

Richard Ashton

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My music CV (1) - General

At the "Victory 87" Charismatic Convention held in Adelaide's Wayville Showgrounds Motor Pavilion, singer Barry McGuire shared the Lord put his guitar and voice away in the closet for 12 months at his conversion.

I came to accept the real Jesus as "both Lord and Christ" on the last night of that same convention

In one of my 1989-1995 era teaching tapes (subsequently digitised) which I made about the Mormon heresy, I shared that my musical skills had stayed longer than Barry's in the cupboard, but I did not compare his greater musical skills with mine.

At that same gathering, I made the acquaintance of another singer, Robert Colman, with whom a friendship developed over several years.

Background

In the late 1940's (in the UK), I had learned to play an ordinary cheapie harmonica as a school kid; self taught, no theory.

In the early 1950's, I tried for 2 years - and failed - to learn to play a flute. :-)

This was probably not just lack of aptitude, nor even a dislike of my teacher... but mainly a lack of personal dedication. I actually wanted to play the pipe organ.

No, I didn't ever go to "no steenking" Conservatorium <grin>

My music CV (2) - Accompanied Singing

I came to Australia in 1965, having a non-participatory interest in music, probably largely through the seasons (in London's Royal Albert Hall) of the "Henry Wood Promenade Concerts" and Sir Henry's protégé, Sir Malcolm Sargent (who took over on Sir Henry's death). This heightened with "Flash Harry" (as he was affectionately known) being a regularly occasional but annual pen-friend with my first wife and I as a result.

I became a **Latter-Day-Saint** after moving to Adelaide in February 1966, through to the late 1970s. I sang in their harmony choirs (which presented in public as well as in church services and large gatherings) in both **Adelaide** and **Perth**. This required me to develop score reading capability, although I was far better at it then than I am now.

For about 3 years, I was a member of the "**Metropolitan Gleemen of Western Australia Choral Society**" - (a Male Voice Choir) which was associated loosely with the **Perth Philharmonic Society**, and the year I left to return to South Australia (1971), we were rehearsing to present Handel's "Messiah" that Easter. We regularly presented many concerts in public halls around Perth.

In late 1977 followed a musical drought - for me, for several years, apart from helping knock some youngsters into musical shape for an end-of-year youth concert in 1977 while at Woomera.

1980 - 1990 was back to Scouting and its campfires.

Working for 6 months in Sweden, in about September 1990, I was invited to sing an "unexpected" or impromptu a capella duet (in English) with the Salvation Army captain's wife during refreshments after a Saturday evening worship gathering for old people (I wasn't one then). This was a Swedish hymn well known to us all - "**How Great Thou Art**". and "Fru Kaptén" put in a delightful alto harmony with my melody.

In December that year at the 8am English language service at the pentecostal church that was my home most of the time there - at my farewell, if you like - , I presented an a capella solo of one of the Hosanna! (Worship) Choruses - which the pianist picked up, but in a different key - which rather threw me, being quite terrified at what to do next :)

in 1991 after returning to Australia, having moved house as well, I looked for a local church, and attended Hope Valley in Adelaide's North-East, being invited to regularly participate as a song leading vocalist on a rotating roster. I was also invited to join their harmony choir by the choir director (who was a fellow singer), and was invited back by her twice to sing with them after moving on to another church - which was a great joy. I was there until early 1995.

While at Hope Valley, having been introduced to its message of hope, I sang in some of the excerpts of Murray Wylie's "Jerusalem Passion" oratorio presented some Sunday nights at Adelaide churches. It would have been nice to have been in any of the 3 seasons in Adelaide's Festival Theatre before that, but it wasn't to be. The concluding "worship concert" of excerpts was at Paradise Assemblies of God on April 1995.

During this era I was fortunate to have been able to attend two 1-1/2-day church music workshops with **Wes Beavis** (at Hope Valley), and two with **Geoff Bullock** (at Paradise).

During this time, my rock and blues composing son, songwriter and guitarist **Gwyn Ashton**, decided to relocate from Australia to Europe via the USA because of difficulties in musicians obtaining paid work in this country.

You can find him online at <http://www.gwynashton.com> and I think much of his quite exceptional talent comes from his late mother, (my first wife). He has done very well, with many accolades from his contemporaries, including an European magazine "guitarist of the year" award, and several CDs published. His mentor for years was Adelaide Blues composer-guitarist Chris Finnen.

