



KPMVC sing – at last – with Brecon Male Voice Choir

‘Thirty months in the making, one weekend in the enjoying’

That is the pedigree of Brecon Expedition 2022 - first outline plans back in late 2019 and we sang - at last - with the Brecon Male Voice Choir in July 2022.

What a journey it's been!

Read the review by Geoff Fisher

Friday 1st July saw the bulk of the Kent Police Male Voice Choir heading westwards towards Brecon, the jewel of the Brecon Beacons, for a much-delayed rendezvous with the Aberhonddu & District Male Voice Choir. Their invitation to sing with them was received some time ago but KPMVC were unable to join with them due to Covid-19 restrictions. Read on for the full story.

“The only thing better than singing is more singing.”

Ella Fitzgerald

Early morning in Kent. Dew glistened on the grass as I pulled up at the Brookline Coach depot near West Malling. Early start - since retirement seven years ago me and the Mem'sahib had almost forgotten there are two six o'clocks in the day! More early birds – Chris and Carole Cole and Lynne Watson – wait in their car . . . guess they couldn't sleep, either.

Soon, other folks arrived and hauled luggage out of their cars - we're only going for a weekend but there's mounds of baggage! The coach driver, Mark, arrived bang on time so I briefed him on the plans and timings for the weekend. Stout fellow – he's probably heard it all a hundred times before so he's not fazed by anything. Just what I wanted to hear.

Coach all loaded and everybody accounted for – no latecomers, thank

the stars! All sitting comfortably and we're off heading along the M26 to join up with the M25. Google Maps told me there are no delays along our planned route - good news!

We're soon speeding along the M25 in our very well-appointed coach. A low hum of conversation and laughter reached me sitting up at the front . . . that's more good news – no early morning grumpiness.

Mark suggested we stop for lunch in Abergavenny. Not being too familiar with Wales I had originally thought we'd stop at some motorway service area for a bite to eat so his suggestion of a stop in a town with real food instead of plastic service area fare came as a nice surprise.

After a comfort break at Membury on the M4 we reached Abergavenny, relieved to stretch our legs. Two hours to



“He who sings scares away his woes.”

Miguel de Cervantes

have a wander round and buy some lunch is just what we needed. Pleasant little town, Abergavenny – quaint High Street and plenty of shops to look in. The Mem’sahib found a dress shop from which I gently extricated her before serious harm could be done to the credit card.

With lunch all done it was off to the Castle of Brecon Hotel, our home for the next two nights. Parking a huge coach in a car park not designed for huge coaches was a challenge but Mark rose to the occasion and squeezed a quart into a pint pot - well done, that man! We had to queue up outside as the reception staff processed us so fortunately the rain held off – as it did for almost the whole time we were in Brecon. Who said it always rains in Wales! The hotel was, shall we say, ‘different’. It has seen better days – shabby chic as it’s known in the trade – but it was more than adequate. The staff were brilliant – friendly and helpful with good humour thrown in. The breakfasts on both mornings

were very, very good. Not having had a cooked breakfast for many a year me and the Mem’sahib threw caution to the winds and made the most of it – as did everybody else as far as I could tell.

Every silver lining has a cloud, they say, and our cloud was the unfortunate accident concerning Mick Pepper. He lost his footing in the car park and went down on his face, doing damage to his forehead and the bridge of his nose. Chris Bates cleaned Mick up as best as he could but it was felt he should go to hospital to have a professional job done. Mark Santer volunteered to take Mick to the nearby local hospital where Mick was patched up. Following the first-aid, the local hospital strongly recommended that a brain scan should be done so Mark drove poor old Mick some distance to Merthyr Tydfil Hospital where they did the scan. Having originally left the hotel at around 4.30 pm to go to the local hospital, Mick and Mark got back to the hotel at around 4 am the next morning.



Mick must have the constitution of a carthorse as he insisted on singing with us in the concert the next day and, sure enough, there he was in the back row singing like a canary.

While Mick and Mark Santer were otherwise engaged at the hospital, the rest of us unpacked and made arrangements for dinner in Brecon. Dinner over, it was back to the hotel for a wash and brush up before the BMVC chaps came to the hotel for an informal gathering. They were great company and, as the evening progressed, impromptu singing echoed throughout the hotel. From reports received, I understand the sun was well and truly over the yardarm and down the other side by the time the festivities ended.

Saturday dawned with a bit of rain in the air. Leisurely breakfast taken and coach boarded to take us on a narrow boat cruise along the Brecon Canal. We had booked for afternoon tea and our tables were loaded with sandwiches, pastries and scones - far too much for sensible consumption! After a very laid-back two-hour cruise along the waterway it was back to the coach to return to the hotel for the choir to have a quick wash and brush up before heading off to the theatre for the serious bit of the trip . . . rehearsal and the concert. The WAGALs* (see below) were left to their own devices at this point. Naturally, we had a bit of trepidation about an unfamiliar MD directing us but our fears were soon allayed as BMVC's Lynette Thomas and Lynne Griffin took us through our solo pieces and then, with our host choir, through the joint numbers. Karen was happy with the piano and it all went very smoothly throughout – some of the joint numbers as sung by BMVC were slightly different to the arrangements we are used to but we followed our new MDs and we did not disgrace ourselves in any way!

