



Annual Report

High Street Bells Choir Inc.

1 January – 31 December 2024

President's Report

The year 2024 was busy and productive for the High Street Bells Choir.

Attendance continued to increase, and we ended the year with a regular group of about 30 singers (including up to half a dozen attending via Zoom) out of a total number of 37 on our roll.

During 2024, as part of a Community Engagement program, several senior students from St Monica's College in Epping attended Choir each term. Organising teacher Wendy Styring reports that students love interacting with singers and have developed a greater understanding of disability. The effect on the choir has been very positive, with singers always eager to talk to the students.

As a result of these visits, we were invited to perform for the annual 'Spirituality Day' at St Monica's College where several hundred teachers welcomed us warmly and generously. Some of our younger singers also attended a performance of the school musical 'Hairspray', which they thoroughly enjoyed.

The relationship with St Monica's College has contributed significantly to the choir's fulfilling several of its stated purposes. These purposes include 'to create social links and networks that benefit choir members, their families and support workers', 'to encourage the participation of the local community ... in the choir's activities', 'through public performance, to create opportunity for the general public to gain greater understanding of, interaction with and appreciation of people with disabilities' and 'to create opportunity for people with disabilities to have a public voice and face and to contribute to the wider society ...'.



Choir on stage at St Monica's

Performances build our confidence and group cohesion, and memorable performances during 2024 are highlighted in the Music Director's report. We are grateful to the City of Darebin (in particular, to Bronwyn Ryan-Mercer) for facilitating our participation in the Council's annual music programs.

We had long been concerned that the drop off area for maxi taxis bringing and picking up singers in wheelchairs was inadequate. During the year Council officers arranged for the existing disabled parking area to be extended so that maxi-taxis can safely discharge and pick up passengers through the vehicle's rear. Our wholehearted thanks go to the City of Darebin for making this adjustment.

During the year we also received a generous grant to create a film of the choir singing 'Cover me in Sunshine', a song by the artist P!nk. We hoped that this film would come to the singer's attention, but so far we've not heard from her. Nevertheless, making the film was a positive experience for choir members.

One small change in our weekly routine also has made a positive difference. We reinstated a pre-Covid practice of offering a cup of tea or coffee to singers before a session. This has helped create more opportunities for positive social interactions, which in turn strengthen our sense of being a supportive community.

Sadly, three deaths occurred amongst our group during the year. Donna Corlett was a long-term choir member who lived life to the fullest. Judith Tacey was with us for several years and loved coming to choir and singing. Anna Taylor, who joined more recently, was an artist and the sister of the choir's first music director, Jenny Taylor. Several choir members attended the respective memorial services, which the families appreciated. These three wonderful people will be missed.

The committee had a good year. We welcomed volunteers Tom Russell and Jenny Penfold back onto the committee and Kathy Stevens joined Scott Macfie as singer reps. Our family representative, Aldo Renda, had to resign from the Committee during the year, and we thank him for his valuable contribution.

Kath Boyer continues to provide phenomenal admin support. She keeps our records up to date, manages membership and efficiently takes care of many other tasks to keep us running smoothly. Chris Falk, our musical director, is a genius at choosing songs that provide just the right amount of challenge and reward for effort; her gentle manner and her musical skill make our sessions an absolute joy. We are so lucky to have her. Accompanist Jan Briggs and 'the band' of uke and harmonica players add so much to our singing, and our volunteer team is the best.

Many people assisted us financially this past year. The Lewin Foundation generously sponsored the video of the choir singing 'Cover me in Sunshine'. We thank the Community Bank for their continuing interest in the choir and for providing funds to conduct a Music Day in 2024 (and for their understanding when we had to postpone the event until 2025). The Rotary Club of Brunswick and Tullamarine gave us 70 Christmas cakes so that every singer, support worker and volunteer received one. And many individuals contributed generously in response to our fundraising activities; our Treasurer's report has more details.

I am so proud of the Choir that we have together created over 15 years. It just keeps getting better, both musically but also in the support and friendship it offers to all its participants. My heartfelt thanks go to all who have contributed to our journey.

Julie Contole

Music Director's Report

2024 was a busy musical year for the High Street Bells Choir.

Three performances were under the umbrella of the City of Darebin. All were well attended by friends, family and members of the public.

