



A group of NYCoS singers and Christopher Bell at the Scottish Parliament, July 2008

Never a dull moment

And quite right too. December may be the lull between the end of the National Choirs activities for one year, and the beginning of the process all over again for the next, but it's right in the middle of activities in our Area Choirs, Education and Publication Departments. That's the nature of this organisation as we seek to put singing on the map in Scotland at as many levels as we can.

The change in colour of this newsletter points to one dramatic arrival for us in the last few months: our new website. The sheer scale of it and our revamped online shop reflects the size and scope of NYCoS in 2008. To design and construct it we had to examine what we did at every level, from Mini Music Makers to Alumni activities and all points between. This process mirrors exactly what Joan Gibson, our new Chief Executive, has also been doing with every facet of our activities – examination, assessment and reorganisation to ensure we are able to function effectively and efficiently. This also included the NYCoS Board, which undertook a development day to examine its own activities and responsibilities more closely.

We have combined both our general and education newsletters this year. I hope you enjoy reading the reports and looking at the photographs contained within these pages. I'm personally musing that in less than two years we will be writing about our plans for our upcoming 15th Anniversary Season in 2011. Much fun to be had before then, but a fine party we'll be planning.

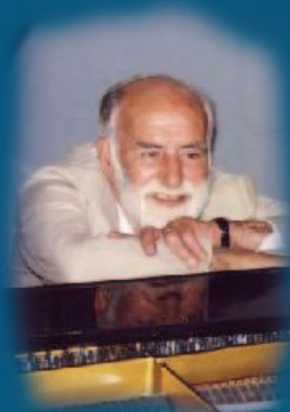
Christopher Bell
 Artistic Director

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Arthur Oldham/Michael Lester-Cribb Memorial Fund

In August, Joan Gibson was presented with a cheque for £10,000 from the Arthur Oldham/Michael Lester-Cribb Memorial Fund. We asked Kathy Crawford, one of the Trustees of the Fund, some questions about their donation.



Arthur Oldham



Michael Lester-Cribb

Who were Arthur and Michael?

In 1965, Arthur Oldham formed the Edinburgh Festival Chorus. The Festival needed a fine chorus and Arthur was the man to build it. Michael Lester-Cribb was Edinburgh Festival Chorus' pianist and assistant chorusmaster for 40 years. They were a great team.

Tell us about the Edinburgh Festival Chorus.

EFC is a group of amateur singers, open to all; admittance is by audition. The singers rehearse weekly throughout the year in preparation for several concerts given during the Festival itself. The Chorus has performed with world renowned conductors such as Claudio Abbado, Carlo Maria Giulini, Herbert von Karajan, Sir Georg Solti, Michael Gielen, Sir Charles Mackerras, Carlo Rizzi, John Eliot Gardiner and Esa-Pekka Salonen. It has toured to Salzburg, Berlin, Cologne, Paris and the London Proms.

How has this sum been raised?

Singers from all over the world, who were trained by Arthur Oldham and Michael Lester-Cribb, contributed to the fund to honour the memory of both men.

Why did the Trustees want to donate to NYCoS?

It is an investment in the future of choral singing in Scotland from those who have experienced the fulfilment it can bring during their singing careers to those who are just setting out on theirs. It is important that the torch which was lit by Arthur Oldham should be passed on to a younger generation of gifted, committed and enthusiastic singers from all over Scotland.

Yes, but why NYCoS specifically?

Members of NYCoS and EFC both want to sing to the highest level, and we hope that NYCoS members will become EFC singers of the future. The Edinburgh Festival Chorus will benefit from the rigorous training the young people receive in their musical formation with NYCoS.

NYCoS is thrilled to receive this very generous donation and will use the funds in three ways.

- We will establish a set of standard repertoire folders that all members of the National Choir will learn and which can be used in large-scale and small-scale concerts and events as appropriate.
- NYCoS will use funds to publish Series 2 of **singbronze!** **singsilver!** and **singgold!** – 30 brand new songs – in September 2009.
- When appropriate, NYCoS Area Choirs with SATB choirs may take part in an occasional rehearsal with EFC, coming to the Hub on a Tuesday evening and having the opportunity to meet with EFC members.

One year on...

Joan Gibson arrived in the NYCoS office in November 2007, just in time to write a few words as the new Chief Executive for the 2007 newsletter. At the time, she said it was the 'perfect job'... 150 meetings and events, 27 area choir concerts and visits, 21 national choir performances, 9 training day visits, 15 project visits and around 300 working days on does she still think that?

Last December I wrote a small piece for the NYCoS Newsletter 2007 introducing myself, and as it was really early days felt that I was simply finding my feet. One year on rather than 'finding one's feet' I suppose 'running to keep up' might be a better expression, as NYCoS is an organisation that moves at a considerable pace with something new always happening.

My career to date had been mainly in education. Secondary music teacher, instrumental teacher, primary teacher, headmistress of two schools, a school inspector (!) and then my mid life crisis had me retraining to be a business consultant. All in all, I'd had around 10 different jobs in different parts of the UK and in different environments working with a wide variety of people so I felt I was fairly adaptable and could tackle anything. Then I met Christopher Bell! This was a completely new experience. I was now working with an ideas man who fits about 35 hours into every 24 and is as near a genius as I have ever seen in front of a choir. Total respect came very early on and I knew that working with him would be neither dull nor routine.

NYCoS, although still a young organisation at only 11 years old, had grown at an amazing rate and, wearing my business manager's hat, I advocated that we had to 'bed down firm foundations now, to allow growth in the future'. Consolidation was a word I was using often. However, there is such a creative and opportunist current that flows throughout this organisation that says, 'we must never miss an opportunity'. It is at this point that theory flies out the window and everyone is sucked in and buckles down to make the 'opportunity' work. So business theory doesn't always

apply, especially with an organisation like NYCoS! But I have relished the opportunity to bring some of my business experience to the organisation over the last year, with a real feeling of satisfaction as I see the results of my work.

The year has had many highlights. Arriving in post just before the Christmas season was upon us was a wonderful time for me to visit the Area Choirs and attend their Christmas concerts. Christmas had always been my favourite time of year as a music teacher and hearing young people singing Christmas music was one thing I had really missed since leaving the school environment a few years earlier.

The residential courses of NGC, NBC and NYCoS: what a joy to hear these choirs with such a high level of singing from such young voices. I was especially moved by the NYCoS concert in St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh in September, which included *Eternal Light* by Howard Goodall. We were thrilled that Howard Goodall was actually going to attend the concert. He thoroughly enjoyed the performance and we were all delighted when he agreed to become Patron of NYCoS!

Another highlight for me was the Kodály Training Weekend, which took place in early September.

At the end of October I joined the



NYCoS Changed Voices at the Sage, Gateshead for a male voice weekend. They were the stars of the weekend and I felt very proud to be a part of it.

Communication can be a problem for any organisation, especially when staff members are spread throughout Scotland – it is a challenge. However, the days I have thoroughly enjoyed are when groups of staff get together and provide us with a chance to sit down and talk. The Choir Directors Day and the Coordinators Day were two such days.

If I were asked to write down everything that makes up my perfect job there wouldn't be anything closer than the job description for the Chief Executive of NYCoS. I have had a truly stimulating year with steep learning curves and new challenges, but I can honestly say that no two days are the same. I have the opportunity to meet interesting people, I work with like-minded people and am surrounded by excellence. Oh, and there are a few good choirs to listen to as well!!

Joan Gibson
Chief Executive



Stuart Finnie joined the NYCoS office in March 2008 taking over from Catherine Williams as Office Assistant. He is the first point of contact for anyone emailing or telephoning the office and responsible for processing the orders from our online shop (which has been keeping him busy as our merchandise increases!). He is also on hand to assist the other members of staff in the office with their daily duties.

