

## BETTY KING & THE SONGSTERS



Betty King grew up with the sound of music. Her parents sang in light opera and musicals before WW2. Betty showed potential as a little girl, singing solo items while still at school. She gravitated to choirs and sang solo roles in choral productions and The Messiah. Betty studied piano and singing. She competed in and won many competitions as her talents were honed to the professional artist she became.

Betty married Colin King after his RAAF service in WW2. Col had a good singing voice, together they provided pleasure for everyone who had opportunity to listen to their performances. Naturally they encouraged their two daughters' musical interests. Sandy and Julie are skilled musicians and now there are grandchildren embracing music as career paths.

No wonder The Village benefited so greatly from Betty's talents and expertise when she and her beloved husband Col became residents in 1999. The Millennium New Year party was the first venue where residents became aware of this gifted pair. The nucleus of Betty's choir, then The Village Singers performed ably on that occasion too. Betty saw a future for these singers—some had never even realized their potential! She was ably assisted by another new 1999 resident Jill (Ford) Johnston who became the Songsters accompanist and musical director; followed by Jean Byrnes, set and screen designer; Daphne Davis, script writer and stage manager; and Jeanne Thompson; costume designer and wardrobe mistress.



Serious rehearsals began in 2000. The Keperra Songsters were named and presented the most memorable concerts Village residents remember. The Songsters entertained at 'Birthday Dinners' through the next four years. Long-time residents will remember a Birthday dinner in October 2000 when the Songsters entertained and Betty and Col and the chorus performed a hilarious rendition of 'Antonia' turning serious opera into rib tickling comedy. The audience went wild! They were the 'music' in some of the riotously funny concerts that Hostel Chef Rick produced in the heady days of our 'do-it-yourself' entertainment.



In November 2001 The Resident's Committee (president Jean Byrnes) invited the Governor and his wife Mrs. Barbara Arnison to the Village for the November Dinner. The Keperra Songsters practiced until they were absolutely 'perfect' for the entertainment on that important occasion. One of Brisbane most spectacular summer storms hit the north western suburbs at precisely the time the Governor was to leave Government House. The storm flooded and damaged the Walton Creek Bridge to the extent it was un-trafficable

and their arrival was delayed by more than an hour. Imagine the poor caterers with their special menu spoiling! The Governor and Mrs Arnison enjoyed dining with the residents and were most generous with the time they spent moving around and talking to everyone—but most sadly other vice regal commitments

necessitated their departure before the Keperra Singers could perform! It was devastating for Betty and the Songsters after all the hours of practice they had done.

Betty's success was discipline and the passion she was able to imbue in her singers. Betty demanded perfect pitch and tone. "No! No! NO!" Her baton would rap loudly on the music stand. The singers grumbled and growled at times but persevered and the result was outstanding. There were more than thirty singers including seven strong male voices performing under Betty's baton.



Who can forget "Travel & Song - 2002" ([Click here for Video](#)), and "Songs from the Shows" - 2003" ([Click here for Video](#)) in which The Songsters presented excerpts from "South Pacific", memorable settings and costumed items from "The Mikado", the Duo of Gendarmes, Col and John Thompson and famously the Keperra Marching Girls in St. Trinian style uniforms which brought the house down. This incredible band of beauties (?) went on to preform 'outside' such was their entertainment value. And a rousing chorus of Stout Hearted Men" called for encores from the audience. Dorothy Jenkinson's husband Graham was the compere for these star studded nights, always gracious, witty and a true master of ceremony.

In July 2004 "The Gathering of the Clans" was resplendent with a 'tilt o' kilt an' all.' The male chorus rendition of the Skye Boat Song was a fine performance indeed. Col King the senior Songster proved that 'if you use it, you don't lose it,' his voice was strong and true as he sang 'I'll Go Home with Bonnie Jean' and 'Westering Home.' Bev Luke wriggled and giggled as she and John Thompson sang 'Stop Your Tickling Jock.' The Songsters' long hours of dedication to practice resulted in total enjoyment for the audience on that memorable night. Betty's leadership and her role as choir mistress as always was exemplary.



Alas, good things don't go on forever. At the celebratory supper after this show Betty paid tribute to the many people who contributed to the success of the Songsters. The arduous responsibility of aiming for the best from her singers and for the audiences was taking its toll. With great grace and regret Betty announced her resignation from the Keperra Songsters.



Betty and Col were highly regarded always, for their contribution to Village life. They supported functions and events, they were active in their church life and the Village Ecumenical Church. Then health problems began to curtail their activities. The Village mourned with Betty and her family when Col died. Betty became frail and moved to the Hostel in April 2013, but was still able to regularly beat me when we played Cribbage on Saturday afternoons. Betty is a much loved gracious lady.

Searching through The Village Songsters' stories in the old Newsletters, remembering the highlights of Betty's life in the Village and reminiscing with her has been a pleasure. It is a privilege to be allowed to present this tiny glimpse into Betty's life, a lady who brought much joy and happiness to our Village.

John Thompson