**Semi-structured interview**

**Date: 12/06/22**

**Signature of researcher: JL**

**Name of participant: Jimothy (Head Chorister)**

**Interviewer**: Briefly tell me about your choral singing experiences.

**Jimothy:** So, it began in my primary school where I was **declined to join the choir in Grade Three**. I **could not match pitch,** I could not sing a note, and I didn’t have a voice. At that time, I picked **an instrument, the flute**, cause at that time I still had a **love and passion for music**, and I continued learning and working but every year I came back (to choir auditions) and still got declined to be a part of the choir. **Grade Five came along and I got declined in the beginning but then I went back again and then they ended up taking me, and so I got into the choir**. **All my years of playing the flute and doing music at that time, I developed singing and the pitching of notes subconsciously without thought essentially.** I was very excited to join the choir in Grade Five which was very interesting because I have never sung in a choir before that. All the **music was fun to learn**, and I was exposed to new artists. In **Grade Seven I received the chorister award at my school and that inspired me to continue pushing on and that no matter what you do in the beginning and no matter what people say, doesn’t mean that it would be the outcome for the rest of your life** and then I came on to join the choir **(Kearsney College Choir) in Grade Eight**. I was one of three that went on tour to the World Choir Games in 2018 where we performed well and really left our hearts on the stage no matter the outcome. It was really an **amazing space** and being in an unfamiliar environment of high school and all these barriers and still going on tour and still **breaking the barriers**. Normally the **tours** are international, but that year it was in South Africa, but still getting the opportunity to go with the choir was wow, it was **amazing**. Even though I was the smallest there carrying the biggest box, it was an amazing experience. Since then, I have grown in the choir, seeing changes happen in the choir, from conductors to leaders to people to people leaving and being exposed to new things through different people. For me being in the choir, even though I am not the most musical and not the most “dancy” and not being most of the things, b**eing exposed to those things inspired me to grow and to work towards being better growing myself**. Honestly, it is amazing to see myself being in Matric now where it is like the final stretch, final tour, final experience, and I’m not sure what the future holds, but if it were up to me, I would still **stay singing in the choir.**

**Interviewer**: So, you obviously, through Covid and all the changes in the choir, you remained passionate about it?

**Jimothy:** Yes. Many people left the choir during that time as well.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think people leave choir? Is it academic stress?

**Jimothy:** Some people leave choir because of academic stress. I think also sometimes that parents force the boys to be in the choir and then those boys end up not wanting to be there. Sometimes it (the choir) grows on people, and they eventually end up staying. There are a few that do not want to be in the choir, and it is hard to force someone to do it if they do not want to do it. It then turns out that they end up bringing the choir down because their attitude is that they do not want to be here.

**Interviewer:** This is interesting to me. I do not know if you saw it, but I observed one performance with the MSU, and I observed your rehearsal last week, and the choir is focused and quiet throughout the rehearsals most of the time. As the rehearsals went on people started talking more, but in the beginning, you guys were quiet and focused, and you could hear through the sound that you concentrate a lot. That is impressive. Explain your initial reasons for wanting to join the Kearsney College Choir. The name, Kearsney College Choir, why did you want to join this choir in the first place? Did you know that there was a certain standard for this choir? Did you know that before you came into the choir?

**Jimothy**: ***The first time I came for an open day, then the choir performed, and I saw the lights, I saw those red gumboots and I saw the dancing and I saw the oneness and I said I am going to join that choir, and this is the school I am coming to.***

**Interviewer:** What made you join? When you were seeing the choir for the first time, what made you decide that I want to be there?

**Jimothy:** I have **never seen a choir that incorporated gumboots** with their works, I have **never seen a choir do folklore music** because a lot of the choirs in primary schools do pop songs and contemporary types of things, but I hadn’t seen folklore. It is also a very good touch into **South African roots**, I mean t**his is South Africa, so for a choir to be able to do that while still doing pop and all those things, just wow, it inspired me a lot**.