"Over the summer I assisted Joanna with the new website, which I enjoyed as it appealed to my technological side. I have also helped out with various concerts, which has the added perk of allowing me to hear the fantastic choirs. Whenever the movement of heavy packages around the building is required, I am first on the scene, relieving Tony of his previous position as the only male in the office."

Squiggles, Stars and Bubbles

NYCoS website was launched in 2000 and was exactly what NYCoS required at the time. As the organisation continued to grow we needed something different. Along came an enthusiastic new marketing person who decided to take on the task of launching a new website.

I squinted out of my window for the millionth time convincing myself that if I threw my nice, pretty Mac computer hard enough it might make it to the street and even take the window frame with it. But no, violence was not the answer; a cup of tea to calm me down would suffice for now. If anyone else has come up with the ingenious idea of revamping a website and given themselves a three month timescale then these feelings may be familiar.

After researching and meeting with various website companies we decided to go with Dog Digital who had an impressive portfolio. We wanted a site that was easy to use, and displayed information in an organised, systematic way so that it was simple to navigate. We also wanted to implement more online forms and expand the use of the online shop to try to reduce the amount of admin and form filling being done in the office. And obviously we wanted it to look fancy - we didn't want much!

Dog (as we affectionately like to refer to them) laid out a three month timeline and I thought - easy! The site will be up and running in no time. My first doubts appeared when I was asked to approve our 'site map', a diagram that shows the main menus, submenus, where everything is going to go on the site and which bits will link to which. In practice this is a page full of squiggles, stars and bubbles. Oh dear! I had thought I would just have to choose some good photographs, a nice font and some pretty colours. Panic!

The website dominated my life for not three but eight months. There were numerous meetings and discussions about what we did and didn't want and what we could realistically afford. My dictionary expanded to include words like XHTML, browser based interface, customised tags, digital media asset repository and Really Simple Syndication (nothing simple about it!). Text from the old site had to be revised, ditched or rewritten entirely and then uploaded onto the new site through the shiny new CMS (Content Management System don't you know?).

Now this may sound all doom and gloom, but far from it. The new website was an enormous task but it was also exciting to see this original idea turn from squiggles, stars and bubbles to pages, photo galleries and online forms. We are still tweaking it, but the site is easy to update and so should have the longevity to cope with whatever comes next, and with NYCoS, who knows what that might be. I learned a tremendous amount and now actually sound like I know what I'm talking about when dealing with web developers (the scary part is that I do). I'm immensely proud of the site and grateful to all in the office who helped, especially Stuart, our office assistant who helped with uploading.

Please visit www.nycos.co.uk. You won't actually see squiggles, stars and bubbles but as you navigate its colourful pages spare a thought for the blood, sweat and tears behind it all!

Joanna Lennox

Sponsorship from Pinsent Masons

Earlier this year we were delighted to announce that a sponsorship deal had been secured with international law firm Pinsent Masons. The agreement has been set up for an initial one year period, but both parties hope this will extend into a long term relationship. Pinsent Masons will provide both cash and in kind sponsorship for the first year, providing NYCoS with legal support and advice. In return, they will receive hospitality opportunities for staff and clients as well as advertising opportunities.

John MacKenzie, partner in Pinsent Masons stated: "The ambition and excellence that is at the centre of everything NYCoS does is reflected in the values of Pinsent Masons. The partnership with NYCoS provides an ideal opportunity to develop our commitment to community-based initiatives."

Some of the Pinsent Masons employees were delighted to attend the NYCoS Summer Concert in Glasgow. Claire Kennedy an associate commented: "Having heard and seen the work of NYCoS at close quarters, I was in awe of the singing talent that we have in Scotland and unavoidably proud of the small part that Pinsent Masons is able to play in nurturing such flair."

Joan Gibson, Chief Executive of NYCoS says: "We are so pleased to have Pinsent Masons on board. Their advice and guidance is invaluable and in return we hope they can enjoy the benefits NYCoS has to offer."

If you are interested in finding out more about sponsorship opportunities with NYCoS, please contact Joan Gibson, Chief Executive on 0141 287 2857 or joan.gibson@nycos.co.uk.

Patrons

NYCoS enjoys the support of Lady V Gibson who has been patron of the whole organisation since 1997. In addition we are keen to secure patrons for the individual choirs. It is wonderful to have this level of recognition, as well as being a great boost for the choir members.



In April we were delighted to announce actor Billy Boyd as patron of the NYCoS National Boys Choir. Billy attained worldwide fame and acclaim playing Peregrin "Pippin" Took in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Billy is not only a renowned actor but a singer as well, so was keen to support the boys.

"Singing has always been a huge part of my life. These days I still sing as well as act, and sometimes manage to do both together (as in *Lord of the Rings*). I'd have loved to have had the opportunity that the talented young singers in the National Boys Choir currently have, and so am delighted to be able to support them as patron."

The Right Honourable George Grubb, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh, attended the NYCoS Edinburgh Area Choir Summer concert with his wife. They thoroughly enjoyed the concert and were overwhelmed by the standard and quality of the performance. The Provost wanted to show his support for the young talented singers, so expressed an interest to NYCoS' Chief Executive Joan Gibson that he would like to become a patron of the choir. Joan contacted the Provost's office and after going through the official channels, he was declared the patron. We hope that this is something we can encourage more Provosts to do with the other Area Choirs.



"I was delighted to be declared patron of NYCoS Edinburgh Area Choir earlier this year. The Edinburgh Area Choir has given hundreds of young people from our capital city the opportunity to learn about, and participate in, musical performance over the last ten years. The Choir has involved many young people from our city in numerous prestigious events during that time and the enthusiasm and dedication of our young people is to be commended.

The Lady Provost and I very much enjoyed the Summer Concert back in June and we hope to meet many of you again at future concerts."



British Composer Howard Goodall became involved with NYCoS after the choir was invited by Rambert Dance Company to take part in its *Eternal Light* Tour when it came to Edinburgh in October 2008. *Eternal Light* is a new collaboration by Rambert's Artistic Director Mark Baldwin and Howard Goodall. Howard was extremely supportive in the lead up this exciting venture, even managing to attend a NYCoS concert in September, where extracts of *Eternal Light* were performed. He was so impressed with the performance and took the time afterwards to talk to the choir members and tell them personally how fantastic they sounded. As a result of the enthusiasm and support he has shown NYCoS, he was asked to become a patron of the choir, a role that he gladly accepted.

"I am extremely proud and honoured to have become a patron of NYCoS, whose ravishingly fresh and beautiful sound I have admired for some time. Hearing NYCoS sing my music is an especially joyful and illuminating experience; I hope they never stop! As well as their exemplary recruitment and development programme to encourage as many young people as possible to join up and benefit from the NYCoS adventure, their educational work in schools is, frankly, superb and a great complement north of the border to the National Singing Programme I spearhead south of it. To be honest, although I am named 'patron', I am in fact a FAN."

We are delighted to have secured three new patrons and look forward to forging more relationships next year.



Friends donations double

The Friends of NYCoS scheme has been a part of the organisation's fundraising since the beginning. Originally motivated and administered by the parent of a NYCoS member, it eventually came within the remit of the NYCoS office. The scheme allows people to show their support to NYCoS while being regularly kept up to date with all the organisation's activities and events.

Managing the Friends scheme was one of the jobs Joanna inherited when she started her post with NYCoS as PR and Marketing Officer and she saw an opportunity

for a relaunch: with the activities of the organisation expanding, you can never have too many Friends!

The NYCoS Friends scheme is now split into five categories; you can become a Friend, a forte Friend, a Family Friend, an Alumni Friend or a Corporate Friend. Each varies in level of donation, ranging from £10 to £500, and offers different levels of 'rewards', including regular updates, complimentary concert tickets, invitations to interval receptions and a Friends newsletter.

