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THE CURRAGH MALE VOICE CHOIR

THE EARLY YEARS - 1958-1962

By Michael Kelly

The **Curragh Male Voice Choir** was formed originally in **1958**. It consisted of both a **Boy's** and **Men** Section, and all living in the **Curragh Camp**. Previous to this, there was a very good Girls Choir who were taught by the Church Organist **Miss O'Callaghan**, from **Brownstown**.

The auditions were held in the **Band Hall**, in **McDonagh Barracks**. The Conductor was **Mrs. Maura Butler**, who was the Wife of **Comdt. Des Butler**, who was serving in the Depot Signals Corps, in **Ceannt Barracks**. She was a very dedicated, hard-working and patient Lady, and above all a perfectionist, who devoted a lot of her time to the teaching of the Choir. The Choir was formed for the Opening of the **New Church** in the **Curragh Camp**.

In the early days, the **Choir Practice** was held in the **Band Hall**, but after a while, it was moved to one of the Classrooms in Depot Signals, **Ceannt Barracks**. The Practice was held each **Monday** at **6pm** for the Boys, and **7.30pm** for the Men. There was in excess of **50** Boys in the Choir and approximately **20** in the Men's Section around that time.

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The Boy's names in the Choir were as follows:-

Don McGrath, Seamus Cambell, Tony Dwyer, Peter Delahunt, Tony McGrath, Phil McGrath(R.I.P), Vincent Culllen, Eddie Stone, Seamus Power, Charlie O'Neill, Junior Tyrell, Des Flynn, Michael Kelly, Donal Douglas, Finbar Sheehan, Michael Lydon, Michael Quinn(R.I.P), Michael McHale, Tony Power, Christy O'Neill, Dick Keogh, Tommy McHale, Arthur Farrell, Gus Reilly, Dominic Heavey, Seamus Murphy ,Tony Curran, James Dillon, Sean O'Shea, Paddy Phillips, Frankie O'Leary(R.I.P), Michael Power, Philip Tucker, George O'Neill(R.I.P), Christy Coyne ,Eddie Dillon, Raymond O'Leary, Joe Donohue, Noel O'Connell, Andy Hayes, Pat Sweeney, Sean Quinn Billy Mullery(R.I.P), Dermott Clossehy ,Michael Campbell, Marty O'Brien, Joey Quinn, Peter McGlynn, Pat Hayes, Sean Callaghan, Johnny Reddy, Sean Curran, Charlie McAlister, and Don McAlister.

And The Men's Section was as follows:-

Matty Roche,Gerry McCutcheon, Christy Kearney,James(Jemser) Farrell, Sean McAlister,Joe Fahy,Chubby Geary,Maxie McLoughlin,Jim Campion,Bobby Moore,John Mullins,Jim Keogh,John Finnegan,Jim Clossehy,Des Hogan, J.O'Brien, M.O'Brien and a Capt.McMahon. And sadly by now, most of the Men have sadly passed away and gone to their eternal rest . May all the deceased members Rest in Peace !

The first 2 Hymns that we learned were "**Ave Maria**", and "**Cor Jesu**".

And our first performance was in the **Old Church** in **O'Higgins Road**. It was on the **7th October 1958**, and it was the "**Feast of our Lady of the Rosary**" It was traditionally honoured by the **Military**, and a Church Parade was always held . The Organist was **Miss O'Callaghan** . We sang again on the same date, the following year . The New Church - **St. Brigid's**, was scheduled to be officially opened and **Consecrated** in **November 1959** .

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And for that occasion , Mrs. Butler selected "**The Mass of St. John the Baptist**" for the Choir . It was in **Latin**, and in **4-Part Harmony**, - **Soprano** and **Alto** for the Boys, and **Tenor** and **Bass** for the Men. We would have also learned the "**Laudate Dominum**", "**Ave Verum**" and "**Ecce Panis Angelorum**" and "**O Sanctissima**" for the occasion . It was a huge undertaking and challenge for her, as she had to teach each of the 4 Parts individually . We Rehearsed quite a lot leading up to the Opening of the Church . Prior to the opening of the new Church, there was a **Concert** held there, featuring some of the top Classical Singers in Ireland , among them Louis Fitzgibbon, Mary Sheridan, Othmar Remy Arthur , and Martin Dempsey. And all the Seats in the Church were turned round facing the Balcony for the occasion My late **Father - John**, (R.I.P), brought me along to see it , and I remember it well .

Our Church uniform consisted of a White Surplice and Red Soutane . The Surplice was made to measure by the Late **Mrs. Maureen McNamara** (R.I.P), (The Mother of the Site Administrator - **Matt McNamara**). She was always kept very busy, as she had to make them for the Altar Servers as well . She was a very hard-working lady, and her standard of work was always first-class . The Soutane's however, were supplied for us . The Church was **Consecrated** and Officially opened by the Late Bishop **Thomas Keogh**,(R.I.P) in **November 1959** . And the Organist for the occasion was the late **Comdt. Denis Mellerick** (R.I.P) .

