

TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



TOUR OF CANADA & USA 2000

By Dean Powell, Publicity Officer
& Honorary Archivist

The dawn was far from being distant as, in hushed tones of an early morning start, choristers crept through the wet and windy South Wales morning to board one of two coaches headed for a foreign land - England that is, and Heathrow Airport.

With a typical high-spirited mood the men reached the coaches before an early valley sunrise, dressed in the burgundy tour shirts, full battle dress for some, filled with excitement for what promised to be one of the most successful tours ever undertaken by the Treorchy Male Choir

It would mark the choir's 10th overseas tour in its impressive history, starting way back in 1963 with the first trip to Switzerland, a far cry - and indeed modest in comparison to future tours - from the trip that lay before them.

It was two years in the making for Honorary Member Ed Fraser, that organiser of organisers from the West Coast of the United States of America who planned the first trip with such minute detail, way back in 1994. But the time had come to make a return tour, this time incorporating Canada into the busy schedule, along with a full-length tour of the west coast of the USA. Indeed, war plans had been drawn up with a lot less aforethought!

Morale was high, with a baseball-capped wearing Daryl in the front seat, ticking off names, followed by the odd quip as choristers took their seats. Chairman Roger Morse, whose birthday was that day, and who also expected a call from his wife to say he'd become a grandfather, launched into a flat version of the Carpenter's hit, *Top of the World*, and the laughter began.

Travelling south through the Rhondda, Stuart Hill half-heartedly opened a can of lager before the 5am call, as they sat and waited in Ystrad for the one and only chorister who wasn't at his port of call. Allan Bowen, was missing. Gone. Where was he? A frantic Daryl walked the length of Ystrad Road, wondering just which house to call at, until finally a half-asleep Allan appeared, dressed in his blazer. He'd fallen asleep in the chair, watching the Olympic coverage on the TV set. Amid cheers from his fellow choristers, head bowed low in shame, he boarded and away to go.

At Penrhiwfer the first signs of singing began, with Bob Turner wishing wife Brenda farewell and the choristers bursting into a tongue-in-cheek rendition of *Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing* as the bus drove away. Reaching Cardiff by 6.10am, meeting the second bus outside the BBC Studios at Llandaff, the last of the choristers joined the party.

The usual good humour of the boys carried through the trip to the Leigh Delamere where they stopped for a breakfast break, at the usual extortionate prices, and to meet Choir President Brian Bates. Following a 45minute break it was back on the buses to continue the journey, interspersed by telephone calls from the tour operator, calls to Treherbert for Roger to discover whether his daughter had given birth, and then the boys ended up singing *Happy Birthday* to him. Daryl held a contest on how old the chairman actually was,

with only two guessing correctly at 52 years and Jack Knapgate guessing the highest of all at 68. Now, now Jack!

Arriving at the destination by 10am, the Choir was met at Terminal Three by tour operator Jim Strachen, complete with his army of helpful airport staff, eager to escort the entire troop, now numbering 67, including 63 choristers and three music staff, quickly through the check - in desks and into departure lounge.

It was with one mad rush that many of the seasoned travellers reached the departure lounge and settled quite comfortably into the nearest bar for pre-take-off drinks. Poor Roger, concerned about his daughter's well-being and still totally unaware of whether he had become a grandfather yet or not, made frequent telephone calls home, but to no avail. Boarding the craft, a United Airlines 777, at 10.45am, the majority of the choir sitting together in the economy compartment, it was time for take off.

At 11.30am, the engines roared and within minutes the first round of drinks was served - staff armed with the beers, spirits and other refreshments we desperately required - purely for medicinal purposes of course!

With dinner consumed and cleared away, and the frightening prospect of the bar being closed for an hour - yes, an entire hour (!) - silence descended in the cabin. Islwyn's pitch of *Men of Harlech* broke the hush, but only momentarily, as cabin crew insisted on a rest period - regardless of the men's thirst.

For many it proved a worthwhile experience, a period to relax, sleep and generally re-energise themselves for the adventure that lay ahead. Small groups gathered in darkened doorways of the rear cabin, hoping for a glimpse of the smallest amount of alcoholic beverage on offer, until the second meal arrived, and the request from cabin crew for a song. Naturally, this was granted and they burst into *I Bob Un Sydd Fyddlon* and, with the announcement by the captain that we were on board and that it was Roger's birthday (32 hours long at that!), a rendition of *Happy Birthday* was called for. The hours flew by, until, at last, the destination was minutes away - Hare International Airport, Chicago.

With a security-conscious atmosphere, not unlike San Quentin on the worst of days, customs men and security guards ushered the men into the many queues that lie ahead. Chicago was, in a word, miserable, and few had any desire to return to the airport, let alone the sprawling skyline of the city beyond the departure lounge windows.

What made matters worse was the announcement that the plane was delayed due to a technical fault and parts were needed to repair it. In typical Treorchy spirit they headed for the nearest bar, with rounds of Budweiser beer quenching the thirst. News soon spread of Roger becoming a grandfather at long last. His daughter gave birth to a 7lb baby boy, called Connor. With beers

in hand choristers toasted the choir chairman and launched into *Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing*.

The bar staff, and indeed, the customers, were impressed to say the very least, and with a promise to reduce all drinks by half if the music continued, they performed *I Bob Un Sydd Fyddlon*, followed by the *Soldier's Farewell*. Once again, the bar staff requested another, and then another. With the bar already full and more travellers pushing their way into the confined space, they sang *Star Spangled Banner*. The response, as you can imagine, was magnificent!

At 6pm (Chicago time - five hours behind London) the plane finally departed, heading further west towards Canada and in particular the city of Vancouver. The captain of the plane announced the Choir's presence on board, followed by Roger's good fortune. Food was served, a film to be watched and the upbeat atmosphere of the tour prevailed throughout.

Choristers were glad to reach the vast sprawl of Vancouver Airport more than four hours later where they were greeted by dear friends, Honorary Member Ed Fraser and his wife, Marge, along with their friends and helpers, Dick, Diana and Deborah Aldrich who had also travelled north for the weekend.