The relaunch has been a huge success with lots of Friends old and new signing up and so far we have raised over £8,000! A huge thank you to all our Friends for their kind donations, it really does make a difference to NYCoS.

If you are interested in becoming a Friend contact Joanna Lennox, PR and Marketing Officer on 0141 287 2801 or email joanna.lennox@nycos.co.uk, or you can join online at www.nycos.co.uk.

NYCoS Songbooks 2

In 2006, as part of the tenth anniversary celebrations of NYCoS, we commissioned 10 composers to write three songs, one each for our Bronze, Silver and Gold levels and published them in three books, *singbronze! singsilver!* and *singgold!* The composers responded magnificently to the challenge, writing songs that were within our specification, were imaginative in their treatment of the text and have been received very well by staff and students alike. The songbooks were launched on 3 September 2006 at the third annual Kodály Musicianship weekend. It is great to have material that the singers can read, and can use to develop the musicianship/reading aspects of the choir work.



In September 2009 we will be publishing a second set of songbooks, with a similar specification to before, allowing more two part work if possible and also the opportunity to write an unaccompanied song if the composer wishes. Five composers from the previous books (Sally Beamish, Ken Johnston, Alasdair Nicolson, Sheena Phillips and Oliver Searle) will be joined by five new ones (Tom Cunningham, John Hearne, Stephen Deazley, John Maxwell Geddes and David Paul Jones). Hilke MacIntyre has been commissioned to create the cover artwork.

At time of writing the composers have submitted their texts and are writing the music. Hilke has seen the titles of the songs and the texts and has done some studies for the cover art. Some composers have even sent completed songs, even though they are not expected until January 2009. The project has been supported in part by the donation from the Arthur Oldham/Michael Lester-Cribb Memorial fund as well as the Scottish Arts Council. In the next few months we will be contacting NYCoS Friends inviting them to sponsor a song.

It is a great thrill to be involved in such an interesting creative process, and on the evidence of the work so far, I am looking forward to having yet another collection of songs available for our young singers.

Christopher Bell

Mixing business with pleasure ...

Kenneth Pinkerton, Senior Solicitor with Turcan Connell, Solicitors and Asset Managers in Edinburgh, is the most recent member to join the NYCoS Board.

It is often said that you shouldn't mix business with pleasure. However, when I was invited to join the Board of NYCoS earlier this year it gave me just that chance.

My love of singing began early. I remember performing Lionel Bart's *Consider Yourself* from *Oliver!* at a school concert aged six, and also following the scores of *The Messiah* and *The Creation* with my mum at the kitchen table as she learned her part for performances with Cumbernauld Choral Group – Pat MacMahon, one of my fellow Board Members, sang the soprano part in at least one of their concerts.

Despite my strong love of singing however, a career in law followed and I am now a solicitor specialising in charity law. NYCoS itself is a charity and it is a great pleasure to be able to offer this inspirational organisation the benefit of my legal experience to ensure that it continues to prosper both in and out of the limelight.

I was privileged to hear the inaugural concert of the National Boys Choir in 2002 and was delighted this year for the first time to hear the National Girls Choir at St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh – a force to be reckoned with! I look forward to serving NYCoS on its Board over the next few years and also attending many wonderful concerts.

A Year of Burns ...

Graham Boyce, Director of NYCoS West Lothian Choir saw it as a personal challenge to take his choir to the Aberdeen International Youth Festival. He decided to increase the pressure by giving his choir something tricky to sing. And one year before the Homecoming!



West Lothian Youth Choir in Aberdeen

When I was invited to take the West Lothian Youth Choir to the Aberdeen International Youth Festival, August 08, I had mixed emotions. I was sure the guys in the choir needed a challenge, but might this be too big a deal - to travel to an International Festival and represent the great name that is NYCoS?

John Gardner's *A Burns Sequence* is an eight movement piece that I sang with 'big' NYCoS in 1998. I had enjoyed it and I knew the members of the Youth Choir would love it as well. This was the central piece of our concert. We began serious work on it in January and at times it was not easy; however, never once did their commitment or energy dip in the run up to this tour. Even at our first rehearsal in Aberdeen, in the smallest, overheated most cramped of rooms behind the bar at the Hillhead Campus of Aberdeen University everyone gave me so much energy and was listening to everything that I said to the letter – I knew this was going to be something special.

The festival's opening ceremony gave us the chance to meet the other choir that was involved in AIYF 2008, Homestead

High School from Wisconsin USA. Our first performance in Holburn West Church was a joint concert with them. We were then able to take the energy we had created from that first performance on to the Parish Church in the lovely village of Peterculter and sing another fantastic concert on our own this time, revealing all of the other pieces we had prepared.

In early September, we performed *Burns Sequence* in Oran Mor, that beautiful venue in Glasgow [4-Star Review from Amy Parker in the Herald...a review that each and every member of the West Lothian Area Choir should be very proud of]. For me, this was the culmination of 6 months of intense work and for some members 6-8 years of commitment to the National Youth Choir of Scotland in West Lothian. It is proof

that everything that Christopher Bell imagined when he first started NYCoS is actually happening, and I am intensely proud and thankful to be involved.

These performances and, indeed the entire experience we had from start to finish will remain with me forever. I had the time of my life working with these young singers and am currently looking for more ways to share similar experiences. I'd like to thank our fantastic team of staff under the expert leadership of Elaine Leonard, who genuinely pulled out all the stops to create an atmosphere of security and creativity that allowed this tour to be the success that it very clearly was. Everyone rose to the challenge, and for that I am immensely grateful.

Graham Boyce

NYCoS Area Choirs – out and about

The NYCoS Area Choirs provide a high level singing experience in eleven areas across Scotland.

In April the **Dumfries Girls Choir** performed at the NBC Changed Voices concert in Crichton Church, Dumfries and **Dumfries Junior Youth Choir** took part in the Dumfries Choral Society's Concert. At the Dumfries Festival in May the **Chamber Choir** won the *Andrew Young Memorial Shield for Choral Work* and the Girls Choir won the *Robert Adamson Cup for Junior Choirs*. At the Galloway Festival the TC/PC 1 choirs from the Galloway Choirs received 90 marks – a Distinction. They also performed at Kirkcudbright Parish Church in April, in a concert with NBC Changed Voices and took part in the *Relay for Life*, a charity event in Wigtown. At the end of the session Rachel Hart, a long serving member of the music staff left the Galloway choir. Lois Parker joined the music staff in August.

The **Renfrewshire Choirs** were invited to sing in a Children's Classic Concert in the Glasgow Royal Concert hall in March. They were also invited by Renfrewshire Record Club to sing at Inchinnan Parish Church in aid of CHAS and also by Glasgow City Council Culture and Sport for their Winterfest event in George Square, Glasgow in December.

30 members of the **Dundee Youth Choir** joined with choristers from St Paul's Cathedral in Dundee for a special service as part of the Lord Provost's Twin Cities Celebrations. It is very encouraging to see the **Dundee Area Choir** being increasingly part of the city's cultural celebrations. **Dundee Youth Choir** was also invited to sing at the NBC concert in the Caird Hall. Accompanists Kate Doig and Avril Evans and singer Colette Ruddy joined the music staff. Lindsay Thomson went on maternity leave with Stewart Fyffe taking over until her return.

The **Midlothian Choir** is in its second year now. The PC group is excited to be taking part in Midlothian Council's Showcase event in February, their first outside engagement. Patsy Seddon has joined the staff and Winnie Croal and Ruth Cox have transferred from Edinburgh. Due to an increase in other commitments, Tracey Dance left the staff in October. We are also pleased to welcome the new Local Coordinator, Michele Smales, who will help to keep the rehearsal nights running smoothly and organising children, parents and fundraising.

