993). She found that the songs she sang with others jailed during the African American civil rights movement, bonded people together who were very different from one another. Reagon does not see *Sweet Honey in the Rock's* concerts as entertainment where people can come to forget life's problems, but rather as a space to try and help the audience embrace "what is real to them at that time...Our audiences are often urged to help us out with the singing, to embrace all that makes up who they are" (Reagon 1993:37).

Community singing draws individuals together in creating a sense of community not necessarily having religious affiliations. Estes (2001) discusses what sociologists refer to as social capital where community choirs aid in rebuilding fraying community connections forming the foundation of community crucial to schools, neighbourhoods and governments working well and responsibly.

Building community through singing counters the effect of commercial studio-enhanced recorded music which fosters the commonly held view "I can't sing", which in effect silences and disenfranchises the ordinary individual. Singing in communion with others defies the corporations which rely on the passive silenced consumer. This type of singing can be viewed as a political act, deeply rooted in the African-American traditions linked to the labor movement of dissent and resistance where protest songs have fuelled movements which empower and mobilise groups committed to social change.

Community singing points to the metaphor of human voices singing in harmony where each participant contributes a unique voice to the creation of a single musical instrument. Estes details specific examples of Community Choirs across the United States which all share a common factor of being inclusive and accepting of diversity.

Research has also been conducted into the growing popularity of the US university campus *A Cappella* movement which meets the need college students demonstrate for community. McIntosh (1999) finds that this style of singing has grown in popularity with the interest shown by the media in the changing *A Cappella* scene.

In Australia, the community choral experience has become an emerging area of continuing interest. This growing momentum can be seen as recognition of the personal benefits of engaging in this type of social activity. In July 2004 the ABC broadcast a news item regarding the proposal to establish a community choir in Wilcannia which it is hoped will “provide an opportunity for the town to overcome some of its social problems” (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200407/s1154579.htm> downloaded 10 September, 2004). The Courier Mail in Queensland also published an article highlighting a new breed of tertiary-trained male choral conductors who promote community involvement through the growing interest in singing (Kelly 2003). All male Australian community choirs are also on the rise as a sector of the community which has not been traditionally associated with singing arts practise. Members of Acafellas in Castlemaine Victoria express the view that if you are not into drinking or sport, there is very little scope for engaging with other men outside work and home (Tattam 2003).

The Adelaide based *Tutti Ensemble* evolved in response to a need expressed by residents of an intellectual disability centre for a singing group in 1997. The ensemble is now a model of social inclusion and artistic excellence, being a multidimensional arts organisation which meets the cultural and social needs of a widely diverse group of people. The group now numbers over 100 members mostly from the wider community attracted to this ensemble by the creative challenge of developing repertoire and pieces which are inclusive (Rix 2004). HQ Magazine published an article outlining the formation of the Sydney based gospel *A Cappella* choir, Café of the Gate of Salvation. In this, Clarke (1995) reported that the choir was a successful social and musical experiment emanating a sense of community while still being committed to a degree of excellence. She confirms that the ordinary untrained non-professional can achieve high musical performance standards where everyone is a star. Clarke interviewed choir members who echoed the founder’s views that the ancient joy of singing gets the group on a high.

The ‘high’ that HQ discusses can be analysed in terms of body effect. In June 1993, *The Age* reported on the extensive research conducted on the impact of singing on physical, mental and social well being. The growth of community choirs which sing *A Cappella*

style with gusto rather than chanting hymns proves to be a tonic for the mind and body, and the buzz is out about the participatory arts. The Government department VicHealth (cited in Tattam 2003), has invested in programs which link the arts and health through community connections. VicHealth has spent \$93,500 on community building projects including financing a program which has trained over 100 people as community choir leaders in Melbourne and regional Victoria, and an overall review of this program confirms singing encourages social connection where participants express feelings of liberation where they literally find their voice.

Research conducted by music therapists corroborates what people who sing in choirs report regarding the physiological benefits of group singing. This research concludes that singing heightens breathing and body awareness, tones abdominal muscles, can bolster the immune system, lowers blood pressure, relaxes muscles and improves cardiac output. An Australian active member of two community choirs speaks of being diagnosed with brain tumour fifteen years ago and has found that singing has played an enormous part in her recovery. A member of Acapella Borough choir who has bi-polar says that singing mediates her distress and increases her feelings of self worth (Tattam 2003). Reagon (1993) founding member of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* believes that the act of singing is revelatory in nature and changes the spiritual, physical and emotional condition of the body.

The VicHealth review (cited in Tattam 2003), released results of a US study measuring Immunoglobulin A (IgA) and cortisol levels in the saliva of 32 singers before and after two rehearsals and public performances, finding a much higher level after singing. Tattam also discusses a Swedish study of 12,675 people which found that those attending cultural events, including singing in a choir, lived longer. Tattam's article also outlines the results of a study conducted by British researchers at the University of Manchester who discovered that the sacculus, an organ in the inner ear, responds to frequencies commonly found in music, connected to a part of the brain responsible for registering pleasure. The chair of music education at University of London who has spent more than 30 years researching the voice and music, is quoted as stating that choral singing is acoustically richer than singing individually. Vocal sounds are linked to the inner

emotional state (and the endocrine system), due to the early experience of being in the womb and dependent on the mother's bloodstream, listening to her voice during the final trimester pre-birth.

The effect of singing on mood was researched at the National Voice Centre, Sydney University. The authors write that "it is surprising that so little research attention has been paid to the impact of singing on human emotion or mood, given the importance that is attached to singing in a number of cultures" (Unwin, Kenny and Davis 2002:176). The study was premised on previous findings that music produces emotional reactions in listeners and that these responses are accompanied by significant physiological changes. Based on mood profile questionnaire responses, the researchers found that the singing group compared to the listening group showed greater positive changes in mood.

Professionals in the field of trauma report on the effect of developing and implementing vocal training techniques. McNamara (1997) details her work with psychologists, education and field workers at the front line of war ravaged Bosnia. Her workshops incorporate drama therapy, music and voice work and she confirms the importance of music as therapy in the post-conflict rehabilitation and cultural reconstruction of the former Yugoslavia. A collection of essays by noted women experienced in the field of voice work (Armstrong and Pearson 1992) cover many aspects of techniques developed and insights gained from working in this field and generally these writers' anecdotes and experiences validate the notion that strengthening the voice to speak or sing is in most cases a healing and empowering experience. Rodenburg (1996) recounts a personal history of training professionals to realize their vocal potential. She outlines practical methods of how to improve vocal technique and how this work can unlock deeper emotional areas of anxiety and tension in improving individual expression and communication. Linklater (1976) provides a treatise in vocal development detailing techniques which are designed to focus on the body's deep seated habits which inhibit natural vocal ability. Linklater has intimate knowledge of the body's mechanics and how this affects vocal production.

### Community Choir Structure

In spite of egalitarian ideals which persist in the consciousness of western democratic notions of community, the Choir's structure is closely bound to the role and personality of the Director. Gary Smith, Director of Sydney A Cappella group 99 ½ responded to an interview question in the Sydney A *cappella* newsletter Oral Majority<sup>1</sup> about democracy within his ensemble: "The musical director, being me, decided before the group was formed how the group should be formed...I really don't see that musical groups work on the basis of democracy" (Oral Majority 1992: No.7).

Holst (1973) on the other hand argues that the choir-trainer is a "hard-worked servant of his [sic] singers" (Holst:1-2) in contrast to the orchestral conductor who was catapulted to the podium during the nineteenth century where he became more famous than the players actually making the music. She also finds that the orchestral conductor can be an unnecessary adjunct where players who are familiar with the music are able to continue without direction.

The choir Director can ensure that the choir offers a satisfying experience while at the same time enacting conditions requiring discipline and personal commitment of members. Reagon (1993) Director of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* believes that strict enforcement of time and rules are requisite to the successful operation of her workshops. She has little tolerance for students attending her sessions who are product driven and not motivated by singing as a "discipline, as a philosophical guide and a force in one's life...I searched in myself...for an honesty and integrity of sound that many of my workshop participants knew nothing about. They would give me melody, harmony, rhythm, and style, and I kept asking for the rest of it. I wanted to feel and hear their soul in their singing. The talk of older women in church kept coming back to me as a standard, 'The child's got a nice voice but I don't feel nothing' "(15).

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<sup>1</sup> 'Oral Majority' was the official newsletter of the Sydney Acappella Association, Inc. which became defunct in 2001

The community choir does not depend on musical prodigy and superior vocal talent, instead relying on attention to developing and refining interpersonal skills. Shinichi Suzuki (1978) writes about talent being not so much an innate gift as one which is cultivated with persistence and determination. He speaks intimately about his vast experience working with children who did not initially display prodigious talent, however with perseverance and positive encouragement, have become exceptional and accomplished musicians in whom he is proud because of the humanity they display rather than musical brilliance.

From the author's own experience, sustaining a community choir can be a full time occupation depending on the level of commitment made in setting a standard of musical achievement as well as being socially responsible to members. The Director is generally the focus of the group due to being responsible for repertoire, and lack of awareness of interpersonal dynamics can affect how well the group work together musically. It is also in the author's experience that it is the Director's role to express a level of enthusiasm for repertoire which nurtures and inspires members and this directly relates to the level of member musicianship attained.

The Director can be seen as a facilitator of lifelong learning skills, as one who is in an influential position of directly affecting the learning experience of each choral member. The Structural Cognitive Modifiability (SCM) and its associated theory of Mediated Learning Experience (MLE) as developed by Reuven Feuerstein and his co-workers (Slabbert 2001), is a model which highlights the Director's role as mediator rather than source of all knowledge. In this role the Director provides feedback and encouragement which reinforces learning. The learner is challenged with problems which are above their current problem solving capability and are ultimately solved by the learner. The facilitator's role is to maximise the learning environment where the highest possible quality of learning can be achieved. Cooperative learning and interdependency are viewed as the highest human values which ensure the maintenance of learning.

## **Summary**

The literature review centres on the study's interest in the personal, social and educational aspects of the community choir as it is framed within a historical and social perspective which also takes into account the role of repertoire in this cultural activity. It can be seen that singing draws people together and can act as an agent which builds community. In capitalist economies where society is predicated on adversarial principals, the phenomenon of community singing has grown in tandem with media attention to this cultural activity. Community singing bonds people together and can meet a vital human need of social participation in societies which have become places of stress and alienation. Research into the effect of singing shows how singing can stimulate physical and emotional health. It has also been shown that singing can act as a medium to rouse a 'high' emotional state, as evidenced in the black gospel tradition. Western Christian practice has been influenced by exposure to a custom which is typically found in non western, indigenous tribal music ritual. Clinical evidence illustrates how vocal work and singing in particular can assist victims of trauma, and the African American and South African singing tradition demonstrates how marginalised and oppressed groups can become empowered and energised by engaging in communal singing. The community choir Director holds a position of responsibility in the type of structural environment created which relies on the quality of relationship between the Director and the choral member.

Chapter 3 outlines a methodology which sought information from the Choir Director and the Choir Member as informed by the discussion in this chapter.



