

Rhubarb Rhubarb Rhubarb

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GALS Dazzle Denmark

The June long weekend dawned bright, sunny and clear as the Gay and Lesbian Singers arrived to enjoy their fourth Denmark Festival of Voice. This uncharacteristic good weather remained throughout the weekend and was taken by some as a positive sign for GALS' performance on Saturday afternoon.

After a daring invasion of the Anglican church which they commandeered for their pre-concert warm-up, GALS were indeed in fine form. The basses were rearing to go after learning to sing like men in a workshop with the Spooky Men of the West. The tenors had been vigorously practising their stick-shaking and ferocious shouts and the altos were prepared for anything with their usual commitment. The sops had broken a number of light bulbs with their high notes and were ready to lift the roof of the Civic Centre. Frances had enjoyed the drive down with her non-lesbian sister and apart from a case of tight pants, was confident in the abilities of her protégées. All went well with the warm-up, but then Jackie discovered that the keyboard had no



music stand. Genius though she is, Jackie couldn't quite remember the music for every song by heart. After a frantic flurry with the organisers, a makeshift music holder was made and Jackie's racing pulse slowed somewhat. GALS then made their way to the waiting room where much to their horror, they heard A Kapella Munda singing 'Wimmoweh.' GALS were greatly unsettled until the tenors calmed them with promises that they would personally ensure that the GALS performance was made unforgettable. This comforted choir members, though not the conductor. Her fears were unfounded though, as the audience enthusias-

tically joined them in this classic favourite.

GALS performed their set with their usual grace, polish and amazing harmony. The only glitch in the show was the botched ending of 'Mad World' which was attributed to the sopranos until further investigation revealed that a UFO had actually been passing over the town at the time, and their alien mind-altering technology had somehow caused the sopranos to temporarily blank-out. After this fact came to light, the sopranos were duly forgiven.

Despite receiving a standing ovation, GALS were not called to present an encore - much to their disappointment after the heated debate at their previous rehearsal as to what number to perform as an encore. They were later assured though that this was only due to time constraints and not due to any lack of brilliance on their part. Comments from audience members afterwards revealed that once again, GALS were the hot favourites on the Festival of Voice program. Congratulations on another amazing performance GALS!

Super Lez and Fantastic Fran Save the Day and Serve the Breakfast

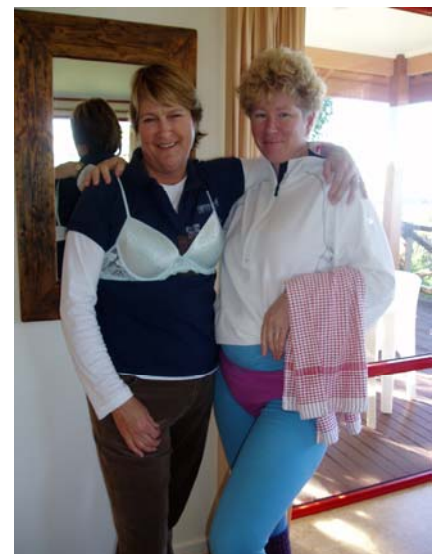
During the early hours of Sunday morning, June 3rd, the good people of Denmark, WA were astounded to see an unusual object cruising through the skies above the town. Exclamations were heard from the amazed townfolk:
"Is it a broad?"
"Is it insane?"
"Yes, it's Super Lez!"
Tea-towel streaming behind her and purple wonderpants flashing gallantly, the nation's number one Lesbian Heroine was clearly on her way to conquer evil, rescue a damsel in distress or pick up the newspaper.

Shortly after the sighting of the sensational superhero, another strange form was spotted streaking through the streets. Bra bouncing

boldly, Super Lez's trusty sidekick, Fantastic Fran was also hurrying to help out.

It's not everyday that two superheroes race through town and the extraordinary event caused much speculation amongst the native Denmarkians - where were the dynamic duo headed? What emergency in this sleepy, country town could warrant the intervention of this topful and bottomful pair? Was it a terrorist bombing, an attack by aliens, a natural disaster or a villain intent on world domination? After extensive investigation, the Rhubarb has discovered the crisis... the Gay and Lesbian Singers of W.A were hungry and desperately needed breakfast.

Fortunately for them, the superheroes arrived just in time to save the day. Enlisting the help of their partners, they whipped up a feast of bacon and pancakes for the ravenous singers. The grateful choir sang the praises of their saviours and declared the day officially saved and breakfast served.