The **Isle of Lewis Choir** has been invited to sing at the Head Teachers Conference and the Round Table Conference sometime next year. This year they welcomed two new members of staff, Barbara MacKenzie and Elizabeth MacLeod. As a new member of the music staff, Barbara was very keen to learn the NYCoS 'way' so flew down to Edinburgh in August to attend the Staff Training Day. Elizabeth, a very experienced administrator, joined the staff as Local Coordinator and she too is busy ensuring that the choir rehearsals are well organised and run smoothly.

Both the **Stirling Area Choirs** and the **Falkirk Area Choirs** have had a busy year with several requests for them to sing at various events including Children's Classics Concerts' *Music Goes Wild* in Perth Concert Hall. You can read about the Sons of the Rock Concert in Dunblane Cathedral and Falkirk Choir's successes in the National Mod elsewhere in this newsletter. Falkirk also appeared with the Phoenix Choir at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall in December the Scottish Concert Orchestra in May and sang *Lift Thine Eyes* at Falkirk Festival Chorus' performance of *Elijah*. Ysla Robertson joined the staff and Susanne Bell and Jessica Leary departed: Claire Derrick will stop for maternity leave in December. In addition to the joint concerts with Falkirk Choir 40 children from the **Stirling Choir** took part in the Raymond Gubbay *Glory of Christmas* Concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. They said goodbye to Marion Lang, the choir's first Local Coordinator and welcomed her successor, Margaret Glencross.

The **West Lothian Youth Choir** accepted an invitation to sing at the Aberdeen International Youth Festival in August. They also visited Oran Mor in Glasgow to repeat their Festival Programme. Meanwhile the **West Lothian Junior Choir** members performed in the Compassion UK concert.

In April, **Edinburgh Chamber Choir** performed at Oran Mor's *Concert, Cocktail and Canapé* series in Glasgow. They continued their outside engagements in May with a performance for the German Business Conference at the Hub, Edinburgh and later in the month at the RSA for the RSA Friends Event. During December, **Edinburgh Senior Choir** took part in Waverley Care's World Aids Day where they performed Ken Johnston's *Jubilate* and the following day they took part in the Sick Kids concert in St Cuthbert's Church.

Finally our newest choir, **Inverness Area Choir**, started in September under the enthusiastic direction of Margaret Rae and her staff, Fiona Gray and John Thomson.

Lorna Rudden

Anybody speak Gaelic?

Kirstie Hemple, Director of NYCoS Falkirk Choir was wondering if it was a good idea to enter the Mod, which this year was in her home town of Falkirk. Both choir and conductor performing from memory – how would that work out, as no-one had any experience of Gaelic?



NYCoS Falkirk Youth Choir at the Mod

The Royal National Mod is Scotland's premier festival celebrating its Gaelic linguistic and cultural heritage and provides opportunities for people of all ages to perform across a range of competitive disciplines including Gaelic Music and Song, Highland Dancing, Instrumental, Drama, Sport and Literature. Classes are divided into fluent (for those who have studied Gaelic for years and are fluent or native speakers) and learners (as its name suggests, performers with more elementary Gaelic). Assessment is comprised of marks for the performance and marks for the Gaelic.

2008 was the first year that the Mod has been held in Falkirk and Kirstie thought it would provide a good experience for the NYCoS Falkirk Youth Choir as singing in Gaelic was something completely different. She split her choir into two groups (Senior and Junior) as the maximum number allowed in each choir was 26 voices. Kirstie conducted the Seniors, and Laura Smith conducted the Juniors. It was a major challenge for a number of reasons. With no native Gaelic speakers in the choir, and no-one with a background in Gaelic on the staff, they all had to rely heavily on input from a Gaelic tutor, Kenneth Thomson of the Glasgow Gaelic Musical Association. The choirs and conductors had to perform from memory. And they started learning the music five weeks before the competition. (Other choirs apparently started last November after the last Mod!)

The senior group had two set pieces: *An Gille Guanach* and *A bhanarach chaoin* and was awarded the Mrs Millar Trophy for first place and the Dugald Macdonald Quaich for the highest marks in Gaelic. They were also awarded the Hugh MacPhee Trophy for the highest marks from three separate competitions.

Adjudicators' comments included: "You gave beautiful words good convincing meaning - a most creditable performance - always well balanced and harmonies good." They were invited to perform both songs again at the Junior Prizewinners' Concert which was televised on BBC Alba and BBC 2 that evening and the following day on BBC 1 Scotland.

The younger choir sang *Cadal cha dèan mi* and *Dh'èirich mi moch madainn Chèitein* and were placed joint fifth out of nine choirs. Adjudicators' comments included: "Intonation secure, good phrasing - extremely promising choir - accurate and well controlled."

The smiles in the photographs say it all, and Kirstie was enormously proud of staff and singers alike who, with a five week standing start, had done so well in a national competition.

Gaelic singing anyone? Oban next year and Caithness in 2010.

Christopher Bell

Sons of the Rock

On Saturday 6 September the most senior members of the NYCoS Stirling Area Choir joined forces with their counterparts from Falkirk to sing in Dunblane Cathedral. Marion Lang, departing Local Coordinator for Stirling Choir tells of one of the last events she had to organise.

The invitation had come from **Sons of the Rock**, a Stirling charity which, amongst other things, offers financial assistance to talented young local musicians - not to be confused with a local folk band with the same name!

In a sense the concert was given by young musicians for young musicians as the other artistes were also young performers from the Stirling area - an organ scholar, a harpist, a flautist and a former member of NYCoS, soprano Marion Wyllie. All the concert participants had at some time benefited from the generosity of the Sons of the Rock Society.

Singing at such a prestigious event so early in the term could have posed some problems, for although the Stirling and Falkirk Choir Directors, Anne Murphy and Kirstie Hemple, had already planned and rehearsed the varied programme with their own choirs, including some repertoire they had sung together at a Children's Classic Concert in Perth Concert Hall in May, the Saturday afternoon was the first time that the two groups had rehearsed all the pieces together. But such is the unanimity of NYCoS choral training that they were almost immediately singing as one choir with a beautiful unified sound as they spent the afternoon rehearsing in the Cathedral Hall and then in the Cathedral itself.

A very large and extremely appreciative audience attended the evening concert. In the lovely acoustic of the Cathedral, the choir gave a very impressive and polished performance. They were later congratulated by Bob Tait, the first NYCoS Administrator, who said he had thoroughly enjoyed the concert and was pleased to report that he had heard the distinctive "NYCoS sound" - praise doesn't come much higher than that!

Marion Lang

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I'd like to thank Marion for her dedicated work co-ordinating the Stirling Choir for the last five years. She has a reputation for fine attention to detail and going the extra mile, and staff and young singers have benefited from these qualities in her time. She maintains her connection with NYCoS as a Mini Music Maker leader in Stirling and still plans to attend NYCoS concerts whenever she can.

Christopher Bell

Artistic Director to be split in four!

Christopher's schedule outside NYCoS is quite packed, leaving very little time to observe and appreciate the work of his colleagues with the Area Choirs. The only way to achieve it is to slice him into bits, or clone him?



Dumfries Girls Choir



NBC Changed Voices

Interesting concept, and I'm sure I'd have a long line of people keen to help with slicing me up: but I was concerned that I was not able to find time to hear the Area Choirs at their concerts. The answer came by merging two ideas together. I need time to hear the Area Choirs, and I'd love the Area Choirs to hear the National Boys Choir – so have joint concerts.

In April 2008 there was hardly a weekend where a NYCoS National Choir wasn't meeting, either at a residential course and concert or travelling to meet an Area Choir somewhere for concerts in great locations.

