

WILLIAM SHAW OAM: SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH MUSIC

On 31st January 2024 William Shaw OAM retired from the position of Conductor and Director of Music of the Adelaide Male Voice Choir after completing 39 years in that role – a period which covers more than a quarter of the Choir’s history. He was the Choir’s eighteenth Conductor since its establishment in 1884 as the Adelaide English Glee Society. During his time in office, he played a significant role in developing the Choir’s skills, repertoire and community service, so that it now has a place at the very heart of music-making in the community. The Choir is acknowledged and appreciated for the professional quality of its singing and for the positive contribution it makes to happy and inclusive community building.

This is the story of Bill’s life in music, focusing particularly on his involvement in community music, although this is, of course, inseparable from his musically rich professional background.

Bill is one of those truly fortunate people whose hobby has also been his job and lifelong interest. Music has been a focal point of his life, professionally and personally, and extends also to his commitment to music in the community. He sees the arts not as an optional “add on”, but as a vital ingredient in the health of the community – both at an individual level in the personal development and fulfilment of the participants, and at the community level in the spreading of enjoyment and friendly links. He has always remembered these words from President John Kennedy: “The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of the nation, is very close to the centre of a nation’s purpose – and is a test of a nation’s civilization”.

WEST AUSTRALIA

Bill was born in West Australia in 1942, and one of the earliest signs of his interest in music was when, as a toddler of around 3 years of age, he was so taken by the sound of the Salvation Army Band playing Christmas carols in his street, that he managed to climb over the fence, lifted his black and white terrier Spot after him, and set off after the Band when it moved to the next street. His anxious parents found him there about 20 minutes later, standing right in the middle of the Band among the players, completely absorbed by the splendid music, and very reluctant to return home.

It was an era when music was an everyday experience of life, at home and in the wider community. Opportunities to hear professional performances were comparatively rare and were enthusiastically attended, but on the whole most of the music around, and there was plenty of it, was at an amateur and often informal level. As in many homes at that time, there was a piano in Bill’s family home, and it was not unusual to have little impromptu musical performances at family get-togethers. There was always an Uncle Tom or Auntie May who could be persuaded to “give us a song”, usually from some popular musical or operetta, such as *The Merry Widow* or *Lilac Time* or else from the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas. Bill’s mother actively participated in music and encouraged his interest. She sang, played the piano and cello, and had taken part in amateur musicals in the country towns she had lived in as a young woman.

As a child, Bill frequently spent holidays with his maternal grandparents in the little country town of Bridgetown in West Australia. Music was always in the air! The local milkman had a pleasant light

baritone voice and was a regular performer on the local radio station of popular songs from musicals. As he drove along in his highly polished Ford Customline ute, he would treat the passersby, particularly the pretty girls crossing the main road, to renditions of love songs from *Oklahoma*, *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Carousel*, and he would invariably be acknowledged with a cheery wave and a smile! When a visiting soprano (a young woman from the Italian community in a neighbouring town) gave a concert in Bridgetown of songs from Italian opera, everyone, including Bill and his grandparents, attended the event and the Town Hall was packed.

Later, Bill's grandfather retired from his job in Bridgetown and he and his wife came to live in the Perth suburb of Victoria Park, where they threw themselves wholeheartedly into the life of the community. They joined the local club of the Senior Citizens Association and in no time they had organized a very successful program of "concert parties" (as they were called), consisting of a small troupe of amateur performers, who would go to Senior Citizens clubs, RSL clubs, and other community and charity groups and give short variety concerts of instrumental playing, stories, jokes and community singing. They were booked up every week. Everyone had a great time, money was raised for charitable causes, friendships were made right across the community, and lonely people were drawn into a warm and supportive network. Reflecting back on those days, Bill feels that this period was probably very influential in developing his lifelong commitment to music in the community. Although he was too young to fully appreciate its significance at the time, he experienced at first hand the positive effects of music in the community.

Bill started learning piano at age 7 from Mother Dominic at the local convent. She was as formidable as the name suggests! She had recently returned from working at a leper colony in India, and she was not going to stand any nonsense from anyone. She would rap his knuckles sharply with a wooden ruler at any wrong notes; and any result below 98% in the theory exam was considered by her to be a failure. Bill discovered that he could occasionally distract Mother Dominic by asking her for stories about her time in India with the lepers. She would describe how their fingers and toes would fall off, and then say briskly: "And that's what will happen to you if you don't do your piano practice".

From that time on, music became increasingly important in Bill's life. Although it was not part of the curriculum at Hale School (an independent school for boys, which he attended for his secondary schooling), his piano studies stood him in good stead and every morning for his final two years at the school he played the piano for hymns at the formal school assemblies and on special occasions. At that time, he also made a bit of pocket money through his music by playing the organ for church wedding ceremonies. Later, in his university days, he earned enough money by providing background piano music at pubs and bars to be able to buy his first car – a beloved 1932 Riley sports, complete with big headlights and running boards and wire wheels! At Hale School, Bill had all-round interests. He was in the Cricket XI, captain of rowing, played football and hockey, was a member of the athletics team, president of the drama society, a member of the school debating team, on the committee of the school magazine *Cygnnet* and Officer-in-Charge of his own Flight Unit of the school's Air Force cadets. For several years after leaving school, he coached a Hale rowing crew and hockey team, as well as playing hockey for Old Haleans and rowing with the Swans Rowing Club.