The first was an in-house gig in March to (belatedly) celebrate the International Day of People Living with Disability. We had a wonderful Auslan signer performing with us for that gig.

The second was for the Darebin "Fuse" Festival, once again, an in-house performance in our usual Monday morning time. We had another wonderful Sign Language artist with us for that performance.

The third was at the end of the year for Darebin's "Our Songs" festival. We performed on the stage in front of the Northcote Uniting Church on a lovely Saturday morning in December. We were accompanied by Snow Angels and Father Christmas and Christmas Elves; it was lots of fun.

The choir performed at St Monica's College in Epping, at their staff Spirituality Day in July. This was a very special performance initiated by the Community Engagement teacher who had been bringing her students to choir as part of their school program. The performance was in the school theatre and was supported by good sound equipment and two experienced sound engineers. The choir sounded great, and we received a standing ovation!



Enzo dancing at St Monica's



Kathy at St Monica's

The choir also performed in the Atrium at Fed Square as part of their end of year celebrations program. There were some initial problems with getting set up, but we overcame those, and once the singing began, it was the High Street Bells Choir true magic once again!



The Atrium, Federation Square, December 2024

There were two other major activities undertaken by the choir in 2024.

The first was doing a video recording of P!nk's song, "Cover Me in Sunshine". This song had been very important to the choir throughout the Covid lockdowns and since then as well. The choir looked and sounded great, and we learnt how exacting the recording process is!

Secondly, we were invited by VALID, a disability advocacy organisation in Melbourne, to sing on the recording of an original song, "I Am More", that had been collectively written through a workshop process that they created. It's a beautiful song, and several of our singers are soloists, with the rest of the choir doing backing vocals. The song will be recorded in 2025.

The choir received a grant to purchase a new PA system. This will meet our growing needs for both weekly rehearsals and performances.

We continue to have wonderful piano accompaniment from Jan Briggs and a steady trio of ukuleles – Lynne Bonney, Robyn James, and Bridget Roberts. Bridget also plays saxophone on some songs.

We have a great group of volunteers, Judy Rassaby, Julie Contole, Amanda Buckley, Jenny Wallace, Judy Dunai, Norma Jones, Lynne Bonney, Jenny Penfold, Bridget Roberts, Robyn James, Rosie Miller and Tom Russell; several of these volunteers lead movement additions to

our songs, and they also have been leading and bolstering our harmonies.

The singers continue to develop as percussionists, and we're planning to grow this in the coming year.

A huge thanks to Jenny Penfold for assembling our lyrics each week and managing the repertoire library so skilfully, and big thanks to Katherine Wositzky for brilliantly acquiring funds for the choir's projects.

Enormous thanks to the Office Bearers (Julie Contole, Judy Rassaby, Katherine Wositzky, Robyn James), the Committee Members and our Administrator Kath Boyer who all work behind the scenes making everything happen.

The accomplishments of the year have been tremendous – singing and dancing together and continuing to manage quality online involvement for singers at home.

Many thanks to all the singers, and the wonderfully dedicated team that make the High Street Bells so extraordinarily great!

Chris Falk



The Band: Chris, Gwlad, Amanda, Robyn, Lynne, Jan and Bridget

Finance Report January to December 2024

During the 12-month period to 31 December 2024 there were cash receipts of \$29,891.92 and payments of \$24,840.78.

The choir received \$9,050.44 donations in 2024, which was similar to 2023. Donations included \$6,828 through GiveNow, \$1,888 from our June Fundraising drive, \$3,000 from the Lewin Foundation for the “Cover me in Sunshine” video, \$300 from VALID contributing to costs of rehearsing “I am More”, and donations from singers, volunteers and friends of the choir. It was pleasing that four people chose to donate monthly, which we encourage as it helps in planning our spending.

We received \$6,290.00 in membership fees which was over what was budgeted (\$5,700). We received almost all fees invoiced. We thank members for their assistance with this matter. This is a great result and contributes greatly toward meeting our operational costs.

The Community Bank Clifton Hill – North Fitzroy granted us \$6,500 for our Music Day project. The grant is included in the cash receipts total and will be acquitted in 2025 as our planned day had to be rescheduled.