## Chapter 3 Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter outlines a methodology which will address the investigation of community choirs and seek information on what drives these groups, which in some cases may run for many years, what motivates members where there are generally no visible commercial rewards to be gained, and why people choose to sing, particularly in collective expression. It describes the participants, the data collection instruments and the analysis methodology. Ethical and validation aspects are also addressed.

### Participants

Seven choirs were approached to participate in this project, four were from Sydney and three from regional NSW. In the beginning stages of planning this research, interest in the study was initially gauged by contacting two Sydney choir Directors and members of my own choir, and each of these choirs was forwarded questionnaires. Five choirs took part in the study and four choir Directors completed the questionnaire, while my role as Director of the fifth choir precluded me from undertaking the questionnaire (see Table 1 – Participating Choir Profiles).

**Table 1 Participating Choir Profiles**

Choir	CHOIR A Regional NSW	CHOIR B Regional NSW	CHOIR C Sydney	CHOIR D Sydney	CHOIR E Regional NSW
<b>Period operating</b>	3 years	7 years	10 years	18 years	4 months
<b>Total members</b>	28	14	18	40	17
<b>Responses received</b>	11	9	6	4	11
<b>Male/Female</b>	M 3 F 8	M 7 F 2	M 3 F 3	M 1 F 3	M 2 F 9
<b>Age group</b>	56 + 11	56 + 4 46-55 4 36-45 1	56 + 3 46-55 2 36-45 1	46-55 2 36-45 2	56 + 1 46-55 3 36-45 5 26-35 2

Three of the Directors were female and one male. Sixteen male choir members responded to the questionnaire and 25 females. I obtained 35% Choir Member response, with 41 of a possible 117 choir members responding, and four Choir Directors included in the study.

### **Questionnaire Dissemination**

The process of inviting choir member participation was by initially approaching choir Directors and asking them to distribute questionnaires to their members. Originally I intended to make personal contact with each participating choir, oversee the writing of the questionnaire within the twenty minute time allocated to respond, and collect the responses within the same time frame. However due to geographical constraints, namely that I live 250 kilometres out of Sydney, and also because I needed to request permission from each choir Director to approach choir members, this plan was moderated as I would have needed to fit in with each Director's busy schedule.

Even though my request to participate in this study was in some cases met with initial reticence, I was pleased to find that in nearly all cases Directors and members made comments that the process of responding became a positive experience. I believe that this was because the questionnaire was left with the respondents to read and fill at their leisure, and also because the questions were aimed at drawing on their experience and opinion. In general Directors and members expressed an interest in the outcome of the study.

I was invited by the regional Director of Choir A to a rehearsal where I explained the study to choir members, and they preferred that I leave Questionnaire copies with them. The completed Questionnaires were collected at the next rehearsal on the following week. Regional Choir B Director forwarded the Questionnaire by email to members, and these were collected at the Director's home address over a number of weeks. Sydney Choir C Director requested that I email the Questionnaires prior to committing to the study. This choir returned completed responses by email and by post. Sydney Choir D Director handed out Questionnaires copies to the choir which I collected from a contact who resides locally. For Choir E, Questionnaires were handed out after a rehearsal and the

members who agreed to participate returned them over a number of weeks. In most cases Questionnaires were collected by the choir Director and one choir member made the comment “I don’t mind if [the Director] reads my responses”. I believe that knowledge of the Directors possibly reading responses (including myself with my own choir members) could have influenced some of the answers, specifically in relation to questions relating to choir structure (see Table 3 Questions 2:3 - 2:6<sup>2</sup>). One Director expressed the opinion that she found the process a good opportunity to review how the choir was going after being together a number of years. One respondent who emailed their response added, “that was a lot of fun”.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire format is a tool which allowed information to be gathered from choir members spread across NSW. This format also draws a degree of depth in response as I was interested in descriptive open answers drawing on opinions, thoughts and feelings rather than factual data (Johnson and Christensen 2000:127). The questions were of two styles: A small number of factual questions requested information on gender and age group, while the majority were open-ended drawing on the participant’s musical training background, engagement with the wider community questions and enquiry into the choir structure. The study therefore is qualitative in nature (131).

I was aware of possible bias regarding my own personal community singing experiences and therefore designed questions which would allow the respondent to answer from their own point of view rather than being asked leading questions to a pre determined set of answers with underlying value judgements (130).

The study asked a set of questions designed specifically for the Choir Member and a separate questionnaire was devised for the Choir Director. Although the areas under investigation overlap for both groups, it was assumed that the individual in the Director’s

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this, and the following two chapters, I have utilised an easy referral guide to each question. For example for the choir members’ responses, 6:1 relates to Section 6 (Relationship between choir and wider community) Question 1 (What affiliations do you have with other community choirs?).

position would have more influence over the experience of his/her respective group members.

### **Choir Director Questionnaire**

The Director's Questionnaire (see Appendix 1 Choir Director Questionnaire) addresses areas of investigation related to the personal, social and educational aspects of belonging to a community choir (see Table 2 – Areas of investigation for the Choir Director). As it is assumed that the Director holds a position of responsibility, questions about choir structure are more detailed than the Choir Member Questionnaire.

**Table 2 Areas of investigation of the Choir Director**

<p><b>Choir Director Profile</b> (personal, educational)</p> <p>1:1 What is your role in the choir and how would you describe it?</p> <p>1:2 How long have you been in this position in the choir?</p> <p>1:4 What is your musical background?</p> <p>1:5 Describe your vocal training background</p> <p>1:6 Describe your choral training technique/s</p> <p>1:7 What further training do you attend in keeping up your own skill base?</p>
<p><b>Why sing? Why Join a choir?</b> (social, personal, creative)</p> <p>1:3 Why did you decide to be involved in this choir?</p> <p>1:8 Describe your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument</p> <p>1:9 Describe your view of singing as a musical activity</p> <p>1:10 What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?</p> <p>1:11 Discuss your view of the role of singing within the wider context of every day life</p> <p>1:12 In what ways has your role in the choir impacted on you personally?</p> <p>1:13 What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?</p> <p>1:14 How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?</p> <p>4:4 How do you measure success of this choir?</p>
<p><b>Choir Structure</b> (social)</p> <p>2:1 What is this choir's name and how was it arrived at?</p> <p>2:2 How long has this choir been active?</p> <p>2:3 How is the choir structured?</p> <p>2:4 What is the story behind this group's formation?</p> <p>2:5 Describe how you gained your position</p> <p>2:6 Do you have sole responsibility for coordinating this group?</p> <p>2:7 If this coordinating role is shared with others, how did these people gain these roles?</p> <p>2:8 Describe the code of conduct with which members must comply?</p> <p>2:9 How are rehearsals managed?</p> <p>3:1 How many members are in this choir?</p> <p>3:2 How does the choir recruit?</p> <p>3:3 What are the prerequisites for membership of this choir?</p> <p>6:8 Which performances are the choir paid?</p>
<p><b>Social</b> (social)</p> <p>3:4 Is it a stable membership population or does it fluctuate? If it fluctuates, why does this occur and by how much?</p> <p>3:5 When new members are not up to the group's musical standard, how is this handled?</p> <p>4:1 Describe the repertoire of this choir</p>

- 4:2 Describe repertoire you would not engage with, and for what reason/s  
 4:3 Who makes decisions about repertoire?  
 5:1 How important is group cohesion to the maintenance of this group  
 5:2 How do you encourage a sense of belonging in this group?  
 5:3 What approaches do you take to handle differences within this group?

**Choir & wider community** (communal, social)

- 1:15 Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations  
 6:1 What affiliations does the choir have with other community choirs?  
 6:2 What affiliations does the choir have with other national/international associations?  
 6:3 How does association with these organisations influence the choir's activities?  
 6:4 Where do you feel this choir fits within the wider musical community?  
 6:5 How does the choir participate in the broader, non-musical community?  
 6:6 What forthcoming public performances are the choir planning?  
 6:7 List some of the choir's past public performances  
 6:9 For which causes does the choir fundraise?  
 6:10 Which contests does the choir compete in?

### Choir Member Questionnaire

The Choir Member Questionnaire (see Appendix 2, Choir Member Questionnaire) was designed to elicit responses which would indicate why members joined such a group, what benefits they perceived, how much influence they individually felt in how the group operated, any prevailing ethos in the perceptions they held of the choir, how they viewed their role within the group and the relationships which formed within the choir and also the wider community. Most of the questions were open ended, intended to focus the participants on the areas of enquiry which, like the Director's Questionnaire, addressed personal, social and educational aspects of belonging to a community choir (see Table 3 Areas of investigation of the Choir Member).

**Table 3 Areas of investigation of the Choir Member**

**Member profile** (personal, educational, cultural)

- Male/Female  
 Age Group  
 1.7 Describe your musical background and training  
 1.8 Describe your vocal training prior to membership  
 1.9 What is your preferred singing range?  
 1:10 What parts do you interchange between?  
 1:11 What further training do you attend to keep up your skill base?  
 1:15 What is your family cultural background?  
 1:16 What is the role of singing in this heritage?  
 1:17 In what ways does your family history influence how you engage in musical expression?  
 1:18 How has membership of this choir impacted on you personally?  
 4:4 How do you measure personal achievement in this choir?

<p><b>Why sing? Why join a choir?</b> (educational, social)</p> <p>1:1 How long have you been a member of this group?</p> <p>1:2 Is this the first choir you ever joined?</p> <p>1:3 How did you come to know about this choir?</p> <p>1:4 Why did you choose to be in this choir?</p> <p>1:5 What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?</p> <p>1:12 Describe your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument</p> <p>1:13 Describe your view of singing as a musical activity</p> <p>1:14 What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?</p> <p>2:5 What are the benefits of belonging to this choir?</p> <p>2:6 What are the disadvantages of belonging to this choir?</p> <p>4:5 How do you measure success of this choir?</p>
<p><b>Choir Structure</b> (social)</p> <p>1:6 What was the repertoire style of past choirs?</p> <p>1:19 What differences do you feel are there between choir competition singing and regular public performances?</p> <p>4:1 Describe the repertoire of this choir</p> <p>4:2 What style of song would you choose which is not currently in this choir's repertoire, and why?</p> <p>4:3 What is your approach when working with challenging repertoire?</p> <p>2:1 How do you see your role in this choir?</p> <p>2:2 How do you see your role when the group is performing?</p> <p>2:3 What structure do you perceive to be operating in this choir?</p> <p>2:4 In your experience of past choirs, what structures did you perceive to be operating?</p> <p>3:1 What conditions were there for joining this choir?</p>
<p><b>Social</b> (social)</p> <p>3:2 New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is not up to standard. Discuss how you would handle this situation.</p> <p>3:3 New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is of a higher standard than your own. Discuss.</p> <p>1:21 How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?</p> <p>5:1 How important is group cohesion to your membership of this choir?</p> <p>5:2 How important is creating a sense of belonging in this choir to you?</p> <p>5:3 How do you resolve conflict within the group?</p>
<p><b>Choir &amp; wider community</b> (communal, social)</p> <p>6:1 What affiliations do you have with other community choirs?</p> <p>6:2 What other musical groups do you belong to?</p> <p>6:3 Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations.</p> <p>6:4 How does membership of this choir impact on your involvement with the wider community?</p>

### Questionnaire Areas of Investigation

In tabling the data, I categorised the findings into the six topics used to organise the corresponding sections of the Choir Director and Choir Member Questionnaires (see Appendix 1 Choir Director; Appendix 2 Choir Member Questionnaire).