During this period, the NBC Changed Voices met the Galloway Choir in Kirkcudbright Parish Church, and then the Dumfries Girls Choir in Crichton Church. These collaborations allowed the

Changed Voices to travel to a very beautiful part of the country and I was thrilled to be able hear the Dumfries Choirs on their home turf.

The following weekend the NBC blue shirts met the NYCoS Dundee Youth Choir in Dundee's stunning Caird Hall. This concert was a lot of fun, especially as none of the NBC boys fell over (they had been going for the world record for the number of boys passing out during a

concert the previous evening in Aberdeen!) and the Dundee Choir was on sparkling form.

It's such a good idea from all perspectives that we'd be mad not to try it again. There's one in the planning in Paisley with the Renfrewshire Choir, and we'll be keeping our eyes open for other great chances to sing together.

Christopher Bell

You can't start the concert – we need more chairs!

The National Boys Choir course last April ended with a concert in St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh. It usually seats nearly seven hundred, and being a Tuesday afternoon well away from the Easter holiday week we thought we'd have enough seats to cope. Rehearsals had gone well, and the choir dispersed throughout the building to munch sandwiches – the final narrations were being rehearsed (and pre-recorded in case of problems in the concert) and through the West doors we could see a queue forming.

We'd better let people in, and so they came ... and came ...

As the appointed time approached, staff could be seen unearthing chairs from distant parts of the cathedral, narrowing the aisles and adding extra rows at the back. A huge crowd appreciated the premiere of Tom Cunningham's *Seven Planets and a Cosmic Rock* as well as fine contributions from the Changed Voices and the Junior Corps. The BBC recorded it all and we were able to hear it again later in the month on Radio Scotland.

I suppose we should have got used to it by now, but the phenomenon of 160 boys between the ages of 9 and 16 singing is actually pretty unique, certainly in Scotland and perhaps throughout the UK. We can think of boys choirs certainly and of course many cathedrals maintain fine choirs with boys singing the top line. Ironically, St Mary's Cathedral, where the concert was about to take place was one of the first UK cathedral choirs singing daily services to start adding girls to the top line when the numbers of boys began to diminish.

The NBC story - modest beginnings with 50 boys then expanding to include a Junior Corps and then a Changed Voice Group with around 150 annually taking part - has been noticed by people working in other parts of the country. During this year's residential course we were visited by staff from the Sage, Gateshead, home of the English based Sing Up! scheme. As a result of their visit, the Changed Voice group was invited to participate in a whole weekend of activities based at the Sage towards the end of October, which included working with the Kings Singers,

watching a masterclass by Sir Thomas Allen, and joining a mass of other boys voices to give a concert. We weren't able to take the whole Changed Voice group but still managed to outnumber the rest. Our contribution was greatly appreciated.

So we were very careful when choosing the venue for our concert in 2009. A boys choir of the size and calibre of NBC draws an audience, not just from proud parents and family members.

Christopher Bell



National Boys Choir at the Caird Hall, Dundee

The Mary Cunningham Bequest

NYCoS was delighted that in January 2008, a donation of £6,000 was received from the estate of Mary Cunningham. Mary took a great interest in music, especially when performed by young people, and always took time to offer encouragement and appreciation. She particularly enjoyed live music and regularly attended concerts, recitals and musical shows.

She was born in Edinburgh in 1915. There was always music in her family – Mary's father was a talented craftsman who made violins as a hobby – and everyone in the family sang. After her death in 2006, at the age of 90, The Mary Cunningham Bequest was set up to support the work of NYCoS and, in particular, the National Girls Choir.

Eternal Light – a swansong(!)

Ali Watt has completed his eighth and final NYCoS residential course. He was asked to blog for the Rambert Dance website on his experience of *Eternal Light* ...



Photographer: Carl Fox

The National Youth Choir of Scotland got its first look at *Eternal Light* during our annual July course, those seven days of intensive rehearsal when we learn the works that make up the season's repertoire. Every year, one of those pieces defines the summer - for example, Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* conjures up memories of Chicago 2004; Whitacre's *When David Heard*, Hungary 2007; and I will always remember in the anniversary year, 2006, that the sopranos singing of the second movement of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* managed to reduce one of my friends (a hulking great bass of a lad) to blubbing tears.

Of all the compositions we worked on this summer, it was *Eternal Light* that we could be found humming to ourselves whilst lolling on the grass during break times. It was extremely unnerving, though not uncommon, to turn down a darkened corridor in the dormitories to find a tenor with set face striding purposefully towards you, vehemently muttering Latin under his breath in an attempt to master the text from one of the trickier movements. *Eternal Light* would be the piece of which we would all think when we looked back on NYCoS 2008.

St Cuthbert's Church in Edinburgh is one of our favourite venues and composer Howard Goodall was in the audience. This is my eighth year in NYCoS and I've been lucky enough to take part in some truly special concerts but, without a doubt, this concert in Edinburgh, of which *Eternal Light* was no small component part, definitely ranks up there among the very best.

Essentially, all this preparation meant that, by the time October came around and we got the opportunity to perform the work with Rambert on the Edinburgh leg of their tour, *Eternal Light* was already a very dear piece to us. It was a real privilege and hugely enjoyable for all the chorus involved to work with the Rambert Dance Company. We all rehearsed on the first afternoon and then divided into three teams for the three evening performances. From the experience of having prime spot in the pit to hear the work we'd grown to love over the course of the year played right in front of us by the Company's orchestra, to the moments in the performance where the lights from the stage would suddenly illuminate the audience so that we could see, all at once, hundreds of astounded faces, we simply had a terrific time.

NYCoS will be travelling up to perform with Rambert once more on the Inverness dates of their tour in March. I say this with no small hint of envy as I know I won't be able to make it along. I hope it's not long before I get a chance to sing it again.

Ali Watt



Photographer: Zili Bhatia

200 singers ready for battle ...

Lizanne McKerrell, Board Member since NYCoS' inception in 1996, was in the audience at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on Remembrance Sunday for our performance of *The Armed Man* conducted by its composer, Karl Jenkins accompanied by the Scottish Philharmonic Orchestra. There were 200 singers on stage, NYCoS, NYCoS Training Choir and about 40 Alumni. She found it exceptional and most moving.

This concert, the brainchild of John Delaney and Gordon Rigby was to raise money for Teenage Cancer Trust, a wonderful new organisation which improves the lives of teenagers with cancer in Scotland. I went because NYCoS was performing, because friends who have heard or sung in the piece have been most impressed, and because I have a chance to sing in it in Croatia in the spring. This performance will live for a long time in the memories of all those who heard it.

The work is 13 movements drawn from eastern and western sacred and secular texts, set to beautiful, sometimes shocking music by Karl Jenkins, with various ethnic echoes. It is based on a 15th century secular tune, *L'Homme Armé*, and includes words from Rudyard Kipling, Dryden, Swift, the Mahabharata, Sankihi, the Bible and the Koran.

The music is emotional and harrowing bringing war into the imagination with sudden loud percussion and drum interruptions representing cannons and guns. Eventually this mood is slowly changed and a message of hope and plea for peace is introduced, ending on a very positive mood.

The young singers may not been influenced by memories of the World Wars but more recent wars, although not on home ground (except in Northern Ireland) will have had an emotional and political effect on them. Behind them was a huge screen where continuous harrowing images of wars in the 20th and 21st centuries were displayed. Fortunately, they were not able to see this: many of the audience could be seen dabbing their eyes. The wonderful sound and professional conduct of NYCoS provided a taut, compelling, exceptional experience.

The soloist, Elizabeth McCormack, sang with purity and perfectly expressed the emotions contained in the words of her text. NYCoS soloists, Andrew McTaggart and Ali Watt, were clear and accurate. Karl Jenkins should have been thrilled with this performance of his work, which was greeted with a standing ovation.

Lizanne McKerrell

Their mouths are all moving at exactly the same time!

