

I practise these passages over and over again - the singer is working at a phrase which is worrying him - a phrase which bears no relation to my exercise - the two of us are making a cacophony - we are like greyhounds in the slips dying to get going to re-record the song - Gerald Moore

## For the record...



In his book "Am I Too Loud?" accompanist Gerald Moore recalls his experience of "Recording in the Brave Days of Old": "The express train from Paddington on the Great Western Railway passes huge buildings... where the letters H.M.V. are largely displayed. In 1921 I alighted here to make my first record for His Master's Voice with Renee Chemet, the French violinist.

"The recording studio was set in the uttermost interior of the building, completely shut off from daylight and outside noise. It was purely utilitarian: no soft lighting, no carpets or curtains brought warmth to the scene. The walls - or shall I say fences? - were of unpolished deal, the floor of hardwood and, in the absence of any absorbent of sound, my footsteps thundered on the bare boards, my voice boomed as if my head were in the resounding womb of some giant double-bass. I ran my fingers over the keys of the pianoforte and was appalled at the metallic harshness of its tone; it had the brazen splendour of a brass spittoon. This brittle sound was not to be attributed entirely to the acoustics of the chamber, for I found on examination that the piano, by the tuner's art, had been rendered as percussive as possible by the filing down of the felts on the hammers. The anti-upholstery campaign had extended even to my piano.

"A huge horn or trumpet protruded into the room and tapered away into the wall; it connected obviously with the machine-chamber, gathering the sounds and recording them on the soft wax disc.

"Many test records are made and played back to the studio before artists and engineers are satisfied. They had great trouble with me because I tried to play softly. Arthur Clark... insisted on my playing *forte* all the time. I protested that it was impossible to bang out the notes of a lullaby; I should wake the baby. The result, in the test played back to us, was that I was unheard. I did not relish this. In the last reckoning I obeyed official recommendation and clattered my part of the lullaby like a charge of cavalry, to the approval of all.

"My younger readers acquainted with modern tape recording with its expert cutting and editing... may have little idea of the revolution created by the microphone. It was the cat among the pigeons. Whereas trumpet recording was accepted as giving an approximate reproduction at best and a distortion at worst (you could get away with murder), the microphone effected a faithful likeness of the sounds we made. It is still beyond our capacity to see ourselves as others see us - perhaps this is just as well for our peace of mind - but now it was possible to hear ourselves in very truth.

"It was a salutary cure for smugness. To think in terms of accuracy and vigour which had sufficed in the past was not enough, we now had to sing and play as musicians, with refinement, with light and shade, with delicacy of nuance. I even had to play very softly when necessary. The making of a good record, it was quickly realized, demanded infinitely more concentration and care from the artists. The microphone picked up everything."

Christ Church Cathedral is certainly a more comfortable environment than those early recording studios, and the wonderful acoustics are a blessing, perhaps flattering, but making our first CD was still a challenge for the choir. Moore's last paragraph is a warning!



*In the Cathedral \**

I'm pleased to be able to report that we rose to the challenge. We learned to turn pages silently, to enunciate clearly, to remain absolutely silent at the end of each piece.

We learned to watch our musical director, Chris Allan, because any incorrect entry is so obvious on a recording.

The result is a triumph, well worthy of the effort the choir has put in to making this an enjoyable sampling of our musical scope and ability.



In October 2012 Terence Koo helped us *Swing into Spring* in a jazz concert that presented new challenges to the choir. We're happy to welcome Terence back - he worked with the choir on a couple of tracks for our CD, and it's just been announced that we'll be collaborating with Terence for our Christmas concert this year.

## How to obtain your copy

Now comes a period of hard work, as our team of expert editors, under the direction of Christopher Allan, after listening to some 12 hours of recorded music, decide exactly which takes are to be included on the final product. That's not an easy task!

Watch this space!

## Roo Grass??

What's the difference between Blue Grass and Roo Grass? Wikipedia says Bluegrass music is a form of American roots music inspired by the music of Appalachia, usually played by a group featuring fiddle, banjo, acoustic guitar, mandolin, Dobro and upright bass.

Roo Grass is an Australian improvement, and is played by Bob Corbett & the Roo Grass Band, who visited Wollombi recently on their Country Hall Tour, where I first heard them. It features songs like *Lucky Country*, and in addition to the traditional instruments, Dave Carter plays bagpipes.



Best of all, the Roo Grass Band features Sue Carson.

Sue is an astonishingly versatile musician well known to our Choir. She is classically trained in violin and as a coloratura soprano, and plays rhythm guitar, fiddle and mandolin. She has been a featured soloist with the choir, singing jazz in our concerts with the Dungeon Big Band, and as our soprano soloist in the choir's productions of Handel's *Messiah*, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*.

I loved her part as vocalist with the rock group in Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* with the University of Newcastle Wind Orchestra.

She teaches contemporary singing at the Newcastle Conservatorium, and in her spare time is studying for a Master of Educational Studies (Music).

Sue is a guest artist on our CD.

If Bob Corbett & the Roo Grass Band are playing in a hall near you, don't miss them. A really entertaining night.

"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music."

- Friedrich Nietzsche

\* Photo by Florian Knorn

*Cacophony* is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at [newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com](mailto:newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com)

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