Once the luggage was retrieved - all except Wyndham Phillip's unfortunately, which was sent by mistake to Minneapolis – the Choir boarded the two awaiting coaches, greeting Honorary Member Doug Firstbrook along the way. Doug had travelled from Adelaide, Australia to spend the duration of the tour with them.

The drive into the city gave the Choir some idea of how vast Vancouver really is. Founded in 1792, it is now one of the largest cities in the American continent, with an old area, called Gastown, at opposing ends to Granville Island, where there is a popular market. Vancouver also boasts its own Chinatown - since 40 percent of the population are of Asian background - as well as the beautiful Stanley Park.

Travelling across one of many bridges linking the downtown area, choristers all admired the colourful skyline, and after such an arduous day were delighted to reach their destination of the Best Western Hotel in downtown Vancouver.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 23

Awaking at 7.30am, feeling the full jet-lag affect, choristers enjoyed a very nice breakfast in the hotel restaurant and despite thinking themselves brave for sitting on the patio, many gave in to a cool morning breeze and went inside! Choristers, filled with adventurous spirit were soon on the many shuttle buses headed down to Gastown.

Rather quiet given the early time of day, many took the opportunity to walk the empty streets, taking pictures of the Steam Clock - powered by steam from below - and sightseeing the harbour front and trade centre. Taking a short

walk further into the retail area of the city they visited a few shops, had coffee and then opted for a two hour tour of Vancouver by trolley car. Probably the best decision of the tour so far!

The trolley tour was excellent, giving them the opportunity to fully appreciate how much of a beautiful city Vancouver actually is. Surrounded by so many yachting harbours, beautiful parks and an impressive skyline. Stanley Park, named after the first governor of Canada, Englishman Lord Stanley (also where the Stanley Cup comes from) boasted some lovely scenery, particularly the beaches along the coastline and the Lion's Gate Bridge. It is also home to a magnificent museum and academy of music.

The time soon came to return to the hotel and prepare for the job ahead. Wearing traditional choir battle dress - the tuxedo - they boarded the one bus (which made the journey twice) to Tenth Avenue and the venue for the first concert of the tour, the Tenth Alliance Church.

Almost 300 tickets had been sold, mostly by members of the large Vancouver Welsh Society who had assisted Ed Fraser in organising the performance. Understandably nervous about their first engagement on the two week tour, the choristers walked on stage in typical military fashion and from the onset of the first note - of *Sanctus* - were assured that this would be a first class concert.

The Welsh items received the most applause, particularly with so many Welsh speakers in the audience, as well as the operatic choruses, such as *Speed Your Journey* and *March of the Peers*. The performance of *Comrades in Arms* was exceptionally good and *Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl* received a magnificent ovation from the crowd.

During the second half they treated the audience to two light arrangements in *Memory* and *Cavatina*, which brought the audience to a thrilling standing ovation. Followed by *Cwm Rhondda* the Choir also gave a joint performance of the Canadian and Welsh National Anthems before leaving the stage and heading for the coaches.

The Choir was invited to a supper with the Cambria Welsh Society in their club nearby. Serving a large buffet and plenty of drinks behind the bar, they joined forces with members of their male voice choir to give just a few songs. Although still reeling from the affects of jet lag, choristers thoroughly enjoyed themselves in such pleasant company.

Choir chairman Roger Morse gave a vote of thanks to the Welsh Society and in return society member Geoff Owen presented the Choir with an inscribed pen for the Choir trophy cabinet. Combining for a joint performance of *We'll Keep A Welcome*, Treorchy soon left the club and headed for the hotel.

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 24

Breakfast was fast and furious as chorister prepared to leave Vancouver and travel south. With luggage safely packed away, they departed the west coast

city at 9.15am on the two Choir buses. No sooner was the late bus on its way than the Clec Committee of Daryl Stacey, Gareth Evans, Stuart Hill and Dean Powell met to discuss the winners of the idiot awards - the Bing Bongs - for the day. With baseball cap on his head, notepad in one hand and microphone in the other, Daryl announced the first round of winners.

The fun and frolics remained for the duration of the trip this morning, everyone having plenty of fun on board the bus as they travelled towards Tsawwassen and boarded the British Columbia Ferry. Once the coaches were safely parked on Deck Two, choristers all walked to Deck Five and also to Deck Six, the open-air level, which allowed such commanding views of the beautiful surrounding scenery.

The entire cruise was magnificent as members stood in awe at the views around them, sailing between the mainland and Vancouver Island. Lush green forests, mountain top luxury homes, all surrounded by the beautiful deep blue water. The trip lasted almost two hours, with many of the choristers sitting outside in the sun and enjoying the spectacular sights before them, or treating themselves to lunch in the ample restaurant below.

Reaching dry land at Swartz Bay, they boarded the coaches again and headed for Victoria on Vancouver Island, reaching the Strathcona Hotel by 1.30pm. Boasting the most outstanding harbour filled with yachts, luxury liners and even a galleon, it is flanked by the huge colonial style buildings - architecturally magnificent in their own right and obviously influenced by the British presence here. The Empress Hotel and Parliament Buildings, surrounding James Bay - named after Captain James Cook, were truly awe-inspiring sights to behold.

Two yellow school buses transported the Choir on the 20minute drive across town to the massive University of Victoria campus. Boasting its own football arena and 1,400-seater theatre, choristers gave a short rehearsal. While waiting for the word to walk on stage, the Choir assembled under a huge tree in the grounds of the campus and Daryl Stacey managed to convince poor Dewi Jones that there was a racoon on the branches. Armed with his trusty camera, Dewi began clicking away at the 'phantom' endangered species.

Soon enough it was time to march on stage, amid rapturous applause from the 800 members of the audience. Opening the concert with *O Canada*, the Choir launched into a repertoire of music, all aware of the fact that despite the glorious surroundings, this was not a good venue acoustically. The hymns were especially well received, along with *A Valley Called The Rhondda*, *March of the Peers* and *Myfanwy*, naturally.