During and after his degree studies at the University of Western Australia, Bill continued training as a pianist, as well as a singer and choral conductor. He graduated with the degrees of Bachelor of Arts (with majors in music and drama), and Bachelor of Music (specializing in Music Education). Later, he also had professional lessons in violin and double bass, and taught himself the guitar. He sang with, and became Secretary of, the 200-voice University of Western Australia Choral Society, which was conducted by Professor (later Sir) Frank Callaway and performed major choral works (such as Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Faure's *Requiem*, Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, and Karl Orff's *Carmina Burana*) with the WA Symphony Orchestra at concerts which were broadcast nationally by the ABC. It used the best soloists available nationally, some of them singers from South Australia, whom Bill met again in Adelaide, at a later time in his career. For three years he was also a singer with the ABC Lyric Singers, a 30-voice ensemble singing works for public performance and broadcast, sometimes *a cappella* and sometimes with the ABC Symphony Orchestra. For several years, he assisted the University in the mounting of arts events, in the role of stage-manager for concerts and sound-effects man for theatre productions.

Bill's teaching career in WA schools gave him the opportunity to implement a wide range of music initiatives, introducing innovative ideas and exciting curriculum, while maintaining a secure grounding of quality music knowledge and principles. He established instrumental ensembles and choirs at all age levels, as well as presenting musicals and operettas, and arranging for school music groups to perform at various community events. It is interesting to note that a quote from J Edgar Hoover, a former Director of the American FBI stayed in his mind: "If you give a kid a musical instrument, he'll never reach for a gun". Although Hoover's remark had more to do with crime prevention than music, Bill felt it had an underlying message about the particular value of teaching children real music on real instruments, as part of their musical development. He was certainly aware that for many of his students, music opened the door to a world of life-changing opportunities.

The invaluable music teaching experience he gained in schools was able to be used later in setting up a new initiative by the WA Department of Education to create the Music Area Resource Teacher scheme, whereby specialist music teachers each mentored a group of class teachers in metropolitan primary schools and helped them to bring worthwhile and enjoyable music experiences into the classroom. This work slotted neatly into Bill's next professional position, lecturing in the School of Education at WAIT (WA Institute of Technology, later to become the Curtin University). Many of his students were middle-aged women wanting to re-enter the workforce after raising their families. They were training to be primary school teachers, and Bill taught them music theory, how to read music and how to play the auto harp and guitar, as well as a repertoire of songs suitable for primary school children. His courses were very popular, in fact over-subscribed, as the word passed around among the students about how useful and practical they were, so he had to schedule extra classes. It was obvious that Bill was a stimulating and effective teacher, so the School asked him to do a series of demonstration classes (using some primary school children from a nearby school), which were filmed and used as a teaching resource in the School of Education. He also devised a choral music education course (possibly the first in Australia) and guided it successfully through the accreditation process at WAIT.

It is of interest to note that one of the extra-curricular attractions for Bill at WAIT was that the Institute has a Flying Club, which meant that Bill could join and use their plane (a Cessna 150: Registration WXP)

to realize one of his childhood dreams: learning to fly, like Biggles! He took lessons and in about six months he gained his pilot's licence. In order to maintain the licence, he was required to put in a minimum of three hours of flying time per month. This was a very enjoyable break in the normal routine of work while at WAIT, but it was impossible to maintain the flying hours subsequently, so later he was reluctantly forced to allow his licence to lapse.

During his university days and subsequently as a professional music educator, Bill threw himself into a wide variety of voluntary extra-curricular activities in the community. One of his busiest commitments was to the Children's Activities Time Society (CATS), which was founded in 1965. Bill was a foundation member, committee member and performer with CATS, which gave valuable participatory music, dance and drama experiences to young children in metropolitan and country areas, particularly during the school holidays. Bill was also a committee member of the WA branch of the Australian Youth Performing Arts Association (AYPPA), a government body with oversight of children's arts events. In 1977, he was one of the organizers of a major AYPAA arts festival for children, celebrating the centenary of Mr Thomas Edison's invention of the phonograph, and featuring dance, music, theatre and craft activities. It took place at various locations on the spacious WAIT campus, where Bill was working at the time, and was spread over two weeks of four days in each week, involving a total of 3,000 schoolchildren.

Bill was never short of energy and good ideas, and was involved in many other projects to enhance music-making in the community, including the following: Conductor of the Bach Choir, a mixed-voice choir of 20 singers, performing at festivals, special church services and for broadcasts; founder and conductor of the Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra, a community orchestra performing concerts in aid of charities and in association with amateur theatre groups in musical productions; music director of several musicals and light operas for amateur music societies; conductor of the Inter-Hospitals Orchestra, performing concerts in aid of medical charities; and conductor of the St Paul's Uniting Church Choir. St Paul's was located not far from the University of WA and had many academic members in its congregation, which meant that Bill had some quite distinguished and musically sophisticated choristers to work with and could rehearse quality music of some complexity to present at special church occasions, such as *The First Noel* by Vaughan Williams at Christmas-time.

Bill always made sure that he kept abreast of the latest research and developments in the field of music education interstate and overseas. There was no internet in those days, but he kept up-to-date through conferences, membership of several music education bodies, subscriptions to a range of professional journals, and contact with practitioners in Australia and overseas. In 1977 he was very interested to hear about a scheme of Special Interest Music Centres (SIMCs) currently being introduced in the Adelaide metropolitan area by the South Australian Department of Education. SA led the country in arts education, and Bill was keen to learn more about this innovative scheme, so when the position of Head of Music at the Woodville High School SIMC was advertised, he recognized a unique opportunity to gain some first-hand experience in implementing the scheme. This was a moment of decision for Bill and his wife Daina: If he applied for the position and was successful in gaining it, would they really want to take on the challenge of such a big step? They decided they would! They both worked in the tertiary education sector but were willing to be flexible in regard to employment, and they felt that their three sons were young enough to benefit from a change of scene. Bill applied for, was offered, and accepted the Head of Music position in SA. On 28 March 1978 the Shaw family embarked enthusiastically on what

seemed at the time to be more like an exciting working holiday than the major change in their lives that it turned out to be.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Bill brought sixteen years of valuable professional experience in music education to his new job, together with his boundless energy and enthusiasm, as well as his diplomatic and negotiation skills. He set about establishing new curriculum and teaching directions at the Music Centre and was generous in sharing his expertise with his staff members and encouraging them to try new approaches which would enhance their own job satisfaction as well as benefit the students' musical progress. He consulted widely and discussed ideas and issues with a variety of people, not only in the music and education sectors, but also with the Woodville Council and local businesses and industries.