The National Girls Choir stunned audiences this year with the quality of its singing. When it came to the following tour, initially it was their absence that stunned Christopher Bell...



NYCoS National Girls Choir at Perth Concert Hall

I'm standing outside St Mary's Cathedral at the top of Edinburgh's Leith Walk. It's locked, has no lights on, and definitely does not seem to be harbouring a choir (unless this is some sort of surprise! joke and they are about to jump out from somewhere). Stuart Hope, pianist, has also appeared and we are comparing notes – we agree – it was 6.30 pm we were supposed to start, and as it's 6.45 pm, the National Girls Choir is missing! It is all too quiet.

A few phone calls later and we have the reason – trams. Or rather the roadworks for the new tram system in Edinburgh made it difficult for parents to find the meeting point. So the standard excuse for everything in Edinburgh these days (trams) even complicated the beginning of the National Girls Choir mini tour last April.

NGC had its second annual course – stop! Only second? To those who heard the choir after its residential course the idea that 2008 was only the second season for the choir seemed astonishing. Perhaps it was a combination of factors. There was the programme of music, some sophisticated (RR Bennett's *Letters to Lindbergh*, William Sweeney's *Three Soutar Songs* and unaccompanied folksongs by Kodály) and some quirky (*La Lluvia* recreated the sounds of a South American rain storm). There was the sound, full and blended with a variety of colours from floating and sweet to rich and powerful. One commentator was transfixed by the choral discipline – *They are all looking up and their mouths are moving at exactly the same time!* For a variety of reasons, NGC is a choir to watch and listen to.

There are many opportunities for girls in Scotland to sing in local and regional choirs, so there is potentially a large pool of singers with experience. Bringing up to eighty of these singers

together at a national level and adding NYCoS coaching, singing lessons and choral expertise was always a recipe for excellence and it has been a great thrill to see how quickly the group has developed. This year, after the residential course and concert in Horsecross, Perth, it was time to start giving performances in other parts of Scotland to let many more people hear this choir.

Edinburgh's St Cuthbert's Church is becoming a NYCoS favoured venue. The acoustic is very sympathetic for voices and recently the church has been given a good Steinway grand piano. This was the venue for the first leg of our mini tour in mid April 2008 and where the potential for this fine group began to be in evidence. It is always good to hear a NYCoS choir some weeks after the residential course when the tired voices have had a chance to recover. The brightly coloured singers did not disappoint, and similarly the following night in Helensburgh.

NGC has other characteristics. Anyone who has spent any time with a group of girls will recall their capacity for endless chat. Faced with 80 before a rehearsal, their mouths also seem to be moving all at the same time. Perhaps I should have relished those few silent moments at the top of Leith Walk.

Christopher Bell

NYCoS Kodály Training Weekend

Joan Gibson has over 25 years experience in education and has attended many conferences in her time with mixed views. How would she find the NYCoS Kodály Musicianship weekend?



The Singing Playgrounds workshop makes everyone smile!

As my first year as Chief Executive of NYCoS has progressed, I continue to be amazed at the level of activity and standards displayed by this multifaceted organisation. One would expect strengths and weakness in what we offer, but every segment of NYCoS is an area of excellence. The singing from the flagship choirs is truly outstanding, the Area Choirs demonstrate best practice in school age choral delivery, publications are innovative and challenging for our singers and the education is forward thinking and current.

The Kodály Training Weekend though was something very special, and I put it down to two things. It had something for everyone with every tutor an expert (it didn't matter what level of Kodály experience you came with, you certainly left with more!) and it was meticulously planned, prepared and carried through. Carole's attention to detail and experience makes a secure framework for the tutors and delegates alike.

The weekend began with Christopher. Using his unique Irish charm and individual ability, he had all delegates singing in 4 parts, all before 10.00am! This launched a non-stop action packed two days. Musicianship sessions were provided at a variety of levels, from beginner to advanced. Workshop leaders from all over the UK brought new ideas for teachers and choir directors that included Mini Music Makers, 16th century SATB material, the Singing Playground and Getting Boys to Sing.

There were opportunities to mingle and mix with other like-minded people all sharing ideas during lunch and coffee breaks that gave the atmosphere a real buzz. At the end of the final Q & A and singing session on the Sunday evening, the delegates' comments reflected the feedback forms.

"The best weekend I have spent in a long time", "this is the only weekend I

would give up for work", "I wish it was for longer", "I've learnt so much".

The Scottish Arts Council assessed the event and gave it a glowing five star review. However, we are always keen to make improvements, so it's back to those feedback forms and debating the question - *should these weekends be residential?* Watch this space!

Joan Gibson



Unchanged voices from NYCoS Stirling Area Choir

Get yourself a Kodály Degree!

NYCoS has been offering Kodály musicianship courses in a variety of packages – weekends, whole day courses, afternoon sessions, and even twilights and early evenings. Our next wish was to offer an accredited course, and we are thrilled that Aberdeen University has come into partnership with us. Read here about the first course **Music – a pathway to learning**, and the reaction of two participants.



How do we do "Hill 'n Gully Rider" in canon?

This was a first! An opportunity to gain credits towards a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma or M Ed was offered by this award-bearing 15 credit programme. It was aimed at primary class teachers or music specialists, but gave all interested parties the chance to gain the skill, knowledge and confidence to deliver a child friendly music programme across all primary stages. It started with a summer school at the University of Aberdeen in July. Subsequently students have had to show video evidence of work, write lesson plans and underpin the work with reading and personal research. A 4,000 word assignment is due in January 2009. Elsewhere on these pages, read the views of two participants, and a staff member at Aberdeen University. We will be running the course again in 2009. If interested, please contact Carole Allen, NYCoS Education Projects Administrator.

Catriona McDonald, Programme Director of the BA in Early Childhood Studies at University of Aberdeen is delighted that the School of Education, is working in partnership with NYCoS in the delivery of this highly rated course.

Over the past few years, increasing numbers of people have expressed a wish to acquire formal recognition of knowledge and skills that are available at NYCoS Kodály Musicianship courses. We are particularly pleased to be able to help achieve this and in 2008 the first cohort of students have joined us from all over Scotland. The Kodály approach to working with children and young people fully embraces the aims and principles of A Curriculum for Excellence in promoting active learning through Music, whilst strongly supporting Literacy and Numeracy. The whole experience is regarded not only as a valuable learning opportunity but also as really good fun by both participants and staff. We will be running the course again in 2009/10 and urge anyone interested to get involved.



Lucinda Geoghegan explains how it is done

Eve Scott came to teaching as [in her own words] a 'mature' entrant in 1995 and took up her present post as class teacher in North Lanarkshire then. She undertook the course in order to gain full Chartered Teacher status.

Some years ago, I 'inherited' the post of choir leader – the only one with any knowledge of music or the desire to sing. There was no pianist and I felt that singing along to tapes and CDs was not the answer. I was lucky enough to attend a NYCoS inservice course run by the wonderful Christopher Bell. I felt a flame had been lit under me and couldn't wait to get back to school to use my new found knowledge based on the Kodály methods. I have since attended three marvellous training weekends. Every year I look forward to news of the next one.

This course has allowed me to study further and put it all into practise. This year I elected to be our staff member providing Class Contact Reduction cover: part of my remit is teaching music. As choir leader and class teacher I had already identified the benefits that the Kodály methods could bring. I've reduced the need to sing along to CDs or dodgy tape recordings. I am endeavouring to look at our school music scheme in accordance with Kodály's theories so that we use age and stage appropriate materials and I incorporate learning games and percussion as much as possible. Curriculum for Excellence could have been written with Kodály in mind.

The best part is seeing the faces of children light up during a performance. They know instinctively that they are performing to the best of their ability, they sing in pitch and they understand so much more about music than ever before. Other teachers have shown an interest in the methods used so I feel like an ambassador for Kodály. I know I have a lot more to learn and a lot more to give, thanks to this course. I hope that this is just step one on my new music pathway.

