

Magical Music Moments

Alchemy Chorus COVID Newsletter # 7

7 May 2020



From the Committee

Welcome to our seventh edition of Magical Musical Moments – our ‘virtual’ weekly get together. Things are improving, we’ve all been vigilant, washing hands, staying at home...how’s the voice holding up? Have you been singing with zoom or your phone/video? Check out what two other choirs are up to in the Spotlight section.

Magical Music Moments
(hours, days and weeks, really)
especially for Alchemy’s G&S fans...



A Tale of Nine Pities

This excerpt comes from Graeme Trompf’s ‘Memoirs of a Tenor in the Pit’. The background is that Canberra Philharmonic’s Musical Director asked some blokes from the Rugby Choir to help out the chorus in the production of The Mikado from the Orchestra pit.



‘You may have heard of *Les Miserables*. We, the singers who volunteered to follow the conductor’s request to go down into the depths of the orchestra pit for the performances of the *Mikado*, have adopted the name of *Les Pities*. The name just seemed to speak of our situation.

What follows are some observations about life in “***the Pit***”.

For two weeks of performances so far, nine of us have been sandwiched between the bass drum and the exit door in ***the Pit***. We console ourselves with the belief that they have put us next to the door so that we can be the first to be saved if fire breaks out in ***the Pit***.

On behalf of all who share the pit space, the tenors begin the night by handing

around a selection of Fisherman's Friends (or is it Fiends?). The tenors do this in the vain hope that it will combat well known issue of BBB (Basses Bad Breath). To encourage the basses to take the bait, the tenors tell them that the lozenges will greatly improve their libido. Thinking that it is some obscure musical term the basses ask "What is 'Libido'?" The tenors reply that it is like vibrato only much more significant from the performers' perspective.

Madam Conductor was quick to notice that in one performance our contribution lacked focus when the normal drummer (if there is such a thing) was replaced with a young, female percussionist whom we haven't seen since. But it did not go unnoticed that when the regular percussionist could not make it to a subsequent performance, the stand-in was a bloke of our vintage and hairstyle.

We almost sit on a foldback speaker the size of a small Ayers Rock, and in front of us we have the broadcast end of a Euphonium shoved up our nostrils. In this encouraging, conducive environment we are asked to sing into a single microphone. The microphone is supposed to broadcast our quality contribution to the excited audience, but we live in fear that it may broadcast our other noises as well.

On the first night, when the foldback speaker wasn't working, we could not hear the chorus who bounce around on the stage above us. Both groups had to work very hard to stay out of phase enough to create this interesting sliding echo effect. Sadly, Madam Conductor was not a fan of sliding echoes, and she decreed that the offending monster foldback speaker would be squeezed into the vast amount of non-space

immediately behind us and adjacent to Des's ear hole (I think that was the orifice she mentioned.) This was also intended to discourage Des from snoring but there is a certain admirable, strong, never say die, determination about Des that will not be easily silenced.

In the dark middle distance behind a pillar, if you look carefully from where we crush, you can see Madam Conductor waving her arms frantically. Her waving actions and facial expressions - not to mention the expressive gestures she makes with her finger(s) - appear to be intoning, threatening, applauding, pleading and intimidating. (At one point she was seen to make a throat cutting gesture in our direction but we prefer to believe it was directed at the **other** wind section who sit directly in front of us). We invariably choose to believe that Madam's angry gestures are intended for the orchestra or even the cast, **but definitely not us**. So, we gladly disjoint our necks around the pillar in an effort to watch this "Pantomime beyond the Pillar" in the hope that some of her efforts may provide some guidance, or even a hint, as to what we are supposed to do.

We look like the mafia because, after one night when one of us turned up in luminous sandals and shorts that revealed an unpalatable pair of knees, Madam decreed that we had to turn out in full black from head to toe. One aspiring-to-be-SAS person hoped that this extended to boot polish on the face and the top of his head but sadly this was not required - shame really; it would have been such an improvement. We were told that these measures were necessary to prevent the audience from seeing us. But we didn't understand why they would want to hide us from the audience (particularly since we had covered the offending knees). But I suppose it is intended to be a comedy

and not a tragedy. Anyway, we make a silent protest about this blackout order – some rebels turn up with music folders that are yellow, blue and a very fetching little red number disguised with the words ‘Xmas Music’. Our protest goes unnoticed.

Madam Conductor starts each performance resplendent in cans (headphones that allow communication to and from the stage manager, sound and lighting booths etc.). But Madam quickly discards the cans once things get underway lest she be distracted by the dreadful screaming noise of a stage manager wanting to make some polite suggestions about how things should be happening. However, to ensure that visions of Madam are not wasted on **the Pit**ies alone, there is a camera positioned directly in front of her so that the cast and crew can see her frantic wavings on strategically placed TV monitors. (Early on we developed a strong bond with the cast because they clearly regard these wavings with same mix of confusion and disregard as we do). However, the lighting boys, who have nothing better to do, have noticed from their monitor that the energy in Madam’s wavings varies through the performance in synch with the occasional swig she sneaks from her coffee cup. They unkindly run a sweep on whether the coffee beans come from the Barossa or the Golden Triangle.

It is interesting to study how those in **the Pit** entertain themselves when they are not contributing directly. Sudoku is very popular, some like to appear dedicated by following the score (apparently totally unaware that what is actually happening has only passing resemblance to what Gilbert and Sullivan wrote), there are car magazines, the brass section has a competition running on who can sketch the most amusing human trombone on

their music, and a number of musos take time out to reposition congealed or rapidly congealing spittle from their instrument onto the floor. I would pay money to be there when the oboe player is suddenly called upon to play when caught with a rag stuck up his instrument. This matter of unhealthy spittle disposal could become a serious OH&S issue for the cleaners in the highly unlikely event that they ever find out where **the Pit** is.

So that is how life will go on in **the Pit** for another week until we are granted our release at the Madam’s pleasure - after the final performance - and we have contributed our last pittance.’
Graeme Trompf (the good-looking one)

Join in the G&S fun here, click on the link: [Tit Willow](#) (AKA **Pit Willow?**)

From the Linen Cupbored

When you’ve finished the clean-up, you can make some pompoms and hang them in your neighbourhood park.



Fellow Choirs in the Spotlight

Yes, there are other like-minded choirs sharing the music, the fun, the memories...

Forget Me Nots (Grafton)

Check out their Facebook page; they are having lots of Tuesday fun. And their repertoire is very familiar. Click on the link: [Forget Me Nots](#)

Musical Memories (Melbourne)

Zara Thompson conducts and they are doing some things with zoom. Singers keep Zara going for 2 + hours without a tea-break!



Singalong time

One here for Manager Jill who is studying [all through the night](#) to re-join the nursing heroes. Keep going, Jill.

And how could we finish without a wise Mother's Day song? Click and sing with [Doris Day](#)

Send stories, photos, suggestions, song requests PLEASE to

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We Will Be Back!