He realized the importance of embedding the Music Centre in the local area, so that it would be seen as a community asset and resource. With this in mind, he got to work visiting the local CEOs, managers and business owners, explained to them the Centre's mission and plans to enhance the education and life prospects of the young people in the area, and encouraged them to take an interest in the Centre as part of the community they served. There was quite a gratifying response and, in fact, the first saxophone at the Music Centre was purchased from a donation from GMH (General Motors Holden), after the student band had given a lunch-time concert for the GMH staff on the factory-floor.

Bill established a cordial relationship with the Woodville Council as well, and before long the Music Centre's various ensembles and choirs were in regular demand to play at community events, ceremonies and commemorations. A few years later, the Mayor and Town Clerk asked Bill to advise them on how the Council should go about providing more music activities to involve the citizens of Woodville, as they felt that sport had been well provided for in the area and it was now time for music to have a turn. Bill suggested that a band and a choir would be a good start. A Music Steering Committee of the Council was set up, of which Bill was a member, and after several meetings to work out all the details, the Woodville City Band and the Woodville Choral Society were born. Bill remained on the Music Steering Committee for several more years, to help with further initiatives.

When Bill first arrived at Woodville, music was being taught in the school hall and in an assortment of classrooms, including the shabby classrooms vacated by the domestic science unit, which had moved to new premises. One of Bill's early tasks was to liaise with an architect in the detailed planning and design for a purpose-built Music Centre to be constructed at the school. The building work was completed in 1981 and formally opened by the Minister for Education at an impressive ceremony, where the school band played an opening fanfare composed by one of Bill's music students. A tour of the new Music Centre followed the opening, with various ensembles performing in every nook and cranny of the building.

Over the following years, Bill's music influence spread well beyond Woodville, as he conducted in-service teacher education courses and presented papers at state and national music conferences. His published teaching materials were used in several states, and he had constant requests from music teachers asking if they could visit the Music Centre to talk to him and observe his programs at first hand. At various

times he also lectured part-time in both the School of Education and the School of Music at the University of Adelaide and also at Hartley College of Advanced Education (which later became part of the University of South Australia). Somehow, he even managed to find time to undertake the research necessary to gain a Master of Educational Administration degree at Flinders University, his thesis topic being on the organization of special programs for children gifted in the performing arts.

The Music Centre was always abuzz with activity as its fame spread and more and more students wanted to participate in its innovative programs. There were concerts, musicals, music camps, interstate and overseas music tours as well. One highlight among many was an overseas tour by a 17-voice chamber choir (with Bill as the 18th member) of Italy, Austria, Germany and England from late November 1986 to mid-January 1987. They sang at prestigious venues (including the Australian Embassy in Rome) and were very well received wherever they went. In London they featured in the national press, due to a chance meeting on a train that Bill and Daina had with a London journalist working for Australian Newspapers in Fleet Street. He was most interested to hear about the choir tour and insisted that Bill and Daina come with him to meet his boss and another colleague, both Australians. This resulted in some very positive articles about "The Lamington Choir", so titled because of the fund-raising efforts by the students to make the tour possible, which included baking and selling several thousand lamingtons.

After twenty three years of service at the Woodville High School Special Interest Music Centre, Bill took early retirement in 2001, in order to pursue more fully his growing involvement in music-making in the community, as well as some other voluntary work. There was a week of farewell functions for Bill at Woodville, and many messages of goodwill and thanks, a testament to his wise guidance over the years and the lasting legacy of his influence in opening life-changing opportunities for so many of his students. For a few years he continued with some professional part-time work for the School of Education and the School of Music at the University of Adelaide, as well as helping out at times of crisis in the secondary school music world. Most of his time, however, was committed to the Adelaide Male Voice Choir.

When Bill had left employment in WA to take up his new job in SA, he had also farewelled a number of community music projects in which he had been involved. He had worked with a wide range of groups of all ages (choirs, soloists and choruses in operas and musicals, and instrumental ensembles of various sizes) and was familiar with a remarkably extensive repertoire of music. Not surprisingly, it was not long after he took up his post at the Woodville High School SIMC that his extracurricular commitments also started in the wider community – some music related, some more broadly based. It is relevant to note that each of his commitments was "by invitation", that is, he did not seek to take on any role or membership, but was approached to do so, as his experience and expertise became more widely known and he gained a reputation as a resourceful and encouraging supporter and promoter of community initiatives. His community work has always been as a volunteer – he has accepted positions only on an honorary basis, not for payment.