These six topics are, for Choir Director:

Section 1 CHOIR'S HISTORY/STRUCTURE

Section 2 MEMBERSHIP

Section 3 REPERTOIRE

Section 4 THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP

Section 5 THE CHOIR & ITS WIDER COMMUNITY

Section 6 CHOIR DIRECTORS PERSONAL PROFILE.

For Choir Member:

Section 1 CHOIR MEMBERS

Section 2 CHOIR'S HISTORY/STRUCTURE

Section 3 MEMBERSHIP

Section 4 REPERTOIRE

Section 5 THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP and

Section 6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHOIR & WIDER COMMUNITY.

The Questionnaire was designed to allow the individual to reflect on a process which is founded on the notion that although the choir is experienced as an organic whole by the audience, it is comprised of individuals who each have varied and in some cases contrasting ways of experiencing and viewing the same process. The common objective which draws people to sing together requires cooperation and compromise. The choir member questions were designed to seek responses which could give insight into the elements which work together in creating a space for people to participate in a shared vocal experience. The questions were also designed to answer an area of enquiry which relates to an assumption that community choirs are instigated by people who are motivated less by ambition and musical brilliance, than by the simple joy which singing brings.

Two questions sought information on the choir members' level of formal musical training which also gave information indicating the proportion of trained musicians to those who had little to no musical knowledge or background:

*1:7 Describe your musical background and training*

*1:8 Describe your vocal training prior to membership of this group.*

The area of enquiry into family cultural heritage background is premised on the notion that Australian cultural expression is founded on a collective memory of a migration experience where cultural values of musical expression vary widely depending on specific ethnicity whether it be for example, Anglo-Celtic, Greek or Asian. Also related to this area is enquiry into the degree of family influence in continuing the pursuit of musical activity into adulthood. The questions:

*1:15 What is your family cultural background?*

*1:16 What is the role of singing in this heritage?*

*1:17 In what ways does your family history influence how you engage in musical expression?*

looked into influence of cultural heritage or family influence on the choir members' musical engagement.

The Questionnaire also opened up enquiry into personal and educational issues including health and social consequences of belonging to such choirs, musical training background and if this could be a determining factor to participation. Examples of this type of questioning include:

*1:18 How has membership of this choir impacted on you personally?*

*1:14 What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind-body) experience?*

*6:4 How does membership of this choir impact on your involvement with the wider community?*



It is assumed that singing as a musical activity is experienced differently from playing an instrument and the responses to 1:12 (*Describe your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument*) would help to flesh out how members viewed the act of singing. Responses to this question could also indicate if playing an instrument has any influence on singing as compared to participants who don't play an instrument. A further area of investigation probes social interaction within the groups, and also how the groups interact within their respective localities. I was interested in finding out whether participation in choirs impact on a more personal level and in regards to the broader community, how members viewed this interaction, if it occurred at all. For example 1:18 *How has membership of this choir impacted on you personally?* 6:4 *How does membership of this choir impact on your involvement with the wider community?* This area of enquiry directly relates to the literature of how community choirs impact personally (Tattam 2003, Rix 2004) and how community choirs can fit within the broader social spectrum.

A method of gaining more comprehensive results was to question a topic from two angles. It was hoped that this would allow an expansion of response options on one particular area of investigation. For example, two question which enquire about a similar topic are:

1:2 *Is this the first choir you ever joined?* and

1:5 *What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?*

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Analysing Qualitative data**

To analyse the responses of the Questionnaire I adopted a content analysis paradigm as set out by Gillham (2000). Each person's response was assessed as to its substantive statement/s and categories were formed on the basis of these responses. Overall headings were then devised which combined the relevant categories. If a respondent gave a lengthy multi-layered response to a question, I included each segment of their answer as a separate category value in collating the data. I grouped responses in general categories, refining them when adding responses which were the same or similar. The objective was

to limit the category list, without doing injustice to the raw data (see Table 4 Sample of Raw Analysis Content Grid).

**Table 4 Sample of Raw Analysis Content Grid**

2:2 Member Questionnaire: *How do you see your role when the group is performing?*

**Categories**

RESPONSE NO.	NO RESPONSE	PART OF A TEAM	DO MY BEST	GIVING TO OTHERS	IMPORTANT	ENJOY
	No Response	One of the group	Contribute my best	Enjoy Giving	Important voice	Look happy
	N/A	Equal to everybody else	Do my best	Support weaker voices	Important	Enjoy
		Work together	Learn my part	Support	Soloist	Keep energy & fun happening
		Don't try & stand out	Try very hard not to get it wrong		Key member	
		Part of nice sound	Be completely focussed		As one of the leads in my section	
		One of a harmonic whole	Do as I'm directed		Interested in future extended role	
		Assist to unify our voices	Don't want to let Director down			
		Strengthen our (register) part	Willing participant			
		Hiding	Rely on practice to get it right			
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>

In the final coding, the responses to “Part of a team,” “Do my best” and “Do as I’m Directed” were categorised under the “Part of a team/Do my best” coding (see Table 5 Sample of Refined Analysis Content Grid).

**Table 5 Sample of Refined Analysis Content Grid**

2.2 *How do you see your role when the group is performing?*

No Response/NA	Part of a team/Do my best	Enjoy	Giving	Important	TOTAL
2	36	6	3	7	<b>54</b>

### **Trustworthiness**

A method of validating findings was to ask similar questions of the Choir Member and Director regarding various aspects of the choir's operation. This acted as a form of cross checking different reports about the same event (Johnson and Christensen 2004:250) and as a method of data triangulation to verify information collected (Johnson and Christensen 2004:255). In one example the Choir Director is asked:

*5:1 How important is group cohesion to the maintenance of this group? and*

*5:2 How do you encourage a sense of belonging in this group?*

*5:3 What approaches to you take to handle differences within the group?*

Similarly the choir member questionnaire asks:

*5:1 How important is group cohesion to your membership of this choir?*

*5:2 How important is creating a sense of belonging in this choir to you?*

*5:3 How do you resolve conflict within the group?*

This gives an opportunity to compare the Director and Member responses, utilising the information collated to validate conclusions reached regarding social interaction within the groups.

In the process of analysing the data, I included, in some cases, a response which I surmised would have been predictable, but the results did not concur with this expectation. This is a point discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2003:56) regarding the myth of value-free or bias-free research analysis. For example, for the Choir Member question 4:5 (*How do you measure success of this choir?*), I would have anticipated "increased membership" as a standard reply. However, answers varied from this anticipation and included personal, musical, educational and social responses (see Table 6 Choir Member Question Response Sample).

**Table 6 Choir Member Question Response Sample***4:5 How do you measure success of this choir?*

No response/ Don't need to	Enjoyment – self & others	Audience Response	Musical Competence	Invitations to perform	Good relationships within the group	Increased Membership	Commitment
5	16	24	12	8	12	1	3

**Member Check**

Denzin and Lincoln (2003:69) and Johnson and Christensen (2004:252) recommend member checks as a way of contributing to the validity of a research project by allowing participants to review and audit the material. I emailed and faxed the preliminary draft of the Findings chapter to each of the participating Directors as a method of validating analysed results which were based on their responses, with a request that the Directors reply to the analysis with which they did not agree, or comment on any other aspect of the findings. One Director responded and requested that I address the ethics of community choir membership, with the comment that choirs which restrict membership have become removed from the 'community' aspect of the endeavour.

**Ethics**

This study was small in scope and conducted over a short period of time. All potential respondents were reminded that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. An Information Sheet approved by the UWS Ethics Committee (Appendix 3 Information Sheet) was included in the dissemination of each questionnaire. A number of respondents did not answer questions related to the Choir Structure, Membership and Repertoire sections, however they completed questions which allowed them to respond how much they enjoyed their choir. I believe that there was some resistance demonstrated by a number of respondents who chose not to reply to a number of questions which could have potentially jeopardised their loyalty to the Director. This non response factor in the findings of the Questionnaire demonstrates that participants were free to not answer questions, and therefore this response choice is added as part of the overall findings.

## Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter presents a review of the responses to the Director and Member Questionnaires, and the literature review informs this discussion as it relates to the research aims of exploring why people choose to sing and why they join community choirs. The chapter begins with an elaboration of the Choir Director's role and personal ethos as this relates to the choir structure and the personal, social and educational topics under investigation. This is followed by discussion and interpretation of the Choir Member's responses in relation to the research aims and areas of enquiry. A summary of the research findings are presented in concluding this chapter.

Each reference to Section and Question of the Questionnaire (for example, 1:3) refers readers to Appendix 4 (Questionnaire Responses – Choir Directors) and Appendix 5 (Questionnaire Responses – Choir Members) for full information of relevant findings.

### **CHOIR DIRECTOR**

#### **Personal**

Three of the four Directors initiated their respective choirs, citing personal and philosophical reasons for wanting to start a community choir (1:3). The fourth Director inherited the position after being a member of the group, and stated that the reason for taking on the role was that it would offer a musical opportunity and that it would be fun. All Directors chose to be involved in a community choir for reasons related to personal musical development. Coupled with this was the desire to address a perceived gap in the wider community where she/he took the initiative to create an opportunity for the wider community. Choir A Director recognised a need in the local community for older members to be given an opportunity to participate in a social and musical activity which did not demand high musical standards of the participants. Another Director wanted to have creative input into their home town, finding that (1:12) the choir has made a profound impact in gaining “a community, a family...”. A third Director (1:3) “had to make my own fun” and (1:12) the choir has “highlighted areas of musical ignorance: Given me a platform to improve musically, an opportunity to experiment with

composition, try out skills, songs and techniques: Feel very encouraged and humbled in my role.”

All Directors believe that singing is a vital form of self-expression contributing to healthy living within a social context, a finding reflected in the literature. Choir A Director (1:11) concluded that she/he “can’t imagine a life without singing. Listening and performing provides pleasure and balance to people’s lives.” Choir D stated that singing “has the capacity to bring people together...not enough singing in my culture,” while Choir C noted there are “many cultures on our planet where there is no schism between art and culture; western culture the poorer for the relegation of singing to the virtuosic few. I would love to see more people seize the right and privilege. Australia should be a singing culture...the Choral sea events...gave a glimpse of this possibility.” For Choir D, the “general community appears to have lost confidence in their singing ability”.

The embodied voice is seen as the instrument which is intimately bound with personal physical and emotional well being (1:8). One Director expressed the view that “singing connects more deeply with the body, both approached kinaesthetically as a whole body/spirit experience: Singers are instrumentalists [with] no schism between the body and the instrument; anybody can sing depending on desire, intent and application” and “don’t have to be a virtuoso to gain pleasure out of singing.” All Directors put forward views that describe singing as fun, providing a sense of well being with the added opportunity to develop skills (1:9). A Director described tangible physiological outcomes from singing, (1:10) “with diaphragmatic/intercostal breathing, duration of sound, pitch and tonal range: Singing oxygenates the blood, steady or excites heart rate and increases sense of well being which has direct impact on psychological state and spiritual harmony and well being.” Another Director responded, “singing has affect on body and spirit but don’t know how; refreshes the mind; an alternative to left-brain problem-solving.” A Director wrote that “many members comment that even though they didn’t feel like coming to rehearsal, always glad to have made the effort; they must feel the same way as me, happier once start singing,” and another found that “breathing, thinking, shaping mouth to produce sound brings the mind and body into complete harmony.” These views

reflect the literature on the holistic benefits of singing, which influences psychological and physiological well-being.

