



## M.B.E. FOR MIKE

As most of you know by now, Doctor Mike Thomas, our very own Musical Director is a recent recipient of a MBE, awarded in the Kings New Year Honours List.

### A GRAND NIGHT OF CELEBRATION

Mike's three choirs felt that the award should not pass without a celebration. So, much skulduggery and secret messaging was the order of the day for a celebration bash in Tonmawr Rugby Club. It was to be a complete surprise for him with choristers and partners from the three choirs, together with friends from his past and even a special visit from his cousin from Australia. Phil Steel, the rugby commentator, ran the proceedings and a video had been produced depicting Mike's life. Cwmdare Voices contribution was a re-enactment of Mike's first interview with the committee, with Gary Powell standing in for Mike with a look-alike face mask on. All agreed it was a grand night, the memory of which, we're sure, Mike will treasure for a long time.

**What is a MBE?** Standing for *Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*, a MBE is the third highest ranking Order of the British Empire award (excluding a knighthood/damehood), behind CBE and then OBE. The MBE is awarded for an outstanding achievement or service to the community which has had a long-term, significant impact. MBE holders are also entitled to get married in St Paul's Cathedral.



### HOW IT HAPPENED

As 2022 came round, your Committee felt that our Music Director, Mike, had not been recognised sufficiently for his work in running three male choirs, both in the Cynon and Pelenna valleys and for his contribution to music in general. We decided to look at the possibility of us nominating Mike for an award. This turned out to be quite a task with each of us digging supportive information to accompany the nomination. Margaret, Mike's wife, was also in on it, whilst Bob Jenkins had the unenviable task of compiling it all together, completing the extensive application and submitting it to the appropriate authorities.

As is the norm with these nominations, the applicants get no feedback or further communication, basically it disappears down a black hole. So it was quite a surprise for all when Mike announced in the new year that he had been offered an MBE (Member of the British Empire). Apparently he had received the news by email a couple of months previously but almost

trashed it thinking it was a scam. He was however, told to keep it a tight secret with the threat of incarceration in the Tower or even execution if he breathed a word of it. Of course he told Margaret and both of them had to suffer the torments of keeping the secret whilst bursting with pride. It must have been quite a torture. We, of course, were over the moon with the news and even more delighted that it was a prestigious MBE award.

In July, Mike attended Buckenham Palace where he was presented with the medal by Princess Anne. The Princess wanted to know if he was the real Mike Thomas from Aberdare!



**12th July 2023 Mike gets his MBE at the Palace**

### A PRESIDENT FOR OUR CHOIR

Cwmdare Voices are proud to announce that Professor Peter Vaughan QPM CSTJ, Lord-Lieutenant of Mid Glamorgan has agreed to be the Choir's Honorary President. Peter has been a patron and supporter of the choir for several years and we feel privileged to have the patronage of such a distinguished person.

He served as the Chief Constable of South Wales Police and was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in the 2013 New Year Honours. Peter, originally from Aberfan lived, for some time, in Cwmdare and retired from the South Wales Police at the end of 2017, after more than 33 years in the service. Peter was appointed by Her Majesty The Queen as Lord-Lieutenant of Mid Glamorgan in May 2019



## CHRISTMAS CHEER

Christmas jumpers were dug out again last December for three different gigs. We sang in Tesco's raising nearly £400 for charity, in just a hour and a half. The following week



### IN SPOONS



we gathered again and braved the cold in Aberdare town centre, this time raising money for the Home Start Cymru charity. A great afterglow in the Rugby Club followed. The following day we entertained the customers in Wetherspoons for their sponsored cancer charity. So plenty of Christmas spirit going round Spoon's must have liked us as they have invited us back again this year!

## CWMDARE VOICES HELPS PROTEST AGAINST THE COST OF LIVING RISE

On March 21st we were asked to sing at Saint Elvans Church, at a rally organised by our member of Parliament, Beth Winter, as a protest against the rising cost of living.