Some of Bill's music activities in the South Australian community are listed below:

For five years from 1978, Bill was the Conductor of the Italian Corale (the Italian Choral and Arts Society), a body of about 50 singers. They were a very enthusiastic group and celebrated the appointment of "il maestro" after the first rehearsal by toasting him with champagne in paper cups. Bill wondered how the

Corale would cope with a non-Italian conductor, but he need not have worried. At an Ethnic Communities Festival concert in 1979 of ethnic choirs, music and dance groups from a variety of countries, where Bill's name was the only non-ethnic name in the whole programme, the Corale performed with great success, and the President and other dignitaries said that it was the best performance the Corale had ever done and that "ethnic distancing" was good for discipline, that is, the members would never show such respect or work so hard for a compatriot. The Corale was extremely popular in the Italian community and sang at national anniversaries, church festivals and special occasions, but its commitments were not restricted just to the Italian community. For example, the Corale sang at the opening of the special Pompeii Exhibition at the Art Gallery of SA. A lady came up to Bill at the conclusion of the opening ceremony and asked what choir it was, because her husband had said that only a Welsh choir could sing like that! Through Bill's professional connections with the Adelaide music world he was able to arrange a variety of performance opportunities for the Corale in association with other groups, such as Polished Brass and the Adelaide Consort.

In 1980 Bill received an unexpected invitation from the University of Adelaide's radio broadcasting station 5UV, which had started planning for a rather ambitious project – a comprehensive history of jazz in a 10-episode series, including a commentary which would be published for use in conjunction with the series. The producers wanted the commentary to be well-researched but not drily academic, so they chose Bill as the ideal person to provide them with material which would be knowledgeable as well as entertaining. For the next few months, the Shaw house and car resounded with jazz melodies, as Bill listened to the tapes and gathered his thoughts on how the various eras could be best captured in words.

For several years, starting in spring 1983, Bill was the Conductor of the Adelaide University Choral Society (AUCS). At that stage, the choir had been in existence for about 23 years and had a membership of around 50, which varied considerably as new students arrived at the University to take up their degree studies and graduate students departed for the wider world. However, there remained a core membership of "old hands", including University staff members and former students, who enjoyed the conviviality of the choir community. The first AUCS concert Bill devised and conducted was performed on 30 October 1983 and was entitled "This Love is but a Wanton Fit". It comprised songs of the spring season from around the world, including several by the 17th century composer Thomas Morley (including the title song), plus songs by Bach, Brahms and Grieg, as well as English, Hungarian and Russian folk songs. The program also included a Ravel piano solo piece and a Telemann quartet of recorders, violin and continuo. It was an exhilarating performance, the first of many over the next few years. Another special occasion was a concert with both the Haydn *Mass in Time of War* and Lambert's *The Rio Grande* on the program, accompanied by a 25-piece orchestra which Bill had assembled and rehearsed. An especially exciting concert was David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*, with two performances at Maughan Church.

Bill was Chair for some years of the former Festival Choral Society (the co-ordinating body for a number of South Australian choirs), and was for two years the invited Guest Conductor for the combined choir items at the Festival Choral Society's annual gala concert.

All the choirs which Bill conducted over the years always prepared special programs of music at Christmas time, but one of his choirs was a “Christmas only” group. One of the medical specialists at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, who had an English background, wanted to introduce the English carol-singing tradition into the hospital. He asked Bill if he could rehearse and conduct a small group of hospital staff members (medical and administrative) to sing carols at an evening service in the QEH Chapel, which would be broadcast throughout the hospital. This proved to be a popular initiative and was well attended, with the Chapel crowded every year. Rehearsals were quite a challenge for Bill, as changing staff rosters at the hospital meant that he was never sure which singers would be present. However, good will and enthusiasm carried them through, and the tradition was maintained for quite a few years.

THE ADELAIDE MALE VOICE CHOIR

In the context of volunteering work, Bill’s major commitment to music in the community was as the Conductor and Director of Music of the Adelaide Male Voice Choir for 39 years. Bill had not been looking for a new challenge, but it literally came knocking at his door. It all began when Daina was seated next to a Miss Gladys Bailey among the invited guests at a concert of various choirs and instrumental ensembles in the Woodville Town Hall in October 1984. Gladys was one of that admirable band of energetic ladies of independent means who were enthusiastic patrons of the arts in the community. She listened very attentively to the performances by the Woodville High School Choral Ensemble and the Woodville High School Concert Band, both of which were conducted by Bill, then turned to Daina and asked: “Do you know anything about this William Shaw?”. “Well, yes I do”, replied Daina “He’s my husband”. Gladys then proceeded to question Daina very closely about Bill and his background and asked for his contact details. Daina was surprised by the thoroughness of Gladys’s questions, which seemed rather more than just polite interest. She did not know that Gladys was a Vice-Patron of the Adelaide Glee Club, which was looking for a new conductor, but Gladys recognized straight away that Bill would be just the right person to fill the vacancy.

Gladys lost no time in contacting Ray Brown (the President of the Adelaide Glee Club): “I’ve found you just the man you want, and it’s up to you to persuade him!” Ray arranged to call upon Bill at his home, and recruited the choir’s Accompanist, Clem Gracie, to join him on this mission. They were very honest with Bill, saying that, although the choir had a long and honourable history since its establishment in 1884 as the Adelaide English Glee Society, it was now struggling to keep afloat. Bill knew that this reflected a general trend. In the early 1900s, choral music had been a popular entertainment and there had been many large choirs, but as commercial entertainments became readily available choirs tended to decline in popularity and membership dwindled. However, Bill was not daunted. He could see that the Glee Club was keen to rebuild, and he agreed to “give it a go”. His head was already buzzing with ideas for exciting repertoire and performance opportunities, and he was pretty sure that he could carry the men with him.

Thus began the long relationship between Bill and the Adelaide Glee Club. In its heyday in the early 1900s the membership had reached around 100, and at times there had been a waiting list to join, but by the time Bill took the choir over, membership stood at around 16 active singers, although there were other names listed on the roll. Bill could see the potential for the development of the choir into a quality performance group, and he set to work on several fronts, including the formation of a supportive

committee. He introduced new music, new performance standards, new performance format and new performance venues and opportunities. Even a new name! It was changed to the Adelaide Male Voice Choir in 1989, because the music term “glee” was no longer well known in the wider community and some people were under the impression that the Glee Club told jokes and sang funny songs.