Catriona Kavanagh is a primary Support for Learning teacher in East Lothian. She had attended several NYCoS training weekends and was keen to develop what she had learned.

I wanted to know more about Kodály's philosophy and approach to teaching music, and how to link it to *A Curriculum for Excellence*. This course provided that - and more. The sessions in Aberdeen during the summer were fun yet challenging. I came away with lots of new material, new ideas for teaching (my P2 class adores the gold lycra we use!) and the skills to analyse songs and judge their appropriateness for particular learning outcomes.

The work has continued as we apply our learning to the planning and teaching of our music lessons, video recording some of our lessons, producing a suite of evaluated lesson plans, analysing songs, reading about Kodály's philosophy of music education and reflecting on our learning. Fitting that in with a busy school schedule has not been easy and though music comprises a small part of my timetable, it has all been worth it. Emphatically so!

Ask anyone evaluating a course like *Music – a Pathway to Learning* what was the best bit and I'm pretty certain the answer will be meeting like-minded people – people who love what they do, are keen to learn and willing to share and who enjoy a good blether about all sorts, especially teaching music. Top it off with a superb course tutor, Lucinda Geoghegan, and you are away!



Delegates try out some of the singing games

Active learning through music ...

*Curriculum for Excellence is the current educational talking point. As one participant in our accredited Kodály course said elsewhere, Curriculum for Excellence could have been written with Kodály in mind. In West Lothian, staff and pupils of the nursery and Primary 1 classes of St Nicholas RC Primary School, Broxburn, have been taking part in a pilot project called **Active Learning Through Music**.*

The programme has been developed and supported by Lucinda Geoghegan, in partnership with West Lothian Council, and is being delivered by the classroom staff, not a music specialist.



Primary One at St Nicholas Primary School, Broxburn

Resource packs are provided, with clear instructions for the activities and lesson plans, songs recorded on a CD, learning intentions and links to the *Curriculum for Excellence*. Groups of children rotate weekly, so the programme is delivered repeatedly, giving staff confidence. Planning, progression and assessment are all contained within the packs. Music is acting as a springboard for holistic development and links directly with all four capacities of the *Curriculum for Excellence*. As well as building a solid foundation in music, other skills such as improved concentration, coordination and communication are seen.

Carole Allen asked Karen Brown, Head Teacher, and some of her staff, some questions ...

Why did you decide to pilot the Music through Active Learning Programme?

We wanted to use music groups as part of our Active Learning Programme as this was an approach that we had used in the past and knew that it could work.

What was the thinking behind it?

When we were talking about connecting the agendas in Curriculum for Excellence, and looking at all the different themes, we thought that it would be a wonderful way to include music as a cross-curricular type of theme.



This is fun!

How well is it working in practice?

Staff have been learning along with the children and have really enjoyed it. When the staff sing the register the children really listen out for their names. As soon as they see the special bags with the activity packs, they know that they are going to have fun.

What are the children learning?

What we have found is that many of the songs use rhyme, so it fits in beautifully with a lot of the language work and phonic sounds that we are doing in class. There is also simple maths involved – some of the children have become adept in combining multiples of four beats for example!

What are the main advantages of the programme?

Everything is there for you in the packs – it's all detailed and laid out step by step. Working with small groups means that you get to know the children and what their abilities are. We then have the confidence to assess them in a very straightforward way.

How have you evaluated the programme?

At the start of the year, we did an Action Enquiry on how fully the children were engaged in their learning in P1, and found that 70-75% of children were very actively engaged, but we wanted to target the other 25% to ensure an enjoyable experience in their learning. After introducing the Active Learning through Music, we carried out another Action Enquiry at the end of the year, and it was very evident that 99% of children were not only actively involved, but were also thoroughly enjoying the whole experience.

A final thought?

With many new initiatives, once the funding runs out, the school has been unable to take it forward or it has proved very costly, but the benefit of this programme is that it has empowered and trained the existing staff. The whole programme is sustainable and this has been a very important factor in working with the Youth Music Initiative. The staff understand that it's a development programme, improving their teaching skills and enabling them to take it forward. We think it has been a wonderful opportunity.



Active learning indeed!

Not strictly Hungarian

Participants in NYCoS weekend or one day courses have been asking for years for regular classes throughout the year to continue their development. This year we ran a series of evening classes in the City Halls in Glasgow. But the first task was not Hungarian.

I'm not sure what the people assembled in Studio One of the City Halls thought when the musicianship leaders started the evening off by getting them singing, clapping and moving to an African song. But that's the NYCoS way – don't let's talk about it – let's do it! Kodály might not have known the African song, but he would have recognised the principles behind its use.

Twenty five people signed up for our evening classes in Kodály musicianship training. Some were teachers who had attended our training courses before and had asked for further classes in Kodály musicianship. Others were members of community choirs and were looking for help in reading music and sight singing. Yet more were students, looking for an insight into the Kodály approach to music education. And four of them were NYCoS office staff! All of them were keen to learn, and were giving up two hours of their week to find out more about solfa, rhythm names, and how to ease the process of translating notation into musical sense.

By the end of the course, everyone had gained in confidence, and the evaluation forms came back with an overwhelming "Yes, we want more".

One of the students was enthused by her involvement – "I thought the course was great and I was able to develop my own musicianship as well as learning more about Kodály technique which will be useful for when I begin to be involved in teaching!"

We are planning more classes in the spring – watch the website for further details. We hope to have three levels – beginner, intermediate and advanced. The fun element will continue, so don't be surprised if there are some more African songs to sing.

Carole Allen

Mini Music Makers has grown!

The NYCoS singing experience for children up to five years old (and their parents, grandparents or carers) has some new classes. Catherine Williams now coordinates this programme, and introduces the new opportunities here.



The group at Clarkston enjoys an active game



Shake and shake at Kelvinbridge

New classes at Kelvinbridge (Glasgow) started in October at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral on Great Western Road, led by Katie Hepburn. There are two classes of eager babies and toddlers, 0-18 months and 18 months-3 years, joined by their equally enthusiastic parents, grandparents and carers.

NYCoS has been running thriving Mini Music Makers classes in Biggar and Hamilton for a couple of years. Earlier this year we were approached by South Lanarkshire Council proposing a partnership with us to form a cluster of classes in the area. From January 2009 a range of classes will be taking place in Biggar, East Kilbride and Hamilton, all led by NYCoS trained leaders. Places are exclusively booked through the Arts Development department of South Lanarkshire Council. Contact details are on our website.

Following successful taster sessions as part of the Bathgate Music Festival in September 2008 another Mini Music Makers partnership, with West Lothian Council, will also start in the new year. Ruth Hollis will be running classes at the Regal Community Theatre in Bathgate for little ones aged 1 to 5 years and booking will be through West Lothian Council. Contact details are on our website.

Of course, if you are prepared to travel, you could do a Mini Music Makers class every week day and Saturdays as well. Here's the menu.

- Monday:** Linlithgow
- Tuesday:** City Halls, Glasgow; Kelvinbridge, Glasgow; and Killearn
- Wednesday:** Bathgate, Busby, East Kilbride, and Stirling
- Thursday:** Biggar and Hamilton
- Friday:** Giffnock, Glasgow (previously Clarkston); and Forfar
- Saturday:** Tramway, Glasgow

For full details of individual classes see the website www.nycos.co.uk.

For more information and booking enquiries, please contact Catherine Williams, 0141 287 2943 at the NYCoS office.

Nearly there – don't stop now ...

For the last x number of years Lucinda Geoghegan and Christopher Bell have been writing a musicianship training programme. The equivalent of War and Peace in solfa and six parts, it has this year seen its first four sections completed. Alongside that some other music was commissioned. What's up in NYCoS publishing world?

