



# NEWSLETTER

Summer 2007

## LETTER FROM OUR PRINCIPAL

Dear Friends

I don't know if this is a good day or a bad day. I have just returned from visiting the doctor and have been ordered to take a complete 'cut back' with my life-style and workload. In some respects I was not surprised. She does realise how much my music means to me and said that she would never want to stop me doing it but I must do less and have two complete days off a week! As you can imagine this will create problems for me but at 63 years of age I feel I must listen to her. Don't worry - I will still give 110% in everything I do for as long as I can. I need to be well for the work that I still do. I feel sure that you will all support me in the new decisions I will have to make.

I was also saddened to have the resignation of Geoff Walters as our President and accompanist of nearly 40 years. Again, I think he is feeling that his weekends are precious and that he must put his family first. We are arranging a presentation to Geoff to say a big heartfelt "thank you". Kentwood would not be where it is without Geoff Walters!

The May concert was a great success and now we look forward to the cream teas at the De Vere Hotel on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July. The children's show is at the Arts Centre on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September and the Christmas Cracker hopefully at the Wyvern Theatre on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

Now is the time for many of us to take holidays so may I wish you all a lovely time!

The family Bean show was a resounding success. Their new CD should be in everyone's home. I love it! So wonderful that they will be giving £7 from every CD to Prospect and the proceeds of this show.

We welcome our new musicians bank into our Kentwood family:

Accompanists: Paul Maguire, Mark Burton, Garry Bamford, John Horler

Percussion: Ashley Pulleyn, Steve Perry, Andy Griffiths, Paul Ashman

Bass Players: Ben Kidds, Steve Wiltshire, Tracy Absalam, Garry Bamford

All in all the future of Kentwood is secure. Long may we reign.

A lady who works tirelessly for Kentwood at all times is my friend Mary Sherratt. We have recently appointed her as a Vice-President of the choir. Congratulations Mary!

Well, rest calls! I'm now going to take a nice walk with Chris! Doctor's orders!

Love

*Sheila*



## **SHEILA'S WORKSHOPS**

12<sup>th</sup> May 2007. We arrived at All Saints Church, Cannock, Staffordshire at approx 12.30pm greeted very well but they were still to have their AGM. After lunch Sheila whipped the assembled choir members into shape - this was the start of the "Workshop". First step - posture, sitting down and standing up. Note: no slouching, no lounging, crossed legs, no hanging onto chairs when standing up. Six or seven goes and we're getting there.

"Right" says Sheila, let's talk about the larynx, the very important vocal organ containing the vocal chords. Restriction - try not to cough too many times, keep your chin up so you can open the mouth nicely when singing high notes. Demonstration - First scale. Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma Ma. How does that feel? Not too bad, now try Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me. A little different so change the shape of the mouth to make it easier.

Time to listen to Sheila. Advised that all members of her choir have lessons to ensure that the standard of singing is maintained and is in addition to the normal routine practice. Dress code was also discussed as a very important part of presentation. In conclusion, Sheila was able to help this choir singing 'You build me up' and 'He's got the whole world in his hands' mainly with movement and harmony.

After about 2 hours everybody was full of praise for Sheila and said they enjoyed every entertaining minute of it. We had a good journey home listening to Chris's new Sat Nav advising us of all sorts of comical instructions down the motorway.

### *Mary Sherratt*

16<sup>th</sup> June 2007. Having finished another fabulous show with Sir John Dankworth and Dame Cleo Laine at Wavenden I knew I had an early start the next morning as I was going with Ann Stone to observe Sheila at a workshop in Nottingham for 55 men whose ability ranged from never having sung before to being a member of Carlton Male Voice Choir. I would be dishonest if I didn't admit that I wished I had not agreed to go as it was a 7am start at Sheila's which for the people who know me this means a 5.45am alarm call. However, after a 3 hour car journey through some torrential rain we arrived at a church hall in Nottingham to be greeted by a room full of men with an average age of 65. Hanging around in groups, clearly intent on catching up with their friends for a chat and a laugh I could not see how it could be possible to form any order from this crowd. How wrong could I be! As soon as Sheila told them the workshop was starting they took their places and turned all their attention to her. Most of the men had received two evening workshops from Sheila prior to this day and were ready to continue to work on the four songs they would be singing in a short concert later that afternoon. A mixed ability, they did their best but you could denote a lack of conviction and confidence. After completing all four songs Sheila worked on each song again, adding some of her own sparkle, enthusiasm and passion. As each song unfolded a story was told, although 'Unchained Melody' proved a little difficult for them as the men found it hard to show love in their faces. But they got there! By the time lunchtime arrived the change in the sound of the choir was phenomenal. At 2pm everyone re-convened in the church next door for a final rehearsal before the concert at 3pm. The choir, all dressed smartly in black and white were ready and sang with more drive than at any time that day. Sheila said they could still give more - Sheila was right!

