

PMVC History

The Perth Male Voice Choir (PMVC) traces its roots back to 1926 when members of the Commercial Travellers Association (CTA) in Perth formed a Concert Party with the aim of raising money for charities. This Concert Party was comprised of a choir conducted by Mr O. G. Campbell-Egan, and a small orchestra conducted by Mr. H.J. Otto. It was the choir section that became known as the Commercial Travellers Association Choir (CTAC). The Choir principally sang in the Welsh Male Voice Choir tradition, i.e. adult males singing in four part harmony with Bass 2 (the lowest pitch), Bass 1, Tenor 2 and Tenor 1 (the highest pitch), usually with piano accompaniment. In 1983 the Commercial Travellers Association moved from its Perth offices as a new venue for choir rehearsals was required. A suitable venue was found at the Subiaco offices of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Choir, by then under Musical Director Mr Edgar Nottage, changed its name to the Royal Commonwealth Society Male Voice Choir (RCSMVC). In 1998 the Choir moved to the Bob Daniel Community Centre in Inglewood for rehearsals, and in 2000 the Choir changed its name to the current Perth Male Voice Choir, (PMVC).

Throughout its long history the Choir has raised money for worthy charities by entertaining audiences with “bel canto” singing, which emphasises beauty of tone and phrasing and agility and ability to take high notes without strain. The Choir encourages members to dress and conduct themselves as gentlemen, and to foster friendship and collegiality, all leading to a positive social experience for members and audiences. The Choir also actively recruits new members, while retaining existing members, to ensure that the Choir flourishes.

The Early Years: 1926 - 1939

In 1926 The Perth Children’s Hospital (now the Princess Margaret Hospital) approached the CTA about sponsoring their “Cot Fund” for babies. The club was fortunate in having amongst its membership people with musical ability and some with the ability to entertain. This group came together and realised they needed a leader who was skilled musically and had the leadership qualities to bond the group and get the best out of the individual personalities present. By 1926 Mr. O.G. Campbell-Egan had made a name for himself as a leader in musical circles in Perth and club members sought his assistance in leading them to start rehearsing for the purpose of raising funds for charity.

Owen George Campbell-Egan (O.G.) was born in Ballarat Victoria on the 16th of October 1890. He was educated at Normal School, Perth, Teachers College Claremont and the Royal College of Music, London. He joined the Education Department in 1908 and served with the AIF from 1917-20. O.G. Campbell-Egan was appointed Superintendent of Music, Speech and Drama for the Education Department in 1929 and served until 1955. He conducted various bands and choirs and was founder and Conductor of the State Youth Orchestra in 1947.

First rehearsals and concerts

Rehearsals commenced in 1926 for the whole Concert Party when music scores were available and Mr. Campbell-Egan was appointed the 'Honorary Conductor'. About 5 weeks, and 4 rehearsals later, a program was ready for the very first performance given to an overflowing assembly of members and their ladies in the City clubrooms on a Saturday night. The concert was also attended by music reporters from the metropolitan press who were glowing in their critique of the type of program selected and the 'hidden talent' amongst the 'kings of the road'.

Excerpts from The Australian Traveller record are as follows;... 'To hear the inaugural performance of the party, there was a large gathering of members and their lady friends at the club house, Perth, on Saturday night, June 12, and it was generally agreed that in the near future, with added numbers and further practice under the capable direction of their honorary conductor, the Concert Party would form a notable addition to the musical institutions of Perth...' In responding to a vote of thanks for their performance, Mr. E.A. Hughes, Chairman of the CTA Concert Party of W.A. noted 'that the concert would have been absolutely impossible had it not been for the assistance rendered by one of Perth's most enthusiastic, most talented, and most sincere musicians, Mr. Campbell-Egan'. 'The evening agreed that the next concert would be held in the Fremantle Town Hall, again for members and their families, as the Fremantle club rooms were too small to handle the anticipated crowd.'

The First Public Concerts

Extract from the "Australian Traveller" 6th September 1926:

'COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS' CONCERT PARTY OF W.A.

Successful First Public Appearance, appreciative audience at Fremantle

The members of the C.T.A. bungalow Club at Fremantle were delighted to have the privilege of the first public performance by the Commercial Travellers' Association Concert Party of Western Australia, which was given at the Fremantle Town Hall on the evening of August 14. The seating accommodation was taxed to its fullest capacity and as a result of the effort it is anticipated that the local hospital, in aid of which the concert was held, will benefit to the extent of over 80 pounds (in fact 80 pounds no shillings and eight pence).'

