



Covid 19 edition – June, 2020
A newsletter for all choristers in
Western Vic. & SE of SA

Founder: June Roberts
Editor: Helen Lyth
3/13 Balmoral Crescent
Rippleside 3215

Phone: (03) 52786058 Email: hlyth@westnet.com.au

The Choral Grapevine website: <https://thechoralgrapevine.wordpress.com/>

Welcome to this special edition of The Choral Grapevine during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is in response for a request for information about how choirs are planning a resumption to face-to-face rehearsals as distancing restrictions begin to ease. We are particularly aware of the special dangers that singing presents to the spread of pathogens, especially when singers are in close proximity as in the choir setting.

Thanks to all of you who have responded with information about how you are keeping connected during distancing, and also for the research you have been undertaking to inform your return to singing as a choir.

Before your reports, it is important to impart some news which has impacted so many of us.

VALE – STEPHEN BROCKMAN

Stephen Brockman died around two weeks ago, following a cycling accident. Stephen has been Musical Director of the Gisborne Singers since 2008. As well as impacting the Gisborne Singers, many of our other choristers also knew Stephen, as the Gisborne Singers often collaborated with other choirs, including the Ballarat Choral Society and the Geelong Chorale.

Stephen is remembered as an outstanding musician and good friend by so many of us in the choral community.

We offer condolences to Margaret, Johanna and Heidi, to members of Stephen's immediate and extended family, and to his numerous friends in the music community.

There is a remembrance for Stephen from Alison Kinghorn of the Gisborne Singers below.



Stephen Brockman

GISBORNE SINGERS

Vale Stephen Brockman

Vale Stephen Brockman (1/11/1941 – 28/5/2020)

It is with great sorrow that The Gisborne Singers announce the death of their esteemed Musical Director Stephen Brockman, following a serious fall from a bicycle.

Born in Windsor, Stephen first studied flute at the Melbourne University Conservatorium of Music before starting an engineering career in Geelong. He later switched to music, his great love, and became a successful orchestral musician and conductor, both in Australia and overseas.

Stephen was appointed Musical Director of The Gisborne Singers in 2008 and, under his expert and compassionate leadership, the choir has successfully brought quality large-scale classical works to the Macedon Ranges, complete with professional orchestras and soloists. On two occasions, members of the choir have been invited to sing at Carnegie Hall, New York. The first was in 2017 for the North American premiere of Sir Karl Jenkins' *Cantata Memoria* and the second in early 2020. Stephen was ably and lovingly assisted in all things musical by his wife Margaret and it was her reduced orchestral score for *Cantata Memoria* that made it possible for the choir to present the 2018 Australian premiere of this work. In 2015 Stephen received the Macedon Ranges Arts Ambassador Award in the Australia Day Honours List.

Compounded by COVID-19 restrictions, the choir is grappling with this devastating news and is unsure how it will best proceed as a choir, as Stephen's shoes are very BIG shoes to fill.

There has been an outpouring of grief from the wider musical community, and the immediate choir family has been supporting each other virtually (including the very special virtual recording of two songs to be played at the funeral).

Two messages from choristers show the love and respect they had for their conductor: "His remarkable capacity to encourage musical excellence with a manner that was warm, engaging and appreciative was so very special" and "I saw him as indestructible, infallible. He was our conductor, our leader, our musical compass. He WAS The Gisborne Singers, and it was most definitely HIS choir".

Stephen is survived by his wife Margaret, daughters Johanna and Heidi, and grand-children Jack and Jean.

At this stage, Gisborne Singers are grappling with the loss of their friend and musical director, and not making any plans for a resumption of singing. [Alison Kinghorn](#)

Reports from our choirs

SWEET ADELINES (GEELONG HARMONY CHORUS)

In Sweet Adelines around Australia, we've been relying on Zoom to maintain our choruses' connectedness and community but find that singing as an ensemble is impossible. Our Musical Director at Geelong Harmony uses our learning tracks as backing and we are all muted but we sing along to those and record ourselves singing. It's working out really well and we're certainly finding that we are keeping up our morale and maintaining friendships. We make good use of the 'breakout rooms' to have sectional rehearsals. All in all, it's not been too difficult to do, but having a good internet connection makes for a much happier time, that's for sure!