Finally the concert began. The opening song, 'Old Time Religion' was a good start and went down well with the audience. Sheila then gave a short resume about her work and 'Pedro the Fisherman' was then sung. A fabulous choir was forming in front of our eyes. Four choir members each spoke about their own achievements from the workshop. Each speech was so positive about how much they had taken away from Sheila and her teaching methods. These speeches were followed by Ann Stone singing the unaccompanied Folk Song 'The Turtle Dove'. This was received very well by the audience and choir alike. 'Steal Away' was the penultimate

song and this was sung beautifully with Sheila having taught them how to sing quietly but still with energy and good diction. The choir were performing beautifully and the more they sang, the stronger their confidence became and the more they gave from within. I was then asked to talk a little about the choir and some of our achievements. Boy, haven't we accomplished a lot! It was then time for the final number, 'Unchained Melody'. There are no words that can express how I felt listening to this song. The improvement from the morning session was immense. The choir put their heart and soul into this to the point that I saw at least two choir members in tears not to mention myself and Ann. Everything that Sheila had asked of them they did and received a standing ovation after the final note! What a day! Sheila was given three cheers from the choir, presented with a bouquet of flowers and given so many compliments.

Thanks to Sheila and The Kentwood Show Choir, I have once again had a great, if not unusual, weekend.

*Jane Shrimpton*



## **WALKING IN MEMPHIS**

*"When I was walking in Memphis  
I was walking with my feet ten feet off of Beale..."*

I was asked to write a few memories of my trip of a lifetime – my journey to America's Deep South back in late March, to soak up the sights and sounds of New Orleans, Memphis and Nashville on a whistle-stop tour!

We flew to Atlanta airport and started our trip with some champagne on the flight – after all, this was my delayed birthday trip! Christine and I enjoyed the company of four of our closest friends (including Terri – from the choir – and her husband Paul), and it was going to prove interesting to see what they would make of the busy itinerary ahead.

Our first night was spent in Montgomery, Alabama – the town where, in 1955, a black lady by the name of Rosa Parks famously refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person, which led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, one of the largest movements against racial segregation. We walked over to a typically southern eaterie and dined handsomely while the waitress cooed over our accents.

All through the trip, I was enthralled by the road signs we were passing: Birmingham, Macon, Mobile, Biloxi, Baton Rouge, Jackson, Chattanooga, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Arkansas – every one of them sparked off a song in my head.

New Orleans was a true city of contrasts – the tourist attractions such as Bourbon Street, Jackson Square, the French Market and the mighty Mississippi river, against the miles of devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. The city is desperate for tourists to visit and witness both sides, and we really had our eyes opened to the peoples' plight some 18 months after the storm.

On to Memphis, and the real reason for the visit – a chance to pay my respects to the King: Elvis Presley. First, though, a more sobering experience concerning a different King – we were taken to the place of Martin Luther King's assassination, the façade of which has been preserved. Adjacent to it is the National Civil Rights Museum, which unfortunately was closed that morning.

Then to Sun Studios, birthplace of rock'n'roll, where Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins and, of course, Elvis first recorded back in the 1950's, and where yours truly (and

also Terri and Paul) got the chance to record a track in 2007! Simply to stand on the spot where Elvis stood and to imagine the thrill of capturing those early sounds was something else!

From there we headed for Graceland, Elvis' home for twenty years. This was a humbling experience, as the house is a lot more modest and not nearly as garish as I'd feared. (Okay, so the Jungle Room is a little over the top but hey, it was styled in the '70's!). Elvis' presence is still almost tangible in every room, as if he might walk back in and sprawl out on his fifteen-foot white leather sofa any minute. And to stand at his graveside in the rain is an experience I will never forget.

Our final major destination was Nashville, the home of country music (and yes, we did come back with some cowboy hats!). One unexpected treat was being taken to RCA Studio B, where the Everly Brothers, Jim Reeves, Dolly Parton and Elvis recorded many times over the years. As we sat in the studio in the dark (Elvis liked to set the mood for his night-time recording session with little or no lighting), listening to 'Are You Lonesome Tonight?' being played in the very room where he recorded it, we all felt more than a little moved. Then we were allowed to sit at the piano he used to play gospel on to warm his voice up!