This was a concert full of interest and variety. There were 34 singers. The program, as listed in the 'Australian Traveller' was as follows;

1. There were orchestral items and orchestral support for the choir singing "Old King Cole" by Forsyth, as well as support of audience singing of "Show me the way to go Home"
2. The choir sang 6 Sea Shanties, the "Roman War Song" by Wagner and "Holy Night" and "In Absence" by Bucks

3. Individual solos by 5 choir members
4. Individual monologues by 3 members
5. 2 duets
6. Humour by 1 person plus a humorous rendition of “Italo da Lingo” by a quartette from the choir
7. 3 instrumental items – violin, saxophone and piano
8. 2 very hard working pianists supporting choir and items in O.G.Campbell-Egan and Jack Brewer

The quality of performance, the rapturous response from the audience and the camaraderie engendered amongst the performers set the Concert Party on the road to greater things. Because of the success of the Fremantle concert, it was repeated 2 weeks later in the Perth Town Hall. This concert was followed by another concert at Gosnells to raise funds for a poor unfortunate man who had both his hands blown off; he had only recently arrived in Australia and was without friends. The latter concert raised 50 pounds.

In October 1926, the choir travelled to Bunbury and presented a program in the Lyric Theatre to a crowded hall, appearing for the first time in a country centre, and raising funds to aid the Bush Nursing Fund. A photo taken there is the earliest known of the Concert Party. The Concert Party comprised around 25 voices and a small orchestra of 8-10 players. The first major public concert occurred on May 1 1927 when the Concert Party hired His Majesty’s Theatre. Funds from the concert were to benefit the Children’s Hospital. By then, 300 pounds had been raised for charity since inception. From such beginnings and under such leadership the choir increased in stature and performed regularly on ABC radio and in many country towns raising funds for many causes.

Depression Years

The Great Depression brought financial hardship to many, and membership of the CTA dropped significantly, but in 1931 the Concert Party under Mr Campbell-Egan gave fortnightly concerts at the Perth Town Hall, raising 638 pounds. Five hundred and sixty pounds, 11 shillings and 2 pence was raised in 1932, and in 1933 702 pounds, 2 shillings and 2 pence. As things improved in the late 1930’s the CTA Choir (as it was now known) made a visit to Adelaide and extensively toured the Eastern States. In fact the late 1930’s have been described as the golden years of the Choir.

Interstate Travel

Adelaide 1936

By the late 1930s the choir was well established in the music scene and in 1936, following encouragement from Interstate Chapters of the Commercial Travellers Association embarked

on its first interstate tour. This was to Adelaide to take part in South Australia's centenary celebrations in December 1936. On Christmas eve 1936, 34 members left on the MV Westralia for Adelaide.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission also booked the party for two engagements on National radio.

'The C.T.A. Male Voice Choir and orchestra, comprising the Concert Party, visited Adelaide during the Christmas vacation and gave two concerts in the Adelaide Town Hall, both sell-outs, and one in the C.T.A. Clubrooms in Adelaide. Local choir conductors and music critics also attended the Town Hall concerts and wrote glowingly of the quality the Party's efforts. Leading choir conductors rated the performance of the all-male troupe to be the best ever to perform in Adelaide. Some leading conductors even stated that the price of the ticket was worth it to come just to witness the conducting prowess of O.G. Campbell-Egan.'

Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth 1939

A one month tour of the above Capitals was subsequently organised with outstanding concerts in all cities. The choir and its associated orchestra were widely known and faithfully reported.

The War Years: 1939 - 1945

The Second World War broke out in 1939 and the CTA was asked to help raise funds. The CTA of WA Concert Party was co-opted by the W.A Branch of the Red Cross for the duration of the war, exercising control over the role of the concerts held throughout the State under the auspices of the Society. The Concert Party undertook appearances at Military Camps and on board warships in the harbour. The orchestra, still under the baton of M.H. Otto was included in the Concert Party's assignments. No other public engagements were undertaken during the War years.

In 1946 Mr Campbell-Egan was awarded Life Membership of the CTA.