**Interviewer:** What are some of the highlights of being a member of this choir for you?

**Jimothy:** For me, the **2018 World Choir Games**. I would say being able to **make the videos** we have made, “The World is Ours”, to be able to create that video and the message that was sent through that video. I **enjoyed the process of the choir**. **I have taught myself to play the bass guitar because of the choir**. I did the bass in the video, I was in Grade 10 and recorded it in the studio, so **growing myself musically I would say is a very big milestone.**

**Interviewer:** Did you guys tour? Have you gone overseas with the choir before?

**Jimothy:** We were due to go in 2020, but this year will be my first time.

**Interviewer:** How are you feeling? How does it feel to go overseas?

**Jimothy:** I am excited, I am not going to lie to you. We were due to go to South Korea, but then it (the World Choir Games) got cancelled, but now we are **going to Austria**.

**Interviewer**: The next question I would really like you to explain to me in detail. How does choral singing make you feel? Once you stand between your mates. Let's say, you are performing at World Choir Games in 2018, you are standing on that stage with your friends, you see the conductor, you see people watching you, how did the experience feel for you? How did it feel when the first notes came out of your mouth? And the sound of the choir? How does that make you feel, even in a rehearsal?

**Jimothy:** I am going to relate it to sports. The same way a team does when they're on that field winning and representing a country or a school, there's that **same way I feel whenever I am singing in a choir**. That **oneness**, and all the hard work, the training, learning techniques and movements, everything coming to one for that one performance, it is just amazing. **We see all our hard work, time, dedication, and selected individuals who are singing solos, dancing, and playing an instrument**. We see all that talent on that stage and **we all just pour it out that stage for the audience**. When **we walk off, we all smile**, we are all **happy** essentially. Because we know what we just did, we left our hearts on that stage. It is essentially us becoming one individual performing for whoever was performing for. **It just gets your heart pumping, your head sweating, your arms fidgeting** but we cannot move them because we are all standing there still. It gets your toes curling. It is almost like **an indescribable feeling**. It **gets you fired up**.

**Interviewer:** Do you have friends in the choir? How important are these friendships to you in this school?

**Jimothy**: I do have friends in the choir and **the strongest friendships I have made, and the most meaningful friendships I have made have been friends I have made in the choir**. I feel that **we have a common ground**. We **started the friendships in Grade Eight and those I would say are the closest friendships. From there, it has grown**. In Grade Eight we were all new, we were all young, we were all fresh and seeing someone I could talk to, or even someone coming to me, at that time I was a shy little Grade Eight and as the years go by, making other friends and being in a senior position, we make friends with the juniors. During the last c**hoir camp, we played a touch rugby game, seniors and juniors intermixed, and obviously, that left an impression**. That left us all happy and smiling and it is not something you would do on a normal school day, because on a normal school day you have your bags, juniors are greeting you, you going to write or whatever is happening at that moment. **The friendships in the choir mean so much more than the friendships around the school.**

**Interviewer:** Based on the question I just asked you, do the members of this choir share a unique brotherhood separate from the rest of the school?

**Jimothy:** Yes, we do. **The things that happen in the choir, don’t happen anywhere else**. The things that are said in choir, are not said anywhere else. **There are unique things that happen and unique nuggets that get dropped, unique moments, you either end up joking about them or laughing about them, talking about them, thinking about them, singing about them, dancing about them afterward, but other people wouldn't get that experience.** It is very particular to the choir and very specific and I wouldn’t say anything else is like it.

**Interviewer:** Do you think singing in a choir can bring diverse cultures together? If so how, and if not, why do you think that is? Do you think the choir has a way of bringing a Zulu-speaking student and an Afrikaans-speaking student together? Does it have a way of integrating?

**Jimothy:** Yes, it does. **The music that we do is very diverse. From folklore to a German song, and an Austrian song, we touched on songs from different areas**. Earlier on we did an Afrikaans song and at Carol Services we did Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa songs but we touched on songs from different cultures. **It is interesting to see but you don’t usually see a white person singing a Zulu song, or a black person singing an Afrikaans song, I know this is generalizing, but it is not very common.** They are out there, but it isn’t as common. In moments like that, it is interesting to see. For example, **when MSU came**, they **started singing and did very well! I was honestly surprised.** All the clicks that were coming out were clean. Obviously, some people struggled a bit more than others, some people struggled with the movements, but they tried. They try and work to get it to the best of their ability and that’s the thing. We were even talking about it afterward and we were like that was amazing. **This builds relationships and friendships.**

**Interviewer:** How do you personally experience the cultural integration in the Kearsney Choir? You can be honest about this question.