Have you viewed the Gondwana Choirs webinars about choral singing? They're very informative and this one about what choirs and choruses can do in the times of coronavirus is especially so. I have to say that I'm in no rush to return to face to face rehearsals any time soon.

I've learned from this that the person most 'at risk' of anyone there will be our conductors who will be out front, facing all those singers and copping all that aerosol spray of potential coronavirus particles that emanates from every voice and lingers in the air for hours. Masks aren't really a solution either because we won't be able to sing in them and it's the aerosols rather than the droplets and sputters that do the damage and infect people. Remember too that once the physical and social distancing controls are reduced and people go out into their communities more, the next wave of active cases will occur and we will be back to avoiding creating the environment that puts our singers and musical directors and accompanists at risk all over again.

Here's the link to that webinar. <https://youtu.be/LZss6EbVzTo>

From [Anna-Marie Shew](#)

WONDROUS MERRY

I think Wondrous Merry is a long way from resuming singing together, sadly.

Singing seems to be the riskiest activity we can be involved in!

[Marie Goldsworthy](#)

'Let the Music Keep Your Spirits High' (Jackson Browne)

DEANS MARSH SINGERS

Tanya Stewart is another person who recommends choirs who need information watch the Gondwana Voices webinars.

[Tanya Stewart](#)

GEELONG GRAMMAR CHOIR

We are a long long way from face-to-face rehearsals. I cannot see them happening presently even this year – being a boarding school there are added risks we have to think about.

I have been using Sound Trap to do some collaborative work with my choirs and this has been fun but many find it intimidating. Sound Trap <https://www.soundtrap.com/>

[Jodie Townsend](#)

HAMILTON SINGERS

Yes we here in Hamilton have certainly been wondering when choirs will be given the okay to resume rehearsals and it would be great to hear what other choirs in our region have been doing and their plans for the future too.

During our weeks of isolation we have not been rehearsing at all. Instead we have been staying connected as a group via these means:

- A newsy and an extended in length than the usual Newsletter called the Warbler has been circulated to members via email. This publication has had articles of interest concerning singing, other choirs, links to works we might like to purchase, photos of what our members have been doing, comments and general ways to help our members feel connected.
- I as choral director have produced a series of videos through then app Loom which has been circulated every three weeks or so. These videos have presented simple rounds or songs that the choir members can sing along with and replay as many times as they want to in their own homes. It has also been a way that I can personally be in their homes and on their screens. Loom website - <https://www.loom.com/>
- I have also spent our rehearsal night once a week on the phone ringing members and chatting with them on a social level. I have thoroughly enjoyed this as usually at a rehearsal I do not get a chance to really chit chat with members as I am too busy with the musical side of the evening. I feel that I have really gotten to know my choristers as people.
- The committee of Hamilton Singers have been meeting every three weeks or so via Zoom. They have made decisions concerning music to buy for the future and trying to plan ahead for what we could possibly still do this year as a choir and even plan for events for next year.

In terms of returning to rehearsals we feel we still need direction from the governing authorities on this. We would need first for the gathering size to be 30 or more. We did meet in a school and probably this will not be available for us for some time yet. So we have given thought as to finding another venue that would be larger so that all our members could be the required 1.5 meters away from the next person. So far this has proven difficult as other venues like churches or halls do not want outside group in their venues either. So at the moment we have no idea as to when or how to meet again. [Beth Tonissen](#)

(A note about Loom from Beth - Loom is very easy to use. After you do your recording of yourself or whatever you want to record it automatically makes it into a link which you can message or email to others. Others can simply click on the link and they see your video. People receiving your video do not need to download anything.)

