



Welcome to the May lockdown special.

## **Covid-19. Coronavirus Pandemic**

Abertillery Orpheus embarked on a mini tour to Kent during March of this year holding joint concerts with Snowdown Colliery Male Choir and Thanet Male Choir in celebration of the Welsh links with the Kent Coalfield, these coalfields attracting many Welsh coal miners in the early years of the 20th century, taking with them their strong choral traditions.

One such miner being a son of Abertillery Mr John Yorath who in 1929 was the founder of the Snowdown Colliery Male Choir. Little did we know at that time those concerts were going to be the last to be given by the choir for some considerable time.

Coronavirus was about to strike at the heart of our country and communities and in a way that was unimaginable just a short while ago. On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2 people had tested positive for Coronavirus by March 5<sup>th</sup> it had claimed its first British victim and on the 16<sup>th</sup> March its first Welsh death. The whole country being put into lockdown on Monday March 23<sup>rd</sup> and as of this time of writing April 2<sup>nd</sup> the country has recorded 2,921 Coronavirus deaths.

After much deliberation and with a heavy heart and taking into consideration the demographic of our choristers and indeed our likely audiences as well as the wider community the officers and musical team of the choir made the decision on March 14<sup>th</sup> to cancel the choir's imminent annual concert which was due to be held at the Llanhilleth Miner's Institute March 21<sup>st</sup>. This year the choir were very fortunate and excited to have secured the services of the talented West End Theatre Star, Kieran Brown as their celebrity guest artist. Kieran making his West End debut in *Les Miserables* and played the role of The Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera*

at Her Majesty's Theatre, London. We believed that to go ahead with plans for the concert was not a responsible or sensible thing to do. How right we were.

On March 17<sup>th</sup> all choir practice rehearsal nights were suspended due to the escalating Coronavirus pandemic until further notice along with all pending engagement of which there was many.

However, all is not lost. During our last choir rehearsal we started to learn for the first time a new piece of music called Yma o Hyd (*Still Here*) which we will sing in Welsh. Our musical director Steve Bard being only Welsh speaker in the choir has since recorded and uploaded a video of himself onto our Facebook page speaking the words for us to learn during this lockdown period, supported by Penny Hughes, our accompanist, who has recorded and uploaded the four individual piano parts for us.

Now in its 112<sup>th</sup> year the Abertillery Orpheus has survived many hardships along the way, through 2 World Wars, the 1929 General strike and Great depression through the 1930s poverty and unemployment and England winning the 2003 Rugby World Cup, but this period in our history is the first time that the choir has been suspended and we have not been able to sing. As a choir during the war years we were able to sing for injured soldiers returning from the front who were recuperating in our hospitals and we raised a great deal of money through our concerts and fund raising to support the war effort but this war, and a war it is, is against an invisible and silent enemy a killer around every corner and we feel helpless as an organisation to contribute to the fight at this point in time, but we will stand at our front doors, in our windows and on our streets every Thursday evening at 8 o'clock as will the rest of the country and will clap our hand and sing our songs in recognition of our front line services, a small gesture by us in recognition of all those who are putting themselves on the front line for us.

The words of the day are Self Isolate, Social Distancing, and Stay Home, Protect the NHS and Save Lives. Who know where this all will end and what future lies ahead not only for the choir but also for family, friends and ourselves, we are of course extremely concerned for our chorister who are mostly (myself included) in the elderly age bracket and so most at risk and we pray for their safety.

Lyndon Smith

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## **Concert News:**

Caerphilly Male Voice Choir are leading on a proposal for a **Mass Choir Event** with Alwyn Humphreys, possibly at the Principality Stadium, to thank the NHS. This event would be scheduled after the current situation is resolved and more details will be available when confirmed. I have registered this AOMC's interest in this.

The choir has been invited to sing as part of the 4 day **Usk Choral Festival**. This is similar to the Beaconsfield Festival in that we sing in a session with two other choirs. Each choir has a 25-minute slot and the non performing choirs provide the audience for the performing choir. This is currently booked for 7 March 2021 3.30 pm, however if COVID restrictions still apply the festival will be postponed until 2022.

**Liz Owen & Daryl**, whose wedding was due to take place on the 5 April 2020, have now rescheduled their wedding till 3 April 2021 and the choir is still booked for that new date.

The concert with **Exeter Male Voice Choir** which was originally for 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020 has been postponed until in the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2021 (new date to be confirmed with the choir and church) while the **Tom Bundred** concert has now been rescheduled from the 1 August 2020 to Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

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We continue to meet virtually, via Zoom, and we have held both social and quiz nights via this medium. Please join us if you can—Kevin Harris sends out the invitation and its is just a matter of following the instructions to join the meeting - although you will need to install Zoom on your PC, Laptop, tablet or phone if this is your first Zoom session.

Other choirs are using Zoom to create virtual choir performances, but this is actually a case of individual singers videoing themselves singing to a backing track, using headphones so the backing track cannot be heard on each individual recording, and then editing all those videos to form a video choir this time with a master backing track added back in.

## **Stay Safe and Stay in Touch**

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For those of you that remember her, it is with regret that one of the founder members of Erydice, **Mrs Mary Betty** passed away peacefully in her sleep on 30th April 2020. Mary had no children and had lived at Gilwern House for some time. Mary was a true friend to the choir.

## **Monmouth Pudding (Welsh)**

Submitted by Kevin Thomas - Author: Epicurus.com Kitchens

Prep: Time: 30 min, Cook Time: 1 hour 5 minutes

Ingredients:

- 6 ounces breadcrumbs
- $\frac{3}{4}$  pint milk
- 1 ounce sugar
- 1 lemon
- 1 ounce butter
- 5 Tablespoons raspberry jam
- 3 egg yolks

Topping:

- 3 egg whites
- 3 ounces granulated sugar

Instructions:

1. Grate the rind of the lemon. Add the lemon rind, sugar and butter to the milk and bring to the boil. Pour over the breadcrumbs and leave to stand for 15 minutes.
2. Separate the egg whites and yolks. Stir the yolks into the cool bread mixture.
3. Melt the Jam. Pour half mixture into a greased ovenproof dish and spread with half the jam. Add the remainder of the pudding mixture and then the rest of the jam.
4. Bake in a warm oven (325 degrees F. or Mark 3) for 40 – 45 minutes.
5. Meringue Topping: Beat the egg whites until stiff and fold in the granulated sugar using a metal spoon. Cover the pudding with the meringue and bake in a cool oven (300 degrees F. or Mark 2) for 20 minutes until the meringue is lightly browned.

If you wish to submit crosswords, poems or recipes to the Newsletter

just email them to

[choirnewsletter@colcanto.co.uk](mailto:choirnewsletter@colcanto.co.uk)

**Life in lockdown.** (Kevin Thomas)

We can't go out, except for an hour,  
One weekly shop and still there's no flour!  
Baking cakes just to pass the time,  
Sponges topped with lemon and lime.

Your other half makes lists, tired of waiting,  
For jobs that need doing, fixing and painting.  
Reading new books and making the tea,  
Looking for box sets to watch on TV.

All is not lost, the weather is fine,  
Spending time with the family, albeit online.  
Barbecues and games in the garden is fun,  
With drinks on the patio in the evening sun.

And when it's all over with stories aplenty,  
We endured the lockdown of 2020.