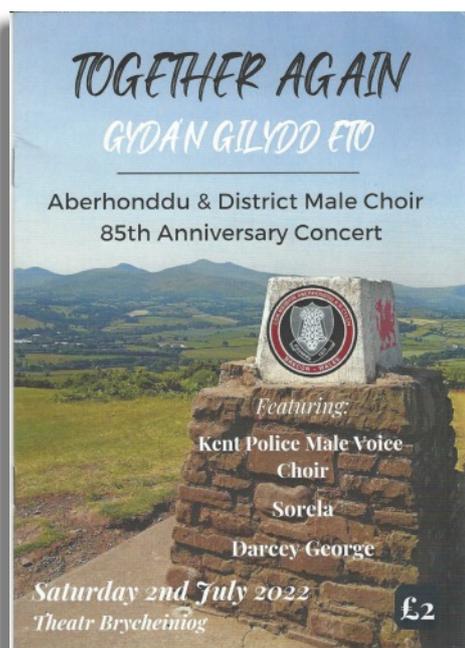
Rehearsal over and sighs of relief breathed, we made our way to The Studio, a sizeable room where a veritable feast had been prepared for us. There were wall-to-wall sandwiches, Welsh cakes, Victoria sandwich cake squares, sausage rolls - you name it, they had it! The hospitality given to us by BMVC was truly overwhelming and the amount of work that went in to staging this concert was very evident whichever way you looked. Nothing was overlooked and nobody was underfed! For those of us who had been on the morning's canal cruise the sight of more sandwiches took our breath away!

After refreshments we lined up with the host choir and took our seats on stage at 7.20 pm precisely. Again, the organisation behind the concert showed in the way everything ran like a well-oiled machine. At 7.30 pm precisely the concert opened with the host choir singing three pieces – one in English and two in Welsh. Their sound was very smooth and harmonious and their MD, Lynette Thomas, was professionalism personified.

Next on the bill was an a capella trio called Sorela. It comprised three sisters singing Welsh folk music and an old song performed by The Ronettes in the 60s - *Be My Baby*. The discordant notes in this number were absolutely stunning – as were the other three Welsh language songs they performed.

Our turn next and we performed with confidence and gusto and, to misquote Bruce Forsyth, 'didn't they do well!' *African Prayer* went down well and I think we pleased the audience. After the concert Karen praised our efforts so I guess we did do well! Following our slot came a remarkable young lady called Darcey George who sang like an angel - only 18 but what a voice! Bright future ahead for that young lady I would say.

** You all know the acronym WAGS when related to the choir stands for **Wives And Girl-friends**. It was suggested this be changed immediately to WAGAL – **Wives And Girl-friends And Luke** so we don't exclude Karen's other half when he joins us on future expeditions. Nobody can say KPMVC is not inclusive! Welcome Luke – we hope you enjoyed your maiden trip!*



The Brecon MVC philosophy

'The hills are alive with the Sound of Music' and, in the heart of the Brecon Beacons, Cŵr Meibion Aberhonddu strives to keep it alive. The tradition of male voice singing is at the heart of Welsh culture which we are keen to protect and promote. To the members it is an enjoyable and challenging experience, which only a few get the opportunity to experience in their lives. Singing is not only to entertain but it makes you feel good. Above all, we are a family. If times are tough, our members are here for each other, quick to help if needed and always concerned for each other's well-being.

Then came both choirs together with a spirited rendition of *Song of the Jolly Roger*. Somewhat different to the way we sing it but very effective nonetheless. This was followed by *I Dreamed a Dream* which contrasted well with the big voice sound of *Jolly Roger*. Interval time - only twenty minutes but time enough to catch our breath for the next slot.

The second half opened with us singing *Bring Him Home* followed by *The Rhythm of Life* and then *You'll Never Walk Alone*, this last number being introduced with a moving dedication by Chairman George. All three were very well received by the large audience comfortably seated in the modern theatre's auditorium. With any luck, Chris Cole may by now have posted some video clips on the KPMVC website.

Darcey George came back next with two numbers and was asked to sing an encore which was simply amazing - the rapport between her voice and the piano was magnificent! BMVC followed with their three pieces, one being an arrangement by their own MD of *I Can't Help Falling in Love* - very wistful with terrific harmonies. They sang the old favourite, *Llanfair*, in Welsh with a slightly different arrangement to ours. Their overall sound was so mellow with great control of dynamics in all their pieces.

Sorela was up next with four numbers including one from the 50s - *Sugartime*. This was originally performed by the McGuire Sisters in 1958 and oh boy, did Sorela do it well! Again, discordant notes right left and centre and by gum was it good!

To round off the evening we again joined with BMVC in *Morte Criste* in English, thank goodness, followed by the evergreen *An American Trilogy* which, again, was slightly different to ours but as every KPMVC chorister's eyes were glued to MD Lynette Thomas we didn't put a foot, or rather voice, wrong. The encore, *When The Saints*, rounded up the evening and, as usual, attracted premature applause just where it usually does!

End of the concert . . . a long evening - but what an enjoyable one! Speeches given, presentations made, thanks expressed and it all wound up at around 10.30 pm. Off to the pub for the afterglow. Again, our host choir's hospitality was amply demonstrated as on arrival were plates of sandwiches and the most delicious chips I have ever tasted.

The beer flowed and the voices sang and the evening ended up when the pub closed.

Sunday morning saw us out bright and early by the coach ready for a 10.30 am start back to Blighty. Good journey home via Newbury for lunch and back in Kent around 5.30 pm.

What an experience the whole weekend was! I was vastly impressed by the good fellowship and camaraderie within the BMVC. There is a different attitude towards male voice choirs in Wales than here in England - to me, the BMVC seemed very cohesive and close-knit - almost like a family . . . which is no bad thing.

Overall - a cracking weekend. Where are we off to next?