



An Interview with Cathy Davies, Musical Director

Q. You've been the JV MD since 2011, where and when did your interest in music begin?

A. In my teenage years, in Scotland, I was in an orchestra and a brass band playing E flat horn, French horn and cornet, but not all at the same time I hasten to add! This not only improved my music reading skills but also started my interest in harmony.

Q. You got married and had children, did your interests outside the family remain the same?

A. When the children were small we lived in Hong Kong where I became interested in musical theatre. (Unless you're in the armed forces, the opportunities for playing in a brass band in the Far East are very limited - to say the least.) Key roles included Tiger Lily in Peter Pan, Snoopy in You're a Good Man Charlie Brown and the tap-dancing rear end of the pantomime cow in Gypsy. Amateur dramatics taught me a little of the art of performance and the importance of connecting with your audience; even when it's only your behind that's performing!

Q. When you returned to the UK, did you continue treading the boards?

A. While searching for another "am-dram" group here in Kent, I came across a local ladies' barbershop chorus and had my first experience of four-part unaccompanied vocal harmony. I was instantly hooked on a *cappella*. Instead of sopranos and altos, as with men's barbershop, they named the four parts tenor, lead, baritone and bass. Just Voices name their parts in the same way, but barbershop is not the only style in which they sing. Quartet singing is the ultimate close-harmony experience and I was lucky enough to sing baritone in Sounds Familiar who were the national barbershop champions in 1998 and 2000. In the ten years I was with them, I learnt a great deal about good vocal production and how to "sell the message" of a song.

Q. You still sing with choruses and a quartet. What is it about this hobby that keeps you wanting more?

A. After nearly 25 years of a *cappella* singing I'm still learning about this unique art form. There are always new challenges and great new songs and the continuing scope for personal growth and development is a significant attraction. Singing in a group is a very sociable activity. Meeting friends of all ages, from very diverse backgrounds, to share a passion for harmony singing is a really uplifting experience. Making music is life-affirming, fun, beneficial both emotionally and physically and, I believe, that's what keeps me and the girls of Just Voices coming back for more.

Q. How do you choose the music?

A. I do so with the help of the JV music team, who are an important aspect of the chorus. With their assistance, we aim to have a balanced selection of mostly twentieth century pop classics. But, to ring the changes, our repertoire also includes a madrigal, a sacred piece, and some traditional choral music. We are in the very fortunate position of having an in-house arranger. Jan, our assistant MD, has arranged several pieces to accommodate special requests.

Q. What aspects of being MD do you most enjoy?

A. Working with a great team, helping JV make beautiful music and hearing them put on a great show; it's a privileged position to be in.

Q. Do you have any top tips for anyone thinking of dipping their toe into a *cappella* harmony for the first time?

A. In order to achieve a good sound in harmony singing you need a voice with no vibrato. So listen to your voice and make it as pure, as straight and as accurate as you can. Find an a *cappella* group who sing the kind of music you enjoy and listen to what they sing and how they sing it. Fifty percent of good singing is good listening because blending your voice will help to achieve 'ring' or 'expanded sound'. This is the secret weapon of close harmony singing. Once you have experienced those overtones there's no going back; you too will be hooked on harmony!

Compiled and edited by Barbara Gray

JV's current list of songs includes Make You Feel My Love, God Only Knows, Walking on Sunshine, The Lord is my Shepherd, Top of the World, Tonight, It is Well, April and many Christmas songs.