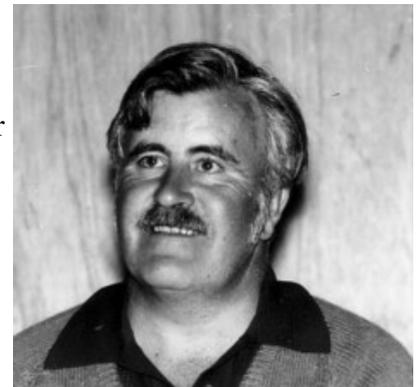


# 1968-75: TIME FOR A CHANGE



By the mid-sixties, interest in choral singing had waned and there were few eisteddfods or festivals to enter. In addition, the male choir had been runner-up three years in succession at South Street and rumours abounded, with suggestions that we would never do any good until Tatura held its own eisteddfod for the judges to attend. Be that as it may, Charles Hamilton, conductor, and Elsie Andrew, accompanist, felt that a change was required and the admittance of ladies to the choir would enable them to widen their repertoire and their appeal.

It was decided to begin by performing a concert version of “HMS Pinafore” but as things progressed, it was decided to add costumes and borrow the set that the North Technical School had just used and so it turned into a full-blown production. It was a great success with audiences amazed at the quality of the singing. The next year it was “The Mikado”, another great success and then they just couldn’t stop doing them!



## WHAT A STIRRER!

During set-construction for one of our lavish productions, one keen worker, who was known to be a bit accident-prone, decided to mix up a four-litre can of paint with an electric stirrer. Hanging on racks not far away were the magnificent costumes recently hired from J. C. Williamsons for the coming show. When Mr Accident Prone lifted the whizzing mixer out of the can, paint flew in all directions putting all

the recently-acquired costumes in peril. By the most fortunate of chances, Mr AP’s ample body shielded most of the costumes from harm and it was he and the rest of The Shed that copped most of the repaint. Not long after, Mr AP was informed that Turaton would manage the sets without his assistance from that time.



Left: Hugh Neil, Bill Mouser and Lyn Parsons take a break in their set-constructing while Brendan Farnhan watches from on the poop-deck.

Michael Pender could sing like a bird but when it came to telling stories and jokes he stuttered so badly that often he just couldn’t get it out. One day he got so frustrated that he said “I can’t get the f..f..f..f..f.....”. Perhaps it was just as well that he didn’t get THAT one out!

## BABY-SITTING

There has always been a wonderful family feeling in the company especially through the seventies and eighties with whole families involved for much of the weekend. Not everyone caught on straightaway and one wife was giving her husband a bad time for being away from home so much while she stayed home with their baby. Isobel Hamilton summed things up quickly and said “I’ll baby-sit for you tomorrow night; you go along with hubby and enjoy the rehearsal”. This she duly did, and the wife was so surprised and delighted that her husband was a BIG STAR that she threw herself into being a part of the company, much to her husband’s relief. The tag to the story is that Isobel had to pay someone to sit her children while she was off doing her good turn.

Below, the Turaton “family” relaxes outside The Shed.



### SUPERMAN DAVID

I remember in September 1966 when I went to Ballarat Eisteddfod (with my boyfriend) Ken Olsson. Ken was a member of the Tatura Male Choir and the competition was held in Her Majesty's Theatre in Ballarat. Following this competition, however, Ken dropped me off at Creswick hotel with my new friend Marilyn Banfield (accompanist) and he dutifully returned to his accommodation in Ballarat with his fellow songsters, not realizing that Marilyn and I were locked out!!!! Thankfully though, David Vibert had some 'superman' qualities and climbed in through a window to unlock the hotel door!! Thanks again, David.

Then, in 1967 (now with my fiance I again enjoyed listening as the MaleChoir sang at the Eisteddfod.