During the second half sound boards were erected on the sides of the stage and they appeared to make quite a difference to the whole Choir sound. The audience was thrilled at *Fantasia* and *Memory*, with *My Way*, raising the roof as always. With an encore of *Cwm Rhondda*, they ended the evening with *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* and then headed for a reception held by the local Welsh society.

The president of the society made an official presentation to the Choir chairman of a video cassette illustrating the beautiful surroundings of Vancouver and Victoria, and by 10.15pm the Treorchy men departed.

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 25

Choristers could think of no better place to be spending their first free day for sightseeing than the beautiful town of Victoria. With the attitude of making a full day of it, troops of choristers walked to the harbour area, once more admiring the astounding views before us, walking the boardwalk and taking in the scenery. With a British feel about it, assisted by the red double decker buses and statues of Queen Victoria, they were equally as impressed by the horse drawn carriages, bicycle taxis and the many sailors and armed forces people, all wearing their uniforms and walking the streets alongside.

Many of the members enjoyed a harbour cruise. It was one of the best decisions they could have possibly made as many boarded the various small harbour ferry, with a seating capacity for just a dozen or so people. Racing around the harbour to take a look at the vast array of vessels and buildings that made the scenery so spectacular, the cruise was enjoyed by one and all. They also viewed the luxury liner anchored just outside James Bay as well as the many sea planes taking off literally a few feet away. Sealions popped their heads out of the water and many of the choristers opted for an excursion out to sea to view the killer whales.

Many ended up disembarking after an hour or more on the water and decided to enjoy a leisurely few hours in Spinnakers Brewerypub and Guesthouse overlooking the harbour near the iron bridge. It turned out to be a truly memorable afternoon as they tucked into delicious fish and chips, drank the local beer and had plenty of fun together as a troop of friends, making jokes and reminiscing about the hilarity of their time in the Treorchy Male Choir. After a few hours together it was time to reboard the harbour ferry and gradually edge back to the Strathcona Hotel, where the evening was spent in Spinnakers bar.

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 26

It was with great reluctance that choristers waved goodbye to Victoria today, but the time had come to move on and visit pastures new. Boarding the coaches at 9.00am, they travelled just a few minutes to the harbour, where it was time to take their luggage and prepare for the ferry ride ahead. Departing at 10.30am, they headed to a new city, a new state and even a new country by crossing the border to the United States of America and enjoying the terrific scenery along the way.

Approaching the city of Seattle, in Washington State, choristers were treated to a breathtaking view of the skyline, complete with its many skyscrapers and the famous Space Needle tower alongside. In complete contrast was the amazing sight of the snow covered Mount Rainer that seemed but a short distance away. In fact, Mount Rainer, a dormant volcano, stands at 14,000ft and is the highest point in the Cascade mountain range, a 100sq mile area

with 26 glaciers. With cameras in hand, the choristers made the most of this spectacular photographic opportunity.

Arriving at Port Angeles, Seattle, the coaches drove through the centre of this lovely city, complete with its own enormous football dome stadium. One bus was a little later than the other, simply because it was held up by a seemingly endless train travelling across its path, which gave the Rodney's time to stop on a vantage point and take more pictures. Travelling to West Seattle they arrived at the concert venue for the evening, the Admiral Congregational United Church of Christ, at 4pm and were treated to a light dinner by members of the congregation. Celebrating Allan Lewis' 53rd birthday, choristers sang *Happy Birthday* to him in the vestry, and then held a short rehearsal in the rather small church.

With time to wander the streets and take another look at the Seattle skyline, choristers headed back to the concert venue in time for the performance at 7pm. The audience, although small in number, were nonetheless very appreciative of the choir's outstanding performance. The many unaccompanied numbers were particularly good, as were the rousing Welsh hymns and such items as *Softly As I Leave You*, *A Valley Called The Rhondda* and the *Men of Harlech* finale to *Fantasia on Famous Welsh Airs*.

Nothing quite prepared them for the response received after the performance of *Memory* when the entire audience rose to its feet in a standing ovation. How on earth could they follow that? With difficulty of course, but in the spirit of leaving the audience wanting more, choristers exited the stage and headed for the buses. Some of the choristers were staying with hosts tonight, while the majority of had booked rooms in the Quest Inn on Aurora Road, and headed for the nearby Goldie's Casino for the evening.

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 27

With the freedom to do as they wished for most of the day, many decided to book taxis and head into the city of Seattle and in particular the magnificent Space Needle. With a certain amount of apprehension choristers walked into the glass elevators and at lightning speed were shot hundreds of feet in the sky before reaching the observatory deck high above the city below. The views at 605ft were outstanding, as choristers posed for pictures overlooking the skyline, highways, harbours and lakes in view.

After returning to the ground, members boarded the monorail system that took them to the shopping centre of Seattle near Pine Road, and with the whole group still together, walked the main streets towards the harbour. It was there that they visited the Public Market with its incredible array of fruit, vegetable and particularly fish stalls with thousands of shoppers nearby. Walking the waterfront, choristers stopped for a quick drink and then continued on our long walk across the boardwalk, before returning to the city centre and taking a look at the many shops around. With an air of liberal, even cosmopolitan feel about it, Seattle was a definite favourite place.

Returning to the Quest Inn they enjoyed a meal together in the nearby Shari's Restaurant and then prepared for the evening concert ahead. Without any coaches available, choristers relied on the local Welsh society to fetch them in a convoy of cars and take them to the venue for the evening performance - the Prince of Peace Lutheran Church - by 6.30pm. Everything appeared to be going well until the concert itself began. Presented by Ystrad-born Allan Upshall, the church was half-full, with only Welsh Society members and their invited guests in attendance. Little thought had been given to publicising the concert at all, making for a very difficult evening.

The Choir performed to its usual high standards of course, despite the difficulties which were made all worse by the overpowering heating system in the building. Opening with the *Star Spangled Banner*, all the items received an enthusiastic response. The second half was still rather difficult, but nonetheless the men performed well and the rather subdued audience did show their appreciation. It was with surprise that at the end of *Cwm Rhondda* they had another standing ovation, despite worries of having little enthusiasm from the crowd! Returning to the hotel in the convoy of cars that brought them to the venue, many returned to the Goldie's Casino for just a few quiet beverages before bedtime.