### **Social**

Group cohesion and good social relationships rate highly for each of the Directors and are seen as a predominant factors to musical achievement (5:1). Success of the choir is measured (4:4) by “whether we are having fun,” “how it feels when we sing...the degree of joy and job satisfaction and achievement that manifest in the members physiology”, “happiness and cohesiveness of the group and their ability to bring pleasure to others” and “the fact that we are still together having a good time”.

The social aspect of belonging to the group is seen as intimately bound with the sound of the choir (5:1). All Directors stressed the importance of group cohesion to the functioning of their choir with one stating, “there are soloists and certain sections of songs that encourage improvisation but I’m always striving for a cohesive sound and mutual focus”. Another stated that “without the easy feeling of the group and belonging I don’t think we would keep going, but the friendship between members helps with commitment and harmony between members”. Other Directors found that group cohesion is very important to the maintenance of their group: “All members are very caring towards each other”. A number of the Directors utilise specific techniques to encourage a sense of belonging in the group (5:2) including name badges, using uniform folders when performing, keeping albums, start and end rehearsals holding hands [with] eyes closed and jamming on a song. “At times we dedicate songs in rehearsal, to members who need support at the time” and “I’d like to think [encouraging a sense of belonging] is one of the strengths of our ensemble”. “We don’t consciously do anything. Everyone is made to feel welcome, and join in...we try not to allow personality quirks take precedence over tolerance. The friendship is more important and using humour to cover, or to highlight problems has worked so far”.

One Director is actively involved in the non-musical community (1:15) also as a nursing home volunteer. Another engages in live performance and is active in theatre not having a “great deal of time outside of this for other community activity”. A third plays golf, is in the town band and plays organ at church while the fourth Director has no involvement in non-musical community organisations.

In most cases, choir interaction with the broader community is limited to being asked to perform for specific events or to sing for fundraising causes (6:6-6:9), with one notable exception where the choir has been specifically set up by the Director as an informal group which does not place great musical demands on members. This choir “specialises in performing for the aged members of the community and for charity luncheons, church services” (6:4-6:5). A comment made by one of the Directors was “I sometimes feel that community choirs are more important to their individual members than they are to their audience”, suggesting that it is the process rather than the product of community singing which draws interest and involvement.

In all cases, membership is voluntary with no members being paid for performances. Two of the choirs receive payment for performances (6:8) which contributes towards covering choir expenses, paying for CD recordings and in one case, member babysitting expenses.

### **Education**

All the Directors had minimal to no choral directing experience prior to being involved with their respective choirs. They all have formal music tertiary qualifications, three specifically through conservatoria including opera school and education with professional solo performance backgrounds. One Director has a major in Composition and another is qualified with a post-graduate degree in Theatre with an extensive professional singing background being a past member of an *A cappella* ensemble.

Choral training techniques (1:6) were learnt on the job with one Director’s teaching background consisting of conducting large workshops culminating in public performances. Another Director’s most useful techniques utilise visual kinetic imagery



and another undertakes vocal development skills, choosing repertoire suitable for the largely retirement village audience. One Director begins rehearsals with warm ups giving attention to vocal blend and rhythm using imagery and humour, and another also relies on vocal warm ups to begin with, giving attention to breath control and articulation. Two of the Directors have continued further training and studies (1:7), while another wrote of informal learning, keeping up to date with relevant literature.

### **Choir Structure**

Vocal training and prior musical experience is not a significant factor to choir membership, however membership appears to become more restricted as participants advance in skill and musical ability. The choirs having more conditions on membership have been operating over a longer period of time, suggesting that the skill base is more advanced and newer less experienced members could jeopardise a finely tuned balance created over many years. Two of the choir Directors responded that they are a closed choir (3:2-3:4) and intake of new members is restricted, in one case, to auditioning each two years. One Director stated that because of the length of time together “it would not be constructive to keep re-learning for new less experienced members”. Another noted that new members would need to fit in and even though the group has “volunteers to tell people that they don’t fit into our group and won’t be able to join”, the need has not arisen to do this yet. This Director replied that recruiting occurs “with great difficulty” (2:1) and that people are invited to join. The remaining Director has established the group as a community service to the local population where there are no conditions or restrictions to membership.

Each of the Directors has major responsibility for their respective choirs. In one case there are two assistant Musical Directors who conduct rehearsals in the absence of the founding Director, and who also conduct the bulk of the repertoire. All Directors indicated no formal code of conduct (2:8), with one Director stipulating that the members are expected to do their best and “not engage in any form of ridicule of other members”.

All Directors are responsible for the choir's repertoire depending on personal taste and also restricted to musical ability (4:1). For one Director, repertoire is "always developed to suit the audience for which we sing. However, songs which develop vocal ability are included albeit surreptitiously"; for a second, repertoire includes "African, soft rock, jazz, madrigals and religious numbers"; for a third, "eclectic – world music" and the fourth, "traditional African American gospel arranged by me and original songs mostly by me in what I fondly imagine is in the Black Gospel style." One choir would not engage in certain repertoire (4:2) because many in the choir cannot read music and part work involving more than two is limited. However "anything that can be learnt aurally is attempted...songs sung together are popular". Another tends not to engage in classical repertoire and "anything unfunky...because not all members read music and not all can sing with a "classical tone". One Director "can't think of anything stylistically or culturally that I wouldn't at least consider, unless it is too musically difficult for this choir" and another has "rejected numbers because we didn't like the arrangement or we thought it boring...but we generally sing just about anything". One Director stressed that although musical criticism may "seem ruthless...it is about the work, not the individual human beings."

### **CHOIR MEMBER**

One of the choirs has been operating 17 years, another for 10 years, two choirs for 3 years and one for 4 months. The average period of choir membership (1:1) for the total 41 respondents is 3 years. Four respondents have attended their choirs for 7 years, 8 for 3 years and 18 respondents have 2 years and less membership.

Over half of the participants learned of their choir by word of mouth (1:3) with small numbers citing advertising and promotion and the Director's profile as how they came to know about the choir. Two respondents were founding members of their choir when it was instigated 3 years ago.

## Personal

A major reason for continuing commitment was the enjoyment and fun aspect of the community choir. A third of the respondents described their view of singing (1:13) as an enjoyable activity, followed by a sixth citing health and physical incentives and about the same number giving social reasons. More than a fifth replied that they measured personal achievement through enjoyment (4:4) and the same number measured personal achievement through success of the choir. Around one fifth regarded “good performance” as an indicator of personal achievement (4:4), a little more than a quarter related success of the choir (4:5) to audience response, with a sixth reporting musical competence as their measurement of choir success. Half the respondents cited public performance rather than competition singing (1:19) as being freer and more enjoyable with more than half replying that they had never competed. As one Choir Director wrote (5:10), “we did the Sydney Eisteddfod once – not a happy experience for any of the choirs that year. We’re not really that interested”.

Many of the respondents indicated that singing, and particularly belonging to their choir yielded health and well being positive results. A clear majority confirm that singing contributes to emotional and physical vigour (1:14), with a sixth citing relaxation and inner balance benefits and a small number linking singing to spirituality. A fifth gave physical/health and meditation responses to describing their view of singing as a musical activity (1:13), with a seventh replying that they viewed singing as a rewarding activity.

A number of respondents described their family cultural background (1:15 *What is your family cultural background?*) as meaning parental influence on their current musical activity, where the question intended racial family heritage. In this case the response to this question was added to the data for (1:17 *In what ways does your family history influence how you engage in musical expression?*). The rationale of Question 1:15 was to determine whether family cultural background has any bearing on adult participation in singing. The majority of the respondents replied “Australian” or “WASC” whereas there was a significant proportion of those over the age of 56 who chose not to respond. Pilger (1992) discusses the convict ‘stain’ and the silence which shrouds the sanctioned acts

against people of races other than white anglo Europeans which I believe becomes apparent when this subject is tackled. I believe reluctance to open up to family racial lineage is a taboo still keenly felt particularly in regional localities, and is an area which has yet to be addressed appropriately, politically and socially.

### **Social**

The majority of respondents subscribe to European Australian cultural backgrounds (1:15) and about half refer to having received family musical encouragement and influence, with a little less than this number stating that family background has played no influence on their current musical engagement (1:17). Half replied that singing played a significant role in their upbringing (1:16) with a third citing little to no family influence. The lowest point for some was being made to feel ashamed of singing as a child which now “is an uphill battle” to overcome.

The majority of the respondents view the choir as a democracy which relies on cooperative relationships (2:3). A third replied that the choir is Director driven and a tenth did not respond. A quarter replied that past choral experiences were Director led (2:4) and a small number found past choirs relied on cooperation with less than half having no prior experience.

An overwhelming majority stressed the importance of group cohesion as a factor related to their choir membership (5:1) with two (out of 50) not viewing group cohesion as an important aspect. Almost all respondents felt that creating a sense of belonging was important to belonging to the choir (5:2) with a very small number replying that this area was not important to their membership. A little less than half resolve conflict (5:3) by dealing with it and in discussion, more than a third replied they had not experienced any conflict, a little less than a seventh use humour and three (out of 60) responses believed it was the Director’s role to resolve.

The choir member generally sees her/himself as part of a cooperative where harmonious relationships are needed to achieve musical goals. More than half stated that they viewed

their role in the choir as part of a team (2:1). A little more than a quarter saw their role as learner with about equally small numbers viewing themselves as helping others and as important members. A clear majority viewed their role when performing (2:2) as “part of a team and doing my best” as compared to smaller numbers replying that they saw their role as important, sometimes as “soloist”. The majority measured success of the choir (4:5) with audience response, a quarter with musical competence, a fifth with level of enjoyment and slightly less by good relationships within the group.

Some anxiety was reflected in responses regarding new applicants who could potentially upset the balance of the pre-existing choir structure regardless of singing ability. More than half replied that there were no conditions for joining the choir (3:1) with the only requirements being commitment and an enjoyment of singing. A fifth replied that aspirant members needed to fit in with the group. The majority stated that they would assist and/or tolerate newer less experienced members (3:2) with about a sixth saying that the choir is carefully chosen. Slightly less stated that it was the leader’s role to handle newer members with some of the replies indicating that the new member could “drift off” if incompatible. More than half expressed positive reactions to new members joining who had perceived superior singing ability (3:3) and saw them as an opportunity to “raise the bar” with a small number again replying that the potential member/s would primarily be required to fit into the social order of the choir.

A major contributing factor to continuing choir attendance is related to social, cultural and educational benefits. A third of the respondents felt that membership gave them social and cultural rewards with almost the same number fielding replies related to learning new skills (1:18). The majority reflected that choir membership had expanded their social circle, increased community engagement and they felt valued and respected within their local communities due to the choir’s activities (6:4). A sixth replied that choir membership has had little impact on their involvement with the wider community. About a third cited social and friendship benefits (2:5) with about the same number replying that the choir has provided them with a creative outlet for learning new skills. A third reported no disadvantage to belonging to their choir (2:6) and a little less than a fifth felt

that committing time was an issue. A small number noted that personalities were a choir drawback and regional members reported long travelling distance as a disadvantage.