CORYULE CHORUS

Joy Porter, Coryule Chorus Musical Director has prepared this comprehensive document which she presented to their committee to inform a return to face-to-face rehearsals.

RETURNING TO CHOIR

Over the past month I have been keeping across an increasing large body of research from the USA about the additional risks of singing and this virus.

It would seem that there are much great risks for singers than the social distancing of 1.5 metres would mitigate.

Some of the research that admittedly is in its infancy and not yet peer reviewed, would suggest the following:

- **On the hierarchy of “safe” activities to return to, group singing is considered among the least safe**, with the exception of a quartet singing outdoors with the wind NOT at their backs (sorry, Irish Blessing!). A return to traditional group singing is considered HIGH RISK. Singing in an enclosed space with recirculated air is one of the most dangerous things people could do right now.
- **For a variety of biological reasons, singers are considered “super spreaders.”** Our deep breathing and loud sound produced during a rehearsal projects disease particle into the air at a significantly higher rate than talking. This is why we keep hearing horror stories of entire choirs falling ill from one rehearsal. According to available data “many severe infections originated in churches, practice rooms, and rehearsal halls.” Even if 6 feet of physical distance is observed, singing mitigates that by filling a room with virus particles quickly.
- **New studies show that those with COVID may be *most* contagious just BEFORE they start to show any symptoms.** Asking singers (or our audience members) to self-police and stay away from a rehearsal or performance if they’re feeling ill may not be much help if they’re most contagious before they’re even aware they have the disease.”

SOURCE: Summary notes from a Webinar run by National Association of Singing Teachers in USA
<https://www.barbershop.org/covid-webinar-summary?fbclid=IwAR0v6bL0ZKYmKgi7df4pbMjIui5LVZ1-jyVFJh68scKpM8VwxbHpJwhKV7k>

“When individuals sing, they project their voices. Powerful voices project droplets at far greater distances than does casual conversation. Therein lies the risk (for group singing.)

I believe the typically advocated social distancing of six feet is inadequate when singing is involved.”

SOURCE: Dr. Tim Greiner professor of pathology and microbiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

A couple of other links may be helpful too:

From the Council of Churches in the US state of Wisconsin

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/04/23/returning-to-church/>

and from a vocal coach and MD of a Baptist church in USA

https://www.drheathernelson.com/singingandcovid19?fbclid=IwAR0_AXRixsP_NnD01cy65snF4-RUI1BU52kyqRU5HqEF1aHFSr3IOVxPedU

<https://www.bleedingheartland.com/2020/05/03/staying-6-feet-apart-wont-stop-covid-19-from-spreading-at-church/>

A couple of weeks ago the well-respected choral group *Gondwana Choirs* held a webinar that has an amazing amount of medical and practical information in it

<https://www.gondwana.org.au/covid-19-the-future-of-choral-singing-in-australia/>

This webinar is worth watching in full but in case you don't have time you may like to look at the video demonstration at **41:45**. This research material is shared courtesy of PHD students Prateek Bahl, Charitha de Silva, and their Lecturers Professors Con Doolan and Raina MacIntyre, University of Sydney. It is very instructive demonstration about the way the droplets and aerosol particles are expelled and remain airborne after a simple scale is sung.

And last week they hosted another webinar on returning to choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzhLMI2jK0>

I know that for my choir, I will be very cautious about a return to even limited numbers at rehearsals until we have more advice from our medical and government authorities.

[Joy Porter](#) MD Coryule Chorus Drysdale

More from Joy

There was a good webinar this week from ABCD (Association of British Choir Directors) that indicated the choirs in Norway will be returning soon and they may well be the guidance that the rest of the world's choirs need to assist in a safe return.

https://www.abcd.org.uk/news/2020/06/abcd_publishes_research_paper_on_the_impact_of_COVID19

I'm thinking that when/ if the govt regulations allow groups of 50 we might still wait until there has been 2 cycles of no new cases in Victoria before we plan a return and then it will only be in smaller groups so as to be spaced a very long way from each other.