The Middle Years: 1946 - 1980

On 26th June 1952 a performance was given at the opening of the Presbyterian Home for the Aged, East Fremantle. An extract from the programme is as follows;

“THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER’S ASSOCIATION CHOIR

Conductor: O. G. Campbell-Egan

Accompanist: Mr Edgar Nottage

The Commercial Travellers’ Association Choir has now been in existence for over 25 years and the conductor Mr O G Campbell-Egan has acted in that capacity since its inception. The Choir has made two visits to the Eastern States, giving public performances and broadcasts in all the capital cities. Numerous recordings have been made and are often heard over the A.B.C. network. The Choir often broadcasts locally and also features with the A.B.C. Orchestra, both in studio and public performances. All public appearances of the Choir are given for charitable purposes and over the years many thousands of pounds have been given to various bodies by the Choirs efforts.”

Edgar Nottage joined the CTAC in about 1949 as accompanist. Mr Campbell-Egan passed away in 1960 and this led to discussions about closing the Choir after 34 years. It is reported that Mr Campbell-Egan on his deathbed implored Mr Nottage to assume the role of Musical Director, and he went on to be Musical Director of the Choir for the next 41 years, finally retiring in 2001.

Tribute to Edgar Nottage

The choir was extremely fortunate to have Edgar Nottage as its musical director. Edgar was in the ranks of a child prodigy pianist and as a teenager was recommended for and accepted into London’s Royal Schools of music for development as a concert pianist. Family circumstances prevented this from happening.

Edgar’s time with the choir was given freely over 52 years in lifting the untrained voices of choir members into a pleasant and harmonious musical delivery through considerable effort on his part. His standards were high and for that we are most thankful. Edgar also produced many beautifully hand written scores for choir members and accompanist and, at times, for soloists who accompanied the choir.

In 1977 Edgar was awarded the Queen’s Jubilee Medal for his ‘contribution made to the community and State of WA’.

In 1979 Edgar was awarded the Order of the British Empire by her Majesty the Queen for 'Outstanding service to Youth and Music'.

One cannot underestimate the tremendous influence Edgar had on the life of the choir throughout his tenure, through selection and purchasing of music, attending rehearsals every Wednesday evening and the passing-on of his love of music, his musical skill and discipline to us all. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude and accept that the choir is still in existence today because of him. Much of the Choir's current program was originally selected by Edgar.

The 1980's to Present

By 1983 the CTA had merged to be part of the United Clubs of Perth and when they moved their office to West Perth a new rehearsal venue was required. A suitable venue was found at the Subiaco offices of the Royal Commonwealth Society and the Choir, continuing under Musical Director Mr Edgar Nottage. Following discussions with the then President of the Perth chapter of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Mrs Tonkin, wife of Premier John Tonkin, the choir agreed to change its name to the Royal Commonwealth Society Male Voice Choir (RCSMVC). The choir continued with this name whilst enjoying the excellent rehearsal facility and club rooms of the RCS for the next 15 years.

The early 1980's were the most difficult for the Choir, with choral membership dropping to less than 10. Wally Hatcher, who was the Choir's Secretary for many years, is to be applauded for his efforts that saw membership lift again. President Allen Williams, Edgar Nottage and remaining concerned members were also instrumental in revitalising interest in the choir.

In 1996 the RCSMVC gave a performance celebrating its 70th anniversary at the Presbyterian Ladies College, Claremont.

In 1998 RCSMVC moved its rehearsal venue from the Royal Commonwealth Society Hall to the Bob Daniel Community Centre in Inglewood, located within the City of Stirling.

In 2000 the Choir changed its name to the Perth Male Voice Choir (PMVC).

The Choir celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2001, returning to where it all began by performing at the Fremantle Town Hall, with all proceeds going to the Fremantle Hospital. Edgar Nottage retired at the end of the year. Thus, from 1926 to 2001 the Choir had only had two Musical Directors. The accompanist John Brearley also retired (the first time) after being with the Choir from 1983. Soprano Rebecca Bird was the star soloist.

In 2006 the PMVC gave a performance celebrating its 80th anniversary, again at the Fremantle Town Hall. Don Gollagher was the Musical Director and Prue Mews the accompanist. Rebecca Bird returned as soloist..

In 2011 the PMVC gave a performance celebrating its 85th anniversary, at the Perth Town Hall. Daniel Masmanian was the Musical Director, with Amy Park and Katharin Cameron the accompanists. Rebecca Bird again graced us with her presence and magnificent voice.