### **Education**

Most of the respondents had no formal musical training or background, and existing choral membership was viewed as a training ground for potential musical skill development. Although the majority report that this choir is their first experience, a quarter cited school, church and community as making up their musical background and training (1:7). The majority of respondents replied that the current choir was their first choir experience (1:2) and half reported no prior vocal training prior to their choir membership (1:8). A little less than a quarter cited school and community activity as prior vocal training, and a fifth indicated professional and tertiary level achievement. Church, school and community have played a noteworthy role in past singing and choir experience (1:5).

A sixth of the choir participants reported not playing a musical instrument, more than a quarter believed that singing was easier than playing a musical instrument, with a little less than this number stating that singing was more fulfilling. Around a seventh stated that the voice is an instrument (1:12).

More than half do not intend to engage in future training to keep up their skill base (1:11) while a seventh viewed choir rehearsal as a continued training forum. The majority of respondents listed practise, being organised, listening and taping parts as training techniques in learning challenging repertoire (4:3). A large proportion related improving musical skills as a measure of personal achievement in the choir (4:4) with a little less than a sixth citing enjoyment as a gauge. About the same number related improving musical skills with achieving good performances. A little less than a seventh indicated that musical competence was how they measured success of the choir (4:5).

This chapter has presented the findings drawn from the questionnaire responses and discussed my interpretation of these responses. The final chapter draws conclusions from the discussion and interpretation of the findings and suggests further areas for research.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusions

This chapter draws conclusions from the discussion and interpretation of the findings presented in the previous chapter, offers organisational recommendations for community choirs and suggests further areas for research.

The aim of this research was to investigate the community choir, enquiring into why people choose to sing, and particularly why they join choirs. The broad areas of interest within which the aims of the research were defined included personal, social and educational aspects of the choir experience. The personal aspect examined issues such as health, enjoyment and empowerment, the educational characteristic looked at technique, training and skills development, and the social topic covered areas such as interpersonal group dynamics and cultural community engagement.

This study has found that the overall experience of the Choir Member is one of expanded musical and vocal development through continued choir attendance and that personal, social and educational aspects of belonging to the community choir are intimately interrelated. Musical creative output directly relates to the level of personal enjoyment and social cohesion experienced by the participant. The creative musical output of the choir firstly meets the needs of members, in that singing is believed to be a vital form of self expression contributing to physical and emotional well being. The choir is, to a lesser extent, driven by the need to perform for an audience and where this is the case, the overriding factor is that members enjoy the experience. In all cases, fun and enjoyment is a principal dynamic in the longevity of the groups. This research has also found that respondents confirm the findings of the literature on the benefits of singing, in that the rewards of belonging to the choir include an increased sense of well being.

Directors investigated in this study initiated their respective choirs in response to a perceived cultural gap in their localities and were motivated by a desire to realise musical objectives requiring skill and commitment. The community choir does not necessarily need Directors with superior musical ability although formal music education is a



significant feature of the role, with Directors requiring some ability in managing people, and able to learn on the job.

Directors tend to hold most of the social and musical responsibility for their groups. Good social relationships are rated as a necessary factor to group cohesion, which is also seen as vital to realising musical objectives. The choir's creative life is intimately connected to the Director's personality and musicianship. Members are attracted to certain choirs depending on the social life, creative output and to an extent, the style of repertoire. All the Directors echoed the sentiment that although the choir is essentially a democracy, leadership requires that they are ultimately responsible for overall artistic decisions made, which if not undertaken competently, would compromise the social and musical life of the group.

Social and cultural benefits are major contributing objectives for continued choir member attendance, where there is a perceived development of musical ability achieved in a group enjoying harmonious relationships. There is a strong indication that members experience significant personal and social benefits due to feeling respected and valued within their wider communities as the result of choir membership and activity. The choir members on the whole view their role within the choir as learner and part of an organisation which relies on cooperation. The view is generally held by members that the choir is fundamentally a democratic group, irrespective of the responsibility held by the Director.

Member vocal training and prior musical experience is not initially a significant factor to belonging to the community choir, however membership appears to become more restrictive as participants advance in musical ability which appears to be a deliberate strategy to protect standards achieved by members who have committed to the group over an extended period of time. Of note, one Director actively promotes a community ethos of accepting all newcomers irrespective of musical ability.

The incidence of community choir member restriction suggests a need to establish a multi-tiered community choral endeavour, where longer standing members can continue

to progress in skill development unencumbered, while at the same time newer less experienced aspirants are given opportunity to engage in choir activity by entering at basic beginner levels. This practice is common in many sporting groups (for example, netball teams of different abilities within a school or community) and there are notable examples of this tiered system of musical practice in organisations such as the Christchurch School of Music where “a wide range of orchestras, bands, choirs and ensembles” cater to young musicians of varying abilities (<http://www.christchurchschoolofmusic.ac.nz/info/about.htm> downloaded 15 October, 2004). Another way of bridging this gap between experienced and new members is for senior members of an established choir to take responsibility for inexperienced members by becoming a supplementary choral Director. This would allow new inexperienced choir members to be in an environment with those of similar level, and would also empower the new, aspiring Director in her/his expanded role of skills development and people management ability. It also alleviates the ever-expanding role of experienced Directors.

Findings from this project suggest that several areas of research could be undertaken on community choirs in relation to personal, educational and social issues. Three topics which emerged strongly are the need for retaining a musical and personal space for all people who want to sing; the informal/formal learning which takes place within the choir environment; and the social psychology of the community choir.

Western capitalist economies have become arenas of increasing social isolation where there is a lack of personal and social engagement leaving many disconnected from mainstream cultural participation. Music can be an agent which draws people together, giving voice to those who have become marginalised from social, political and cultural engagement. The act of singing is deeply rooted in cultural foundations pre-dating western economies which promote the “gifted” few as stars for mainstream consumption, denying recognition that singing is an innate and universal right.

This research has found that there is generally, a deeply expressed desire to sing felt by those who believe they measure poorly against others seen as superior in this human musical endeavour. Singing can provide significant psycho-physiological benefits, and opportunities should be made available to those wanting to engage in this social and cultural activity. Participation in community choirs is a growing contemporary phenomenon, requiring Director initiative, drive and enthusiasm. Long term membership and members achieving advanced musical skills directly relates to the social rewards of belonging to a healthy and happy group, driven more by a desire to participate than performance excellence.

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Appendix 1                      Choir Director Questionnaire

**PERSONAL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF SINGING**

**1.**      What is your role in the choir and how would you describe it?

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**2.**      How long have you been in this position in the choir?

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**3.**      Why did you decide to be involved in this choir?

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**4.**      What is your musical background?

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**5.**      Describe your vocal training background.

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**6.**      Describe your choral training technique/s.

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**7.** What further training do you attend in keeping up your own skill base?

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**8.** Discuss your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument.

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**9.** Describe your view of singing as a musical activity.

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**10.** What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?

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**11.** Discuss your view of the role of singing within the wider context of every day life.

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**12.** In what ways has your role in the choir impacted on you personally?

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13. What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?

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14. How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?

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15. Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations.

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**CHOIR'S HISTORY\ STRUCTURE**

1. What is this choir's name and how was it arrived at?

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2. How long has this choir been active?

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3. How is the choir structured?

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4. What is the story behind this group's formation?

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5. Describe how you gained your position. Were you elected or appointed?

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6. Do you have sole responsibility for coordinating this group?

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7. If this coordinating role is shared with others, how did these people gain these roles?

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8. Describe the code of conduct with which members must comply.

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9. How are rehearsals managed?

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**MEMBERSHIP**

1. How many members are in this choir?

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2. How does the choir recruit?

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3. What are the prerequisites for membership of this choir?

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4. Is it a stable membership population or does it fluctuate? If it fluctuates, why does this occur and by how much?

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5. When new members are not up to the group's musical standard, how is this handled?

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**REPERTOIRE**

1. Describe the repertoire of this choir.

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2. Describe repertoire you would not engage with, and for what reason/s.

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3. Who makes decisions about repertoire?

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4. How do you measure success of this choir?

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**THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP**

1. How important is group cohesion to the maintenance of this group?

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2. How do you encourage a sense of belonging in this group?

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3. What approaches do you take to handle differences within the group?

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**THE CHOIR & ITS WIDER COMMUNITY**

1. What affiliations does the choir have with other community choirs?

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2. What affiliations does the choir have with other national/international associations?

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3. How does association with these organisations influence the choir's activities?

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4. Where do you feel this choir fits within the wider musical community?

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5. How does the choir participate in the broader, non-musical community?

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**6.** What forthcoming public performances are the choir planning?

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**7.** List some of the choir's past public performances.

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**8.** Which performances are the choir paid?

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**9.** For which causes does the choir fundraise?

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**10.** Which contests does the choir compete in?

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Appendix 2

Choir Member Questionnaire

Female

Male

Name of your choir:.....

Age Group

18 - 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

46 – 55

56 +

I am interested in your experiences as a member of a community choir

Thank you for your participation in this study.

**You, the Choir Member**

1. How long have you been a member of this group?

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2. Is this the first choir you have ever joined?

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3. How did you come to know about this choir?

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4. Why did you choose to be in this choir?

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5. What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?

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6. What was the repertoire style of past choirs you were in?

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7. Describe your musical background and training.

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**8.** Describe your vocal training prior to membership of this group.

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**9.** What is your preferred singing range e.g. soprano, alto, tenor, bass?

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**10.** What parts/registers do you interchange between?

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**11.** What further training do you attend in keeping up your skill base?

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**12.** Describe your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument.

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**13.** Describe your view of singing as a musical activity.

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**14.** What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?

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**15.** What is your family cultural background?

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**16.** What is the role of singing in this heritage?

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**17.** In what ways does your family history influence how you engage in musical expression?

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**18.** How has membership of this choir impacted on you personally?

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**19.** What differences do you feel are there between choir competition singing and regular public performances?

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**21.** How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?

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**CHOIR'S HISTORY/ STRUCTURE**

1. How do you see your role in this choir?

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2. How do you see your role when the group is performing?

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3. What structure do you perceive to be operating in this choir?

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4. In your experience of past choirs, what structures did you perceive to be operating?

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5. What are the benefits of belonging to this choir?

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6. What are the disadvantages of belonging to this choir?

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**MEMBERSHIP**

1. What conditions were there for joining this choir?

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2. New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is not up to standard. Discuss how you would handle this situation.

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3. New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is of a higher standard than your own. Discuss how you would handle this situation.

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**REPERTOIRE**

1. Describe the repertoire of this choir.

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2. What style of song would you choose which is not currently in this choir's repertoire, and why?

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3. What is your approach when working with challenging repertoire?

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4. How do you measure personal achievement in this choir?

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5. How do you measure success of this choir?

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**THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP**

1. How important is group cohesion to your membership of this choir?

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2. How important is creating a sense of belonging in this choir to you?