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 28

An early morning wake-up call was necessary as choristers and their luggage boarded the Greyhound Buses, driven by Ron and Wayne, at 8am and left the sights and sounds of Seattle, passing the famous Boeing air field on the way. Turning off Highway 5 the touring party made its first stop of the day at the Backwood's Cafe in Eco-Park, a timber building, which depended on solar heating and was occupied by a group of lumberjacks who were keen to show choristers many of the methods they use for sawing trees and logging. Choristers were treated to a nice lunch, which they referred to as 'road kill' meat - in other words, the animal victims of road crashes! - and a few beers before the show began!

Mike Peachey brought the house down when he was used in the demonstration by throwing axes at a target, then attempting to climb one of the enormous polls there, using a rope and spiked shoes. But it was Stuart Hill that really showed up the crowd by climbing up the poll quicker than a monkey - leaving the demonstrators a little concerned for his well being! Choristers stayed for more than an hour, finishing with an open-air rendition of *Men of Harlech* in an effort to thank their hosts for the afternoon.

The trip continued into the mountain passes reaching the visitors centre in Mount Saint Helens. This overlooked the famous 7,500 ft high mountain, a live volcano which erupted in 1980, claiming 27 lives and totally devastating countryside on a 17mile radius. The affect of the volcano, which reduced the mountain from its original 10,000ft, completely destroying one side of it, remains as visible today as it did 20 years ago. Enthralled by the extraordinary view before them, many of the choristers also watched a film depicting how the eruption occurred.

At 6pm they reached Vancouver, Washington and came to a halt in the local church where they were treated to the most enormous buffet. Prepared by the 90 members of the well-known Vancouver USA singers, the Treorchy group had a most enjoyable social evening with them. After the food was served it was time for the Choir to assemble at one end of the large reception room and perform *Men of Harlech* for fellow choristers, many of whom were hosting members of the Treorchy Male Choir for the following two nights.

The Vancouver USA Singers President, Martha Wasden presented Andrew Badham with a USA flag as a token of their appreciation and individuals within both organisations were introduced to the crowd.

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 29

Following breakfast choristers reunited at the church and boarded the two Greyhound Coaches. Waving goodbye to their hosts for the day, they were treated to a lovely drive along the Columbian River.

Today was Alwyn Lewis's 53rd birthday, and the entire bus sang *Happy Birthday* to him as the journey continued. The buses came to a stop at the Vista Building overlooking the Columbian Gorge, a perfect site for photography, but nothing prepared them for the stunning views offered at Mutnomah Falls, the highest waterfall in the USA. From a distance the falls look almost split in half by a high footbridge, only a matter of a few hundred feet away from the rockface. With cameras in hand choristers marched to the top, walking the bridge and waving at many friends below. A tremendous visit.

Buses stopped in the village of Cascade next, with many of the choristers stopping at the Cascade Bar for refreshments and some of opting for the Cascade Restaurant and Inn for lunch. The next stop was at the salmon farm, with its many deep ponds playing host to the vast display of fish. And soon enough it was time to return to the coaches and make their way back to Vancouver, where their hosts awaited their return and took the Treorchy men back to their homes to change in preparation for the concert.

Choristers reached the First Church of God by 6pm in preparation for a rehearsal in the main auditorium of this impressive building. There was most certainly a great deal of enthusiasm about tonight's concert, the Choir was on top form, and with a capacity audience of 1,200 people awaiting their arrival, choristers knew this was going to be a great event. The concert was excellent from the very first note. Displaying the magnificent sound that Treorchy has boasted for generations, the audience sat totally enthralled with the performance. The Welsh hymns received the best applause, although items like *Fantasia*, *Memory* and *Myfanwy* were truly amazing.

Dean was honoured once more to complete the first half with a performance of *Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl*. And to put the icing on the cake, with no pun intended, Andrew dedicated the final item, the showstopper of *My Way*, to Alwyn on his birthday. The performance was fantastic, bringing the audience to its feet, where they stayed for a brilliant performance of *Star Spangled Banner* followed by the Welsh National Anthem.

Following the concert the Choir headed for the Cafe Pacific bar in downtown Vancouver, where both choirs enjoyed a social evening together, basking in the glory of a great concert. Congregating in a room designated for the Choir, the biggest surprise was yet to come when an enormous cake with 'Happy Birthday Alwyn' written across it in coloured letters and musical notes. He was totally shocked by the surprise, making for a really memorable night.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 30

It was time to wave goodbye to their hosts in Vancouver, Washington as they boarded the buses outside the church and headed further south towards Medford. Reaching Sutherlin just after noon the buses made a stop at the Apple Peddler restaurant for lunch. Both coaches reached the Reston Motel in Medford, Oregon at 4pm, with some of the members rushing to the indoor swimming pool to relax for a short while before the time came to return to the Greyhound buses and head for the concert venue. The performance was held in the Southern Oregon University Concert Hall, in lovely Ashland, filled to capacity with 450 people. Once again, it was an outstanding performance, with an enthusiastic audience hanging onto every note. *Speed Your Journey* was excellent, as was *Fantasia, A Valley Called The Rhondda* and the *Crusaders Chorus* from *I Lombardi*. Dean finished off the first half with *Unwaith Eto* and received a very enthusiastic applause. The second half was equally as good, if not better. Finishing with *My Way, Cwm Rhondda* and another standing ovation, choristers left the stage victorious.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 1

It was an early start for the Choir today, as they had promised to perform in two morning services in the vicinity of Medford. The first service, more than an hour long, was held in St Mark's Episcopal Church and had a distinctive Welsh feel about it. Besides the fact that the Choir sang *Sanctus* and *Gwahoddiad*, they also joined in the congregational singing of *Aberystwyth, Ton y Botel, O Love Divine* and *Immortal Invisible God*.

Once the service was over they made their way to Eastwood Baptist Church, only performing the two solo hymns and then leaving the church to have a Choir picture taken in the grounds nearby. With the bright sunshine on them, this was a sure sign that they were headed for the golden state of California. Choristers stopped for lunch in JJ North's Buffet in Grants Pass before heading further south and admiring the wonderful redwood trees around us.