**Jimothy:** That’s an interesting one [laughs]. **I would say they come together in the form of conversation and relationships that you make**. If I go out there talking to someone I would be like “oh you're a different religion, race, different culture, and belief”. **You learn more and ask questions and be intrigued by your peers**. **I am a very understanding person, so when I find out that someone is Hindu, I ask them what they do**. There are Muslims that are different from Hindus and obviously Christianity and Atheists. **It is interesting to see the different beliefs and cultures, and it is important to ask questions**, especially **today where people are being more vocal and particular about it [diversity of cultures],** it is interesting to see what they go through and what they do and say, etc. **The struggle is also a very big things like the Black Lives Matter movement and just people of color in general**. Just having conversations about it is interesting, like when I went to America [the United States as an exchange student] I met people from different parts of Africa, and it was interesting to see their airport journey. Some people got stopped more than others based on their looks. Some people got spoken to and searched, but things like that shouldn't happen. To bring that back to **choir and Kearsney, being able to make those relations and getting closer to people and getting to know everybody on that type of basis is good.**

**Interviewer:** Could you explain what you value most as a choir member in this choir?

**Jimothy: I value the relationships that I made and continue to make. I also value the music we sing, as a music and art student, music is an important part of my life.** It has pushed me far. Those are the two main things.

**Interviewer:** Have you experienced personal negativity because of singing in a choir? In choir overall.

**Jimothy:** **With being the leader, yes**. There are a lot of expectations and there are a lot of things that people want me to do, people want me to say, people want me to fulfill. At the end of the day, there are only certain things that can be done. There is a certain amount a person can do and what a person can say. But it hasn’t been something that isn’t workable. If someone would come up to me and say ja, can you fix this or do this, I would let them know why we do it in a different way or I would consider it and I would think about it. If it is something of **value that we can change or I as a person can change or change in the system in the way that I discipline, or speak, then it could be rectified in change.**

**Interviewer:** What are some of the benefits of singing in a choir for you? What do you gain? What do you learn? You can think beyond.

**Jimothy:** **I've learned that individually you may be strong, but to get together you are even stronger**. I may be the best soloist, I may be Beyonce, but if I'm **singing in a choir, all the voices create something greater and stronger**. **Even if you aren’t the strongest, or the most confident singer or dancer, we are all there, we help you** in the dorms. There was this one time when I started at the last choir camp, we had learned some complex gumboot thing, I was just walking around, and I heard someone practicing it. I walked in and then I ended up helping them, and I gave them a different understanding of it, practicing it and doing it. The next morning, they came to me with a big smile and gave me that look of “I'm doing it now”. **It benefits from being strong and working as a team**. **Putting in time and dedication and being devoted to something**. For the people who are there and still working on Sundays, we are they're **putting in our time and working together for that oneness and that brotherhood, family, the bond that we have and share, to produce and display in Austria.**

**Interviewer:** What are some of the disadvantages of singing in a choir?

**Jimothy:** Time. **It takes a lot of time**. **Sometimes preservation of voice**. **Sometimes my voice gets tired after a three-day choir camp** when I have a music prac the next day like a singing practice for my music prac the next day or other things that I must do like speaking. With choir we've got people from everywhere, we have people coming from the rugby field, we've got people playing soccer, basketball, art, drama, we have a wide spectrum of people coming to the choir. So, **time and preservation of voice for me**. **It's nothing that isn’t manageable**.

Interviewer: What motivates you to continuously participate in choir singing? What motivates you to participate if you can, every day? What is it that made you participate in the choir here at Kearsney?

Jimothy: It boils down to **my love for music and arts**. Where my heart is at in terms of those. I feel in that spectrum, just **creating music and being together with people**.