At the same time as Bill worked on honing the vocal and interpretive skills of the singers, he also used his network of contacts in the Adelaide community to provide performance opportunities for the choir, often to mark special occasions for various organizations and frequently associated with fund-raising efforts for a variety of charitable causes. He nurtured links with other performing groups and arranged joint concerts with them, and also initiated choir engagements beyond the metropolitan area, including interstate. In regard to the concert program, Bill included guest artists sourced from among his own instrumental and vocal students at the Woodville High School Music Centre as well as through his contacts with professional performers in the wider Adelaide music world. The morale of the choir rose accordingly, and the attitude to rehearsals showed a real sense of commitment: “Monday night is always choir night for me”. Membership numbers increased, and the reputation of the choir rose in the community.

Ten years later, the membership had doubled, and the choir had a full house at its 110th anniversary concert at the Adelaide Town Hall. The concert was held in the presence of Her Excellency, the Honourable Dame Roma Mitchell AC DBE, Governor of South Australia. Dame Roma was the Patron of the choir, and in her message to the choir on its 110th anniversary, which was included in the souvenir programme, she wrote: “The Adelaide Male Voice Choir has a fine reputation and I am proud to be its Patron. I wish all of its members and supporters joyous music-making in the future”. Guest artists at the concert were pianist Edward Kriek (the choir’s Accompanist), and the Band of the SA Police (which, like the choir, had also been established in 1884). Several of Bill’s former Woodville High School Music Centre students were members of the Band, and he had developed a warmly co-operative relationship with the Band’s music administration.

The future of choral music in Australia was at the front of Bill’s mind, and one of the ways that he saw for promoting continuing interest was through a mentorship program for aspiring young conductors. He instituted a scheme whereby a selected young musician could gain practical experience in choral conducting and repertoire by joining the choir for a few years as a chorister and Assistant Conductor. The program started in 2004, and by the end of 2023 there had been six such “apprentices”, who all continued in music-related fields.

Bill recognized the importance of strengthening the choir’s place in the Adelaide community so that it would become known and respected for its role in supporting significant commemorative occasions. Early in his time with the choir, he consolidated its role in leading the singing at the Anzac Day service at the Cross of Sacrifice in the city. Later, he gained the trust of the Returned Services League officials, who organized the event, to such an extent that they agreed to allow the choir to deviate from the long-established and unchanging order of service by including the song “In Flanders Fields” to be sung by the choir before the start of the official commemoration service. The choir had several ex-servicemen among its members in the past. Sadly, they have long since passed away, but the choir has continued its Anzac Day commitment to this day.

Another community commitment which Bill arranged for the choir was to participate for several years in the *Music Matters @ RAH* initiative. This was a program of lunch-time concerts performed in the foyer of the Royal Adelaide Hospital, with the aim of lifting the spirits of patients and staff alike. It certainly worked! The foyer was a bustle of activity, but people would stop and listen for a while and sometimes even join in songs from the popular repertoire, especially Gilbert and Sullivan. It was heart-warming to see patients in wheelchairs and even on stretchers waving their hands in time to the music.

In 2017, the choir was invited by the Mary Potter Foundation to participate in the Loving Tree Christmas Carols evening, held outdoors in the car-park of the Mary Potter Hospice. It was a moving experience. There were over a thousand people present, many of them attending in memory of family members who had been cared for during the year by the compassionate staff of the Hospice. The choir led the carol singing and presented several items, accompanied by the brass ensemble from the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. It was such a successful event that the Foundation asked the choir to take it on as a permanent commitment. In 2022, the venue changed to the St Francis Xavier Cathedral, a very beautiful setting for the service.

Community commitments such as these, plus other regular concerts at retirement villages, and fund-raising concerts for charitable causes, were an important bonding influence for the choir. The members took pride in belonging to a group which played such a positive role in the life of the community, and it strengthened the feeling of camaraderie and loyalty within the choir.

Bill was fully aware of the valuable role that enjoyable social events played, not only in creating good fellowship within the choir, but also in recruiting the families and friends of the choir members to form a supportive network. The committee members and their partners proved particularly helpful in organizing and catering for these events, and there were picnics, barbeques, bocce tournaments, quiz nights and themed fancy-dress dinners. Singing at these events was of a happily relaxed nature. Ever inventive, Bill suggested there was scope to include a more ambitious and formal music/dinner event as well in the choir's performance schedule, and thus was born the very popular annual Opera Dinner. These dinners, usually held at one of the SA TAFE catering school restaurants, started with a 30-minute program of well-known songs from opera and operetta, performed by the choir and guest soloists (usually from State Opera), followed by a convivial dinner. The choir took great pride in the Opera Dinner, which became a highlight of each year and was quickly booked out as its fame spread in the wider community. It is interesting to note that the combination of food and song proved to be a drawcard at other AMVC events as well, including the major Sunday afternoon concerts, when the delicious afternoon-tea provided by the "choir ladies" certainly contributed to the enjoyment of the occasion.

Bill was never short of ideas, and he worked with the committee to constantly implement improvements and innovations. Over time, a general structure evolved for the performance year: three major public concerts (at least one of which was a fund-raiser for a charitable cause or institution, for example, the Anti-Cancer Foundation, the Lions Child and Youth Health Project, the Helping Others Grow Charity Foundation, the Parkinson's Syndrome Society of SA, the Prostate Cancer Association, and the Australian Craniofacial Unit); community commitments (such as Anzac Day, the Royal Adelaide Hospital, the Mary

Potter Foundation); regular performances at retirement villages and churches (especially those related to the Lutheran Church, with which the choir had a strong connection through several of its members); joint concerts with other choirs (including some visiting from interstate and overseas, for example, the Victorian Welsh Male Choir and the Hamilton NZ Choir) and instrumental groups; and social events.