Our last stop en route to the airport was at the world famous Chattanooga station ("*Pardon me boy – is that the Chattanooga Choo Choo?*"), which has now been turned into a hotel and visitor attraction. Great to have been to such a landmark, but a rather disappointing and shoddy place to end with.

So, back home to England after 8 days of musical heaven for me – and yes, everyone else really enjoyed the trip too, finding the whole experience fascinating and impressive. There are lots more memories too, but I could probably fill a book... Huge thanks to Christine for taking me to see such a fantastic part of the USA, and now whenever I sing 'Walking In Memphis' I'm transported right back there!

*Clarry Bean*



## **KENTWOOD CAME TO MARCH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

'Wonderful!' 'The best Sunday afternoon I've spent for ages!' 'I'm still on a high from the concert and it's Wednesday!'. These are just some of the comments I heard after the Kentwood concert held on 20 May 2007. The event had been planned for nearly a year and had been eagerly anticipated by all concerned. The idea had come from the Friends of All Saints School as a way of fund raising that would involve the school choir. All Saints Choir are in regular demand to sing at church fetes and events and Friends wanted them to have the opportunity of singing with a 'real' choir as part of our schools Able Gifted and Talented Programme called 'No Limits to Learning'.

Many months of hard work followed by a small but committed team. Posters were ordered and fliers handed out in town on Saturday mornings, local papers picked up the story and the concert was even mentioned by Aled Jones. The school choir practiced hard, spurred on by the fact that I had told them that Sheila was 'really scary'. Well, she frightened me when I was their age!!

The day itself was planned with military precision. Tracey and Karen spent Saturday evening chopping salad and preparing lunch. When the coach arrived it was great to see so many friendly faces. The children were so excited and loved every minute of the experience. It was wonderful to see how Kentwood accepted them and were so kind. The girls were thrilled. They did not think Sheila was scary at all!!

Although the church was full there was no profit from the concert. The Friends were so disappointed by this - it seemed that all their hard work had been for nothing. But there are more ways to measure success than money. The concert was enjoyed by so many people, the school choir had the opportunity to perform with top quality singers and I got to conduct the Kentwood Choir!! Thank you Sheila - that was a moment I won't forget. It also raised the profile of the school in a very positive way. At the end of the concert, the choir received a standing ovation..... that says it all. March has never seen anything quite like it! And the most frequent comment has been 'when are Kentwood coming again?'

A huge thank you to everyone concerned - band, singers, Sheila for a truly memorable afternoon.

*Rachel Voss, Headmistress*



## RETURN OF AN 'OLD' GIRL

I was 8 years old when I first joined the Kentwood Choir. I left when I was 19 and a few years on I have returned. It was great to see some familiar faces when I entered the first Sunday rehearsal a few weeks ago and I slotted right in next to my old pals and it felt as if I had never left. I left Swindon as I was offered a place at the Italia Conti Theatre School in London where I studied Musical Theatre. I spent the next 7 years doing various shows mostly on tour across the UK. I played Liesl in the Sound of Music when I first left Italia Conti then went on to play Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz both of which were on tour. After that I did a lot of Children's theatre. Some good, some bad and some downright humiliating!! Actors will do anything!! I spent a few months playing 'Peggy Patch' from Playdays. I then got a part in a new show in the West End called 'Tonight'. It was a trial show written by a very talented young Dutch composer but sadly it only lasted a couple of months as many do and went off on tour around Europe. I did not stay with the show as I was offered Eve in 'Children of Eden' in London. This job allowed me to buy my flat and I settled down in Muswell Hill, North London. My next job was in an all women's show called 'We'll Meet Again' which was about the roles women played during the war. A very sad show but the music was great. Over the next few years I continued to do the odd tour and I remember doing a great show called 'Something Wicked' in Cambridge with a small theatre company.

4 years ago I began to want to try something completely new and find a job that was more secure and actually paid a guaranteed wage every month so I decided to train to be a police officer. I trained in Hendon and joined the Metropolitan Police Force and found myself posted to Islington in North London. A crazy and busy borough, I spent 3 years working as a uniformed officer and then I trained to be a detective and work in CID. At present I work in the Specialist Crime Directorate and I specialise in child abuse. Sometimes not a nice job but other times a great and rewarding job. I met my partner, Martin, in the police force and although we love London and we are happy to work there, we no longer wanted to live there so we moved back to Swindon. We have good shifts and commute to work and so far it's working OK. So that's what I have been doing.