GALS' own super-waitresses pose for a picture after the heroic effort of serving breakfast to a hungry choir.

Letters to the Editor

Those Magical Invisible Lesbians

Probably the largest issue facing lesbians who seek to live in a world that might one day offer them equal access to the services, benefits and privileges of our modern society is the problem of lesbian invisibility. Who are these lesbians, anyway? Why should they have the 'special privilege' of being afforded the same rights that their heterosexual counterparts already enjoy? The common perception seems to be that lesbians are a scary and powerful lot. They have the power to bring down the institution of marriage, the audacity to create families without fathers and they even teach girls to play sport! Pile onto that the common stereotyping about flannel shirts, army boots, short-cropped heads and hairy moles, not to mention the thing about cats, recruitment drives and a supposed complete disregard for fashion. These conceptions and perceptions of our community and its members are often upheld and exasperated by the continuing problem of lesbian invisibility.

That's why it is so very important to me, as a devoted member of the lesbian community, that there even *is* a gay and lesbian choir. Fronting up to a stage in all your diverse glory - long and short hair, dresses and slacks, high heels and makeup or Doc Martins and a Mohawk - sheds some much needed light onto who we are and brings the broader community into a positive interaction with our own where the myriad myths about lesbians might finally be dismantled. That's if everything goes to plan. The snag at the Festival of Voice was the unintended, ad-libbed introduction of the choir. Advertising from the stage that 'you don't have to be gay' to join had the unfortunate and ironic effect of once again rendering lesbians invisible - even in the gay choir. While obviously not intended, it does invite the audience to participate in a mental game of 'spot the dyke' and this usually serves only to reinforce pre-existing misconceptions rather than destroy them. While it's true that inside I cringed to hear those words amplified throughout the hall, it's also true that it has given me cause to stop for a moment to really consider things.

This letter should make obvious that I *have* given it considerable thought and it has unexpectedly brought me to a place of bottomless gratitude for all the women of the choir, both past and present, who've had the eggs to put themselves out there whatever the potential risk. I want you all to know how much I appreciate your unabashed willingness to put a face to our community and go out there to show the world that when we put down our labryses, pause the L-word and come out to sing - we're really not all that different after all. Whether or not you agree or even consider it to be, it *is* a political act and I admire and appreciate all of you for it. So I say: well done women and thank you for the fabulous and memorable weekend in Denmark. It truly is an honour to follow you all around like a puppy in heat.

Your loving admirer, archivist and self-appointed
Deputy Superintendent of the Lesbian Bafia,
Tessa Millesse

Drama on the Way to Denmark

Each year at Denmark, we have a tradition of having drama occur. In fact, it just wouldn't be the same with drama of some kind. This year though, the trouble started before some GALS even arrived in Denmark.

One member was delayed in leaving due to a lost cat, whilst another (who shall remain nameless) had problems dealing with a new car. It seems she is so used to her old bomb that she just couldn't handle a car which wasn't filled with screaming kids. It took her an hour to discover how to adjust the seat and build up the confidence to depart her driveway.

Two more choir members travelling together stopped at a petrol station on the way down. As they were stretching their legs, one of them heard yelling and yahooping. She told Rhubarb - "As I heard the noise, I thought to myself - who the heck are those hooligans? And then as they drove past, I realised, it was members of our own choir!!"

Drama of the Day was awarded to the member who, after commenting on what good time they were making, promptly locked her keys in her car when she stopped at a petrol station in Kojonup. She had to wait 45 minutes for the RAC to come and rescue her!!

The dramas didn't cease with people's arrival in Denmark. One pair of friends got to Karri Mia but didn't know which cottage they were in. They then proceeded to sneak around peering into cottage windows, where they gave the occupants of one cottage (who were relaxing with some recreational substances) the fright of their lives. They finally found an open cottage and decided that they would enjoy a spa together, regardless of whether or not this was indeed their



cottage. Fortunately for them, they can thank their lucky stars that it was! It is hoped by all that the trip down next year will prove a lot less eventful!

Left: The illustrious evil mastermind behind the Denmark Scavenger Hunt, Tenille Flower graces GALS with her presence after being somewhat delayed in her arrival at the Festival.

What We Learnt At Denmark this Year

I learnt that...