Next came memories in 1968 (now with my husband as stage manager) for the one night show at Civic Centre in which I played Little Buttercup in *HMS Pinafore* in the very first production of the Tatura Male Choir and Ladies Chorus.

More special memories were when Turaton joined in the 1000 voice choir for the Australian Bicentenary in 1988, I organized a few senior school singing students to join with us and share this amazing experience at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. Music united young and not so young, not only at the concert but also on the bus trips to and from Melbourne.

I have fond memories of many other concerts and productions. In particular, I remember when Marilyn Banfield and I organized a May concert in 1991 called "An Evening of Memories and Song" One of the many highlights of this concert for me, was my sister Margaret Johnson singing 'On my Own' from *Les Miserables*. This is a very special memory for me that I will treasure for ever.

Over the last few weeks, as we searched through the diaries of these years, we have enjoyed reminiscing and reliving many experiences, both musical and romantic!!

This is only a few of the special memories of events but the most important memory for me is the wonderful friendships gained through the years as we all joined to share our gift of singing and sharing music.



ANNE OLSSON

(Anne Olsson)

### DOUBLE SOMERSAULT WITH PIKE

Turaton concert in Nathalia about mid 1970s. Venue old wooden(?) church hall. The choristers were ready to start at the scheduled time of 8pm, but their highly-esteemed conductor had not arrived. When he did appear, some 30 minutes late, he admitted that he had crossed the Murray Valley Highway. without realising and had been in the Barmah area.

The concert started about 40 minutes late before a very restless audience. Unplanned entertainment, was provided at the end of the first item however, for at this moment the back row of men performed a mass disappearance trick As they tumbled back and down appropriate crashing and thumping sounds were provided to ensure that the audience didn't overlook this important moment. Without incurring obvious injury and with composure restored, the concert resumed until the lights went out. In the ensuing inky blackness, Ray Phillips, undeterred by this calamity, continued boldly on with



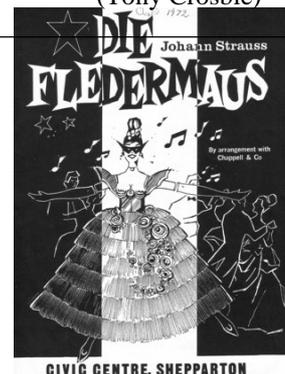
his solo to the accompaniment of pianist Elsie Andrew whose unabated fingerwork was skilfull to the level of miraculous. Unfortunately the audience were not appreciative and began to drown out the virtuosi bringing the performance to an abrupt halt. The contents of someone's box of matches were then consumed at a rapid rate while the fuse box was located and examined for spare fuses. As none were found an idiot produced a screwdriver and stood there holding same across the terminals. As the fuse box and said idiot were located between choir and audience, the continuing choral items were performed under a certain degree of concentration difficulty. It was with considerable relief that no dramatic demise occurred before fuse wire was produced and installed during an interval. The evening's excitement did not continue after the break which must be the reason why we weren't invited back again! Footnote: Over the years it became something of a tradition for the odd fellow to perform a reverse tumble in order to provide something extra to concerts. With the passage of time, however, these became solo, or at the most, duets.

(Ian Wilson)

### The Cherry Brandy that wasn't, was....

It was during rehearsals of "Die Fledermaus" in 1983 when a small shop opened in the Shepparton shopping centre marketing non-alcoholic versions of popular alcoholic beverages. A member of the cast brought along a large bottle of supposedly non-alcoholic Cherry Brandy. Many of the cast imbibed, only to find that the lines they thought they knew were proving exceedingly difficult to remember. Despite this fact, a light-hearted jovial atmosphere pervaded the stage notwithstanding the occasional stumbling of feet.. At some point the alcoholic version had been inadvertently confused with the non-alcoholic version. The perpetrator of this mix-up shall remain anonymous.

