

Newquay MVC working with Treviglas Community College

Report on a project to encourage & develop Male Voice Choir singing in a Cornish Secondary School (as at January 2009).

Context:

Newquay Male Voice Choir (NMVC) made offers to support local schools and followed up verbal interest from the music department of Treviglas Community College (TCC), a maintained 11-19 secondary school based in Newquay. A short planning meeting consisting of choir representatives with Management Staff, & members of the music staff led to agreement about ways in which choir members could help to establish an after-school male choral club. (N.B. TCC were planning a musical production "Grease" for the spring term 2009 and one reason for their interest was that they wanted to ensure sufficient male choristers with enough confidence to make the production work). As a result, in September 2008, members of NMVC were invited to attend TCC to support a "twilight session" club (4.00 to 5.00pm on Thursday afternoons).

"What happened was"

In the first week, 12 to 14 members of the choir attended and were joined by a similar number of students (mainly 6th Form musicians). Numbers have fluctuated since. A very able and enthusiastic, young, part-time member of the teaching staff (Mr Glen Graham) agreed to run the club and he was supported by the Head of Music for the 1st week or two and, later in the term, other musically-minded staff joined us and offered keyboard support. One of the care-taking staff also attended regularly and, having enjoyed the experience, he has since also attended NMVC weekly practices ("been meaning to come along to NMVC for ages"). Also attending the TCC club sessions has been a Year 10 (15 year old) lad who asked especially to come because he really enjoys singing. This young man also asked if he could attend the weekly NMVC practice and has attended regularly during the Autumn term (transport support provided by mum who is delighted with the choir's friendly approach).

Weekly sessions have been well planned by Glen and we have sung a range of songs including sea-shanties like "Pay me my money down" and "Deep blue sea" and also "Da do ron ron". Glen has also arranged one or two modern songs like the Rihanna-hit "Take a bow" & "Only you" and, with a focus on Christmas, carols such as "Good King Wenceslas" and the "12 days of Christmas" with male voice parts and arrangements. Most music has come from duplicated sheets supplied from a "Copyright-free" source but many of these songs have had to be re-arranged into 3 parts, so the overall choral sound appears rounded and balanced and fits comfortably within the choristers' natural range. With the music being sung in 3 parts, (not surprisingly top, middle and bottom!) all voices were separated roughly into these three parts, on the basis of where they felt most comfortable. This "split" into parts took place after week 2 when those attending were starting to sing with a little more confidence.

After about 6 weeks practice, the new "Treviglas Male Voice Choir" (TMVC) including the older "support team" sang in public for the first time, when

they were invited to provide a musical interlude as part a presentation morning at the College. With an audience of other Treviglas students, staff and governors, they performed "Pay me my money down". A few more weeks of rehearsal and the choir were asked to represent the college to a 'standing room only' audience of parents and students from schools throughout Newquay, at the annual "Churches together in Newquay" School Christmas Show at St Michael's Church. The enthusiastic ovation which the choir received, encouraged them to take a leading part in the Treviglas Annual Christmas Concert in the week before the end of Christmas term - again to a very large, diverse & enthusiastic audience.

Overall, I am told that the project has had a considerable impact already. "Grease" has been enthusiastically embraced by both male & female students who wish to sing & perform on stage and the NMVC members who have helped with the choir will receive complimentary tickets to attend one of the performance dates. Later this (spring) term we will be re-starting the club sessions with 6th form and younger would-be choristers and the TMVC will be invited to perform as "Guest Artists" on one or two of our forthcoming NMVC concert programmes.

Relevant background key dates for Newquay MVC:

Nov 2004: Choir AGM: Choir accepts need to increase membership & reduce average age of members. Enthusiasm to work with schools expressed. Community liaison officer established.

Dec 2004: Letter to 2 Secondary & 14 Primary School Heads. *2 Responses*

Apr 2005: International Festival Symposium (Truro) "The future of Male Voice Singing - Attracting younger members"

Summer 2005: Questionnaire for members about future of NMV Choir

Nov 2005: Questionnaire results analysis to AGM produces "Future Committee"

Apr 2006: Future Committee report to Choir Committee + recommendations

Oct 2006: Letter (all 16 local schools & youth groups) - Logo request & offers of choral help & support. *0 Responses.*

Mar 2007: Morning Assembly singalong at Goonhavern CP School.

2007-2008: "The Choir" TV programme about male school choirs

May 2008: Agreement to support a Male Choir Club at Treviglas from Sept 2008. I hour/week after school

Summer 2008: "Last Choir Standing" programme encourages young male choirs

Sep 2008: After School Club established with 6th Form

Main Recommendations:

- 1.** Key Message: **"It's cool to sing."**
- 2.** Don't expect instant +ve response from just a letter - **hot contacts best**
- 3.** **Understand school resource implications** - room, transport, staffing
- 4.** Importance of School "ownership" (School **music team involvement** critical)
- 5.** **Songs must be "Fun", "smily", "acceptable", "age-sensitive", "with it"**
- 6.** Need for real patience - **take it very, very slowly**
- 7.** Encourage **start involving key** (older, positive "role-model") **individuals**
- 8.** Let lads see your concert - **give free tickets + plan to involve them**
- 9.** **Gently involve school staff** - experience concert - free tickets
- 10.** Chorister help essential - gentle background **"we're learning too"** support preferably with 2-3 choristers per section (unless really confident)
- 11.** Need to support each other, esp. music (**3-part arrangement sharing**)

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