

# Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young At Heart Chorus Members

Issue #8 ...April 15, 2017

## Chorus History--The Rest of the Story

By Marilyn Gioannini

Now I'd like to make note of special members and happenings through the years. Please note there is not enough room to thank everyone!

Elvie Jokenin was on the oldest roster we have – 1991, and continued with the chorus as our favorite soloist until 2007. She sang a solo two days before her death, just before her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Our longest serving active member is Fred Waskowiak, who joined in 2001. Thanks, Fred, keep it up!

Back in Joe L.'s era, Isabel and Roberto Tellez, lifetime lovers, helped to give the chorus a Spanish flavor, along with Josie and Luisa Matsuba, Josie Chavez Deason (still active) and Irene Bailey, sisters who used their large Indian drums to accompany appropriate songs. There were others including some English only speakers that joined them in the many years in which a Spanish song was included in our monthly programs.

In the decade 2000 – 2010, we acquired an astonishing number of great voices and organizers. They include Ray Scroggins, our chorus chairman and alternating director. Ray recently had a voice problem, but I remember many great solos through the years. Hope he gets to sing again soon – I loved "Without a Song" and "Some Enchanted Evening!"

We picked up Joan Kowalski, (in charge of member music copies, board member, and music committee member). Who can forget Joan's Senior Olympics rendition of "Second Hand Rose"! Certainly not Joan, but she doesn't do it anymore – enough is enough, she says. She often says that joining our chorus was the best thing she's ever done. We love Joan; she makes sure there are a couple of ballads on each program!

And then there's George, our fabled announcer. He's invaluable – he also brings all the sound equipment and stores it in his home, along with the music file

Continued on page 2

Editors: Ray Scroggins & Dennis Cherry



Dennis leads our Valentine-themed performance at *The Aristocrat* in February.

## Bring a Guest

If you have out-of-town guests visiting when we have a practice or performance, ask if they would like to come with you. They'll get to see and hear what you do, and you won't have to miss a performance. It could be fun to share the experience, and if they will be in town longer, they might even want to sing along. Eleanor's sister has done this several times while she is visiting, and we always enjoy having her with us. Dennis's wife, Denise, Gayle's husband, Jack, and Flonnie's husband, Jerry usually stop in to hear us when at Northrise.

Keep your ears open for friends who like to sing too. If they are free during the day, they might like to join us. Everyone is welcome, but we especially could use a few more men. Is there anyone you sing with in a choir, or maybe someone you hear singing anywhere else, that might be interested? You'll never know unless you ask. I missed an opportunity a few weeks ago when I heard a man singing quietly to himself as he was shopping at Albertson's. Sorry I didn't talk with him, but next time it happens, you can be sure I will.



George & Joan "Zing a Little Zong" at Northrise

# *Chorus Chatter*

*News and Musings for Young At Heart Chorus Members*

---

cabinets. He also does all the copying for the chorus, which is a big job. His innumerable solos have entertained us and our audiences. My favorites: "Who Put the Bomp?" and "Cowboy Boots" or maybe "It's Hard to be Humble".

An important addition was Roger McCandless in 2009. He was a big, beautiful man who did it all with grace and style. He directed, he played his uke, he had a great voice and gave good advice for other directors and the singers. He even did a rain dance, in costume, during our "make it rain" program in April one year. We still mourn his passing in 2015.

Mary Kammann was a spark for the chorus. A great voice, spoons player, and a take charge sort of gal, she contributed a lot before she moved away.

Many others of our most dedicated and talented singers joined in the "2000's" decade. Jo Banks, Eleanor Kruschke, Flonnie Cross, Phyllis Medd, Gayle Trantham Welch, and Wanda Worrell joined in that decade and are still active members. All of them have done numerous featured performances. Notable was the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" by Phyllis, Gayle and Joan, "Cuanto le Gusta" by Jo and Eleanor, Flonnie's Christmas songs, and we will never forget Wanda's impression of Minnie Pearl, although she would like for us to. We appreciate them all for their loyalty and contributions to the success of the chorus.