It was a very long drive today, stopping only once for a very short break and eventually reaching the Eureka Inn, Eureka by 6pm. The Choir settled into this historic hotel for a champagne reception in the oak-panelled main foyer, complete with high-backed leather chairs and a massive fire place. Once they were settled into their rooms, it was time to change and then head back to the buses for a drive to the century-old Samoa Cookhouse, the only logging camp dining room left in the west of the country. Settling down to an all-you-can-eat dinner, choristers enjoyed a leisurely evening in the timber building. Heading back to the town, some opted for a visit to the Lost Coast Brewery, but with

few bar staff available, ended up back in the hotel to settle into the bar for a last minute glass of chardonnay.

MONDAY OCTOBER 2

With only half a blue berry muffin and a cold cuppa to welcome them in the breakfast bar this morning, the choristers were eager to get on board the coaches and head further south into California. It was going to be a long day of travel, but a worthwhile one, with such magnificent scenery along the way. After a short trip they stopped at the Pacific Lumber Company in Scotia, this vast timber work, opened in 1869 in the mountains, and were treated to a guided tour of the plant. Health and safety was hardly high on the manager's agenda, especially since no hard hats were offered to the choristers, but apparently the two small foam ear plugs was all they needed!

As if there wasn't plenty of laughter following the morning awards, the jokes began about trees - yep, you guessed it, they were travelling through the heart of the mighty redwood country, the redwood national park in actual fact, and more impressively, the Avenue of Giants. The road passed through groves of some of the largest trees in the world, although, after a while, the band of Treorchy men had great delight in exclaiming "Duw, there's a big one..." etc, for the duration of the journey. They did take time to stop and admire the redwoods closer up, walking through the nearby forests, taking pictures of the largest species, the Founders Grove and generally cracking tree-orientated jokes.

Moving swiftly on, choristers stopped for lunch in the lovely town of Garberville. At 6pm they arrived in the town of Santa Rosa, right in the heart of the wine-producing Napa Valley, famous for its world-renowned chardonnay. Driving passed miles of vineyards, choristers eventually reached the Motel 6, their residency for the night. Soon enough it was time to board the coaches once again and head to the Third Street Aleworks in the centre of the town. It was there that they settled into the typical surroundings of an American bar and ordered food, drank copious amounts of chardonnay and even played a few games of pool together - Brian Bates certainly plays a mean game himself to be honest!

TUESDAY OCTOBER 3

Following breakfast at the nearby Denny's Restaurant, it was time to board the coaches at 9.30am and head further south, travelling through more lush green landscape of the vineyard country of the Napa Valley. With the usual good humour of the choristers on board the coach, they shared stories of funny incidents of the night before, sang *Happy Birthday* to Gareth Evans, who was 54 today, and following a brief Clec Committee meeting, it was time to announce the awards.

At 11am they arrived at the world famous Korbel Champagne Cellars to enjoy a tour of the vineyard and wine-production room, followed by a champagne tasting session in the cellar rooms - a most enjoyable way to start the day indeed. Some of the choristers decided to splash out their dollars and buy some of the produce, others went straight to the bar and ordered chardonnay,

then sat outside in the glorious sunshine to drink a few glasses and have fun together. At 12.45pm, following a spot of lunch on the patio, it was time to move on and prepare for the important concert ahead.

Choristers arrived at the Motel 6 in Sunnyvale slightly later than anticipated and were given the news that Justine Platts, the soprano soloist for the tour, had fallen ill with a throat infection. She was unable to sing in the Sunnyvale Concert, probably the most significant engagement of the trip, because this was Ed and Marge Fraser's home church. All their friends were in the audience and it was here that we performed our final concert of the 1994 US Tour.

Conductor Andrew Badham asked Dean Powell could perform a selection of songs in the concert. Naturally, he was overjoyed to be invited to sing, and quickly rehearsed *Bring Him Home* and *Stars*, both from *Les Miserables*, with Rhiannon. Choristers had lunch together in the church, reuniting with so many former hosts and old friends from the previous trip. It was great to rekindle old friendships with so many nice people. The concert in the Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church began at 7.30pm, with a full house there and as the Choir walked on stage, they filled the building with applause, making for the start of a memorable engagement.

And it was certainly a night to remember. Once more the Choir gave an outstanding performance, reflected in the amount of applause from the capacity audience who rose in a standing ovation as the final notes of *My Way* drifted through the church. Chairman Roger Morse also received certificates of appreciation from the Mayor of the City to commemorate the visit. Following the concert it was time to mingle with the crowd of familiar faces before departing for the hotel, changing into casual wear, which usually means the burgundy choir shirts, and head for the nearby Shooters Bar, right opposite from Motel 6. It was there that the Choir revelled in the opportunity of a night of celebration and fun. With 1960s music playing on the jukebox, the bar resembled something of a Happy Days set, with choristers singing along to the tunes - although not singing too much of course, under the conductor's orders!

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 4

This was a free day to enjoy the sights of San Francisco. Ed had arranged for both buses to transport those choristers wishing to visit the city for the day. So heading off at 9am, they arrived at the city by the bay at 10.30am, with many members enjoying a harbour cruise. Unfortunately, the tours of Alcatraz were all fully booked, only Rhiannon and Justine managed to buy the last two tickets for the day.

In groups of friends, some jumped on board one of the trolley cars and travelled through the Chinatown area of San Francisco before coming to a halt in Union Square. Walking the streets and admiring the sights of so many colossal buildings, they eventually caught one of the packed trolley cars heading upwards to Nob Hill. Singing the "trolley song" as they travelled along, many passengers looked on with obvious suspicion!

On reaching the top of Nob Hill, choristers visited the elaborate Fairmount Hotel and then strolled across to Grace Cathedral, the venue for their unforgettable opening concert in 1994. Choristers gathered together once more at 5.30pm on Pier 39 in Fisherman's Wharf. Admiring the yachting harbour below, filled with sea lions and otters, they eventually boarded the coaches and headed back to Sunnyvale, where we had less than an hour to shower and change in preparation for the evening's festivities. At 7.30pm they travelled to the King's Head pub in downtown Sunnyvale, where they enjoyed a feast of good food and ale. A pleasant evening commenced which was slightly tinged with sadness because it was time to wave goodbye to Ron Collins and Wayne McKoy, the helpful drivers for the duration of the tour. Presenting them with copies of Excelsior and Choir CDs, choristers bid them adieu.