Concerts and performances will be out of the question for a really long time, until a vaccine is suspected.

My choir committee will meet next week on Zoom to map out the plan forward.

Coryule have been zooming in 2 groups each week (12 in each 1 hour session) We have done some fun warm-ups, sung some rounds and some short songs and then sang along with some audio that I play through Zoom (either our Coryule CD tracks or some professional choirs that the repertoire publishers make available on their websites) and of course enjoyed some chats together.

We joined a wonderful group in UK called Total Choir Resources that provide so many resources, warmups with the scores and audios and lots of tech help and mastermind sessions on Zoom. I am so glad to have found them and their life saving resources since the lock down.

<https://www.totalchoirresources.com/> [Joy Porter](#)

MILLICENT CHORAL SOCIETY

Millicent Choral Society has been having weekly sessions on Zoom to meet up, have a chat, and some fun keeping familiar with our current music pieces. We have had up to 15 participants.

We sing along at home with microphones muted, while I play the accompaniment or backing track.

This is necessary due to the inevitable time lag owing to internet speed differences.

As far as resumption of our rehearsals is concerned, we are watching closely what is happening elsewhere.

The Gondwana Voices website has had interesting webinars that I've watched.

The Adelaide Choral Network has written to our Premier.

They are keen for singers to do a quick survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8J93KWZ>

I have also sent this link to an article which was in Limelight Magazine to our singers for their info.

<https://www.limelightmagazine.com.au/features/covid-19-the-future-of-choral-singing-in-australia/>

[Michael Bleby](#)

WINDFIRE CHOIR and THE CHOIR OF ST MARY OF THE ANGELS BASILICA, GEELONG

Windfire Choir ceased rehearsals way back in mid-March and cancelled our Easter concert and Festival around the same time.

Music at the Basilica has already cancelled the Melbourne Chamber Choir's concert which was to be in August, and will postpone all choral concerts until next year. The reasons are:

- It is too risky for our choristers to resume singing even if we follow social distancing and good personal hygiene. All the research shows that singing is high-risk activity in relation to the transmission of COVID-19. The first webinar presented by Gondwana Choirs showed that the aerosols produced by singing could be forced up to 20ft away from a singer's body

and the body heat of the choir could keep aerosols in the breathing area of choristers. By aerosols I mean the really fine droplets that remain in the air and can be taken deep into our lungs when we breathe. Most of our singers are in the “high risk” age group, and some may have pre-existing conditions that may make them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, and we would not risk putting them in any kind of danger.

- Given that conductors have to stand in front of choristers for more than 15 minutes at a time, we would hate to think of the risk to them, even if they were to wear a mask and stand behind a sneeze guard.
- We don’t think we would get an audience as the average age of our audience falls in the “high-risk” group. We struggle for an audience at the best of times and we think our audience will stay away from public events for quite a long time and some will not return until there is either a vaccine or a more effective way to treat the virus.
- We are uncertain of when the Basilica will be open to the public, so we may not have a venue to perform in. There is also the added cost of cleaning and disinfection before/after each use.

In the meanwhile St. Mary’s choir is keeping in touch via Zoom. We manage to sing a couple of hymns each week but there are real issues with time delays. It’s more to main the social aspect of being in a choir. Music at the Basilica committee keeps in touch via Zoom, and we try to put posts on Facebook to try and keep up interest, but other than that, we are not doing much.

Who would have thought that singing in a choir would be such a high-risk activity! Just goes to show that we choristers are thrill-seekers (... but you and I always knew that).

[Jane Bashiruddin](#)

BALLARAT CHORAL SOCIETY (from the choir's latest newsletter)

Another month has passed, and we have a little more freedom than previously. Sadly, this has not extended to the ability for us to commence rehearsals. We do hope that you are all able to participate in some musical activities to help pass the time and assist your physical and mental wellbeing.