If it seems like you have been hearing about finishing our musicianship programme for the last seven years, that's because you have! Re-writes, much proofreading and, to be honest, a couple of anguished heart searching moments, we are close to being on the final straight. Levels I and II workbooks for both **Go for Bronze** and **Go for Silver** (complete with Teacher Books and all the trimmings) hit the stands at our Kodály Musicianship Conference in September. And in October, on a train from London to Edinburgh, the authors hammered out the programme for **Go for Gold**, and set a timescale for its completion of September 2009.

The sticking point was how, or whether, to make the Gold books articulate with the Associated Board Grade V theory syllabus or not. There were pluses and minuses to this link, and in fact our solution is to do both.

Go for Gold will be finished along its original planned lines with its primary focus on the singer's needs within a choir. In addition there will be a supplement with material to help anyone who wants to then pass grade five. Phew! Nearly there.

Also in September, NYCoS published **I Landed With Seven Men**, a set of Scots songs on the theme of Charlie and the Jacobites. Spurred on by the success of Ken Johnston's song *Johnnie Cope in singgold!* we asked him to arrange four other Charlie songs and combine it with short narrations to fill in the story. The resulting cantata had its premiere in Forfar on 2 October with 100 singers (not pipers!) from Angus secondary schools. Since then we know of full performances in Glasgow and Belfast.

After the success of **The Saga of the Seven Days** with the National Boys Choir, we once again turned to composer Tom Cunningham and poet Derek Roberts who supplied us with **Seven Planets and a Cosmic Rock**. NYCoS published it, and NBC premiered it on 8th April. The witty narrations, stimulating and imaginative texts and effective music combined to make this premiere an event. Subsequently, we are delighted that staff from the Sage, Gateshead (who were at our NBC course and concert), have found funds to have the piece orchestrated, and plan two performances, one with the Northern Sinfonia and 200 children in the Sage, and one with the London Symphony Orchestra and 200 more children in the Barbican! If that's not a ringing endorsement ...

As to future NYCoS publications, see Songbooks 2 on page 6 in this newsletter. And then there is the rumour that the Artistic Director is approaching composers asking for songs with just three notes! What's that about?

Christopher Bell



Keeping it fresh – new challenges in 2008 for choir and staff

Twelve years on, the individual members of NYCoS may be different, but many staff members have been there since the beginning. How does Christopher Bell plan to maintain the energy and enthusiasm: his own as much as the singers?

A residential course, some fine singers, lots of hard work and then some concerts. On the surface that basic pattern has changed very little since 1996, yet cast your eye round the singing and coaching staff and you see many returning faces. We all seem to still get a lot out of the experience but for me there must be more to it than that. It's crucial to me that each year offers something a little, or a lot different. This can be in the form of new concert venues, new repertoire, new or different collaborations to keep me on my toes. So 2008 offered some rather exciting opportunities to make sure that the rush of adrenaline and the thrill of a job well done was still there.

Two new conductors got an opportunity to experience the NYCoS sound first hand. Paul Hoskins is Music Director of Rambert Dance, and we provided choirs to sing Howard Goodall's *Eternal Light* in the Edinburgh Festival Theatre. To prepare for that we welcomed Paul to our residential course, and he conducted the choir in concert at St Andrews in July. Karl Jenkins, composer of *The Armed Man* actually managed to conduct the largest ever gathering of an SATB NYCoS choir when forty Alumni, one hundred NYCoS and sixty NYCoS Training Choir filled the choir stalls in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on Remembrance Sunday.

One of the challenges as Artistic Director of NYCoS is to make these invitations work, and come up with other ideas. Already we are thinking about our 15th Anniversary, but before that we will have had a tour in 2010 and fingers crossed that some of the other ideas we are discussing will come to fruition. It all helps to keep it fresh for me, and it is my hope and wish that if I am excited and enthused by a project, that I will be able to transmit that to the singers. When they get enthusiastic and sing to their potential, that's my reward.

Christopher Bell

**NATIONAL
YOUTH CHOIR of
SCOTLAND**

Kodály Musicianship Training Weekend 2009
University of Stirling
29 and 30 August 2009



Full details will be available on our website in the Spring – www.nycos.co.uk

Ziggy da Dumba and Kodály friends

Carole Allen talks about the connections that can be made between different organisations, all committed to providing a quality musical experience for children wherever they are based.



Ex Cathedra Education Team

I had seen the Ex Cathedra Education team deliver a workshop at the Music Learning Live conference at Sage Gateshead in January 2008, and was sufficiently impressed to invite them up from Birmingham to be a part of our training weekend in Stirling. Singing Playgrounds is one of their education projects and has an innovative approach to engaging children in singing as part of their everyday life. Particularly appealing was the fact that one of the leaders with a Polish background has written a booklet of singing games with Polish and English text. Given the number of Polish children in Scotland now, it seemed a good opportunity to draw on their expertise and find some material that our teachers could use to include some diversity in their work. The workshops were packed out and delegates had a blast!

When I sent out the training weekend application forms, one of the people who expressed an interest in attending the workshops was Nicola Killean, director of the Sistema Scotland project. She brought along her team of musicians, who are working with children in the Raploch area of Stirling – Big Noise is a children's orchestra based on the social programme started in Venezuela over 30 years ago.

One of the foundations of the scheme is Kodály musicianship, and the Raploch musicians are using singing as a basis for the children's musical development. Nicola was keen to see how Singing Playgrounds manage to involve children as song leaders and mentor younger children. She thinks this would be a great way of bringing the older children in the Raploch

community into the picture – they have been working since the summer with P1 – P4 children.

We asked Nicola if she could bring along a group of the children for our *See it in action* slot, knowing that they had lessons for only about two months, but also that it would interest delegates, and instrumental instructors in particular, to see them and hear about the beginnings of the programme. It was lovely to meet them and we look forward to hearing more about their progress.

Meantime we have booked the Ex Cathedra tutors to come up to Glasgow at the end of March for a full day – put Saturday 28th in your diary now.

Carole Allen

The future is bright – the future is bronze!

Renfrewshire was looking for a programme which would be accessible to all pupils, affordable and also offer opportunities for pupils to be able to continue to progress and develop their musical skills beyond their P6 target year of tuition. The new programme would also need to be of very high educational and musical value and, most importantly, to be enjoyable and fun.
A tall order?

The Youth Music Initiative has given our young people the opportunity to participate in a diverse range of musical activities as part of the Primary 6 target, from recorder to guitar, wind band to traditional music, samba to strings, and last but not least, singing. We are determined to build a lasting legacy in our schools which can be enjoyed by children for many years to come with sustainability as a key issue.

The answer was already with us in that over half of our primary schools and two special education schools were already participating in a programme based on **Go for Bronze**. The programme's ability to meet our developmental priorities and criteria was an important factor in our decision as was our existing experience of the programme. Feedback from teachers in previous years showed that children had improved coordination, self esteem and teamworking skills in addition to developing good musicianship skills and a love of singing.

I'm delighted to report that there are now over 5,000 children in Primaries 3, 4 and 5 participating in **Go for Bronze** this session. Although NYCoS is helping to support the programme with additional staff, training our own class teachers to deliver the programme has always been a fundamental part of our approach to this programme. In addition to over 40 staff trained during the last four years, another 70 staff have recently attended two days of training with Lucinda Geoghegan resulting in the majority of our schools now having at least one staff member trained to deliver **Go for Bronze**. This is helping ensure that the programme will be sustainable in the long term as well as giving teachers renewed enthusiasm and confidence in teaching music. We look forward to enhancing our young people's musical education for many years to come.

The future is bright – the future is bronze!

Catriona Winfield
Acting Music Coordinator
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"Go for Bronze" in the classroom

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