The annual schedule was augmented every year by special events such as tours to SA country areas (for example, Meningie, Penola, Naracoorte - these particular tours continued over the border to Victoria, where the choir performed on several occasions for Pastor David Wear's Lutheran congregations, the connection being through AMVC choir member John Wear, David's father); and interstate trips (for example to Brisbane for the inaugural Pemulwuy Festival of Male Choirs, or to Orange to help the Orange Male Voice Choir celebrate its 90th birthday); and hosting visiting choirs (for example, the Harvard Glee Club and the Buderim Male Choir). Over the years, there were various series of events, such as the "Out of the Square" concerts, which consisted of six concerts of the same program over five days at six different suburban venues; the National Trust concerts in the State Dining Room at historic Ayers House on North Terrace, consisting of three different concerts over three weeks (with supper and wine at the interval); "Tuesdays on Flinders" lunch-time concerts at the Flinders Street Baptist Church; evening concerts for the Adelaide Music Club. The choir participated in the week-long National Australian Choral Fest, held in Adelaide in 2004, and Bill conducted the Massed Men's Choir at the major concluding concert of the event.

The choir also received frequent requests to perform for one-off special occasions, such as milestone anniversaries for SA churches and other organizations; the launch of a major COTA (Council On The Ageing) Expo for SA Member Clubs; a Remembrance Day ceremony at the Military Cemetery, West Terrace; participating in a COTA/Lions Club/ABC project to create a Digital Image Program for aged care residents, by recording the background singing to accompany a DVD of beautiful images of natural scenery, which was jointly launched by a Lions Club representative and Bill at the Leabrook Resthaven Home on Kensington Road; singing at a Service of Remembrance arranged by the DonateLife organization, to acknowledge and honour the donors of organs and tissue for transplantation; singing at the launch of the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health and at the installation ceremony for the Grand Master of the SA&NT Freemasons organization; filming a concert of Christmas carols for TV Channel 44; and many more such events. An unusual commission for the choir in 2022 was at the request of the archivist of the North Adelaide Football Club (Dr Barry Dolman – a good friend of the Shaws and the AMVC). The choir rehearsed and recorded a Football Club song from its early years, in preparation for a historic commemorative exhibition at the Club.

Another of Bill's innovations was the formation of a small group of singers from the choir to perform a specialized *a cappella* repertoire, partly for the purpose of providing some of the more experienced singers with an extra musical challenge, and partly for engagements where a smaller group was required. The group (which included Bill as a singer) was originally called "Adelaide Light", but was known later as "The Octet". This term was only loosely applicable, as the size of the group varied from time to time, depending on circumstances. The Octet rehearsed at the Shaw home, and Daina has said how pleasant it was for her to do her housework to the background sound of wonderful singing. The Octet members have sung, as invited guests, at the BREIF (Broadcasting and Radio Engineering Industries Fellowship) Club's annual Christmas lunch for several years (a Club to which Daina and Bill had belonged), and in

2023 they contributed some Christmas melodies to the Mary Potter Loving Tree Christmas Carols evening.

Even when the choir was on holiday leave in January and July of each year, Bill was busy planning ahead and thinking of new performance opportunities. One of his later innovations was to involve the choir in the Adelaide Fringe program from 2015. The Fringe was an extremely popular entertainment festival in March every year and offered over a thousand different shows, of varying quality. It prided itself on being cutting-edge, confronting, raunchy and irreverent. Although the usual Fringe material was more provocative than the AMVC repertoire, Bill decided that it was time to “test the water” and to see if an AMVC concert of good 1920s/1930s jazz-style music could draw an audience of people eager to participate in the “mad March” festival mood and enjoy a lively Fringe show without fear of being offended or insulted. He devised a “Nostalgia” concert for the choir, of songs by Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Jerome Kern and featuring jazz vocalist Luke Thompson (one of his former Woodville Music Centre students), and registered the show for inclusion in the Adelaide Fringe 2015 program. It was a gamble and it paid off! The two performances were sold out beforehand and more people kept turning up at the door, so more seats had to be found and people had to be squeezed in. Bill would never turn people away! The choir’s involvement in the Fringe has continued successfully from that time, with different themes and soloists, often of Gilbert and Sullivan music, and held in three different venues for each series. It is the choir’s most lucrative venture each year and helps to keep its finances in a healthy state.

The Covid pandemic from 2020 onwards certainly played havoc with the choir’s performance schedule. The choir was in recess for seven months in 2020 when singing in choirs was prohibited, but then they were allowed to rehearse and perform wearing face-masks, which they did with good spirit, even though the masks were hot and their glasses misted over, so they could not see their music or the conductor! In October they rehearsed and recorded a program for broadcasting by the Mary Potter Foundation at its website and throughout the Hospice, in place of the usual live performance at the Loving Tree Christmas Carols evening. It is interesting to note that in 2021 Bill participated in a world-wide on-line survey, undertaken by Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK, looking at the effects on choirs of the Covid pandemic. The co-ordinator of the project took particular note of the effective measures that the AMVC had taken to maintain contact with members during the lock-down periods. They had kept in touch via ZOOM during their seven-month recess in 2020 – not singing together, just chatting and sharing stories and very successfully keeping each other’s spirits up. It was a time when many choirs folded, but not the AMVC! Despite all the difficulties during 2021 and 2022, with so many people ill and so many plans having to be cancelled, the choir kept going, even though it was singing at half strength for a lot of that period. Quite miraculously, it was able to successfully fulfil a busy schedule of commitments during those years, including hosting a major fund-raising concert in June 2022 to provide support for displaced persons from Ukraine who were seeking shelter in Australia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine forced them to flee from their homes. The concert, presented by the AMVC and in the presence of the choir’s patron Mr Rod Bunten, featured guest soloists and performers from the South Australian Ukrainian community. It was enthusiastically received by the audience of about 500 people, and the choir was able to make a donation of \$10,000 to help the relief effort.