"it's a good idea to look where you're going when you're walking beside a ditch."

"it's not a good idea to tell Jenni anything if you don't want to be blackmailed by the threat of revealing the info to the Rhubarb."

"it's a na na na na na na na na, mad world!"

"that the Beavers rule— Go Beavers, Go Beavers, Go Beavers!!"

"that the Niplettes are much more gracious and mature than the Beavers."

"that some people just cannot live without their mobile phones."

"the Spooky Men are party animals."

"it's dangerous to get within arms length of Liz W when she's head-banging to Queen."

"it's fun to stroke the frog!!!!!!"

"the editor of Rhubarb is truly insane."

"putting too much bubble-bath in the spa makes it overflow."

"you should never trust a straight girl who wears a rainbow beanie."

Quote of the Weekend: A lady shopping in the supermarket was overheard to say to one of her friends, "so what is this Denmark Festival of Voice anyway?" to which her friend replied, "oh, I think it's something to do with mobile phones."

Special Lesbian Church Service

In honour of the acclaimed Gay and Lesbian Singers of WA who were visiting Denmark for the annual Festival of Voice, the local Anglican church decided to open their doors for a special church service for GALS. The service came at a perfect time for the sub-line singers who were soon to perform in a concert and were grateful for divine comfort.

The service was conducted by the Reverend Frances O'Neill, who spoke with her characteristic saintliness. The service opened with the hallowed hymn of 'Caravan,' which was followed by a moving prayer offered by one of the tenors; "Oh God, please let us get it right in the concert."

Following the hymn, a reading was given from the Sacred Book of Rhubarb, chapter 2, verses 16-18 which read, "16. And it came to pass that Michelle did looketh over mine shoulder and did try to read of mine secrets. And I said unto her, 'take thine eyes which stray like sheep from their flock away from mine scroll upon which I write godly words or I shall smite thee, thou loathsome swineherd.' 17. And it came to pass that Michelle was thus chastised and did bow before me and begged to me, 'oh great queen of the universe, I know that thy powers of exaggeration are great and I worship thy skill with the pen. Forgive me mine trespasses, for I do not wish to be presented with disfavour in the sight of God and GALS in thy holy writings of rhubarb. I do swear that I shall try no more to discern thy precious words.'

Pool and Pavarotti at Pub

On Saturday night of the Denmark Festival of Voice, GALS gathered at the Denmark Tavern - the sopranos to drown their sorrows over the ending of 'Mad World,' the tenors to continue their stick wielding, the basses to show off their prowess at sports, the altos to congratulate themselves on such a doing such a fine job with their parts and Jackie and Joanna to calm their shattered nerves

18. And it came to pass that having repented of her sins, Michelle did take her eyes from mine notebook and being benevolent and blessed by god, I did shew to her mercy and did forgive her. Tho, should she try another time to betray mine trust, great shall be my wrath and lo, she should tremble in fear for there shall be much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The congregation then said the Choir's Prayer together: "Our Conductor which art in front of us, Frances be thy name. Thy concert come, thy will be done on stage as it is in rehearsal. Give us this day our cues to come in and deliver us from flatness. Forgive the sopranos as we forgive them their tunelessness against us. For thine is the Music Stand, the Applause and the Glory, forever and ever, Amen."

Following the Choir's Prayer, Reverend Frances gave an inspiring sermon. The sermon began with the story of 'The Conductor with the Tight Pants,' the moral of which appeared to be the necessity of standing upright before God and the Denmark community if one is wearing tight pants while conducting. The congregation were all moved by the Reverend's righteousness and were receptive to her extortion that they also think about heaven when they sing. "Keep moving upwards," the Reverend preached, "and you shall be rewarded by enjoying the spirit of staying in tune in your lives." Staying focused on God was another important message of the sermon. And as the Reverend, who is god's spokesperson, reminded us, we should watch her all the time. "I shall lead and direct you in the path of harmony if you follow me," she said.

Following the sermon, the congregation was given the opportunity to confess their sins. Privacy cannot be breached by printing confessions, however some interesting and previously unknown facts regarding the activities of GALS members with honey, beavers, spas and whang-dangs were brought to light. Fortunately, everyone was forgiven.

