

## Chair Report 18.5.19

**Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.** Here is the story of *Wangari and The Humming Bird* as told by Penny. And, no, I am not going to sing it.

Wangari told a story 'bout a fire in  
the Forest  
Every animal tumbled out to watch  
the fire burn,  
The Tiger and the Elephant, the  
Beaver and the Bear,  
Just standing by, watch the flames  
grow higher,  
When they saw the hummingbird  
fly.

*To the stream and to the fire,  
A drop of water every time,  
Back and forth and back and forth,  
Another drop of water. X 2*

Some of the animals laughed as the  
wee bird flew,  
Said "You're so small, what can you  
do?"

But the bird flew on, from the  
stream to the fire,  
Never dropped a wing beat as she  
flew higher.

Told the animals big, told the  
animals small,  
I do what I can, and the bird flew  
on.

I will be a Hummingbird,  
A hummingbird, a hummingbird,  
I will be a Hummingbird, fly water to  
the fire.

What fragile volatile times we have lived through this past year: a tempestuous, globally worrisome year, with turbulence, storms and hurricanes devastating communities around the world: extinction coming ever closer.

The tales of rootless homeless people: travellers, migrants, refugees; and the sad and the sick continue unabated it seems. And I'm not even going to mention what's been happening in British politics!!

But, but ... I am minded of another of Penny's songs: ***Mosquito: If you ever feel too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with a mosquito – OUCH!***

We in Protest in Harmony try to act as the hummingbird, as the mosquito, in community.

I spoke the following words from our application for the Trad Community Music Award at our session in September. They bear repeating I think.

*We love that we can protest in four-part harmony about awful things; that the choir helps us find a voice about the issues we really care about; that it brings beauty into the fight against injustice and oppression, and that it brings non-violent resistance into the heart of our lives. And we love that it can be enormous fun!*

*The choir has helped many of us to rediscover our voices. It's a source of joy to be able to take a stand alongside like-minded people on the issues we care about in such a non-violent, life-enhancing and uplifting way.*

*We love to share this joy and commitment with others. Protest in Harmony has become a vital way for many of us to express our commitment to working for change in the world and one that brings so much beauty in the face of despair and hardship.*

*What unites us is our belief in the meaning of the songs and our love of singing them together in harmony. The singular power of music gives shape, gives voice, gives life to our wider concerns. What unites us is our conviction that the power of music, our belief in the meaning of the songs and our love of singing them together in harmony may contribute to making change in the world. There is a better way!*

In the words of ***The Whole Wide World Around***: *Let every voice be thunder, let every heart be strong.*

In recognition of the wonderful community we have let me first thank some people:

- Thanks to our ever committed, energetic, enthusiastic and creative Song Leaders. We have really missed Jane, who started a sabbatical in January. It was lovely to be led by her with her usual humour and commitment for the Climate Change events. We wish her well and look forward to welcoming her back when she is ready. To Penny and Shereen: thank you for all your amazing leadership, so generously given.
- A special treat during our first choir session of 2019 was Shereen leading us (on her own), helping us to think about how to engage people when street singing, through performance and communication skills. We practised considering what the song means to us; then trying to communicate that meaning to others so that the message in the song can reach even those simply passing by. Thank you.

- Gratitude to Neil for his help with taking money and supporting Kathy as Treasurer.
- Thanks also go to Chris P for keeping the website up to date and to Douglas for his work on keeping the email address list updated. Not an insignificant task this past year in particular.
- I am so grateful to the stalwart committee members who have supported me with such kind and tender guidance in what has been quite a year for me. Liz Elkind has given so much of her time and energy over so many years to the choir and is now leaving the committee. We shall sorely miss her experience, humour and above all her wisdom. Ian, too, is resigning from the committee after an extensive spell too. We shall so miss his calm, quiet, humorous steadfastness. Sheila, Liz B, Jane, Liz E, Kathy, Sylvia, and Riona who joined latterly continue. Heartfelt thanks.
- And to you, you lovely singers: for setting out chairs, co-ordinating and organising events, and generally being fabulous. Not to mention, turning and tuning up in ever increasing numbers.

On the theme of Community, let's remember the Away Day in October. Not everybody could come but those who did, I think, had an uplifting time. We are strengthened in our activism by solidarity as a community.

Singing together helps us to feel less alone, less inclined to give in to despair. When we sing with each other, we can be elevated, organised, united and enthused with hope and courage.

*Joy doesn't betray but sustains activism. And when you face a politics that aspires to make you fearful, alienated and isolated, joy is a fine act of insurrection. If our activism is already democratic, peaceful, creative, then in one small corner of the world these things have triumphed.*  
(*Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit)

One concrete outcome of the AwayDay has been choir members leading songs. More conducting sessions are occurring, and gradually folk are developing confidence. It's great.

The Walking and Book Groups continue to explore pastures new, literally and in literature (see what I did there?), further cementing our strong community.

The choir's year has followed its usual rhythm, punctuated by regular commitments:

- ***Freedom Come A'Ye***: Street Choirs Festival; a small but beautifully formed group sang in the tropical heat in Brighton.
- ***We've Sung A Thousand Songs of Peace***: CAAT, (Campaign Against Arms Trade), in December.
- ***Stand Firm***: Bhopal Memorial Day, also in December.
- ***Wall Around Jericho***: Open Shuhada Street, where we protested, with street theatre and singing, against the continuing closure of a main street in the Palestinian city of Hebron, in February.
- ***Unsung Heroes***: International Conscientious Objectors Memorial Day, in May.

#### **Other Events this year to which Protest in Harmony has contributed:**

- ***I Can Can Can: Nae Nukes Anywhere Rally!*** in September, a celebration of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the work of ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) in bringing about the Treaty. How I wish I'd been there to see participants in tutus.
- ***Drastic Plastic***: Environmental issues/, Extinction Rebellion. Penny inadvertently proposed a new school curriculum topic in "litteracy".
- ***Save our Public Services***: Singing in Support of North Edinburgh Action Group. This was a local community gathering against austerity, the particular focus being this time on housing.
- ***Singing for our Lives: Our Voices Resound*** film shown in Glasgow and Edinburgh.
- ***We Shall Overcome***: Pete Seeger 100<sup>th</sup> birthday Singathon: 200 songs over a weekend.
- ***Cultural Boycott***: UnEurovision Day. Street singing and Love Palestine: Eurovision Party. Glitter galore. Who knew what lurked in people's wardrobes?

Who knows what this coming year will bring? I suspect that singing together in harmony and sharing our songs will be an important part of our lives for some time to come. Let's keep on keeping on, gathering strength from each other. It has been a privilege to be chair of this wonderful choir.