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Choir Special

September 2011

BURNTWOOD CHOIR CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS

In 1986, when Mayfield School and Garratt Green School amalgamated to form Burntwood School, the best initiatives from both schools were incorporated into the new school's ethos. Mayfield's choir, run by Debbie Lammin, was one such initiative. Relunched as the Burntwood Chamber Choir, it has gone from strength to strength, providing students with unique experiences and opportunities to which they



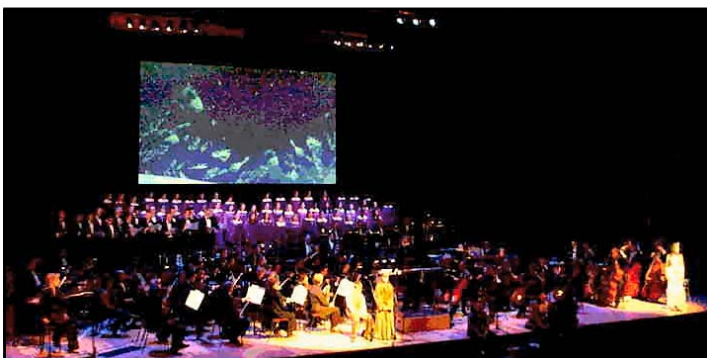
otherwise would not have access. Here, Debbie Lammin, who still runs the Chamber Choir at Burntwood, recalls some of the choir's many successes during its 25 year history.

"Strictly speaking, a 'chamber' choir is one which is small enough to sing in a room as opposed to a concert hall. For members of the current choir, who struggle to squeeze into a large classroom for rehearsals and are eagerly awaiting the purpose built rehearsal room they will have in the new building, it will probably be hard to believe that the whole choir originally fitted comfortably into the tiny steel pans room behind the tennis courts. It seems a very long time ago now! If I remember correctly, the choir's first performance in a school assembly was 'Men of Harlech', in unison! We've come a long way since then, and it's nice to feel that the choir's achievements are appreciated by the student body as a whole. Last term, I overheard a student say to her friend, who had just been promoted from the Young Singers to the main choir "You got into the Chamber Choir? 'COOL!' In no particular order, here are some of my treasured memories of the last 25 years".

■ Our first competition, the qualifying heats for the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition at Blackheath. We didn't get through, but it was a great day.

■ Crying when we were announced as the heat winners the next time we entered! We never did make it to the final, and in recent years other commitments have prevented us taking part, but I suppose there's always next time.....

■ Crying again as the choir danced with Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the aisle of St Martin-in-the-Fields, at the unveiling of the memorial to suffering in South Africa. The leader of the Zulu choir which also sang was very complimentary about our Xhosa pronunciation!





■ The Snow Queen! It did seem to go on for an awfully long time, but it gave us some amazing experiences - and some nice press cuttings!

■ Making our first CD in a small local recording studio as part of the Millennium celebrations. Who would have guessed then that we would go on to record at Pinewood, Phoenix and Abbey Road?



■ Representing England at the International Eistedfodd in Llangollen. The first time we did this was also our first ever trip away from home as a choir, and the way the choir bonded encouraged us to do more of this whenever possible.



■ Being presented to the Queen when we sang at the Commonwealth Day celebration in Westminster Abbey. Over the years, we have sung for the Queen three times - twice in the Abbey, but also at Legoland!

■ Barcelona. Still fresh in my mind, so many memories, but perhaps the most moving being the audience that gathered and the windows that opened when we sang madrigals in a city square as we waited for the coach after an evening concert.



■ The Czech Republic. Seeing the tiny mountain village where our exchange choir was based and taking the whole choir to see 'Rusalka' at the beautiful, historic opera house in Prague.



■ Choosing our robe colours, in 2000. The colours were chosen by the then Sixth Formers, who were terrified they would be made to wear grey and red! As all good choir members know, our colours represent the green, white and violet of the women's suffrage movement.

■ Singing at the Purcell Room in the final of the National Festival of Music for Youth. Our piece, inspired by an African drum ensemble, was so complicated that we had one part printed on the choir T shirts so that it could be read from the back of the girl in front. We made sure that everyone in the front row had a more memorable part to sing! I think I'm right in saying that this was our first time on stage in a major concert hall. Since then we've appeared at every one in London, working with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on several occasions.



"Perhaps most of all, I treasure the kind words that have been spoken and written by members of the choir, and their parents, in response to their time with the choir." Debbie Lammin