

THE JOY OF SINGING

by Jen Rewell



■ ■ 'It is a vibrant mix of people of different ages, backgrounds, and professions, and yet, when they unite in song, their differences fade away. The choir has evolved into a close-knit group that welcomes new members with open arms.'

The heart-warming melodies of show tunes, the vibrant camaraderie of community, and the infectious laughter echoing through the Woodlands Community of Christ chapel every Thursday night—it can only be the WA Show Choir.

This exciting community choir has not only created a harmonious haven for its members but also become a vibrant centrepiece of the community.

Since its inception in 2019, the WA Show Choir has been a source of joy and inspiration for approximately 50 devoted members. They come together each week not only to sing and learn music, but also to share laughs and connect with one another.

The repertoire includes hits from *Les Miserables*, *The Greatest Showman*, *Cabaret*, *West Side Story* as well as songs from lesser-known musicals. Songs like *The Impossible Dream* (from *Man of La Mancha*), *Colours of the Wind* (from *Pocahontas*) and *New York, New York* are favourites. There is also the occasional gospel piece and Christmas carol.

The WA Show Choir is the brain-child of my friend Geoff Robinson and I. We had known each other for many years (due to Perth's close knit musical community), and had previously worked together with a female-voice community choir. In 2019, we decided to up the ante and start a fresh venture which included all voices — and the concept of the WA Show Choir was born.

Leading with an exuberant sense of humour and a love for musical theatre, we are delighted to share our joy in music and knowledge of choral singing. Early on, it was decided that the choir's motto would be "Sing For Joy".

By day, Geoff is a customer service professional in the world of health insurance. I have several jobs which are centred on writing, including being a journalist for the local Post Newspaper and a communications manager for the Australian Alzheimer's Research Foundation. Our professional lives are poles apart, but our love for music and bad jokes makes us the perfect duo to lead this vibrant choir.

Geoff is a natural people person, and has a gift for making everyone feel welcome and valued. His knack for bringing smiles and laughter to the choir

sessions is an essential ingredient in creating the warm and friendly atmosphere that defines the WA Show Choir. But he insists that choristers work hard when the music starts.

"It's fine to just have a singalong," Geoff says. "But what can really touch the hearts of our audience is when we convey real emotion through our voices. It's about everyone in the choir coming together in that one glorious moment of song."

I have played the piano since I was six but I am not a professional musician. That tends to add a unique flair to my role as accompanist (e.g., sometimes I forget what key we are in halfway through a piece!). I've heard the role of a piano accompanist is generally quite passive and defers to the Musical Director. Well, that would be too boring! Geoff and I work best as a team – he provides the knowledge of voice production and I keep us on track with musical technicalities. I would also argue that my jokes are much better than Geoff's!

Initially, we hired a room at a local music school for WA Show Choir rehearsals, but there were many problems with double-bookings and lack of parking (plus a very long trek to the ladies' loos). Happily, chorister (and excellent bass singer) Peter Lonsdale suggested the choir make a move to the nearby Woodlands Community of Christ, where he is the Pastor. This solution has been a great success, as the building has a welcoming atmosphere, great sound system, modern kitchen and a second hall space. We initiated a monthly supper after rehearsal which has added another element of fellowship to the choir.

A vital component that makes the WA Show Choir truly special is its members, who come from all walks of life. It is a vibrant mix of people of different ages, backgrounds, and professions, and yet, when they unite in song, their differences fade away. The choir has evolved into a close-knit group that welcomes new members with open arms.

A wonderful feature of the choir is that members are not required to audition or even be able to read music at all. Every member is given the full choral score of every piece, and as they are taught their part – soprano, alto, tenor or bass – the musical notations are briefly explained. Gradually, the four, five or even six-part harmonies come together to create choral magic.

For many members, choir has become a highlight of their week and an important part of their lives.

One of the singers who joined the choir when it first started said, "Right from the outset Geoff and Jen have made choir practice fun, while still encouraging us to push ourselves to improve. I look forward to Thursday night rehearsals, Geoff often teases us and Jen is an extremely talented keyboard player."

"It's the first time I've been in a choir since leaving school," said another chorister. "I love being part of a community of likeminded souls who come to sing in harmony and make music together. I have made new friends and rediscovered singing. I leave the rehearsals uplifted and positive, and always eagerly await the next rehearsal. Being part of a choir is joyous and happy making, and now that I have found it, I couldn't live without it."

Our choir has a unique blend of music and humour which creates an environment where both beginners and experienced singers feel comfortable, encouraged, and always entertained. As Geoff puts it, "We're not just a choir, we're a comedy show with music!"

One singer said she enjoyed being part of a group in a safe, inclusive and fun environment. "It is great to have a laugh and a reason to smile," she said. "I look forward to attending each week because I feel uplifted and never want it to end. The joy around us through song is evident by watching the smiling faces and enthusiasm to make the best sound possible."

Everyone is encouraged to sing their heart out, and the choir members follow Geoff's lead, enjoy the music and sharing laughter in between notes. The rehearsals are not just about technical precision; they are about the sheer joy of making music together.

The health advantages of singing and music, in a broader context, have been extensively investigated. Music engagement not only stimulates the mind but also provides a workout for the body.

As one of the members said, "Singing makes me breathe properly and takes my mind away from day-to-day worries, which together is very relaxing."

But I think the choral effect is more than physiological. I think that music touches our souls in ways that words alone cannot. It is a bridge that unites hearts. That moment when Geoff brings us all in, and the room takes a breath together and sings out a harmony – it is like magic.

Geoff and I, and the choir members, have not just created a safe space to sing; we have created a community. Our story is a reminder that when we come together in harmony, both in music and in spirit, we can create something truly beautiful and meaningful. As Pastor Peter says, "Having the choir sing in the chapel each week is a wonderful reminder of the singing tradition of our faith community. We celebrate the power of music to touch our spirit and create sacred community in the process."

The WA Show Choir is a shining example of how the magic of music can touch hearts and souls.

Jen Rewell lives in Perth, where lots of ideas wash up on white sandy beaches and come humming out of the blue skies. Jen is a creative thinker who writes for a living and for fun. She is a journalist, a choir accompanist, a hockey player, weightlifter and mother of three daughters. This year, she won the 2023 Furphy Literary Award, and has also been a winner of the 2021-2023 Emerging Writers Program, run by the Fellowship of Australian Writers WA.