Even though we have not been meeting physically as the Ballarat Choral Society, the committee has convened a number of meetings via Zoom and is planning some interesting events for when we can eventually commence rehearsals.

Firstly, we are delighted to advise that we have been gifted a new composition entitled, Kakadu-Gagadju (Bininj Kunwok), by Darwin-based composer, Paolo Fabris. We are so looking forward to sharing it with you when we are able.

On a sadder note, Helen Duggan has informed us that the musical director of the Gisborne Singers, Stephen Brockman, has died, apparently as a result of a bicycle accident. He did wonderful things for choral music in the Macedon Ranges and gave valuable opportunities to singers and instrumentalists. Ballarat Choral Society benefited significantly through its collaboration with Stephen and the Gisborne Singers. Stephen will be sadly missed by many.

[Lyn Broadstock](#)

and from Helen Duggan (Musical Director, BCS)

Not wanting to be a total wet blanket, and recognising that those of us in regional areas might feel that the community risks are lower than in the city, the advice at the moment re resumption of everyone-together-in-the-one-room/space rehearsals in the near future is not encouraging for adults. People who haven't yet come across authoritative information about the challenges and possible solutions might like to look at one or more of the following:

- <https://anca.org.au/newsview/adapting-to-the-new-normal-with-covid-19-575> (scroll down)
- <https://www.gondwana.org.au/free-webinar/>
- <https://www.nzcf.org.nz/choirs-and-covid-19/>

As of last night, specific advice from the Victorian government was not yet available for choirs*.

Imaginative suggestions will be **very** welcome.

* The information re sport is out, so obviously info for choirs will appear any minute now!

[Helen Duggan](#) (MD, Ballarat Choral Society; Choral Director at Ballarat Central Uniting Church)

VOX BOX

Vox Box will most likely not be resuming rehearsals at the earliest, until the winter season has passed, and actually I think we could be quite up in the air until a vaccine - or at least a successful treatment is available.

My choir has a bit of a 'senior' demographic and a lot of them are simply afraid- regardless of guidelines.

On another subject- I'm extremely incensed that ANCA has just sent out member renewal invoices, when they know no-one's been able to rehearse for at least three months, with no end seemingly in sight. As I'm sure you're aware, the discounted insurance choirs get through aon is dependent upon a receipt for ANCA membership. I feel even the insurance should be waived for the year, as most of us won't be back to performance (and probably regular rehearsals - therefore are receiving no money to pay the premiums, etc) realistically until next year.

It is a very worrying time for smaller choirs such as mine who are trying to hang in there!

[Lisa Breen](#)

GEELONG U3A CHOIR

At this stage I have no plans to resume singing with the U3A Choir.

Considering the age of our members and the size of our Choir, the size of the Chapel at Cobbin Farm where we rehearse and the fact that I am in the very vulnerable age and health category, combined with all the research and recommendations from various choirs in many countries, it would not be a wise decision.

We are all keeping in constant touch by e-mail and telephone and have access to lots of on-line choir sessions (e.g. Quarantine Choir from the UK) which we can sing along with and learn new songs. e.g. video pandemic psalm <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRsOq-SBosg>

For those of us whose life is all about music - choirs, concerts, etc.- it is a difficult time and we have to stay safe and well.

[Margaret Hughes](#) OAM

COLAC CHORALE

The Colac Chorale has decided on a recess as we have the month of June off anyway.

Concerns over distancing, breathing etc are probably on everyone's mind and it was good to read the letter from Michael.

Have been watching to see if there were any directives from the Health Department none so far. I shall read with interest what others have been doing.

[Pam Radcliffe](#)

[Gwenyth Knox](#) reports that the Colac Chorale has, like all of our choirs, had to cancel its forthcoming performances. Rehearsals are suspended for the foreseeable future.