THURSDAY OCTOBER 5

Breakfast was served up in the nearby Denny's Restaurant and it was time to depart the hotel by 10am, heading south to Monterey. The pleasant drive was interspersed with the usual good humour of the boys on board the coaches - Roger's singing, Bryn's witty comments and private jokes about the somewhat erratic driving of their new driver, Leroy, a 6ft tall black man with a voice as deep as the ocean.

In just a few short hours they reached the impressive coastline of Monterey Bay, spending the day sightseeing Fisherman's Wharf and Cannery Row. Some of the choristers opted for a visit to the Monterey Aquarium while others settled down to a quiet lunch in one of the many ocean-front restaurants and cafés. With such a warm, sunny day, it was a pleasure to just relax for a few hours and take in the scenery, admiring the many sea lions on the rocks below or visiting the shops along Cannery Row. The second bus had a few problems reaching the tourist town at all, when the brakes failed, and they crashed into the back of a car on the highway. Fortunately nobody was injured.

At 2.45pm they returned to the meeting place outside the sea aquarium and travelled by coach to the Motel 6 in Salinas and within the hour were all booked into our rooms. Changing the time schedule slightly to allow some choristers to go swimming, freshen up, or basically relax for just a few hours, they didn't leave the motel again until 5.30pm, making a return to the Penny Farthing pub in Salinas - their watering hole on the 1994 tour where we spent the evening with Joan Fontaine.

After a very short visit it was time to travel to the St Paul's Episcopal Church for the evening performance. A splendid venue indeed, with good acoustics and an impressive organ, which a local organist, John Park, played for *Sanctus* and *Gwahoddiad*. Following a brief rehearsal, it was time to change and prepare for the evening concert. Before a packed audience, they opened the concert at 7.30pm, and were astonished at the response received. For once, it wasn't one of total exhilaration at our performance. The crowd was

dead. Dead quiet that is. Despite feeling slightly disappointed by the lack of thunderous applause, the Choir performed magnificently.

Justine Platts was able to perform in two sections of the concert and Dean Powell was invited to perform the other two, namely *Bring Him Home* in the first half, and *Stars* in the second half. Following the concert they retired once more to the Penny Farthing pub, where many sampled the traditional British food on offer, while socialising with the local clientele and enjoying a relaxed social evening, leaving for the hotels at 12am.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 6

After a quick breakfast in the Denny's Restaurant next door to the hotel, it was time to board the buses by 10am. Contrary to the itinerary, choristers requested that no stop was made in the San Juan Bautista Mission along the way, opting for a straight journey to the hotels instead where they could relax before the final performance. Both coaches were forced to make a stop in their depot just off the 101 Highway heading north to San Francisco, for mechanical work to be carried out.

Driving across the Golden Gate Bridge for the very last time during this tour, choristers checked in at the elaborate Sheraton Four Points Hotel in San Rafael by 2.30pm and enjoyed a quiet afternoon of relaxation by the pool or in the local shopping mall. Back at the hotel, it was time to change before meeting the coaches outside the nearby Chili's Restaurant at 5.30pm and making their way to the impressive Marin Center, 10 minutes' drive away.

This splendid auditorium, with its magnificent acoustics, proved a more than capable venue for their final performance on this enjoyable two-week tour of the western states. Following rehearsals, they retired to the dressing rooms, warned not to venture into the foyer until the crowd had taken their seats, and then lined up back stage. At 8pm the concert began before an audience of approximately 800 people, an enthusiastic crowd who showed such incredible appreciation of the performance that it was only too obvious this would be a memorable final engagement.

The choristers gave of their best, as is always the case, particularly in *Crusader's Chorus*, *Ole' Time Religion*, *March of the Peers*, *Memory* and, of course, *My Way*, which brought them to their feet. Justine's alternative performance of *Can't Help Loving That Man of Mine*, was one of many highlights:

Can't Help Lovin' Those Men From Wales

Oh listen sister, I love my Treorchy men
An I can't tell you why.
Dere ain't no reason, why I should love dese men
It must be somethin dat de angels done plan

The bus is leavin', oh no they're not all there
But they don't seem to care
They're only happy when they've one or two beers

I even loves 'em when they've been on the beer

Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly
I'm gonna love dese men til I die
Can't help lovin dese men from Wales.

I know they're lazy, I know they're slow
I know I'm crazy oh yes I know
Can't help lovin dese men from Wales.

It'll be a rainy day
But if we come back dat day
Be fine de sun will shine.
They can come home as late as can be
A tour without them would've been no tour for me
Cant help lovin dese men from Wales.

Dean was also delighted to perform *Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl* at the end of the first half, and prior to my final bow at the end of the concert, presented Justine Platts with a bouquet of flowers, while Daryl presented a bouquet to Rhiannon as a token of gratitude for their massive contribution to the success of the tour. With another standing ovation, the choristers marched off stage, waving to the crowd of admirers, and returned to the coaches, which took them to the Ross Valley Brewing Company for an end of tour celebratory party. A buffet had been prepared and bar staff were equally as prepared to quench the thirsts of so many dry Welshmen!

At midnight chairman Roger, wearing a bright stars and stripes tie, gave a magnificent 'end of tour' speech, thanking the music staff, tour organisers, bus stewards and soloists, for their contributions towards the success of the Treorchy Male Choir Can-Am Tour 2000. As a token of thanks, he presented Marge and Ed with their gifts and Ed followed the speech with a few words of thanks of his own. Andrew Badham, also gave a short speech, reinforcing his belief that wherever the Choir performs they give 150percent of their best to ensure a successful concert. As a sign of their appreciation, choristers rewarded the Frasers, Andrew and Rhiannon with a standing ovation of their own.