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3. How do you resolve conflict within the group?

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**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHOIR & WIDER COMMUNITY**

1. What affiliations do you have with other community choirs?

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2. What other musical groups do you belong to?

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**3.** Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations.

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**4.** How does membership of this choir impact on your involvement with the wider community?

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## APPENDIX 3 Information sheet

Locked Bag 1797  
Penrith South DC NSW 1797 Australia  
www.uws.edu.au

College of Arts, Education & Social Sciences  
School of Contemporary Arts, Music  
Kingswood Campus Building O



### Investigating the Community Choir

I am conducting research into community choirs investigating what benefits individuals may derive being a member, and how these choirs operate in the wider social context. I am investigating the notion that adults who may not necessarily be trained musicians, can nonetheless participate in potentially rewarding musical community-building activity.

The questionnaire you are being asked to complete is interested in your personal experience of belonging to a community choir. It takes 20 minutes to complete.

Please understand that by completing the questionnaire you are giving your consent for the information you provide to be used by Elizabeth Slottje, B Mus, Honours student from the University of Western Sydney, School of Contemporary Arts, for educational purposes. Overall findings of this research may be submitted for public presentation. Information supplied in the following questionnaire will be treated confidentially. Personal details are not a requirement and all responses will remain anonymous. Your participation is gratefully acknowledged.

Elizabeth Slottje  
Bachelor of Music, Honours Student  
University of Western Sydney  
June 2004  
[elizabethslottje@hotmail.com](mailto:elizabethslottje@hotmail.com)

**NOTE:** This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 4 QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – Choir DIRECTORS

### DIRECTOR PROFILE

#### 1:1 What is your role in the choir and how would you describe it?

Choir A - Female	Convenor, Leader & Accompanist
Choir B - Female	Organise, lead, conduct, help members feel confident and comfortable in their part and in performing, make final decisions about repertoire and how songs to be performed
C - Female	Choir director, sometimes joke with the group that I am the “benevolent dictator”
D - Male	I provide the vision, focus & most of the repertoire. I oversee the choir sound, even if I’m not conducting the song.

#### 1:2 How long have you been in this position in the choir?

A	3 years - Founder
B	3 years, inherited role
C	10 years- Founder
D	18 years - Founder

#### 1:3 Why did you decide to be involved in this choir?

A	Recognised need with older members in the community who felt their musical competence not high enough for other existing choirs
B	Friend started choir: Fun: Musical opportunity
C	Began conducting a cappella workshops in home suburb Had travelled up & down East Coast of NSW as freelance performing artist & teacher Creative input into my home town Regular attendees comprised the newly formed community choir
D	Wanted whatever Gospel song offers Had to make my own fun as there were no black churches nearby

#### 1:4 What is your musical background?

A	Studied singing at Sydney Conservatorium Performed with Conservatorium Opera productions Rockdale musical productions ABC radio Experienced in Eisteddfods Solo performer
B	Diploma Music Education from Sydney Conservatorium
C	Professional performer for over 25 yrs Childhood piano and theory lessons Studied singing privately and Conservatorium of Music Undergraduate degree in Performing Arts UWS 20 years actor & theatre director Master of Arts in Theatre Studies UNSW Singing in jazz bands & touring opera companies Original member of well known Sydney A Cappella group
D	B Mus in Composition Playing guitar and singing in bands Writing songs



**1:5 Describe your vocal training background.**

A	Conservatorium singing AMEB examinations Conservatorium Opera School School Choral training with Dept of Education Conservatorium choral experience Church choirs
B	Very little vocal training Orchestra instrumentalist School choirs & Philharmonic choir People's Messiah over a number of years before moving to country
C	Continuing vocal study training
D	Very little formal training Developed style from listening Reached an age where increased attention to maintenance of instrument

**1:6 Describe your choral training technique/s.**

A	Voice development skills Repertoire suitable for the audiences we perform for
B	Vocal warm ups including breath control & articulation
C	Learnt on the job Large workshops culminating in public performances
D	Warm ups: Attention to blend & rhythm: Imagery & humour Visual kinetic image is most useful for me

**1:7 What further training do you attend in keeping up your own skill base?**

A	None
B	Attend workshops Invested in choral director and warm up exercises books
C	Continuing training sessions About to embark on a 6 months' study leave including London theatre residency :and intensive vocal methods at the Roy Hart Centre in the south of France
D	Various formal choral training seminars e.g. ANCA summer school etc., Attended USA choir rehearsals in Black churches

**1:8 Discuss your view of singing as compared with playing an instrument.**

A	Singing anywhere anytime: Voice can let you down: I enjoy being a pianist Need a good accompanist as a singer
B	Take a long slow breath to start instead of fast breath on upbeat is difficult for me Keeping vowels open and rounded and singing on the middle of words don't need to be considered as an instrumentalist
C	Similar demands: Both approached kinaesthetically as a whole body/spirit experience Singers are instrumentalists: The singer IS their instrument – no perceivable schism: Anybody can sing, matter of intent/desire and application: Virtuosity depends on conscious choir or control: Don't have to be a virtuoso to gain pleasure out of singing
D	Singing more ecstatic: Connects more deeply with the body (could say the same about drumming): More expressive

**1:9 Describe your view of singing as a musical activity.**

A	Singing overrides other possible emotions While singing not possible to be thinking about life's problems Provides a sense of well being so essential in modern life
B	Singing is great fun: Using voice makes you feel good Smile for audience helps create a better sound so end up feeling good no matter how bad you felt before you started Singing in harmony with others gives a great sense of belonging Creates a sense of trust between members of the group
C	Already responded in Q 8
D	Singing in harmony is heaven Singing in a skilled quartet is the best thing I can think of

**1:10 What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?**

A	Breathing, thinking, shaping mouth to produce sound bring mind & body into complete harmony
B	Uplifting feeling Many members comment that even though they didn't feel like coming to rehearsal, always glad to have made the effort They must feel the same way as me, happier once start singing
C	ABSOLUTELY a psycho-physiological experience: Tangible physiological outcomes with diaphragmatic/intercostal breathing, duration of sound, pitch and tonal range: Singing oxygenates the blood, steady or excite heart rate and increase sense of well being which has direct impact on psychological state and spiritual harmony & well being: So many studies in this area, hard to imagine anyone would dispute the fact that singing is a psycho-physiological experience
D	Singing has affect on body & spirit but don't know how: Refreshes the mind An alternative to left-brain problem-solving

**1:11 Discuss your view of the role of singing within the wider context of every day life.**

A	Can't imaging a life without singing Listening & performing provide pleasure and balance to people's lives
B	Little community singing in the community anymore: General community appears to have lost confidence in singing ability: Boys rarely sing after voices change, so don't have a clue how to pitch as men: Rap not helping young Women have little more confidence and will sing in private e.g. children or with radio more than men do Community singing only seems to take place in church now Less people going to church now, singing doesn't reach as many people as it once may have
C	Maternal ancestors Irish: Grew up in musical family, both parents played musical instruments: Many cultures on our planet where there is no schism between art and culture: Western culture the poorer for the relegation of singing to the virtuosic few Would love to see more people seize the right and privilege Australia should be a "singing culture" (quote from Tony Backhouse in the 80's) Choral sea events with 700 voice choir gave a glimpse of this possibility
D	Not enough singing in my culture Has the capacity to bring people together

**1:12 In what ways has your role in the choir impacted on you personally?**

A	As a retired school teacher, continued opportunity to pass on my skills to others Preparation of music tape rehearsals etc keep me motivated Hopefully keeps me young
B	Helped my confidence in conducting: I wouldn't ever stand in for the conductor before taking on the role: Influenced my confidence with instrumental conducting as well: Now enjoy conducting: More aware singer than I was before More aware about articulation, phrasing: More aware of concept of looking as though I am enjoying singing in other places e.g. organ at church
C	Hugely...tremendously: More ways that I can flesh out here Gained a community, a family: We realised at recent 10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary, that our choir can collectively account for every decade since 1940 Learnt a great deal about myself as a person, an artist, teacher, performer: I am continuing to grow and be challenged by these fabulous human beings: I feel I have a spiritual investment in their lives, and they in mine
D	Highlighted areas of musical ignorance: Given me a platform to improve musically: Opportunity to experiment with compositions, try out skills, songs & techniques: Feel very encouraged and humbled in my role: I'm inspired by the level of trust within the choir: Learnt to be a better communicator

**1:13 What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?**

A	In the techniques I use & choosing repertoire: Previous repertoire more traditional, requiring more formal manner of training & conducting
B	Past experiences have been enjoyable: Main difference is now I am responsible: I enjoyed being just one of the group without responsibility: Still good fun, and enjoy myself
C	This is a truly community choir: Previously more professional intent: On occasion more volatile: Previously, musically more challenging & rewarding, were often more hard work & less pleasurable personally: Too many chiefs and not enough Indians Someone should shut up, it may as well be me: I didn't care about professional creative decisions as long as we could stop talking about possibilities and just START SINGING: At these times found myself craving performance, because then we would just sing: Rehearsal process lost joy and sense of discovery: I am now benevolent dictator as a result
D	No other choirs

**1:14 How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?**

A	In general community activities. Group luncheons occasionally.
B	Share a drink & talk after each rehearsal. If an early performance usually go out to dinner together. Different combinations of the group get together for dinners. Will perform for special occasions eg. Christening. Dinners include partners.
C	Over the past years we have developed more intimate social connections. This sometimes extends beyond a rehearsal process. Most recently we have enjoyed more events that have been social without the expressed expectation of singing, i.e. picnics, BBQ, parties, bush walks etc.,
D	I interact with a few choristers, usually one-to-one, except for the occasional foray to the pub after rehearsal, and our annual anniversary dinner. Pre-rehearsal is when we catch up, as well

**1:15 Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations.**

A	Nursing Home volunteer. Historic Car Club
B	Golf, otherwise only musical community interaction. Play with the town band I organ at church occasionally
C	Live performance, specifically Sydney theatre. Friendships that are not based on performative structure. Don't have a great deal of time outside of this for other community activity.
D	None

**CHOIR'S HISTORY/STRUCTURE****2:1 What is this choir's name and how was it arrived at?**

A	We chose the choir's name because it did not use the word "Choir". We wanted to convey the 'group of singers' concept
B	We tried a lot of different names...one night while we were socialising and by consensus decided that we liked this one the best
C	The name was inspired by a story a previous member told in relation to his sister in Scotland as a child. It has entered the choir mythology...I like the spirit of release that it invokes
D	A momentary aberration – I read about (name) in a book on coffee & liked the sound of it.

**2:2 How long has this choir been active?**

A	3 years
B	7 years
C	10 years
D	18 years

**2:3. How is the choir structured?**

A	5 light Baritones, 11 Sopranos, 12 altos
B	Conductor, & Secretary/Treasurer. Otherwise work by consensus. Group has input into the music that we sing and performances we attend.
C	Few experienced singers & musicians, but most not formally trained or performance experienced. I am responsible for repertoire, arranging and conducting. I organise & conduct rehearsals and performances. Recently members have contributed compositions, and have taken on more organisational responsibility.
D	Incorporated Association/Non-profit. I am Musical Director with 2 assistant MD: Section leaders: Treasurer; bookings manager: performance committee; publicity committee; technical officer; public officer; stage manager & various other committees/functions as the need arises – many positions voted in annually.