The Choir would sing at the 11 o'clock Mass on most Sunday's, and those of us who were members of the Altar Boy's would maybe have to serve the 8 o'clock Mass on Sunday morning, and would have to sing with the Choir at 11 o'clock and again for the Rosary and Benediction on Sunday night . And during Lent, we would have the Rosary and Benediction on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, and the Station's of the Cross on the Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and for the Stations, we learned the "**Stabat Mater**", and the Choir

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would be required to sing at each of these ceremonies . So that would have served to keep us out of harm's way !.

Mrs. Butler entered the **Boys Choir** for the **Feis Ceoil Choral Competition** in 1960, which was held in the **Metropolitan Hall, Abbey St., Dublin** . And the 2 Songs that were chosen were "**The Dream Seller**", and "**Within an Old Fashioned Garden**" . There was a lot of Rehearsals prior to the Competition. And we wore a uniform of White Shirt, Grey Slacks and Green Tie for the occasion . We finished **Runner-Up** to the **O'Connell School** , for which there was a **Silver Medal** awarded . We were all very happy with the result, and to mark the occasion, **Fr. Boylan (R.I.P)** treated us all to the Cinema that afternoon . We went to see a **Film** called "**Sink the Bismarck**" in the **Ambassador Cinema** at the top of **O'Connell Street**. Both the Choir and the Altar Servers used go on a **Day's Outing** each year . I remember visiting the **Dublin Zoo, Portmarnock** and I think **Brittas Bay** . It was always enjoyable . The **Men's Section** of the Choir entered the **Cork Choral Festival**, and they performed really well, and I think that they may have won in their category ? And I think the song which they sang may have been "**Whispering Hope**" ?? We also learned a song called "**The Soldiers Chorus**". We had a **Christmas Party** each year, which was held in the Main Hospital. Which was organised by the late **Mick Cronin (R.I.P)** . And I remember the late **Fr. Brophy(R.I.P)**, who would always give us his rousing rendition of the Song - "**Jerusalem**" at each of them . And on one of the years, the Late **Fr. Rougeot (R.I.P)** was Ill in the **Curragh Hospital**, and Mrs. Butler brought us up to sing for him .

Telefis Eireann started Transmitting on **New Year's Eve, 1961** . And one of the most popular programmes on it was "**The School Around the Corner**", which was presented by the Late **Paddy Crosby (R.I.P)** . It was previously a **Radio** programme . In early 1962, a **Recording** was made in **Plunkett Dining Hall** , and

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to be Broadcast later . There would be 4 children selected to appear in each programme . One of the Choir members - I think that it was **John O'Shea** was selected as one of them , and it was customary that each of them would sing . But he opted to let the Choir Sing in his place . And we sang "**The Happy Wanderer**" . It was Broadcast on **RTE** on **Easter Sunday** night, **1962** . And with the passing of years, the first member of the Boys section whose Voice- broke was **Noel O'Connell**, and next I think was **Pat Hayes** .

I left the Choir in **August 1962** to join the Army Apprentice School, as did Andy Hayes, Johnny Reddy and Eddie Dillon and Peter McGlynn who joined the Air Corps and also Charlie O'Neill, and the late George O'Neill (R.I.P), who joined the Army School of Music. And among others who left around that time were Joey Quinn, and Phil McGrath (R.I.P) . My 3 Brothers - Frank, Ger and Brendan joined the Choir in later years .

I remember going to see the Choir perform at a **Christmas Concert** in the **Girl's National School** in **December 1968** and at which they sang "**The Halleluiah Chorus**", and "**Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring**", together with the **Curragh Army Band** . It was an excellent performance , and it was amazing to see how far the Choir had progressed from the early years .

I have recalled all of the above from memory . And it just covers the early-years from **1958-1962** . And apologies to anyone who I may have inadvertently failed to mention . And if anyone wishes to add anything further of interest regarding the Choir, please feel free to do so . I really enjoyed my time as a member of the Choir . The **Curragh Community** generally owe a great debt of gratitude to **Mrs. Maura Butler** for all her hard work and dedication and professionalism which she displayed in her time as **Conductor** of the Choir . And we the Choir members in turn are grateful to her for giving us an interest in Music at such an early

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age . She was sadly missed when they moved to **Sligo** . And most of all, we the choir members, owe a great deal of gratitude to our **Parents** for giving us the encouragement to join the Choir initially and also ensuring that we attended both the Choir Practice's and also the Religious ceremonies when required . It can't have been easy on them to do so.

And in conclusion, It is good to see that there has always been a Choir in Place in the **Curragh Church** down through the years, and that the present **Choir** is maintaining the strong tradition as is evidenced at the Annual **Vigil Mass** each **Christmas Eve** .

A special thanks to **Michael Kelly** for sharing his wonderful memories of his time with **The Curragh Male Voice Choir**.

Matt