A speech was given by the Union leader Mick Lynch at the Church which was full to capacity with approximately 400 in the audience. Then came Cwmdare Voices turn. We were quite low on numbers however, we sang three songs, Calon Lan, He Ain't Heavy and a rousing rendition of Yma O Hyd which filled the Church with a rich sound despite the low number of choristers. We were given a rapturous applause which showed how appreciative the audience were.

A letter arrived a few days later from Beth Winter, our MP, on Houses of Parliament headed paper, expressing her and the communities thanks for our involvement on that day.



On March 1st we performed once again, together with Pelenna Choir, on the Foyer stage of the Millennium Centre, Cardiff, for a Saint David's day concert. We seem to be the go to choirs for their theatres events! Not a bad thing of course!. And, as always, it gave a great opportunity for the two choirs to have a a pint or two and a song in Spoons afterwards.

## CENTENARY OF THE CENOTAPH

Our very own Nick Evans had a prominent hand in organising a ceremony to celebrate the centenary of the Town's Cenotaph. It commenced with a poignant service on the Square where, we, along with Dare to Sing and Cwmbach MVC helped boost the hymn singing. Then it was on to the Library Square for a short concert in the sunshine.



## OUR CHARITY OF CHOICE.

As most know, each year the Choir chooses a charity to support. In the past we have raised funds for several local charities including Riding for the Disabled, Velindre Hospital, Rowen Tree Cancer Care, just to name a few.

This year we have chosen Home Start Cymru for our support. The Charity offers friendship, emotional support and practical advice in the homes of families who are having difficulties managing parenting for a variety of different reasons. These could be poor mental health, managing children's challenging behaviour, disability, domestic abuse, isolation or low self-esteem.

At Christmas we organised a street collection while we sang in Aberdare Town and we also took the lead part in a super concert in Abercwmboi Rugby Club. In total we have raised well over £2000. Well done boys!

Next year we have decided, after a suggestion by Kingsley Samuel, to support a prostate cancer charity. Kingsley has had a tough couple of years and the whole choir wishes him well.



### THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Yes, singing in a choir is satisfying, enjoyable and sometimes quite exhilarating, but it does make you very thirsty and what better way to remedy that than a few pints after a gig. However, a few pints makes you want to sing again and so the cycle continues..

This happy bunch of choristers sampled a few Drummer Boys (not literally) in the National Tap after Natasha's wedding and had an enjoyable afternoon singing their socks off.

So, spread the word, our Choir is not only striving to be the best at singing, we also want to provide a great social outlet with plenty of after concert fun and laughter.



## FROM WASHINGTON TO WALES

At the end of June we were privileged to sing at a St. Elvans concerts featuring the magnificent Tacoma Concert Band from Seattle, USA. The band featured 50 top line musicians on a tour of the UK and Ireland and made a fantastic sound. The afterglow at the Con Club was certainly an eye opener for the Americans. Not quite sure what to make of it at first, they soon got into the swing of it and certainly appreciated the good old Welsh hospitality. The pizzas they provided also went down very well!



## WELSH PROMS...FOR THE SECOND TIME

Some choirs never do it, Cwmdare Voices do it twice!. What a night once again! A packed St. David's Hall in Cardiff with a massed choir of 180, the world famous Cory band and conductor Owain Arwel Hughes. It doesn't get much better than that!



### WHAT A SOUND

For the Caradogfest Gala Night in St Elvans Church we were joined by Cwmbach and Pelenna choirs, and what a sound we made. 86 choristers in full voice. For an even bigger sound we were joined for the opening and closing numbers by 85 choristers from Dare to Sing Ladies Choir.



St David's Theatre, Cardiff

## CHOIR HITS PEMBROKESHIRE AGAIN

Once again at the end of September we undertook our pilgrimage to West Wales to sing in the lovely cathedral of St. David's. What a sound and what a privilege to sing in such a prestigious, historic setting. This of course was the climax of a super short tour which saw us, once again entertaining the good folk of Haverfordwest in their cricket club with the aim of raising money for the Paul Sartori Charity. It's pleasing to report that the Charity was well chuffed as over a thousand pounds was raised on the weekend.