After the confession, the Reverend blessed choir member's drink from their bottles, sanctifying the water and consecrating it to the god of singers. The choir then praised the lord as they sang the closing hymns, 'Wimmoweh' and 'Saint Louis Woman,' after which Reverend Frances offered a closing prayer, "Oh god, you guys had better not forget the words in the concert. Just give it heaps of attitude and energy and make every note count. In the name of Kd, Kylie and ABBA, Amen."



Reverend Frances conducts a service to the Holy Choir of GALS in the Church of Lesbos.

from the dramas of organising a gaggle of Gals into any semblance of order and trying to play a keyboard with no music stand.

After a few drinks and games of pool, everyone was feeling much more relaxed and definitely ready for dinner. The choir then traipsed into the dining room, where there was much discussion, debate and dissection of the concert performances while they waited to be served, as well as a certain amount of menu stealing. After about half an hour, someone

finally realised that orders were being taken at the counter, not the table. Once they'd ordered, GALS broke into their trademark enthusiastic dinner-time singing, which never fails to delight other patrons, who are usually content to listen to the lovely strains of these luscious lesbians. However, on this occasion, another diner was so inspired that he decided to climb on a chair and give us an Italian aria. Being serenaded at dinner was a first for GALS and an experience not to be forgotten in a hurry!!



A Commentary on The Great Denmark Scavenger Hunt of 2006

Friday Night

Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the inaugural Denmark Scavenger Hunt. We're here at Café Bazzo in the South West town of Denmark with Gay and Lesbian Singers who will be battling it out for a grand prize and the title of 'Denmark Scavenger Queen.'

Contenders are lined up around the table here, psyching themselves up and preparing to receive the list of items to be collected. And here's Tenille, the devious designer of this hunt - are there no lengths which this conniving woman will go to to create havoc and chaos? She has the papers in hand and yes, she's handing them out... and they're off!! Look at those GALS go! And it's Saani who is first off the mark and frantically scribbling a six-line poem - just look at her pen fly. Does she ever stop writing? And now here comes Michelle who has a teabag from her cup of tea and Deb who has a beanie. The other GALS are off to a slow start, but what's this? They're all heading off to the opening concert. We'll just take a break ladies and gentlemen and return after this pause in the proceedings...

Welcome back folks, the concert is over and the race is back on. Some of the GALS are heading over to the festival club and there's Nikki asking her B.O.A friends for signatures whilst others have raced back to the cottages to make plans for the next leg of the race. And we'll leave it here for tonight folks. Join us again tomorrow as we continue our coverage of this exciting event.

Saturday

Welcome back to the Annual Denmark Scavenger Hunt. This morning it appears many of the hunters have dropped out - it seems that they just didn't have the stamina to go the distance. Many of them seem determined to begin a training regime though, in order to be fit for next year's challenge. Wait, what have got here? It's Saani and she's not happy - it seems that Tenille has refused to pay her

Denmark number plate and she's been disqualified. Oh dear, what a travesty. It seems that we've now only got three serious contenders left - Jude Cotter, Cherie and Robin, however they all seem to have recruited teams to help them. Let's see what they're up to.

Oh my goodness, look at this - it's Robin asking Akasa for a photo with them. She's telling them about the scavenger hunt and they're happy to play along. They're even letting her come up onto the stage with them! Wow, Robin has got to be getting good points for this one. But there's Cherie over there giving her personal assistant Simon instructions for continuing the hard work of collecting while she relaxes in a concert. Hmm, it seems this might be the way to tackle this task. And where's Jude? It seems she's off gathering her points by attending workshops. You've got to admire her diligence. And it seems like a good time to take another break. We'll return with more when the GALS gather at the pub for dinner.

And here we are at the pub, where beer coasters and menus are being surreptitiously stolen and smuggled into handbags. Robin is discussing her strategy to obtain a Denmark number plate, while Cherie is bragging about her postcards and preserves. Jude isn't saying much though - it seems she's being tipped as the dark horse in this chase. At the moment it looks like Robin's in the lead though, closely followed by Cherie, although Jude is definitely hanging in there. And we'll have to leave here again as the GALS are all heading off for more concerts and parties.