His female vocalist at one time - **Karen Grace** - gave me some good pointers on performance techniques such as finding harmonies where there often don't seem to be any.

My (un-named) vocal singing group

With Vision One's written permission, a lady singer from Hope Valley and I, presented a number of songs from Murray Wylie's work in several churches in the North East - as duets, with the composer's blessing to

"pick what harmonies suit your voices, and if you feel extempore harmonies fit better, then go for it" :)

This later became a mixed quartet, presenting in homes for the aged, and after a while, reduced to a trio because of the other male vocallist's work needs. The trio was better balanced in sound.

We used pre-recorded accompaniment for a 45-minute programme of highlights from the "Jerusalem Passion", presented to a range of institutionalised old people in northern suburbs over several years.

<http://www.highlights.jerusalem Passion.org>

Because we continually tried new and closer harmonies to "improve" our presentations, I suspect the other singers might have wondered at every rehearsal what changes we were going to try!

While The Jerusalem Passion highlights quartet/trio was not a capella, admittedly, it was harmony, singing mostly from the composer's score - although we often tried out new ideas without accompaniment.

One of the last presentations we did was at the **Mile End Church of Christ** where we literally "sang for our supper" at the invitation of older members of the congregation, having been asked a number of times to do so, by a dear lady there (Jean Averay) :)

Something we all learned early in the piece was that without a conductor, we needed to see as well as to hear each other, which was why we developed our horse-shoe line-up.

After the contracting of several cancerous presences in her body by one of us, we decided to suspend the group and produced a CD of our repertoire current at that time. The remaining lady singer and I presented one of our favourites at her funeral

My music CV (3) - a capella Singing

From 1972 to 1986 I was involved (through being a Scout Leader) with unaccompanied sing-alongs, having attended the first ever Campfire Leaders' course they had run as an "extra unit" in my Scout Master's Wood Badge training course at the South Australian Headquarters camp site at **Woodhouse** in the early 1970s. .

Actively ran scout (and girl guide) campfires from then through to 1987, and towards the end was a member of the "**Piping Shrike Campfire Club of South Australia**" - the unofficial leader training group for campfire leadership, even though I had left regular scouting and had joined the rival back-to-basics "Baden-Powell's Scouts" organisation

Campfires are almost always unaccompanied (a capella); ear and pitch are therefore crucial!

This was an ideal environment to lose any remaining fears of singing in public.

During the period 1983-86, I recruited and trained a two other local adults interested in this activity, and together we formed the unofficial "**Morphett Vale Campfire Association**", taking our skills to other groups, running many campfires in the suburbs, including a group of **CEBS** (Church of England Boys Society), and an Uniting Church **Kids' Club**.

You teach the kids the really simple songs beforehand, so no word books need be used. It is great fun. Really!

I have a little treasured gift in my study, given to me by the **Happy Valley Cub Pack** in my capacity as as "**Singing Skip**" :-)

Scouting is based around two important concepts, both being promoted since its founding in 1907 up to the present day, in the words of the founder:

1. Learn by doing
2. If you don't strike oil in 5 minutes, stop boring (!!).

My music CV (4) -Training Adults in a capella and Harmony Singing

While still a Latter-Day Saint in Perth in about 1971, I formed a mixed quartet to compete in a church-wide vocal quartet competition across the city. We chose two songs from the Seekers' repertoire. ("**Turn, Turn, Turn**" and "**The Carnival is Over**")

While they decided to not award a winner that particular year, many acknowledged us as being the best - perhaps it was because we had a look-alike and sound-alike Judith Durham :-)

For the first two years at my previous church prior to coming to Modbury Church of Christ, along with a previous singing associate, we tried to get an impromptu harmony singing group going, but it went into permanent recess at Christmas 2006.

In 2007 I was asked to put together a group of seven experienced "sheet-music" church choir singers known to the hostess on her 50th Birthday celebration. These I trained in two rehearsals across town, over 4 weeks, in a bracket of 6 a capella songs in the Welsh language. They found harmonies too! This necessitated arrangements as well.

http://richard.ashton.dreamhosters.com/Karen_50/

To be fair, three of them were already literate in the Welsh language, so we placed them between those who didn't speak Welsh. They all did a terrific job.

The curved line of singers concept described above worked well here too, even with a double quartet, as can be seen from photos on that web page..