



When will we sing together again?

Julie Thomas

Director of Imperial Choir

How strange life is these days. From a most successful festa concert at the beginning of last September with the joy and fun of bands marching, the choir singing and the glittering displays of fireworks, to the now empty rehearsal room, silence, and the fear of meeting up again. My little family of lovely ladies who love to sing - when will we sing together again?

We were flying high after our annual concert in the square. The choir gained a new member when Jan Gauci joined the sopranos and how she loved singing in her first festa concert! We then sang at a concert with the band for il-Festa tal-Madonna tal-Mellieħa at the end of September and, even though Geoff and I had booked a long holiday down-under during October and November, the ladies were still kept busy. They sang at the remembrance service in the Parish Church and, later in the month, sang at the mass in the lovely Monastery of St Catherine in Valletta with Miriam Muscat kindly stepping in to rehearse the ladies and play the organ during the service.

When we returned from our travels early in December, it was full on for Christmas. A joint concert at the band club with the band on the 14th was followed by our usual carols and Christmas songs at the Paradise Bay Hotel on the 19th and at The Maritim Antonine Hotel on the 26th. We also took part at Milied Mellieħi on the 22nd of the same month on a very windy night that set the whole pavilion shaking and billowing. All was prepared for an exciting 2020 with a visiting ladies choir from Doncaster coming to us in May for a joint concert (with the hope that they would host us over in the UK in the near future), together with taking part at the opening of the Easter exhibition at the Club and the annual Palm Sunday concert at the Parish Church. It was not to be.

The year 2020 started with two funerals. It was, perhaps, a portent of what was to follow. We lost two wonderful members from our Imperial Band Club committee, Charlie Borg and Carmen Cini, within a few days of each other.

Rehearsals continued as we put together our beautiful pieces for the Palm Sunday concert. Then, on March the 7th, another funeral. A true gentleman and musician, Mro Joseph Sammut, passed away. The world was by now slipping into a dark time with the virus spreading like wildfire. We stopped rehearsing on the 12th of March and the club shut its doors to music-making for the first time in its history on March the 18th.

Our concerts were cancelled one by one as Malta went into lockdown. Our gorgeous music for the Palm Sunday concert was never heard. The choir from Doncaster pulled out of their tour. Our traditional Maltese concert for the celebration of San Ġwann tal-Ħgejjeġ did not happen and, of course, the hard work towards a festa programme was never started. A small ray of hope came when the band club opened its doors again on the 22nd of May. The band started rehearsing again on the 6th of July and we had a meeting on the 9th of July, agreeing to start rehearsing the following Thursday up on the roof in the open air. It worked well until the number of COVID-19 cases started to soar again. Now we are back to no rehearsals. The singing has stopped again. We are so disappointed.

I would like to share this post from Facebook with you as it reflects many things I feel about the choir. It was posted by Joseph Woolf, an American music teacher, who had set an online assignment to his students to define a choir. This is what he wrote to me when I asked for permission to share the post.

'I'm so glad you found Chloe's writing as inspiring as I did. Chloe has given her permission to use her writing. The more that hear her message the better.'

Festa 2020

Choir – by Chloe

If you had asked me what choir was 7 years ago, I would have told you that it was a bunch of people singing a song that they'd practiced.

If you had asked me what a choir was 5 years ago, I would have told you that it was a bunch of people having fun learning songs and then performing them.

If you had asked me what a choir was 4 years ago, I would have told you that it was a bunch of people working together on songs, even when they didn't feel like it, and even when they had bad days, and creating something beautiful. I would have told you that it was what I wanted to do in my life, but I didn't think I was good enough to.

If you had asked me what a choir was 2 years ago, I would have told you that it was a bunch of people that worked on a collection of pieces and tried to sing them exactly right so that the judges would like their performance. I would have told you that you could only be as good as the choir you were in.

If you had asked me what a choir was 1 year ago, I would have told you that it was a group of people that spent hours together perfecting music, and working to make people feel something when you sang that music. I would have told you that this is a group of people that are bonded together by the emotional connections they find with a song, and that, even though they might not

all see eye to eye or be the best of friends, they are one.

Today I can tell you that a choir is a family. A choir is a family that is held together not by mutual interests or blood, but by a love of music. A choir is a family that has bonded over the hearts they have poured into their music, a family that may not always like each other but always loves each other, and a family that doesn't give up on anyone. I would have told you that a choir is one of the things I have done with my life, and that my choir family has faced disappointment and heartache and fear and that maybe we still are. Maybe there isn't a single guarantee that we will ever sing together again, and maybe our last performance together already passed and we didn't know. But I don't believe that. Because a choir is more than just a bunch of people singing a song they've practiced. It is hours and days and months and years of commitment all built on top of itself and no virus is going to change that.

I don't know who you are Chloe, but you know exactly what it is to be a part of something so special as a choir. Stay safe my lovely ladies. Thank you for all the time and commitment you give to our choir. I wish you, your families, and all who support the Imperial Band Club all the very best for the future, and in particular for whatever these strange times may bring us.



Interested in joining the Imperial Choir?

New Members Welcome!

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