



Singing for Fun



Judy Sansom: Northampton U3A

A definition of singing, according to the Chambers Dictionary is: 'The utterance of melodious sounds in musical succession to emit more or less songlike sounds'.

The words 'more or less' are important here! On arrival at Holy Trinity church hall, people could be heard saying: 'I can't sing but I like singing'. And this was the reason for holding the session – to accommodate those amongst us who love to sing but who couldn't or wouldn't join a choir.

Let's return to the beginning. About three years ago, a few U3A members requested a singing group for enthusiasts who couldn't sing well but just enjoyed having a go. From this, a small monthly group of seven was formed, meeting in the piano-playing leader's home, singing songs from the 20s and 30s and researching songwriters of the time.

We were greatly helped by the enthusiasm and huge knowledge of our leader's husband, a talented jazz musician. Subsequently, more people expressed an interest but we were limited by the size of our leader's front room.

And so it was that we decided to hold a Sing-along, hosted by the small group but held in a church hall. Hopefully from this, someone would be moved to start a second group. Well it was a success; 25 people travelled musically through England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, singing songs remembered from school days. We discovered we could no longer hit the high notes but it didn't matter because we were singing for the sheer fun of it. Melodious or not, we had a brilliant morning and everyone left smiling.

From that first Sing-along, a thriving new monthly session has grown with 50-plus members on the register. Somehow I became the leader – a non musician with a growing library of

Evolution of a group

song books and sheet music. Our programme has developed and we sing a mixture of traditional, popular, mostly from the 40s, 50s & 60s, silly songs and songs from the shows.

We sometimes do a small amount of low grade work on a song to improve our rendition but NEVER anything threatening like 'singing on your own'. I do a little bit of research about each song so that we can learn something on the way. My spouting also gives time for a sit down and a chance to get breath back between songs. To include those not able to make a regular commitment, we also hold three "Big Sings" throughout the year and one at Christmas.

We've developed in other ways too. Our two pianists are now augmented by a guitar group, an accordion player and an up-and-coming beginners ukulele group, courtesy of the brilliant U3A. We've also bought a range of un-tuned percussion for the singers to let rip on. So, do we perform? Are we part of a Performing Arts group? In the strict sense of the word the answer has to be no, but we perform for our own pleasure and we are our audience and my goodness, how that audience has grown along with our confidence.

We are all-inclusive: growlers and the tone deaf, people who can sing and those who can't, all are equally welcome. The most important thing is that we have fun. We leave every session with springs in our step and smiles on our faces. And that is the reason for our success – the fact that the whole thing is low key with no pressure to be up to performance standard. And success breeds success. Not being musical is no excuse for not singing. Minimum requirement: a pianist and heaps of enthusiasm.

P.S. Sshh! I'm planning a bit of a sing at our Members' Day later this year – our first performance. I think we're ready!