Another new performance concept for the choir originated from a telephone chat Bill had late in 2020 with one of his grandchildren, who lived in London and who alerted Bill to the upsurge of enthusiasm for sea shanties, which were being sung in pubs throughout the UK, particularly in seaport towns. Bill realized that the SA Maritime Museum in Port Adelaide would be an ideal place to present a concert of sea shanties, as a benefit concert for the Museum and as part of the SA History Trust's May History Festival in 2021. The Maritime Museum was keen on the idea, and it was decided that the choir would sing in groups spread around the deck of the ketch in the centre of the display area, with the men dressed as sailors in the sailing-ship era. There were already several sea shanties in the choir repertoire collection, and Bill got to work researching others and arranging them for the choir. There was plenty of scope for audience participation, singing the easily-learnt repeat choruses for each shanty. The concert *Sea Shanties and Songs of the Sea* was a great success, and Bill was able to register similar concerts with historical and nautical themes for the History Festival in the following three years.

The Maritime Museum was so delighted with the popularity of the May 2023 concert that it asked the AMVC to participate in a special concert called *Salty Sessions : Shanty* in December of that year. The audience was divided into two groups, and while one group (reinforced by the AMVC) was learning two shanties from Bill on the ground level of the Museum, where the ketch was "moored", the other group was on the upper level listening to a talk about sea shanties, and then they swapped over, with the second group learning two different shanties. There were refreshments in between, to give everyone strength for the concert by the two groups, with the reassuring support of the AMVC. This was followed by the AMVC singing "South Australian Seas", composed by a music student at the University of Adelaide as part of her studies. (She had originally composed it for children's voices, so Bill worked with her before the Maritime Museum event and helped her to adapt the music for a 4-part male choir.) Then everyone joined in most enthusiastically in singing the finale "Bound for South Australia". Bill was thrilled by how responsive the audience was and how eager to join in the spirit of the event. As one lady said to him: "I wish I had a male voice, because I want to join your choir"!

Publicity was an area needing constant attention, and Bill started tackling the matter right from his early days with the choir. At that time, there was no mechanism (apart from expensive advertising in the newspaper) for informing the general public about any forthcoming events. In fact, the annual concert was virtually the only public event, and this was advertised by word of mouth through the choir members' personal contacts. The performances at nursing homes were organized by the institutions concerned and were solely for the benefit of their patients. Along with Bill's introduction of new performance venues and opportunities for the choir, he set about instituting publicity and public relations measures, including interviews on local radio and articles in *The Messenger* community press, with a view to making the choir known more widely and to build up a regular audience. A somewhat surprising element he had to combat was the reluctance for self-promotion by the choir members. There existed the idea that a gentleman did not boast – did not "blow his own trumpet" – about his achievements. Bill had to convince them that, rather than being modest and self-deprecating, they had to "sell" their concerts and let their friends know that they would be in for a treat.

John Lawson, one of the committee members and later president, was a printer by trade, and he contributed greatly towards the choir's public image by creating attractive publicity flyers and concert programmes. With Bill's encouragement, he started to produce a small regular choir newsletter, which

later became the more ambitious quarterly choir newsletter *In Harmony*, containing a report from the choir president and information about coming events, choir activities and choir members. It started as an “in house” publication and was distributed only to choir members, but later became a valuable promotional tool in building up and maintaining a loyal group of supporters, known as “AMVC Friends”, who formed the nucleus of the choir’s regular audiences. When John later moved to Goolwa and retired from the choir, it fell to Bill and Daina, who had regularly helped John by contributing and editing items for the newsletter, to take on full responsibility from August 2006 for the production of *In Harmony*. Between them, they composed items for publication and learnt how to arrange the layout, including photographs, of the four-page newsletter and to get each issue ready for the printer. Daina, who had professional editing and writing experience, became the de facto editor, and contributors of items to the newsletter knew that they could rely on her sensitive editing to “polish” the material received. In co-operation with the president Colin Styles and committee member George Willcox, Daina also created a database of the names and addresses of the “AMVC Friends”, soon numbering several hundred, and posted a copy to them of each issue of *In Harmony*. In later years, an AMVC website was created by one of the choir members, Peter Schulze (later president), and this became an additional valuable promotional tool for the choir. Email also became useful for publicity purposes and as a means of distributing the newsletter, but some of the AMVC Friends indicated they would prefer to continue receiving hard copy by post, so Daina continued mailing out around ninety copies of each issue.

When Bill started with the choir, its Patron was the current Governor of South Australia. This was a happy and long-standing tradition, and much appreciated by the choir. Each of the Governors during Bill’s time as conductor showed interest in the choir and attended choir performances on special occasions. In 2022, the new Governor the Honourable Frances Adamson AC arranged to share her patronage duties with her husband Mr Rod Bunten, and the choir was pleased to welcome Mr Bunten as its Patron. Mr Bunten quickly developed a rapport with the choir, attending its June 2022 fundraising concert in support of Ukrainian refugees in SA and then the small ceremony at a later date for the handing-over of the \$10,000 cheque to the representative of the Ukrainian community. He also attended the 2022 choir Christmas dinner, and in May 2023 he sang in the bass section of the choir for the SA History Festival concert “Sailors, Settlers and their Songs” at the Maritime Museum.