We also added Chuck Riggs and Harry Whalen that decade. Harry moved to Las Vegas and Chuck took up uke work, a project started by Roger. We'll never forget Harry and George singing "Clancy Lowered the Boom", or Harry's Irish solos. Chuck was a rotating director, announcer, and had a good voice. His rendition of "Hard Hearted Hannah, the Vamp from Savannah" at the Senior Olympics was outstanding.

Bob and Arlene Shade joined in 2005. Arlene passed a few years back, and Bob at 94, recently retired. If we're lucky we may see him at the two Good Sam's venues, where he is a resident of the independent living facility. We all appreciate his service in the Army Air Corps during WWII and helping us during our patriotic month. His uniform still fits!

Sometime after Joe L. was disabled, we called a chorus meeting (a very rare event) and the group decided to organize the chorus differently. Ray stepped up when we were choosing a chairman. Thank you, Ray, you're doing great! We also adopted a rotating schedule for musical directors. Many have served, including Ray, Dennis Cherry, Marilyn Gioannini, Ruth Ann Hanlin, Chuck Riggs, Roger McCandless, and Phyllis Medd. We always need more!

We also developed further structure: a board of directors and a set of bylaws, courtesy of Chuck Riggs, who is a lawyer. The music is chosen by a music committee, with the addition of the director of the month. This all seems to be working well.

The years since our reorganization have been a time of growth for Young at Heart. I see 35 names on our latest roster! Rob and Chris Pearson, Joy Webb and Dennis Cherry have become leaders in making the chorus work. Jim Gibson and Skipper Botsford are very helpful. It is wonderful to see Lanny and Sara Norris come back to us. Many other great singers have joined just in the last year or two. Ray is working his way through the chorus for his newsletters, so we all look forward to learning more about our new members.

There are many special aspects to Young at Heart. One is the music itself, which is a joy to those of us of a certain age. Another is the obvious change in demeanor of the audience while we are performing. Seeing some of them clap hands, smile, or sing along is very satisfying. And finally, Young at Heart is probably the world's easiest organization to belong to. No fees, no requirement for attendance (except you really do need to practice), and the family-like atmosphere. Members attend chorus because they love it. No one will suggest you leave the chorus for health reasons; that is your decision. The directors are extremely unlikely to point out your flaws. The reason we sound so good is because we love the music, Joanie makes it fun, Ray and Dennis are helpful directors but not domineering, and we have great singers who enjoy doing a good job.

I see Ray has put me on the latest roster. You probably won't see me at performances for a little while longer, and I won't be singing. (Some would argue I can't sing, anyway.) But I am still supporting the chorus by writing

# Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young At Heart Chorus Members

---

this article, transposing the odd song for Joanie, keeping track of the song list, preparing the occasional new song and other little things. Now that you have my phone and email address, any of you could call or email me if you would like to borrow one of our books, or copy a particular song. I can email you the database of songs we possess, if you are an Excel user. I am probably your biggest fan!



**Josie Chavez Deason** joined the chorus almost 17 years ago. For many years, she also sang in the choir at Immaculate Heart of Mary Cathedral and in the Diocesan Choir, which performed when Bishop Oscar Cantu was ordained here. Josie was born in Las Cruces and has lived here since. Her sister, Irene Bailey, also sang with Young at Heart for many years.

Josie was married to Louie Chavez for 50 years before he died in 2009. She has three married children, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. In 2012, she married Tom Deason, who also has three children.

For many years, Josie worked for the Las Cruces Schools until she retired. In her spare time, she enjoyed quilting with her sister, Irene, and also sewing. Now, she spends most of her leisure time traveling with Tom to see their families.



**Karen Gomes** joined Young at Heart in February, 2016 at the invitation of Ray, her neighbor. Earlier, she sang in her junior high (middle school) chorus and her high school's senior night performance.

She says her father instilled his eclectic taste in music in her and her brothers. They listened to musicians ranging from Gene Autry and Woody Guthrie to the Andrews Sisters and the Dorsey Brothers, with Irish folk tunes and a tasting of Ravel added to the mix.