**2:4 What is the story behind this group's formation?**

A	The group was formed following a presentation to the Pensioners & Superannuants meeting prior to the 2002 Seniors Week celebrations. A book was passed around & the original members put their names down (12) and rehearsals began
B	The choir started off as a group of the previous conductor's friends. She had always wanted to have a singing group and asked her friends to join her
C	Answered in Q 3
D	I put up signs in cafés asking for interested singers & it grew from there

**2:5 Describe how you gained your position. Were you elected or appointed?**

A	As I was the instigator, I got the job!
B	When the former conductor left I was seen as the logical successor and was asked by the group to do the job. There are people in the group who had good musical backgrounds but no conducting experience.
C	I initiated the ensemble and to date have remained unchallenged...better ask the members how they feel about this?
D	Self appointed avuncular tyrant

**2:6 Do you have sole responsibility for coordinating this group?**

A	Yes
B	Only in that I organise rehearsals. We are democratic. Volunteers for performance organising depending on the job & who they may know and how prepared they are to ask for money for the performance. Also have volunteers to tell people that they don't fit into our group and won't be able to join – although we have not had the need to do this yet.
C	Yes, however I am receiving more support of late
D	I have 2 assistant MD's who conduct rehearsals when I'm away. They also conduct the bulk of the repertoire

**2:7 If this coordinating role is shared with others, how did these people gain these roles?**

A	N/A
B	Almost always volunteer, or persuaded to do something
C	They elected themselves when they were collectively concerned about my stress levels in relation to my professional life
D	By vote at the AGM. In the case of conductors, by trying out.

**2:8 Describe the code of conduct with which members must comply.**

A	Do their best & not engage in any form of ridicule of other members
B	Don't have a code of conduct
C	Do not have a formal code of conduct. Unspoken commitment to contributing positive & supportive energy to the individuals in the group. Always seemed that we are able to deal with problems as and when they arise in a constructive fashion. I am interested in hearing what the choir may have to contribute in relation to this point
D	(loose). Punctuality, attentiveness, dress code for performance – that's about it

**2:9 How are rehearsals managed?**

A	Meet at the Bowling Club Auditorium. Whole body stretches, breathing, vocal exercises. Repertoire practise
B	I decide on what we will work on for the night. Try to be ready to sing at 7:30, which does not always occur. Sing until 9:30, in which time we do some warm-ups. Work on parts – learn by rote because not many members can read music – and brush up on things needing refreshing. Usually finish with something we know or feel comfortable with.
C	Meet between 7:30 & 10:00pm weekly
D	I plan repertoire, warm-ups & amount of time allotted to old repertoire, new songs, skill-building, attention to detail. Group improvisations at start and end.

**MEMBERSHIP****3:1 How many members are in this choir?**

A	28
B	14
C	18
D	40

**3:2 How does the choir recruit?**

A	If you like to sing, come and try! No auditions. Word of mouth
B	With great difficulty. Lots of men but trouble getting women recently. Usually recruit by word of mouth and people are invited to join us. Some of the women have left and we are now short of Altos and Sopranos
C	By invitation
D	Ads in the newspaper, word of mouth

**3:3 What are the prerequisites for membership of this choir?**

A	A desire to sing (make a joyful sound!)
B	An okay voice and the ability to hold a part, unless you are a founding member
C	In the past, we were happy for anybody to join, as long as we felt the 'human chemistry' was compatible with the existing community. We have recently embarked on recording our first CD. In future I suspect we will be more discerning about a degree of musical skill in potential recruits, because the choir has been together 10 years, and would not be constructive to keep re-learning for new less experienced members
D	Good rhythm, strong voice, ability to listen conscientiously & pick things up quickly. And a feel, that we can't as a group qualify or describe, it's just if they <u>feel</u> tight

**3:4 Is it a stable membership population or does it fluctuate? If it fluctuates, why does this occur and by how much?**

A	Fluctuates because of the age of the members & their commitment to families, health problems etc.,
B	Until recently, have been very stable. Most are founding members. Recently have women leave because of other commitments. One left because found the operation of the choir frustrating, i.e. going over parts more than once
C	It's stable at present
D	Stable. We audition every 2 years or so, if we need to replace members. Then we get 6 new people, knowing that peoples' lives change & only 3 will really stay on.

**3:5 When new members are not up to the group's musical standard, how is this handled?**

A	Ask them to sing softly or to play a tuned or un tuned percussion instrument. So far in this group, this has only been a minor problem
B	Never have had to tell anyone to leave, but we do have volunteers that will do the job if necessary
C	Not happened in a long time, but new member rehearses as much as possible, and uses tape recordings to take home. On occasions, existing members have stepped into mentoring roles with new members
D	Section leaders will discuss it with them. We have a 3 week/ 3 month probationary period.

## REPERTOIRE

### 4:1 Describe the repertoire of this choir.

A	Always developed to suit the audiences for which we sing. However, songs which develop vocal ability are included albeit surreptitiously
B	Mostly 4 part unaccompanied songs. We have people who can play keyboard so can organise accompaniment if we need it. African, soft rock, jazz, madrigals and religious numbers
C	Eclectic – world music
D	Traditional African American gospel (arranged by me) & original songs (mostly by me) in what I fondly imagine is in the Black Gospel style...

### 4:2 Describe repertoire you would not engage with, and for what reason/s.

A	Because many can't read music, part work involving more than two is limited. However anything that can be learnt aurally is attempted. Songs sung together are popular.
B	We have rejected numbers because we didn't like the arrangement or we thought it boring. We have put on hold some Jon Rutter arrangements that are too high for the sopranos that we have at the moment, but we generally sing just about anything
C	Can't think of anything stylistically or culturally that I wouldn't at least consider, unless it is too musically difficult for this choir
D	'classical' repertoire – because not all members read music & not all can sing with a 'classical' tone. Anything un funky

### 4:3 Who makes decisions about repertoire?

A	Myself – suggestions are always considered
B	The group. New music is presented, we try it out and then decide if we want to keep going with it. Usually very little discussion about it.
C	Usually myself
D	Me

### 4:4 How do you measure success of this choir?

A	Happiness & cohesiveness of the group & their ability to bring pleasure to others. The sense of doing something they have always wanted to try. A frequent quote "I was given a book to read when choir was on at school"
B	Never thought about it. I guess the fact that we are still together having a good time. Once a year we do have a discussion about whether we want to keep going or not and we have always continued.
C	Depends whether referring to musical/skill success, or functioning and healthy community success. Musically recently talked about the shiver factor!...when you just know in your bones that the chord or song is sitting down beautifully. You don't have to be a professional to know that you have just created magic! The most reliable measure of success is whether we are having fun.
D	How it <u>feels</u> when we sing. If we have the feel of a song down & the requisite energy & it's cooking – plus the degree of joy & job satisfaction & achievement that manifests in the members physiology.

## THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP

### 5:1 How important is group cohesion to the maintenance of this group?

A	Very – all members are very caring towards each other
B	Very important, without the easy feeling of the group and belonging I don't think we would keep going, but the friendship between members helps with commitment and harmony between members
C	Vital! Essential!
D	Very. There are soloists & certain sections of songs that encourage improvisation but I'm always striving for a cohesive sound & mutual focus

### 5:2 How do you encourage a sense of belonging in this group?

A	By providing a name badge & wearing of a simple scarf to tie the group's uniform of dark bottom & white top together. Performance folder of blue for conformity. Photo album records.
B	We don't consciously do anything. Everyone is made to feel welcome, and join in, even when someone does not bring something to drink they are not made to go home before drinks are poured. We try not to allow personality quirks take precedence over tolerance. The friendship is more important and using humour to cover, or to highlight problems has worked so far.
C	I am genuinely interested in the lives & well being of every member of our choir. We "listen" to each other in the deepest sense of the word. I value their opinions and feel this is reciprocated. I'd like to think this is one of the strengths of our ensemble. Our recent recording project has sometimes meant that musical criticism may sometimes seem ruthless, but the group receives this criticism in the spirit that it is offered. It is about <i>the work</i> , not the individual human beings.
D	Start & end rehearsals: we stand, eyes closed, holding hands & jam on a song. At times, we dedicate songs (in rehearsal) to members who need support at that time

### 5:3 What approaches do you take to handle differences within the group?

A	With laughter!! Music especially singing is a great unifying activity. We really don't have a problem in this area. If we did I would be "the bottom line...."
B	When I took over the group one of the members had a problem with interpretation, sorted it out by working a compromise. If there is a real problem we tend to talk about it with the person privately. If anything looks a little stressed in rehearsal, I tend to move on before the situation escalates or tell them it's simply my choice
C	Fortunate in that there has been very little friction. When there has been differences, we communicate directly and take issues to the source. More honest and cleaner than dealing with a third party
D	Section leaders tend to sort out disagreements & if that doesn't work they talk to me & I discuss it with individuals concerned. It happens <u>outside</u> rehearsal and privately. People are encouraged to talk to me privately rather than encroaching on rehearsal time.

## THE CHOIR & ITS WIDER COMMUNITY

### 6:1 What affiliations does the choir have with other community choirs?

A	None
B	Tried to join with another regional group, but did not continue, so now none.
C	Not a lot. Occasionally performed with other choirs, but not frequently.
D	Tenuous. Through the now defunct A Cappella Association, we performed with many others at big choral events & gave our time to fund raisers for other choirs, as they've done for us – but not as much since Association went under.



**6:2 What affiliations does the choir have with other national/international associations?**

A	None
B	None
C	Used to be associated with the A Cappella Association...sad loss for Sydney
D	Australian National Choral Association

**6:3 How does association with these organisations influence the choir's activities?**

A	None
B	N\A
C	When it happens, offers more performance opportunities, and a chance to reflect on and learn about our own processes and outcomes
D	None

**6:4 Where do you feel this choir fits within the wider musical community?**

A	It provides for people who wish to sing in a less formal group. A group which does not have music reading requirements and who are mostly available for day time entertainment.
B	Seem to be fairly isolated in terms of the wider musical community. Although some of the members do participate individually in other areas
C	Sprung from a community, therefore it is a community choir, giving back to a community. Strongest function is in its social contribution. I sometimes feel that community choirs are more important to their individual members than they are to their "audiences". As most community choir members are not seasoned performers, the collective sound can range from angelically sublime to not so sublime! Sometimes members don't have the skills to be able to evaluate just why a performance was so wonderful. Often hard to know how to re-crete that experience. When audiences respond to the spirit of intent, they often realise there is much more going on than just pleasing (or not so pleasing) sound. I have more to say on this topic, but I think I need to let my thoughts gather on this one.
D	Peripherally, tangentially – but we do initiate performances with musicians from other genres: Jenny Morris, Tim Finn etc & with funk bands (Jackie Orzsassky) & once a horn quartet (Otto Orchestra). We've backed pop singers at the ARIA Awards & performed on film soundtracks & commercials.