The support by the choir’s Patron was gratifying and affirmed the choir’s position at the heart of community music-making. This also held true for the choir’s current Vice Patrons – the media personality Peter Goers OAM and the pianist and music teacher Jeffrey Kong. In 2011, Bill had proposed a change to the structuring of the choir’s office-bearers, suggesting that the four Vice Patrons listed at that time could more appropriately be honoured by Life Membership. He envisaged a new high-profile role for the Vice Patrons (two in number), which would involve actively publicizing and promoting the choir in the community and furthering performance opportunities for it. The choir members agreed to the proposal and the four Vice Patrons were happy to transfer to Life Membership. The restructuring was successfully achieved, with the election of Peter Goers in 2012, to be joined in 2013 by Jeffrey Kong. This proved to be a positive strategy in enhancing the choir’s profile in the community.

In the Australia Day Honours list in 2011, Bill was awarded an OAM (Order of Australia Medal) for his services to music in the community, especially through the Adelaide Male Voice Choir. The award was greeted with pride and acclaim by the choir, as being very appropriate acknowledgement of the inspiring

work he had done over the years. Not only had he guided the members through a richly varied repertoire and honed their technical and interpretive skills, but he had also taken on a wide range of organizational and administrative tasks. These included devising the theme and content of each concert; choosing, sourcing and arranging music especially for the choir; organizing contacts, venues and performance opportunities; mentoring young conductors; engaging and rehearsing soloists; writing funding applications; registering choir involvement in various festivals; researching the history of the choir in the archives held in the State Library; doing radio and newspaper interviews and writing publicity materials; and working with Daina in preparing the *In Harmony* newsletter for publication. In fact, teaching and rehearsing the choir usually took only two hours per week (plus an extra hour and a half of Octet rehearsal per week at certain times of the year), but organizational tasks usually averaged around twenty hours per week throughout the whole year. All the work he did for the choir, as with all his community commitments over the years, was undertaken on a voluntary basis. As one choir committee member said at a meeting: “We’ve been incredibly fortunate as a choir to have the benefit of Bill’s expertise and experience in such a wide range of functions. If we paid professional rates for all the things that Bill does for us, we’d be out of business!”

Daina was Bill’s constant support over the years, hardly ever missing an event, and always contributing to the friendly and encouraging environment at concerts, social occasions and choir tours. For quite a few years she was the compere for the choir’s annual concerts, and she was also to be found at the ticket desk or serving afternoon-tea at concerts. She always contributed home-baked cakes and biscuits for the choir’s social functions, and on one occasion she provided a Latvian treat – 150 little Latvian savoury yeast buns (called “piragi”) – as her contribution for an “International Night” celebration.

She and Bill worked as a team on producing the *In Harmony* newsletter and in composing publicity materials, speeches, submissions and also, sadly, obituaries and condolence letters. A Christmas letter from the family of one of the choir members who had recently been widowed reflects the warm regard in which Bill and Daina were held: “Dear Bill and Daina, Thank you both so much for providing Dad with such marvellous support and love. The choir gives him meaning far beyond family and his interests in the political world. The choir is amazing – you both nurture all the members, and they, each other, whilst delivering beautiful music to audiences – bringing pleasure and joy to so many. With our love and appreciation.”

The choir has flourished under Bill’s musical leadership. Not only does he have a remarkable breadth and depth of knowledge and experience as a music educator and conductor, but he has a unique talent for interpreting and bringing out the spirit of the music, and the patience and teaching ability to achieve a high-quality standard of choral performance. His innate musicality and his sensitivity to nuances of mood and meaning have been recognized by the professional musicians with whom he has worked, and at times he has been asked: “Why do you stick with amateurs? With your talent as a conductor, you could make a really good living on the professional circuit.” Bill just smiles, but the answer is that he does not seek fame or fortune. His greatest job satisfaction has come from helping his choir members to achieve the best possible level of performance of quality music and to join with the community in “celebrating choral excellence”. Right from his childhood days, long before he could put it into words, he had become aware of the magic of music-making in the community – whether it was the Salvation Army Band playing in the street, or the happy and spontaneous music evenings around the piano at his home,

or his grandparents and their “concert parties”. These experiences in his childhood and then his own active participation later in providing positive music experiences of all kinds and for all age groups reinforced his conviction about the vital role music played in fostering the well-being of the community.

On average, Bill has conducted around twenty-five AMVC performances every year. Multiplied by the number of years he has been with the choir, the total reveals the somewhat remarkable fact that he has conducted around a thousand AMVC performances. Multiply this by the number of audience members at each concert and it is clear that his commitment to sharing the joy of music has enhanced the lives of a great many people in the Adelaide community and far beyond. The very positive feedback which is constantly received from audiences confirms that they greatly appreciate the quality of singing, the variety of repertoire and the sense of goodwill at the heart of the concerts. Here is an extract from an email Bill received from the administrator of a church where the choir had performed late in 2023: “Wow ... thank you so much for the most amazing Concert yesterday. We LOVED it and your vocal harmonies ... Out of this World!!!” She went on to invite the choir to perform there again in 2024, and concluded by saying: “It was one of the best events we have ever been blessed to be part of. Thank you again.” Many people work hard for the success of a concert – the choristers, accompanist, guest soloists and the choir committee – and Bill thanks them all for their commitment over the years. He is justifiably proud of the Adelaide Male Voice Choir and wishes it every success in the future.