

# Tutti Ensemble

Making music with our glorious selves

## Introduction

Tutti Ensemble is a fully integrated choir including people with disabilities and members of the wider community in Adelaide. It has become known for its non-stereotypical music-theatre productions for the main stage and community events.

Tutti began in 1997 as a recreational singing group at Minda, a residential institution for adults with an intellectual disability. Over the next few years, the Holdfast Community Choir – as it was first named – grew from 11 to 60 members and in 2001 was incorporated as Tutti Ensemble. The founding Artistic Director of Tutti, Pat Rix,\* has been part of the choir's development since she was first asked to lead the singing group.

The musical term *tutti* is itself a representation of inclusiveness – it translates as 'everyone will now perform together after only a few have been allowed to play'.

## Performing Tutti

**In Tutti you are accepted for where you are at and what you can give now. You are valued for your life experience, abilities and capacities.**

TUTTI WEBSITE, [WWW.TUTTI.ORG.AU](http://WWW.TUTTI.ORG.AU)

The ingredients of a love of singing, acceptance of difference, willingness to learn and a sense of community are reflected in Tutti's repertoire and



Out Festival. This was followed by *Towards Unlit Skies* (Pat Rix and Natalie Williams) with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Yvonne Kenny, a new choral work created especially for the Bundaleer Forest Event. *Sounds of the City* saw the choir performing with the Holdfast and Glenelg concert bands, and *Melrose Under the Big Top*, written by Pat Rix for the celebration of Melrose's 150th anniversary, took Tutti north again to the Flinders Ranges. There they were, in Pat Rix's words, part of a cast of '100 men and women on the land in a real circus tent with live horses, sheep, sheepdogs, utes, tractors and school children, as well as professional musicians and opera singers and a very well-behaved bull'.

Throughout 2004 and 2005 Tutti collaborated with Interact Center in Minneapolis on the creation and development of two new works to be performed in the US and Canada. Interact also plans to stage *My Life, My Love* in Minneapolis in 2007. In the past two years Tutti has also collaborated with Arts In Action and regional Leisure Options to create the Big Country Choir in regional South Australia.

For Tutti members, the experience of singing and performing with the ensemble is about personal, artistic and social expansion.



*The Singing of Angels, Come Out Festival, 2003.*



Backstage preparation for *The Singing of Angels, Come Out Festival, 2003.* (L to R) Sue Downing, Karl Bryhn and Pat Luscombe.



**Lots of friends, more confidence, shared interests, improvement in singing and stage presence ... would love to pursue a career in singing and drama.**

AIMEE CRATHERN, TUTTI PERFORMER

**At choir I am treated like a person, not looked upon as a disability. Although I cannot verbalise, the little things I can achieve play a part in the overall production. I've even become quite famous after my picture was in the paper and now other people are looking at me in a different light.**

JEREMY HARTGEN, TUTTI PERFORMER

The practical arrangements that have to be made for Tutti performances – concerning access and facilities for a range of needs – also raise awareness of disability issues. Interaction between carers, families and community leaders is part of the preparation for every Tutti appearance. So too is the negotiation of appropriate fees for their work.

## **Creating and managing Tutti**

It is Tutti's focus on both social inclusion and artistic excellence which gives the group its impact on participants and audiences. In Tutti's hands, these are not two distinct goals but practices which support and enrich each other. The choir visibly achieves high quality, creative performances in the context of a wide range of support needs.

Tutti embraces difference and inspires acceptance. In musical terms, this means that all participants are appreciated and recognised for what they can offer. All contributions, even 'a very small or very loud uncontrolled sound' are incorporated into the music-making process. The fact that no sounds are censored provides an open and confident base for learning and exploring the 'new aesthetic territory' that is Tutti's brand of large-scale music-theatre and opera.

**We are proud of our unique aesthetic and know it derives from the extraordinary range of voices. I love the variations in our voices and know them so well that if one person is missing I can hear the difference. Over time, most have learned to pitch even if they have a hearing or vision impairment or palsied vocal folds. Such effort takes enormous self-discipline. It also takes self-awareness and sensitivity to others.**

PAT RIX, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The approach to learning that supports such achievement is one that uses and builds on participants' existing skills and sees learning as a cooperative activity in which all participants, including the Artistic Director, are both learners and problem-solvers. The understanding that everyone is a supporter and encourager provides a strong basis for working together in a context in which, as Pat says, things may easily go wrong and different



behaviours may be confronting.

An important element in Tutti's success as an integrated choir is that the process of integration took place as a move into the 'margins' rather than into the 'mainstream'. Wider community members joined what was originally Minda choir. From this time through to the incorporation of Tutti Ensemble, all choir rehearsals prior to technical and dress runs have continued to be held at Minda. There the residents' world rules, and those from 'outside' have to integrate with it.

From its beginning in 1997 to its current form, Tutti's work has been financially supported by project grants, productions partnerships and some donations – which are tax deductible. Arts sector funding and generous support from Minda have been vital to the ensemble's development. Partnerships with flagship theatre and opera companies have broadened the group's audiences and their field of potential support.

### The future: Tutti Arts

Tutti's strength and success as a choir and an inclusive creative organisation has seen it develop to the point of growing out of its present structure and funding. How to manage and shape its future is an important issue.

In May 2003 the Tutti Ensemble expanded to create Club Tutti, a non-performance choir for people who do not want the



Tutti Arts. Photograph by Jackie Smith.



Tutti Arts. (L to R) John, Alex, Aimee, Rachel and Joel.