The choir has never had more than 50 members on its books. A high point was reached in 1996 when 45 were regularly in attendance, comprising 9 first tenors, 9 second tenors, 14 first bases and 13 second bases plus conductor and accompanist. Although in 2017 we are approaching these numbers again. In 2016 (29th of October) the Choir celebrated its 90th birthday with a concert at the Old Mill Theatre in South Perth under the

The Choir currently has over 40 choristers under the musical direction of Ms Simone Bishop, supported by our long-standing accompanist and Life Member Mr John Brearley.

The honour of being the senior active member of the Choir goes to Arthur Evans, who has provided continuous service since joining in 1982. Two of our past Musical Directors, Daniel Masmanian and “Emjay” Bell, recently visited a Choir rehearsal and announced their engagement. Music truly does make the world go round.

Musical Directors/Conductors

Owen George Campbell-Egan L.A.B., 1926-1960

Known as “Cam”, he was the musical mentor, leader, and inspirer of the Commercial Travellers’ Association Concert Party of Western Australia. He was a talented pianist and

organist who learnt his conducting skills from Welshman Davy Davies, who directed the Kalgoorlie/Coolgardie Liedertafel Choir. Cam was Deputy Headmaster of the Perth Boys' School and later became the Education Department's Superintendent of Music in the late 1920s. Cam wrote the music for a number of children's songs, words by Ruby A Bilston. The booklet of 12 songs, with Foreward by O.G.Campbell-Egan was published for use in schools under the title "Here and There – Songs for Children". He died suddenly in 1960.

Edgar Ashton Nottage O.B.E. L.Mus.A. L.R.S.M., 1960-2001

Edgar took over the Choir from "Cam" and like him was a talented pianist and organist. Edgar was asked to tour the State as accompanist to Joan Southerland in a series of concerts she gave, following her winning of the Mobil Quest Competition. He succeeded "Cam" as Superintendent of Music and was noted for forming youth orchestras in the main music schools. He was awarded the O.B.E. for his work in music education.

Don Gollagher, 2002-2009

Don also conducted the Perth Philharmonic Choir, the Metropolitan Gleemen, Oratorios by Handel, and had many other roles in teaching both music and drama. Don was a foundation member of the Perth Youth Orchestra which was founded by none other than Mr Campbell-Egan, and later worked under Mr Nottage in both the Youth Orchestra and in the Choir at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Daniel Masmanian, 2010 -11

Mary-Jo "Emjay" Bell, 2012

Katharin Cameron, 2011 -15

Simone Bishop, 2016 to date

Simone is our current Musical Director, commencing with us in 2016.

Note: People such as John Brearley, Rebecca Bird and Susan Buckey have conducted the Choir on several occasions.

Life Members of the RCSMVC/PMVC

Edgar Nottage* Williams*	Cyril Carter*	John Little*	Wally Hatcher*	Allen
John Brearley	Allan Hardy	Graham Howe	Arthur Evans	Mark Stevens

Note: * indicates deceased.

Accompanists/Pianists

Jack Brewer was original accompanist) Ken Watts G. Cock K. Watts S.H. Bremmer (original member 1926)

C. Bird (later Sir Cyril, also an original accompanist) Edgar Nottage Wallace
Tate Michael Cole (joined May 1961)

John Brearley (accompanist from 1983 to 2001 and again from 2013 to 2016, he is also a Life Member) Prue Mews Daniel Masmanian

Amy Park Katharin Cameron

This is an incomplete list and we will endeavour to add further details..

Choir Presidents

E.A. Hughes (original member 1926) Ron Duke John Little Allan Matson
(24 Mar 57)

Allen Williams. (joined the Choir in 1954 and went on to be its President for many years serving almost continuously to 1997).

Glynn Watkins Michael Dean Bob Bamford Alf Ukich John
Marshal David Moody Adrian Hill

Sam James (current President.)

This is an incomplete list and we will endeavour to add further details..

Choir Secretary

Every good organisation relies heavily on its secretary. Wally Hatcher served the choir admirably until his passing. Wally joined the choir in 1960. He was a warrior for the choir, particularly at times of stress when it appeared continuation of the choir was in question. It was the quiet word from Wally that restored common sense and his determination that the choir should not fail that we are most thankful for.

Choir Librarians

Faithful work has been done by many unsung heroes over the years since inception in 1926. Those in living memory, i.e. since around 1980, were Alan Hardy, Arthur Coopes, Mark Stevens and Adrian Hill.