With the formalities over, it was time for the fun to begin as Roger Morse proudly announced the overall winner of the Bing Bong Awards. With a gold plastic medallion attached to a red ribbon in his hand, he called on Roger 'Rocky' Watkins, the Victor Ludorum of the Can-Am Tour 2000. Showing his typical good sportmanship, Roger received the award and was surprised with the second element of the evening, a all-expenses-paid performance by those well-known singers, Los Trios DaRoDe (Daryl - Roger - Dean)!!

Together they had penciled an alternative version of I Left My Heart In San Francisco.

The Ballad Of Rocky

I left my suit back in Eureka
With Strabel's shoes, they linger there
To be in Sunnyvale with me
Oh, it was not to be
The Fed-Ex van couldn't bring them there
I don't care.

I'm in a bar, ha, ha, ha, ha
With Batesies coat and Daryl's shirt.
People think I look a berk
But I am not a jerk
I win awards most every day
Hey hey hey!

While I've been here, I've had an nightmare
Can't use the phone, or count the cash.
I'm claiming medals all trip long
When Daryl calls each Bing and Bong
My German host said 'Don't come back'
That's a fac.....T

Cant use the taps, and life's too fast here
And the beer just makes me ill
I'm coming home to you my Blaenrhondda
Shame my suits not coming too!!!

As the evening steadily drew to a close, choristers gave a hearty applause for Jack Knapgate, who was celebrating his 80th birthday on the following day. With a tear in his eye, Jack performed his solo item, receiving a rapturous applause from his many friends in the choir. It was the end of a memorable evening and an equally as memorable tour.

SATURDAY OCTOBER 7

A short walk to the shopping mall was necessary this morning, where many enjoyed a quiet breakfast before spending the last of those dollars on gifts and memorabilia. Returning to the hotel to finish packing and relax by the pool, the Choir left the Sheraton at 12noon, arriving at San Francisco International Airport just over an hour later. After booking in their luggage, they retired to one of the quiet bars, which remained quiet for only a short while after their arrival. In the true Treorchy spirit of 'letting our hair down', they gave a short concert for our fellow travellers, rounded off with *Star Spangled Banner*, amidst an enthusiastic applause!

Following take-off at 5.25pm it was time to sit back, relax and rekindle fond memories of a two-week visit to Canada and the USA. *Happy Birthday* was performed for Jack, after an announcement by Captain Tom Mellor and for the next 10 hours, prior to landing at Heathrow at 11.30am (GMT), choristers reminisced about the previous fortnight together, a time of fun, laughter and most of all - singing!

The 10th overseas tour was undoubtedly a very successful experience and stood as a testimony to the fact that Treorchy Male Choir remains one of the greatest musical institutions in the world.

The 2000 Can-Am Tour Bing-Gong Awards

**As Collected By The Official Clec Committee of:
Daryl Stacey, Stuart Hill, Gareth Evans And Dean Powell**

**Announced Each Day By
Captain Bing-Bong - Daryl Stacey**

Mention in Dispatches

Bryn Howells - prior to the tour he was using Daryl's mobile phone and made a crude remark after putting the phone down, not realising that it was still turned on

Ivor Lock for giving a perfect example of a Krypton Factor exercise by trying to put the music stand together in Bristol last week

Daryl Stacey for ringing Bryn's house at 3.30am on the morning of departure, telling him it was an early morning call and realising it was the wrong house. Then he almost left Keith Owen behind on the side of the road

Mal Morgan started as he means to go on - by falling asleep within minutes of boarding the choir bus

Dave Bailey for wearing his beach hat during the duration of the trip to Canada

Allan Lewis for knocking on the curtains in the plane to see if he could go into the staff kitchen area

Dean 'Del Boy' Powell for leaning against a wall on the plane, not realising it was the toilet door and falling in

Ivor 'The Engine' Williams for saying 'You have to turn the lights off before you can turn them on' because the switches are difficult to use

Roger 'Rocky Raccoon' Watkins for going to the toilet in the hotel and finding he was out in the corridor and the door locked behind him

Len Gale for trying to use the phone card to get into his room

Rocky Watkins got on the bus in Vancouver and asked for a 'single to the gasworks' when he meant Gastown

Mike Russ for thinking the Steam Clock was on fire.

Rocky Watkins for saying 'Good day sport' until someone reminded him this was Canada and not Australia

Mal Morgan for almost falling asleep on stage

John Hopkins for managing to fix the shower and making it work - shame he was fully clothed when the water came pumping out

Reg Stephens noticed the petrol in Canada was the same price as home - 79.9, but forgetting it was cents not pence

Ceri Rees for saying they had depth charges on the ferry when they were actually life rafts

Ivor Lock took loads of photographs on the ferry and couldn't understand why it wasn't winding on - because there was no film in it

Tony Vaughan bought sunglasses and put them on his head, but the label came off and remained stuck on his forehead for ages

Mike Russ for pointing out that he'd just seen his first cloud of the day. It was a snow capped mountain

Bryn Howells for saying the carol concert in Derby was quite close to Christmas

Justine Platts for sitting down to a full breakfast while the rest of the boys were waiting on the bus

John Hopkins said we have to get off the blunt end of the ship

Jack Knapate said Dan Dailey (David Bailey) had taken his luggage by mistake

Roger Morse for saying he couldn't wait to 'hear' the boys faces when they knew more money had to be paid

Dewi Jones rushed to get his camera to photograph the racoon and said he even saw it's tail, when in fact it was the air conditioning blowing the branches on the tree

Bryn Jones for saying 'Leave the racoon alone, it's not harming anybody'

Justine Platts should be complemented on the way she handled the police siren in the concert which went off as she was about to start singing the Laughing Song

Ivor The Engine walked towards the audience instead of the stage

Dai Coleman for saying the car does 460miles to the gallon

Roger Morse, Leigh Sprague, Keith Owens and Brian Bates for queuing in the line for the \$10 valet parking at the Seattle Space Needle, instead of the box office, which Roger called valetttt parking

Ceri Rees told the boys he enjoyed the burger he had in Cardiff yesterday

Mal Morgan said the Greyhound bus we were on is 40 year old, when in fact the number 1960 above the door is the bus number, not the age