Like many of us, Gwenyth has enjoyed finding concerts and music on the internet, and recommends **"Music for Hope"** (about an hour long) held in the beautiful *Duomo* in *Milan* – and featuring just the organist and the tenor, *Andrea Bocelli*.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-13/andrea-bocelli-music-for-hope-concert-in-milan-duomo-coronavirus/12143964>

THE GEELONG CHORALE (excerpt from choir newsletter)

The committee met via Zoom last Monday. Our provisional date of return of July 13 is not promising, and we have decided to delay performance of the Brahms *Requiem* until early next year, hopefully.

We are hopeful of having a Christmas concert, but it will be a simple one where we can accommodate a reduced number of singers. We feel that there are a number of singers who will not be able to join us for some time due to medical conditions of their own or their family members.

Music improves your memory. Some of you may know that ABC Classic FM do a countdown of classical music every year over the Queen's Birthday weekend. This year it was Beethoven. In case you ever wondered, here is an article about music improving one's memory. <https://www.abc.net.au/classic/read-and-watch/news/classical-music-helps-test-scores/12253890?fbclid=IwAR2yHZXNayqa8qJqP87DrnNemgIIIPeEhfOLLnsYoywW6-mLD61JJc5Vioo>, Beethoven especially is mentioned.

[Angela West](#)

Choirs in The Choral Grapevine network in 2020:

Apollo Bay: Apollo Bay Community Choir **Ballarat:** Ballarat Choral Society, U3A Choristers Ballarat, Vox **Berri:** Riverland Choral Group, **Bordertown:** Bordertown A Cappella Singers, **Camperdown:** Camperdown Uniting Church Choir, **Casterton:** Sacred Heart Church Choir, **Cobden:** Cobden Community Choir, **Colac:** Colac Chorale, **Deans Marsh:** Deans Marsh Singers, **Drysdale:** Coryule Chorus, The Bellarine Community Choir **Geelong:** acabellas, Bella Mama, Geelong (Bay City) Conchords, The Geelong Chorale, Geelong Harmony Chorus, GSO Chorus, Geelong Trades Hall Choir, Geelong Welsh Ladies Choir, Geelong Youth Choir, The Gesualdo Consort, International Harvester Male Chorus, Sing Geelong, St Luke's Uniting Church Choir, St Mary's Basilica Choir, Geelong, St Paul's Church Choir, U3A Geelong Choir, Windfire Chamber Choir, With One Voice Geelong, Windfire Chamber Choir, Wondrous Merry, Vox Angelica Chamber Choir, Vox Box Community Choir **Gisborne:** The Gisborne Singers **Hamilton:** Footprints the Choir, Good Shepherd Choir, Hamilton Singers, Tabor Male Choir, **Lavers Hill:** Lavers Hill Choir, **Millicent:** Millicent Choral Society, **Mt Gambier:** Mayfair Youth Jazz, Mount Gambier Choral Society, Mt Gambier Christ Church Anglican Choir, **Naracoorte:** Naracoorte Singers, **Penola:** Southern Heritage Singers, **Port Fairy:** Port Fairy St Johns Anglican Church Choir, **Portland:** Portland Choral Group, **Queenscliff:** Tides of Welcome, **Torquay** Surfside Singers **Warrnambool:** Cantori, Red Tent Singers, Warrnambool Christ Church Choir, Merri Singers, Warrnambool St Johns Presbyterian Choir, Warrnambool Theatre Company Chorale

There is no Choral Calendar in this edition, but, like most of you, I have been watching concerts and performances online. One of the few Australian choirs who are still performing, is the Australian Chamber Choir. There have already been two concerts presented through the [Melbourne Digital Concert Hall](#). These were by a new four voice group, ACC4 and ACC8 who opened the ACC's 2020 season before the pandemic lockdown. There are three more concerts in the digital series, which will be performed at Mandeville Hall, and streamed live online, on Sunday June 26th, July 28th and August 8th and 26th. <https://www.auschoir.org/buy-tickets/>

The Melbourne Digital Concert Hall aims to give musicians some income during this time of no live music.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to this special edition – I am reassured that our choirs, and our choral community, are keeping connected in this most difficult year. [Helen](#)