(Tony Crosbie)



CIVIC CENTRE, SHEPPARTON

### AH, 'TIS KATISHA

Life begins at 40! I had a ring from Charles Hamilton, could I please come along and audition for the part of Katisha in the production of "The Mikado". I accepted, and much to my joy, was given the part. Little did I know what was ahead of me. Dear Margaret Moore the wardrobe mistress, a very clever lady, had to make me "a fattening corset" to make me big enough. This was put on and laced up at the back. Then I had a very heavy red frock and a pearl head-dress put on.

But then came the long, long red nails which made my hands useless. Oh what a to-do when I had to go to the toilet for a nervous one. You will understand that I had to back into the little room, two girls held up my dress, another pulled down my knickers, all this with men and women everywhere. I sure had a time. This was thirty-five years ago but it still stands out in my memory. I forgot to say: THE DOOR COULD NOT BE CLOSED!

Thirty-five years of friendship, love and fun.

(Ruth McCracken)



### FLUFFY FOOTWEAR

As part of the costume for the Mikado – the cast wore white socks as footwear. They all padded about the stage looking very 'Japanese' like. Olive Paez delivered her lines beautifully then, as she bent down in front of Pooh Bah, a pair of fluffy pink slippers was revealed to cast and audience alike –much to their amusement.

### PULLING THE PIN

Because of power cuts during "Orpheus", the company hired a generator and surrounded it with hay bales to dampen the noise. One night, someone pulled the plug out of the generator, plunging the Civic Centre into near darkness. With only the emergency lights operating, the show went on until the back-up generator was restarted. After the show was eventually concluded, Bert Gale, still in extreme costume and make-up, reported the incident to the police in Shepparton where his brother John was stationed. Judging by the looks he received, Bert reckons John would have been asked some pretty searching questions about his family and Bert in particular.



### TAKE A SEAT, PLEASE

Eileen Hetherington was a BIG star with audiences and cast alike but, even she, had her worrying moments on stage. In "The Merry Widow" she wore a number of beautiful dresses, one of which was red and covered with coin-like decorations. In one scene, wearing this dress, she was seated on a slatted bench and when she attempted to rise, no doubt to sing another glorious song, she found herself stuck to the bench as one of the "coins" was trapped between the slats of the seat. Recovering from such a situation takes great savoir faire and Eileen had that in trumps.

One show she was in danger of losing her voice and swallowed a mixture of orange juice and raw eggs before going on-stage each evening. Whatever the efficacy of that mixture, she did get through the show, although she had to have a jab from a doctor on the final evening to fight off the throat infection.

Left, Eileen and THAT dress. Right, she is wearing something far safer with Alan Every, the "Red Shadow" in "Desert Song".



### DUCK YOUR HEAD

Herb Whitfield used his truck to transport offal to a processing plant and it was always slippery when we transported sets to the Civic Centre, standing on the back to stop them sliding off. It was made worse because Herb drove pretty fast and sometimes things did fall off. Going through Mooroopna one day we were hanging on to tall columns for the set of "Die Fledermaus". In those days, there were overhead flashing lights at the hospital pedestrian crossing and we were sure that we were going to get wiped out as we went under them. Fortunately we JUST sneaked under them and avoided depriving the company of some keen workers.



Charlie Hamilton came up to our orchard at Yarroweyah and said: "If you two could come down to Shepparton, I think we could start a company of

Tatura Male Choir and Ladies Chorus". That was in 1963 or 4 or 5. (Warwick and Joan Hanna)



### LICENCE PLEASE DRIVER

Lofty Henderson and George Taylor drove home from a "Pirates" performance, still in their police uniforms one evening and the speeding Jaguar attracted the attention of police officer Ken Mollison who chased them all the way to Tatura. When Lofty noticed that he was being pursued, he flew down Hogan Street, around the clock and down Brown Street lickety-split. He pulled into his garage in Pyke Street and turned the lights off waiting to see if they had lost their pursuer. P.C. Ken knew the car, however, and also knew just where to find it so he pulled in behind them shortly after. Fortunately he had been to their performance that evening and he and his wife had enjoyed it thoroughly, of course. After giving them a good dressing down and threatening them with dire consequences if they didn't slow down, he left with the declaration that they