I look forward to singing with the choir again..... so much to learn and so many uniforms to get hold of..... whatever happened to the pink dresses we wore in Iolanthe, I'm sure I still have mine!!!! Thank you all for welcoming me back.

*Rachel Sparrow*



## A BIG THANK YOU TO THE KENTWOOD CHOIR AND THE PEOPLE OF SWINDON

In December last year I was privileged, at the end of the 'Christmas Cracker' production at the Oasis, to thank Sheila and everyone involved with the Kentwood Choir for all the pleasure they consistently bring through their work to the people of Swindon. With all the problems encountered at the Wyvern Theatre, 2007 was a particularly difficult year to put on the concert and the resultant costs were significantly higher than usual but at the end of the evening the surplus was entrusted to our Club to distribute to worthy local causes. After long thought we decided to donate the funds to the Swindon Women's Refuge and I thought everyone involved with the event would like to see how their efforts were received by the final recipients. The following is the thank you letter we received from Jenni Manners, Manager of the Swindon Women's Refuge.

"I am writing on behalf of everyone involved with the Refuge to express our extremely grateful thanks to everyone in the Rotary Club of Swindon for the wonderful donation of £1,000. I have to admit it is not often that I am at a loss for words - but when I opened your letter containing the cheque it most definitely was one of those rare occasions when I was left speechless.

Sadly, the services the Refuge tries to provide for victims of domestic violence in Swindon are still much needed. The 24 hour helpline is still a source of advice, information and support to both female and male victims. The accommodation services, again accessible 24 hours a day, is still accessed on what, at times, seems an ever increasing basis - sometimes influenced by national or international football matches, the full moon(!) and other unknown factors. Women and children still arrive at all times of the day or night, often with no belongings whatsoever, seeking safety, security and shelter but also needing clothes, food, toiletries, advice, information and support.

There is still no public funding for such basic necessities in an emergency which is why this organisation is so very thankful for donations such as the one Swindon Rotary has made. We also must provide safe and secure transport for the women and children in order to prevent possible abduction or even worse. As far as possible we try to facilitate children being able to continue schooling and it can be unsafe for them to do so using public transport.

We also try to keep the issue of domestic violence high on the public's agenda since we firmly believe education and general awareness, criminal and civil sanctions and more information and options for victims are the only way forward to try to stop the horrendous abuse that still goes on behind closed doors. Repeated British Crime Surveys indicate that only 20% of domestic violence incidences are reported to the police. Statistics from Swindon Police show that 2,862 incidents were reported last year; this suggests that 14,310 actual incidents took place in Swindon - affecting thousands of victims and, of course, their children too.

We carried out some local research, five or six years ago, into the full cost of domestic violence in purely financial terms. The results were staggering since they showed that through taxes, national insurance, criminal and civil processes, costs to employers, health services, police, etc, etc, domestic violence cost more than £10 million per annum in Swindon alone. How we wish that even a fraction of that sum was available for more preventative work! A heartfelt 'thank you', again, to everyone in Swindon Rotary for your generosity and kindness. With my very best wishes". *Jenni Manners.*

A big thank you to Sheila, The Kentwood Choir and everyone involved in the event. Long may your efforts continue to meet this type of need!

*Rob Harman, The Rotary Club of Swindon*



## FUTURE CONCERTS

### 2007

6 July	Aldbourne Methodist Church. Sandra Barnes (01672 540161)
8 July	De Vere Hotel, Swindon. Tickets from Brian Taylor Music - 1 May
5 August	Macmillan at the Hilton Hotel. Gill Thornton (01367 252535)
21/22 September	Junior Show at the Arts Centre (01793 614837)
6 October	St Augustines Church, Rodbourne. Chris Done (01793 693230)
19 October	St Margarets Church, Stratton. Victor Howlett (01793 822793)
28 October	St Bartholomew's Church, Wootton Bassett. Jean Crump (01793 848744)
4 November	Remembrance Service at Wyvern Theatre
18 November	Holy Trinity Church, Bradford on Avon
2 December	Christmas Cracker
15 December	Debenhams, Swindon (Time to be advised)
20 December	Roves Farm

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*Look out for the report of the Choir opening the Garden Concert Season at Wavendon in the next edition of the Newsletter*