Karen and her husband, Gary, moved to Las Cruces in August, 2006. Prior to that, she spent most of her life in downstate New York, primarily Long Island. In her working career, she was administrative and information technology manager for a mid-sized public accounting firm and ran her own bookkeeping service for a few years after retirement. She also was a volunteer for AARP in individual income tax counseling for 13 years, both here and in New York.

Karen and Gary have three children and three grandchildren. Their daughter, Robin and their two granddaughters live in New York, while one son, David, lives in Minnesota and another son, Peter, is in California, where their step-grandson also lives. The third member of their Las Cruces household is Finn, an almost six-year-old Doberman Pinscher, whose demands for attention and exercise help keep them on their toes and in motion.

When not singing with the chorus, Karen loves the puzzling, detective work and geography that are components of genealogy, a long-time interest. She also enjoys reading and gardening and is looking forward to doing more traveling, now that Gary has apparently stepped away from his consulting business.

Karen says that her fellow chorus members are great, and she comes away from Young at Heart practices and performances with a lighter heart than when she arrived. As a junior high school music teacher told his students, she adds, singing can be a powerful antidote when feeling troubled. I think we can all agree with that.



**Carole Rickman** joined the chorus in October, 2016. She has been a Las Cruces resident for 24 years but lived in San Diego from ages 16 to 55. As a young child, she moved all over the country.

Carole retired after 32 years with AAA of Southern California as a service representative. She is the oldest

# Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young At Heart Chorus Members

---

of five girls, three of whom have passed away. Her youngest sister lives in Big Fork, Montana.

Carole's husband passed away 19 years ago, but they belonged to an RV club with which they went on many fun trips throughout the West. She continued to travel with the group until a few years ago, when she sold her RV. Although she misses that activity very much, she says that joining the chorus has been a blessing for her, and she enjoys the people, the songs and the venues where we sing.



**Verlaine Davies** joined Young at Heart a year ago but has sung in church choirs for the past 20 years. Currently, she conducts her church choir at Saint Anthony Desert Mission, which sings a Capella music that requires a lot of care.

She moved from England to Alpine, Texas in 1966, then moved to Las Cruces from 1969 until 1975. Returning to the UK, Verlaine worked in the accounting department at Oxford College. In 1981, she returned to Las Cruces, where she has lived ever since. She does return to England every few years to visit her two brothers there.

In addition to the Oxford College, Verlaine's career as a bookkeeper included the Sun-News and Mesilla Valley Transportation, as well as part-time at home builder Planet Development, all here in Las Cruces.

Currently, she spends her time volunteering. About seven years ago, she published a book on antique rings, which she now sells on EBay. She says she had fun collecting the rings that she used to build the history of ring designs from 1800 to 1910. Since finishing the book, Verlaine says she has taken up hand quilting and belongs to a quilting bee, a change from the dressmaking she used to do.

***Once you lick the frosting off a cupcake, it becomes a muffin...and muffins are healthy!***

## The Value of Music

Jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, now 76 years old, said in an interview published in the March issue of *National Geographic* that there is a close connection between music and science. "I've privately asked many scientists if they had a connection with music or other arts, and the answer was yes from maybe 85 percent of them." He said a lot of young people may not be interested in math or science, but we could use music to teach them about math and science.

## How Our Programs Get Made

Ever wonder where our programs come from? We have a schedule of monthly themes that usually stays the same each year. A couple of months ahead, the music committee members and the director for that month each pick six songs to fit the theme, plus a religious and patriotic number.

The committee and directors then meet and take turns picking songs for two months until we have about 15 to make up each program. Once a tentative order for the songs is decided, the director then pulls the folders for the songs from the files in George's garage.

Next, the director reviews the files and puts together a preliminary list of the songs, repeats and other details before getting together with Joanie to go over the music. Also, any files with missing word sheets or needing new masters for the music sheets are taken care of, usually by Gayle or the director. The files next go to George to make copies, after which he gives them to Joan.

She sorts them all into the folders she brings to practice, making each folder with either words or music as members prefer. Lots of sorting involved there. Finally, when the month's program is finished, Joan brings the folders to practice with the next month's music and takes them home with the old music. Last job is to re-file all the used music and word sheets. A big thank you to everyone who makes this happen every month!

***So when is this "Old Enough to Know Better" supposed to kick in?***