

CORO GALIANO MEMOIR

John Coulthard, 2023

It began in the fall of 2004 and the Conductor was Peter Dent. But there was a prehistory - In the years before that Gloria Soroka organized a group of singers, mainly to sing sing-a-long tunes in unison or with some harmony if individuals could do it. Then Jackie Bowers took it on for a season culminating in our participation in the spring of 2004 at the Galiano Variety Show with real harmony.

Peter and his wife Dorothy had moved to Galiano and lived on the other side of Whaler Bay. He was an experienced choir conductor and was very interested in having a choir to conduct. Jackie was willing to step aside. Peter introduced us to "serious music". There was no audition and the requirement to read sheet music was not onerous. So I decided to attend the fall session and see how it went.

As I recall the first rehearsal I was the only bass person there, but Peter said, "don't worry - I'll sing the bass part with you". Soon I was joined by Dave Clothier, Marek Czuma and Dave Parent. Dave Clothier was a very experienced singer and also acted as an associate conductor.

The Galiano Variety Show in the fall of 2004 was the first public performance for our new choir, temporarily called "The Whaler Bay Choir". A real name was to be chosen at our first pot luck party after we finished our performance. Jackie Bowers came up with the name "Coro Galiano".

I originally learned music from my father at about the age of 10. He played a plectrum banjo (4 string banjo) with friends in our family room. They played mostly world war II songs. The first song I ever learned was "Ain't She Sweet". I was raised in Edmonton, Alberta but came to UBC for my post secondary training. I stayed in a residence at that time. I brought the banjo with me and a small group of us would jam together in the residence common room on Sunday afternoons - mostly popular WW II songs. We had a Trumpet player, trombone player, drummer, piano player and me on the banjo. I also learned how to play a guitar at that time. One summer as well as working I took a course called "How to play popular music on a piano". This taught me how to play simple piano music from a "fake book". A fake book presents the music as a melody staff with lyrics below the staff and chords above. One plays the melody with the right hand and the chords with the left hand.

Later on in life Eleanor and I sang old time songs for seniors in senior homes.

My profession was a computer programmer/analyst/manager type person. I was frustrated trying to play the music we were singing on the piano - I just wasn't good enough a piano player. Most of the music we were singing with Peter Dent was long out of copyright and computer renditions of the music were available on the Internet, but not all of them. So it was a natural fit to start entering the other music into the computer for playback. I also had the background skills to maintain a website so putting the rehearsal music up on the Internet for others to use was straight forward. I also made it available on CD's.

One of our choir members, Ann Duncan, had a husband, Wally Duncan who had a reel to reel tape recorder. Wally recorded our performances for quite a few years with that setup. I copied them over to my computer, put them up on the Internet and made many CD's for choir members their families and some of our audience.

As the years passed by I migrated to using a laptop computer to record the concerts then the compact Zoom recorder I use now.

All of the concerts I managed to capture (which are most) are up on our Google Drive account and can be played by following the link at the bottom of our concerts page at www.corogaliano.ca .

I owe a great thanks to Peter Dent for introducing me to serious choral singing and also to the wonderful musical travel tours he conducted over the years. One of the peak events was to be able to sing the Faure Requiem as part of a 200 voice choir at Carnegie Hall. We have wonderful memories of singing in Europe and many many trips to Cuba to sing Pop and Folk music.

Peter and Dorothy moved to Victoria in about 2013. Fortunately, Suzanne Laughlin stepped into the conductor gap for several years until Pat Pilat appeared on the scene about 2016.

Our first accompanist was Jean Pletz who played for us until about 2007 and was replaced by Will Guthrie who stayed with us until about 2017.