### THE EXECUTIONER

Ross Hepworth hasn't had many big roles in productions generally leaving that to his sister Liz Gale. His big break came when he was cast as The Headsman (executioner) in "The Yeomen of the Guard" with assistants Bruce Blake and Keith Redman and a very impressive trio they made, looking very lethal. Ross had the traditional executioner's axe and before the singing of "The Prisoner Comes To Meet His Doom" Ross was required to bring the axe down on the block exactly on the beat, which was a fair challenge anyway. Ross performed the task beautifully, swinging lustily and landing with a huge thump right on the required beat. So enthusiastically did Ross swing, that the block succumbed to his blow and an examination of film will reveal a crack nearly all the way through. In a longer season, Ross could have provided enough firewood for an entire winter for several cast members. A steel band was added to the block to get it through the rest of the performances. Another company had a stand-in executioner whose mask slipped causing him to miss the block altogether and nearly chop off several toes. Thereafter, he always chopped with his feet wide apart.

### TARANTARA TARANTARA

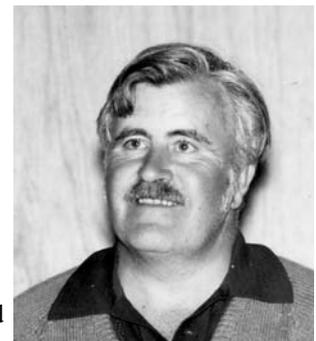
Bert Gale has played the role of policeman many times over the years with Turaton and he was swinging his heavy baton by its leather thong with great enthusiasm in the Policemen's Chorus in "The Pirates of Penzance" when the knot came undone and Bert's baton flew high into the air putting everyone within 15 metres in peril. Bert gritted his teeth and marched on, the baton landed on the stage with a crash, rolled into the orchestra where it was retrieved, passed to a female chorus member and next time Bert came round it was slipped back to him and he continued singing, armed again, without missing a beat.



### EVERYTHING IN ITS PROPER PLACE

Sportsmen have very definite routines to prepare themselves for big moments – golfers have routines before putting, Matthew Lloyd tosses up grass before kicking for goal (even in Telstra Dome), so it is understandable that conductors would have their own routine before bringing orchestras into play. Charles Hamilton had a distinctive routine that fascinated the ladies, adjusting the lapels on his jacket and then reaching down with his right hand to get everything downstairs into correct position. As we all know, Charlie always got the best out orchestras and choirs so we would have to say it was a successful routine. It does remind one, somewhat, of the gentleman who was knocked to the ground by a passerby and, upon rising, appeared to cross himself, much to the puzzlement of his friend who challenged "But you're not Catholic". "Oh no, I was not crossing myself" he informed his friend, "I was just checking: spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch!"

(The Ladies Chorus)



## THE TATURA MALE CHOIR'S NEW HOME

1975

At a committee meeting, about 10 months ago, the construction of a workshop for the building and storing of sets and props for our shows, was first raised.

Well knowing the high cost of such a project, we knew very well that the only way this could be achieved, would be by working bees.

After costing of materials, and the very generous offer by the Banfield family, Pyke Rd., Mooroopna, to allow us to build this 60ft x 30ft shed on their property, construction was started and completed within 12 weekends. All the work was carried out by Tatura Male Choir members except the plans which were prepared by Mr S. Asboth, electrical work by J. Hepworth, under electrical contractor H. Chambers, and the concrete floor was finished by a professional.

It was a very big undertaking for the choir, exceptionally quickly accomplished.