In 2023, City of Darebin granted \$2,500 for a 2024 music performance as part of their IDPwD program funding (this was acquitted in April). We were successful in being awarded a community grant of \$2,500 as part of the City of Darebin Community Grants program to purchase PA equipment which will be acquitted before May 2025. The committee has raised additional funds towards the purchase of this equipment through targeted fundraising. There were no other opportunities to apply for grants to cover operational costs in 2024.

Overall costs in 2024 are higher than last year due to increases such as our hall hire, the hourly rate for directors and administration fees.

The bank balance at the end of December was \$21,214.39; this includes \$17,123.53 held in short Term Deposit accounts. This is an increase on the 2023 end of year balance of \$16,163.25. However, the balance includes \$9,000 of grants yet to be acquitted. The balance of funds held in Petty Cash is \$0. These were deposited into the Statement Account in December which is accounted for in the net cash position.

Robyn James (Treasurer)

HIGH STREET BELLS CHOIR INC SPECIAL PURPOSE STATEMENT

for 12 months 1 January 2024 – 31 December 2024

CASH RECEIPTS	NOTES	2024	2023
Grants	1	11,500.00	5,500.00
Fees		6,290.00	4,710.00
Fundraising		2,238.70	3,469.40
Donations	2	9,050.44	9,691.85
Other	3	812.78	190.25
TOTAL RECEIPTS		29,891.92	23,561.50
CASH PAYMENTS			
Grant Acquittals		2,669.75	5,463.99
Music Director Fees		11,860.00	9,750.00
Administration Fees		3,255.00	2,132.50
Operational Costs	4	3,919.44	4,329.43
Other	5	3,136.59	8.45
TOTAL PAYMENTS		24,840.78	21,684.37
NET CASH		5,051.14	1,877.13

Movement of cash

Bank balance 1 January 2024	16,163.25
Net cash movement	5,051.14
Bank Balance 31 December 2024	21,214.39

Notes:

1. Grants: Community Bank Clifton Hill – North Fitzroy Music Day Grant \$6,500, City of Darebin IDPwD grant \$2,500 and Community Grant for PA equipment \$2,500.
2. Donations: includes \$6,828.09 donated through GiveNow (including \$3000 from the Lewin Foundation for our Cover Me in Sunshine video)

3. Other Receipts: includes \$535.33 interest reinvested in Term Deposits and \$277.45 deposit petty cash balance.
4. Operational Costs: includes insurance, registration, rent, mobile phone, annual website fees.
5. Other Payments: includes \$96.60 for taxi to our Federation Square December performance paid for using debit card. This year it included a payment of \$2,486 for production of the 'Cover Me in Sunshine' video. It also includes cash received as donations or fees added to the petty cash balance.

Assets held as of 31 December 2024

Item	Purchase price		Purchase date
Microphone	119.00		15/9/2022
Mobile Phone	806.19		25/6/2022
Apple MacBook Air	1361.95		22/6/2022
2 Dyson air purifiers	1,529.00		18/6/2022
Blue Yeti Mic	198.00		28/4/2022
Percussion instruments	552.60		As at 16/5/23
Headset	456.50		4/7/18
Projector	449.00		30/10/15
Sound System	299.00		Pre-June 2013
Boomwhackers	\$202.95		11/4/24

Stock held as of 31 December 2024

Stock of t-shirts –2 shirts at \$23.99 each	\$47.98	31/12/24
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We no longer charge for T-Shirts but give them to new singers and volunteers and lend them out at performances.

Volunteer Coordinator Report

Our volunteers contribute in a variety of ways – from being on the management committee and administering the choir, to assisting with tea and coffee, preparing the PowerPoints for our sessions, welcoming people on Zoom, applying for funding, putting out chairs, providing musical accompaniment, meeting taxis. But for all our volunteers, it is the friendships that we have built with each other and with our choir members and support workers that have made volunteering with the choir the best gig on earth.

We welcome volunteers in any capacity. For some people it is enough that they come along and sing. There are generally around 9-12 volunteers attending regularly. We sometimes also have volunteers signing in on Zoom.

The volunteer role of traffic management has been taken up by Tom Russell who returned to our ranks; this role has been made easier by the extension of the drop-off and pick-up space at the front of the church. Thank you to the City of Darebin for enabling this.

Lynne Bonney



Mark at Darebin Fuse Festival



Amanda, Jaz, Jess and Henos at rehearsal