**6:5 How does the choir participate in the broader, non-musical community?**

A	The group specialises in performing for the aged members of the community and for charity luncheons etc Christmas celebrations, church services
B	We perform for a variety of organisations and events both public & private. Lead Carols by Candlelight, Carls in the Caves and many of the members help lead the singing on Australia Day. Performed for the council in tourist promotion and charity organisations and non-profit organisations such as the arboretum at dinners and concerts. We also do weddings and almost anything else that people are prepared to pay for.
C	We have a wide & varied relationship with our community. We have performed at fundraisers for Community Aid Abroad Oxfam, Walk Against Want, The Gujerat Earthquake Appeal, openings of many exhibitions and special events for Art Gallery, Christmas Carol events, etc
D	?

**6:6 What forthcoming public performances are the choir planning?**

A	Christmas for the Aged Care Facilities/ Church services/Aged Care performances
B	Arboretum's Open Day
C	A big send off for two of the members
D	Tilleys, Canberra

**6:7 List some of the choir's past public performances.**

A	Nursing home Aged Care Facilities, Pensioners & Superannuants society, Cancer Council, Senior Citizens weeks, View Club
B	Uniting Church Annual Concert/In the caves for the Combined Councils Tourist Conference
C	See response to Q 5
D	Hemispheres/Horizons/World Choral/WOMAD/Basement/Brisbane Festival/Melbourne Festival/1999 US Tour of Black Churches

**6:8 Which performances are the choir paid?**

A	None
B	Private i.e. Council, Physiotherapists, Restaurants & Weddings
C	Rarely paid. Most recent paid gig was for an environment authority at the St Patrick's Estate in Manly. Funds contributed to recent recording costs
D	All except benefits & US Churches. Nobody gets paid, funds go into kitty to pay for CD manufacture, baby sitting, concert expenses etc.,

**6:9 For which causes does the choir fundraise?**

A	None
B	Uniting church concert in return for rehearsal hall/ Local charities such as Marantha and Arboretum. We reduce our fees such organisations as Quota and Rotary
C	Many & varied. See response to Q 5
D	Counter AIDS, UNICEF, Walk against Want, West Sahara, Golden Stave Music Therapy

**6:10 Which contests does the choir compete in?**

A	None
B	None now. We did do a few eisteddfods in the early days
C	None
D	None. We did the Sydney Eisteddfod once – not a happy experience for <u>any</u> of the choirs that year. We're not really that interested

## Appendix 5 QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES – Choir MEMBERS

### CHOIR MEMBER

**1:1 How long have you been a member of this choir?**

Less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	10 years	17 years	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
12	2	6	8	2	2	2	4	1	1	1	41

**1:2 Is this the first choir you have ever joined?**

YES	NO	TOTAL
23	18	41

**1:3 How did you come to know about this choir?**

Advertising/Promotion	Word of Mouth	Director Profile	Performance	Founding Member	TOTAL
8	27	4	3	2	44

**1:4 Why did you choose to be in this choir?**

Enjoyment	Social	Repertoire	Creative Outlet	Public Promotion	Director Profile	TOTAL
21	20	12	9	5	4	71

**1:5 What is the relationship between your past experience with other choirs and your involvement with this current choir?**

1 <sup>st</sup> choir	Past School/Church/Community	Enjoy	Repertoire style	Different experience Now	Achievable Standard Now	Same as previous choir	TOTAL
20	6	6	5	5	4	3	49

**1:6 What was the repertoire style of past choirs you were in?**

N/A (1 <sup>st</sup> choir)	Church/School	Popular	World Music	Similar	Musicals	Competition	Originals Songs	TOTAL
20	11	5	3	3	3	1	1	47

**1:7 Describe your musical background and training**

School/Church/Community	Play an Instrument	None	Professional	Tertiary	Self Taught	TOTAL
15	15	14	6	5	5	60

**1:8 Describe your vocal training prior to membership of this group**

None	School/Community	Professional	No response	Tertiary Level	Not Sure/Don't know	TOTAL
23	12	7	4	3	2	51

**1:9 What is your preferred singing range?**

Sop/Mezzo	Bass/Baritone	Tenor	Alto	Sop/Alto	Alto/Tenor	Sop/Alto/Tenor	Tenor/Bass	TOTAL
10	8	7	6	5	2	1	1	40

**1:10 What parts/registers do you interchange between?**

Don't Know/Not sure	Sop/Tenor/Bass/Alto	Soprano/Alto	Baritone/Tenor/Bass	No Response	Don't Change	TOTAL
11	11	9	6	2	2	41

**1:11 What further training do you attend in keeping up your skill base?**

None	Practise	Singing Socially	Workshops	Should	TOTAL
23	7	5	3	3	41

**1:12 Describe your view of singing as compared with a musical instrument**

Singing is Easier	Singing is more fulfilling	Don't play an instrument	Voice is an instrument	No response	Singing is more social	Both equally fulfilling/require skills	TOTAL
18	13	10	8	5	3	3	60

**1:13 Describe your view of singing as a musical activity**

Enjoy	Physical/Health	Social	Rewarding	Creative	Meditation	No Response	Don't Know	TOTAL
26	10	9	8	4	3	2	1	63

**1:14 What is your opinion about singing as a psycho-physiological (mind/body) experience?**

Emotional/Energising	Health/Well being	Relaxing/Inner balance	Spiritual	No Response	Social	Don't know	TOTAL
22	14	11	5	4	3	2	<b>61</b>

**1:15 What is your family cultural background?**

Australian/European	Australian/WASC	No response	European	Working class Australian	Celtic	TOTAL
12	12	9	3	3	2	<b>41</b>

**1:16 What is the role of singing in this heritage?**

Family Singing	Little to no role	Social/Cultural	Negligible Influence	No Response	Church	Instrumental Influence	Don't know	Negative Influence	TOTAL
15	11	9	7	6	4	2	1	1	<b>56</b>

**1:17 In what ways does your family history influence how you engage in musical expression?**

Encouragement/Influential	No Influence	Money difficulties	Detrimental Influence	Choir Activity	No response	TOTAL
20	17	3	2	2	1	<b>45</b>

**1:18 How has membership of this choir impacted on you personally?**

Socially/Culturally	Learn new skills	Confidence	Enjoyment/Fun/Happiness	Profound Impact	No Response	Negligible impact	TOTAL
22	19	12	9	3	1	1	<b>67</b>

**1:19 What differences do you feel are there between choir competition singing and regular public performances?**

Public Performance relaxed/freer/enjoyable	Competition hard work/Challenging	Never Competed	Both equally challenging	P P hard work	No Response	TOTAL
32	17	12	7	4	3	<b>75</b>

**1:20 How do you socialise with members of the choir beyond official rehearsal and choir performance times?**

Mostly wider community contact	Socialise often	Selective socialising	Socialise seldom	Don't Socialise	No Response	TOTAL
15	14	8	7	3	1	<b>48</b>

### **CHOIR'S HISTORY/STRUCTURE**

**2:1 How do you see your role in this choir?**

One of a team	Learner	Important	Helping Others	Enjoy myself	TOTAL
33	14	7	6	2	<b>62</b>

**2:2 How do you see your role when the group is performing?**

Part of a team/Do my best	Important	Enjoy	Giving	No Response/NA	TOTAL
36	7	6	3	2	<b>54</b>

**2:3 What structure do you perceive to be operating in this choir?**

Democracy/Cooperation	Director Leads	No Response	Don't Know	TOTAL
33	22	7	6	<b>68</b>

**2:4 In your experience of past choirs, what structures did you perceive to be operating?**

No past experience	Director Led	No response	Cooperation	Power politics	Allocated roles	TOTAL
20	12	7	4	2	2	<b>47</b>

**2:5 What are the benefits of belonging to this group?**

Learn new skills/Creative outlet	Social/Friendship/Belonging	Enjoyment/Emotional	Health/Spiritual	No response	Giving	TOTAL
36	35	11	6	4	3	<b>95</b>

### 2:6 What are the disadvantages of belonging to this choir?

No disadvantages	Time	No Response	Personalities	Travel	Standard	Challenging	Not enough members	TOTAL
15	10	5	5	4	3	3	2	47

## MEMBERSHIP

### 3:1 What conditions were there for joining this choir?

No conditions	Enjoy singing/commitment	Fit in with the group	Fees/Audition	No response	TOTAL
17	13	10	9	4	53

### 3:2 New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is not up to standard. Discuss how you would handle this situation.

Assist/Tolerate	Choir is carefully chosen	Don't know/Hasn't happened	Leader's role	No Response	Take action	TOTAL
24	10	9	8	4	4	59

### 3:3 New members join, and their singing ability in your opinion is of a higher standard than your own. Discuss how you would handle this situation.

Learn from them/Enjoy	They need to fit in	Raises the bar	Not for me to judge	Director's role	TOTAL
32	8	6	3	1	50

## REPERTOIRE

### 4:1. Describe the repertoire of this choir

Popular/Folk/A Cappella	World Music	Religious/Gospel	African/Jazz	Western Canon	Limited due to choir size & inexperience	No response	TOTAL
43	16	15	15	7	5	4	104

### 4:2 What style of song would you choose which is not currently in this choir's repertoire, and why?

No change needed	A Cappella/Folk/Popular	No Response	Religious	World	Director's role	Western Canon	Blues/Jazz	Australian	TOTAL
16	8	4	4	4	4	3	3	1	47

#### 4:3 What is your approach when working with challenging repertoire?

Practise	Listen	Tape Parts	Be organised	Enjoy Learning	No response	Panic	TOTAL
20	19	8	8	6	4	1	<b>66</b>

#### 4:4 How do you measure personal achievement in this choir?

Improve Musical Skills	Enjoyment	Good Performance	No response	Commitment	Confidence	Don't need to	TOTAL
29	12	11	5	5	4	2	<b>68</b>

#### 4:5 How do you measure success of this choir?

Audience Response	Enjoyment – self & others	Good relationships within the group	Musical Competence	Invitations to perform	No response	Committment	Don't need to	Increased Membership	TOTAL
24	16	12	12	8	4	3	1	1	<b>81</b>

### THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE GROUP

#### 5:1 How important is group cohesion to your membership of this choir

Very to Quite Important	No response	Resolve Conflict is Important	Not an issue	TOTAL
38	6	4	2	<b>50</b>

#### 5:2 How important is creating a sense of belonging in this choir to you?

Very to Quite Important	No response	Not an issue	TOTAL
43	4	3	<b>50</b>

#### 5:3 How do you resolve conflict within the group?

Discuss/Deal with it	No conflict	Laughter/Humour	No response	Leader's Role	Avoid	TOTAL
26	17	9	3	3	2	<b>60</b>



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHOIR & WIDER COMMUNITY****6:1 What affiliations do you have with other community choirs?**

None to very little	Occasional gigs/church	No response	TOTAL
28	15	4	43

**6:2 What other musical groups do you belong to?**

None	Community Amateur group/s	No response	Professional Group/s	Aspire to	TOTAL
28	6	3	2	2	41

**6:3 Describe your involvement in non musical community organisations**

Community: Church/School/Sports/ Service clubs/Cultural groups	None	No response	TOTAL
63	8	2	73

**6:4 How does membership of this choir impact on your involvement with the wider community?**

Community engagement/wider social circle	Respected/Valued	Giving to community	None to very little	No response	Profound impact	TOTAL
21	11	11	10	3	3	59