The major benefits are storage space for our valuable props, but most of all, for the first time in our history, we have a home of our own, which allows us to work on our sets at any time and in any weather.  
(Part of the article in the 1975 program for "The Yeomen of the Guard")



**Above**, Rudi Kuhnle, chief "engineer" of all Shed operations and set constructions and **below**, Alan Every shows aptitude off as well as on stage.



## SANITARY ENGINEERING

When The Shed was constructed in 1975, a ready-built weather-board “dunny” with seat was placed over a hole in the ground on the west side and a sheet of galvanised iron served as a urinal for the men. The fact that the iron was positioned with the corrugations running horizontally instead of vertically meant that there was a good chance that he seeking relief could get a fair bit of his own back with big splashes.

Many of the women could not bring themselves to use such a primitive facility and chose to make the trip to the Banfield residence 100 metres down the track. Eventually an upgrade was mooted and a very unusual contraption called an ECOLOT was chosen as being much cheaper and easier than installing a septic tank.. The ECOLOT used a heated coil and fan that ran 24/7 and merely required some peat moss or something similar to get it started and then micro-organisms would do the rest.

When the shelter for this wonder-toilet was being prepared on the east side of The Shed, the ECOLOT sat inside The Shed serving as a throne for rehearsals for “Land of Smiles” until THE GRAND OPENING. Nessie McFadyen was chosen to christen the new appliance and, bravely, she ventured in with the company assembled outside awaiting the great moment. After a short time, Nessie emerged face wreathed in smiles showing her approval. “It’s the first time I’ve been to the toilet and had a blow-wave at the same time!” observed Nessie, obviously “tickled” by the warm air generated by the coil and fan.

**Left:** Doug Rogers, Herb Whitfield, Richard Henderson, Clive Lyle, George Taylor, Max Everett, Ken Tee, Nessie McFadyen and Joan Gibb stand around while Bill Burgess tests the Ecolot “throne” for comfort.



### 43 BEANS, PLEASE!

Rudi Kuhnle drove everyone mad when they were trying to take a coffee-break at rehearsals and at working bees because he would have a drink of water and be ready to start again whereas others liked to have a chat about the football or even the weather. Rudi said that he didn’t like coffee but it must have been pretty watery because one day someone made him a REAL cup of coffee and

he never bothered the workers again.

### INTO THE MELTING POT

What an amazing eclectic group the Tatura Male Choir was in the early days (and is still today). Just about everyone in the district was represented: doctor, orchardist, grader-driver, boot-repairer, solicitor, dairy farmer, research scientist, council worker, milk truck driver, timber merchant, mechanic—everyone was accepted and welcomed as long as they could sing in tune and would obey the company rules. They went a long way towards putting Tatura on the map and they gave themselves an enormous ego boost as they piled success upon success.

In the days when concerts and singalongs were about the only cheap entertainment available, people tended to have one song, sometimes more, that was their particular party piece. Horrie Hilderbrand always sang “Short’nin’ Bread” with full dramatic effects while Ray Phillips was invariably asked to sing “Lotus Flower”.

Eric Welsh and Tom Flanagan sang “The Gendarmes Duet” many, many times, perhaps even as many as David Vibert and Bert Gale have sung it in more recent times and Ray Phillips sang “The Spaniard That Blighted My Life” (made famous by Jolson and Crosby).

George Taylor was out at Dookie one evening singing a song that required falsetto singing but at one stage his “upper register” deserted him and he dropped a few octaves in a flash, having to sing in his normal voice and destroying the impact of the song.

The Tatura Male Choir was fighting above its own weight class most of the time, competing against choirs from capital and provincial cities where numbers and talent were plentiful. Northcote Choral Society and Mitcham both had fine groups and were always hard to beat and Ballarat also had a fine choir led by Keith Young. TMC was flattered to be asked by Keith to sing at the Liddiard Street Methodist Church, where he was choir-master, on the Sunday morning that they were there. The Adelaide choirs were the hardest to beat however, and TMC never quite won the big one, coming second to Adelaide on many occasions.