

What is the Holdfast Choir?

The Holdfast Choir is part of an incorporated body called the Tutti Ensemble.

The development of the Tutti Ensemble's Holdfast Community Choir seems like magic. It has grown in less than four years from a small group of 11 intellectually disabled people and two support workers at Minda enjoying choral singing as a recreational option, to a diverse group of 60 - 70 singers and musicians. The philosophy of the choir is that there are no barriers to participation, therefore people with physical and intellectual disabilities and members of the community from widely differing age groups and musical experience are accepted and encouraged. Our repertoire has evolved to include gospel, popular and traditional songs as well as old favourites. We also sing songs from other cultures and original songs by contemporary writers

In August 2001, over twenty Choir members and Artistic Director Pat Rix were invited to travel to Vancouver to perform at Canada's inaugural KickstART Festival. There we combined with the Swamp Angels, a sister choir created by Pat during her Canadian residency in 1999, to sing excerpts from our opera and a song-cycle commissioned for the Opening Ceremony. During the days that followed, many of our 23 choir members played an active role in symposium sessions and workshops for this international celebration of Arts and Disability Culture. Pat Rix conducted crowded workshops in her methods of working with voice and song, which showed how to nurture creativity and leadership from within the group. The Choir also had the opportunity to present Australian Flags and a hand crafted quilt to the Governor General of Canada, who expressed her great enjoyment and support for the Choir's work.

In the last three years we have developed powerful, original sung and chanted works with our Artistic Director Pat Rix. This has led to the development with the Choir of Pat's original contemporary Australian opera **My Life, My Love**, which had its world premiere at the 2002 Adelaide Festival as part of our State Theatre's subscription season. This award winning new work, set at Holdfast Bay in 1926, celebrates South Australian originality and talent. It not only featured the Tutti Ensemble Holdfast Choir as its centrepiece but also loved performers Brian Gilbertson, Jennifer Kneale and Barbara West together with a host of emerging performers and musicians. **My Life, My Love** was directed by State Theatre's wonderful Rosalba Clemente, conducted by Ryszard Pusz and choreographed by Sally Chance. It was the first time in Australia that a community based group had worked with professionals at this level.

Tim Lloyd....Advertiser March 2002

Of all the strands of community theatre so far presented at the Festival this shows the most power.

What is remarkable is the way it has transcended its community theatre origins to create something of particular artistic significance.

Soon after the excitement of **My Life, My Love**, the choir was rehearsing again. This time we were preparing for a concert, which was to be a feature of the High Beam Festival in Adelaide. Once again we worked with soloists from **My Life, My Love** and had the pleasure of sharing the billing with pianist David Helfgott in the Adelaide Town Hall.

The concert was splendid. The choir sang well, then sat still while the guest singers sang their solos and David Helfgott played with great sensitivity and amazing skill. The Town Hall was true to its reputation and the acoustics were fantastic. How fortunate we felt to have performed there.

Ewart Shaw...Advertiser May 2002

Adelaide's internationally acclaimed Tutti Ensemble Holdfast Choir is fast being recognised as a serious musical force in Adelaide. Look closely and you can see the diversity of the community that makes up the membership. Close your eyes and all you hear is a finely balanced group of singers enjoying their music-making immensely.

In his opening welcome Stephen Goldsmith spoke of the way the choir had moved from tolerance of difference to acceptance. Now they move to recognition of their musical ability and commitment. They earned their standing ovation the hard and fair way.

The goals of our choir

- To create, display and perform innovative music-theatre works which include and involve people with intellectual and other disabilities, older people and people of all ages and abilities from the wider community
- To enlist the support of governments, organizations and community members across the arts and disability sectors
- To promote a positive and inclusive community cultural development model, which responds to the creative abilities and needs of people with a disability and to challenge conventional stereotyping of music-theatre
- To encourage a strong group of volunteers to assist in organization and performance

- To ensure that all people associated with the choir respond to the needs of their peers with a disability
- To recruit and access high quality arts practitioners to ensure the success of the choir's activities
- To encourage leadership by people who identify as having a disability

We are proud of the contribution we are making to South Australia. Wherever we perform, in South Australia, interstate and overseas, we understand that our Choir is the first of its kind in the world and that others are keen to learn from the model we have created. The strength of our work comes not only from our shared love of singing and adventure, but also from an acceptance of difference, a willingness to learn and a strong sense of community.

Where to from here?

We have achieved much in a short time and 2003 looks to be just as exciting. We begin the year with The Singing of Angels in March. This is a new collaborative voice and movement work with Restless Dance Company for Come Out and will be performed in St Peter's Cathedral. A week later we head north for a concert with Yvonne Kenny, Elizabeth Campbell and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra in Bundaleer Forest. Later in the year we have been invited to perform at the Melrose 150 celebrations and the Wataboshi Music Festival in Brisbane. In the midst of all this we hope to have time to consolidate. We aim to update our database of choir members and encourage all those who have not filled out their information form, or those who may have changes of any kind, to complete the form enclosed and return it to Nikki Zerella. This information is crucial when we are making any arrangements and especially when we are seeking grants or sponsorship.

Through liaison with community groups of all kinds and through personal contacts of choir members we aim to set up a "Friends and Supporters" list of people who will be able to share in the pleasure of performances and special events.

If you are already a member of the choir, please remember to pay your weekly fee and collect your name badge from the helper at the door. We ask that people on a pension of any kind pay \$2, and that others pay \$4 (or more if you are able). It is important that we bring the money each week, as we need to be able to pay for all kinds of goods and services. Much as people love to help us they cannot live on love and fresh air.

If you know of anyone who would like to join the choir ask them to contact Nikki Zerella at Minda Inc (Phone 8422 6316) and she will put their name on the waiting list.

There are very few key people who are paid for their work with the choir. Staff members from Minda Inc who care for and co-ordinate the activities of the Minda clients are paid by Minda. Pat Rix is paid a nominal fee and occasionally, when the choir is involved in a large project, professional musicians are engaged to assist with tutoring choir members, arranging and playing music.

We are fortunate to have such a large group of volunteers, in fact most members are volunteers.

We depend on volunteers to

- transport fellow members
- attend meetings
- play in the band
- work on timetables and arrangements
- sell tickets to performances and fund raisers
- make phone calls to keep in touch
- take photos or videos
- duplicate schedules or song words
- organise refreshments
- help fellow section members with parts
- help fellow section members to get ready for and during performances
- liase with members with disabilities, and where appropriate, their carers and families
- extend the hand of friendship and fellowship
- come regularly, on time and pay their weekly fee