Andrew Badham for forgetting the Star Spangled Banner and Dean's name in the concert

Ivor Lock wanted to know if the ferry was going on the bus

Len Gale knocked Meurig out of bed because he got the wrong room

Dean Powell said he found the microphone in the bus, but in the United States its better known as the seat belt holder

Ron 'The Driver' Collins forgot to get his spare trousers and his wife stopped the bus to hand them over

Gareth 'Gopher' Lawrence drank a glass of water and spat it out immediately because his contact lenses were in it

Daryl Stacey didn't take the plastic cover off his deodorant rollerball and couldn't understand why it wasn't smelling much

Rocky Watkins after being ill is now known as Sickness in Seattle

Dean Powell didn't realise Harry Truman (St Helens occupant) was not the US president

Andy Costin said 27 people died in St Helens but it would have been more if it had been more populated

Gwilym Jones said a \$10 note was found on the floor and he suggested the owners should form a queue to claim it

Stuart Hill - when leaving the house he opened the door and walked right into the broom cupboard

Dai Coleman, while talking about Wales to his hosts he said some sheeps are prettier than other sheeps

Terry Hale said the best thing about being hosted is that you get to stay with people

Rhiannon Williams because the bus got lost when she had to stop in MacDonalds to buy breakfast

Gwilym Jones - when the driver said the Columbian River could be seen from Space, he wouldn't believe him, adding, 'There's no way you can see this from Spain'

Gwilym Jones stayed 50mins off the bus, when it should have been 15

Islwyn Morgan got off the bus and put the driver's coat on instead. It read Greyhound on the front, but Dai Powell misread it and said, 'He isn't even called Graham, he should have known better'

Bryn Jones asked whether the visitors centre in St Helens was built before the explosion.

Rocky Watkins cut a pizza in four pieces and said everyone could have half each

Rocky Watkins was walking in the grounds of his host's house when a neighbour phoned the host to say a strange man was walking around her garden.

Stuart Hill & Gareth Evans - their host was a keen hunter and when he said his friends were now dead they wondered whether he was such a good shot after all

Brian Thomas said the dull town of Eureka was named after someone found a breakfast

Ken Simcox was overheard in the bar talking to the locals, saying he was from Wales and known as Welsh, and Tom Jones lived in Pontyprid but in Welsh it was Pontypridd. He added that some stayed in the histeric hotel.

Ray Tippett telling someone in the bar that him and Wyndham were different from anyone else and nobody understood them

Ivor Lock said Gwyn Morgan was sleeping like Cinderella, when he meant Sleeping Beauty.

Rocky Watkins went into the closet to hang up his coat, didn't read the 'Mind the Step' sign, fell over the step and right into the closet.

Gwilym Jones rang his wife and still had ear plugs in from the timber yard. Keith said Leigh Paige did the same - he meant Leigh Sprague.

Mal Morgan looking at a gang-membered teenager walking across the street, he said "And just think, that's the youth of tomorrow"

Dean Powell for saying three of us could sing a duet together

Rocky Watkins left his suit in Eureka

Ceri Rees wanted his eggs over easier

Geoff Howard said he took pictures of the boys by the Golden Gate Bridge in Sydney

Mike Russ walked into a café, said there was plenty of room for everyone, when he was actually looking in the mirror

Alan Bowen said his host had two cars with number plates of His and Hers - his was his and hers was hers

Derek Langley - a door hit him smack in the face

Dean Powell asked Ed if he'd seduced the audience in Salinas, when he meant sedated

Ray Tippett (who got caught in a wave in Monterey) said there was only one Welsh person in the audience, the others were British

Ivor 'Clock' said Ed & Marge live in Capuccino, he meant Cupertino

BRONZE

Mike Peachy for breaking his false teeth while on the plane. Brian 'The Badger' Thomas said he killed a sheep on the Bwlch last week and if he'd known would have brought its teeth with him!

The Cleck Committee for discussing Bryn Jones' new cap on the Vancouver ferry and breaking into *Where Did You Get That Hat* when a woman, wearing the worst turban ever, gave them a stinking look

Roger Morse found the sold summer raffle tickets in his coat pocket and told us not to tell anybody.

Doug Firstbrook - when he was told he was staying with the coaches he put his luggage on the bus, but that was the name of the couple - Mr and Mrs Coach

Derek Langley cut through a slice of bacon and went right through the china plate as well

Rocky Watkins emptied the 'string' pieces off the pizza slice when it all slid off and left him with just the base

Mike Peachey when he was told we were having a champagne reception he said he couldn't stand the sound of 'porps corking'

Alun Lewis for sitting on the floor in Monterey with a 'Retired' sign in front of him and someone threw him money

SILVER

George Jacob - when a hotel porter offered to help him with his bags he said 'Thank you, can you put it on the early bus please?'

Mal Morgan for falling out of the seat on the public bus and saying he managed to save himself because of all his SAS training.

Mike Peachy - when he saw John Hopkins jump out of the right hand side of his host's car, he wondered whether John was driving it.

Brian Thomas mistook sun tan lotion (water resistant) for shampoo and took 4 showers to wash it out.

Mike Russ opened his hotel window, it fell out and smashed

Ed Fraser said the four men who sang together were the Kingston Trios

Dai Coleman was speaking to an elderly man in a concert and said 'You must have been in America for a long time', and then answered 'Yes, I was born here'

GOLD

Gareth 'Goffer' Lawrence for psyching himself up in the restroom toilet before a concert and being watched at the same time by Rocky Watkins - saying the words 'Go for it Gareth, Go for it'

Alwyn Lewis threw his case in the boot of his host's car and smashed the sound system

Rocky Watkins - when his host asked him whether he'd been to Germany, Rocky said, 'No way, we hate the Germans'. The host answered, 'Well there's a shame, my father's from Berlin'

Brian Thomas - about 30seconds after his host said her mother was 89, he started to talk about euthanasia

Gwilym Jones didn't like the burger he was eating because there was a serviette in it!

Overall Award Winner - Roger 'Rocky' Watkins