### ABOVE AND BEYOND

We have often spoken about how commitment by choristers is important, but when it comes to MD's surely this has to be above and beyond. Conducting us boys in Mark Powell's daughter's wedding in the rain, with a broken heel, on a wonky bar stool with crutches at the ready and still with a smile. Good on you Mike!



Choir in St. David's Cathedral

### SINGING WITH THE REFUGEE CHOIR

The Oasis World Choir from Splott brings together a diverse assemblage of people from different cultures, religions and nations to make music together, and what a happy sound they make. In September, we, together with Pelenna Choir were recipients of their hospitality at their Cardiff centre where we joined forces to entertain an appreciative audience.



45 CHORISTERS AND THE OASIS CHOIR TOGETHER



## BARBADOS

Cwmdare Voices world tour continues. First Germany then Australia and in the past year Barbados. Where next?

A couple of years ago Dave, our Chairman, got wind of a Celtic music festival which is held each year on the island of Barbados in the Caribbean Sea. It was always going to be a step too far for just our Choir to undertake on its own, so the offer was sent out to Pelenna and Cwmbach for interested choristers to become part of a joint choir. Eventually we ended up with a choir of 35



Barbados Celtic Festival

and a full party of 65.

Mike was on board and he swiftly came up with a very suitable

name, **Cor Caru B**, meaning the choir that loves Barbados. Jane the accompanist from Cwmbach, was also on board, so around the second week of May, 2023, we all set off for the sun.

The festival was in its 40th year and has become very much a tradition on the Island. Lasting over four days we performed in a number of venues. Some events were outdoors with the palm trees swaying in the background and the sound of the surf as a soft compliment to our singing, while the main event was held in Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Here we were supported by a full pipe band and the Island's mixed choir who joined us for a number of songs as a climax to a super concert.



The visit was always going to be a holiday as well as participation in the festival and we all had a great time relaxing in the sunshine, sampling the islands favoured drink of rum punch.



### A CHIPPING GREAT CONCERT.

Another commando raid, as Mike likes to call them. This time to Chipping Norton to perform at their lovely old Town Hall to a packed house. The proceeds were in aid of two local charities and our performance led to a standing ovation and an encore for more.

We travelled up on the Saturday to book into the charming old Crown and Cushion hotel where later we had a really super after-glow.

The following day we embarked for a few hours in Oxford where as per course we gravitated to the nearest Wetherspoon's. A really great weekend in the summer sunshine

**GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN.** Long term chorister **Peter Williams** has retired from the Choir. It was with great sadness that Peter had finally hung up his dinner suit and bow tie, dug out his slippers and had prepared for an easier life. Although he will not be forgotten! as he has been granted a life membership of the choir which will mean that we will still see him at Choir gigs, social nights and trips. So its not yet time to say farewell to such ditties as Charlie Mops, The King and Having a Bit Tonight, Tonight.



**TRIBUTE TO OUR SECRETARY: Matthew Burford** has, this year, decided to step down from his role as Choir Secretary and Committee member. Matthew has held the position for over 10 years and has been a major influence on how the Choir has grown. His dedication and enthusiasm for getting things done has helped the Choir become the force it is today. A great big thanks to Matthew from all our members

**WELCOME TO OUR NEW SECRETARY:** At this year's AGM we were privileged to accept **Gary Powell** as our new Secretary. Gary, a long standing Choir member and dedicated Committee member, has been a big influence on the Choir's progress over the years. He has been responsible for our patrons needs and has helped collate and computerise our finances. We all wish him well in his new role.

**HELP FOR OUR PATRONS:** **Ian Blake** has taken some of the work-load from Gary by agreeing to be our new Patrons Secretary

**WELCOME TO THE COMMITTEE:** We are pleased to welcome **Stephen Stevenson** as our new Committee member. We are sure that his input will strengthen an already strong Committee.

**IRELAND NEXT YEAR:** Already plans are well in hand for a short tour, in October, next year to Kinsale in Sothern Ireland. There's already been a lot of interest! So, another great venture for our choir.