Sunday

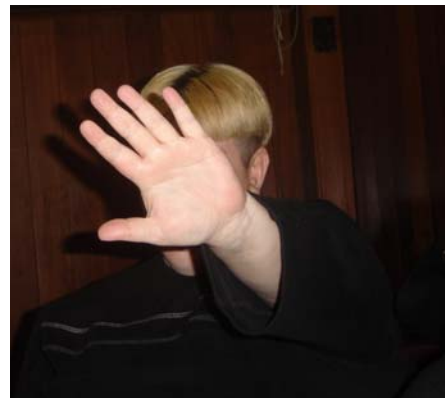
Well, here we are on the final day of this epic chase. It's today that I think we'll really see the battle of wits and strength emerge. And yes, it's started already - here's Jude playing the gumleaf - a creative musical instrument for sure. And over there is Cherie asking Akasa for a photo with them. They're still happy to play along, though now look, Cherie is trying to coerce an unsuspecting B.O.A member into taking off his shirt for her, but no, she has no luck. Here's Robin now heading round the bend at a frantic pace - she's got her beach sand and her strange item - an odd pottery toothbrush cover! Jude is still lurking around but she's not giving much away. It seems that secrecy is a major part of her strategy. Wait a

minute, here she is asking Akasa for a photo. Will they go along with it or are they fed up with being hassled by scavengers? Yes, they're saying that she must be from GALS and they're graciously agreeing - those girls are great sports! I'm walking past the Civic centre now, where B.O.A members are scattering as they see me coming. They must recognise me as a GALS member. One has to wonder whether Tenille will need to employ a body guard to protect her from being lynched by an angry Band of Angels mob.

And now it's Sunday night and the great moment of truth has arrived. Jude and Cherie (with her trusty sidekick Simon) have converged on Tenille's cottage, where Robin is so confident in her lead that she's asleep in the bedroom. Items are being presented and yes, there are certainly some surprises here!! Oh this is so thrilling. Cherie is pulling out her stuffed blue wren - is this cheesey or what? But hang on, Jude counters by producing a wedge of cheese!! This is going to be a close competition. Cherie is having Simon play her musical instrument... a water bottle. She's really pulling out the big guns here - an unusual item whose uses probably should be left to your imaginations. Jude is hot in pursuit though, as she shows off her mead and signatures from EVERY B.O.A member!! Wow, it's a hot chase here. Cherie has artwork, but so does Jude and LOOK, Jude has a Band of Angels SHIRT!! Oh my god, this is an unprecedented achievement. I can't wait to see who is going to win, it looks like all three are just a whisker apart, but no, Tenille is saying that she cannot declare the winner until she has time to carefully consider the points, so it seems we'll have to wait for the result. Join us on Thursday when the winner will be revealed.

Thursday

And here we are at the North Perth Lesser Hall, where we're eagerly awaiting to hear the winner of the Great Denmark Scavenger Hunt. Tenille is coming to the front and she's speaking. She's building the suspense as she congratulates all the finishers, but wait for it - who will it be? It's JUDE!! Jude has won the prestigious title of Scavenger Queen of Denmark. Listen to that riotous applause. Well, what an incredible hunt it's been folks.



We hope you'll join us again next year for the 2007 challenge.

L-R: Robin and Cherie - runners up in the battle for the title of Scavenge Queen of Denmark, and the very modest Jude - glorious winner of the grand challenge.

Jude's Scavenger Hunt Poem*Penned by Jude, Nikki & Sam*

(To the tune of 'American Pie')

Not so long ago, I can still remember,
How the music used to make me smile.
And I knew that we had just one chance
To make those Denmark people dance
Then we could do the festival in style

But A Kappella Munda made us shiver,
With every whim-o-why they delivered.
Still we never feared 'em -
Our tenors rocked, they speared 'em

I can't remember if Frances cried,
When sopranos in 'Mad World' they dried
We could not run we could not hide,
Still she was filled with pride
And we were singing:

Na na na na na na Mad World
Na na na na na na Mad World

Did Saani write the book of love,
While Fran gazed up at the stars above,
And Liz fell in the ditch below

Well Carole and Jude in the motel,
Were giving poor Joanna hell
Deb and Kaz went off to find a Bottle'O'

The priest caught us singing in the church,
And nearly left us in the lurch
But we filled up all the pews
And sang out 'St Louis Blues'

There were some lonely teenage broncin'
bucks
Playing pool to get some fucks
But we knew they were out of luck
Except for maybe, Tenille.

And we were singing
All night in Bungalow Three
At the dinner, for a birthday
All because of Cherie
And then we were joined by Pavarotti
Singing: something we really didn't
understand in Italian

And there we all were when dawn breaks
For Jen's bacon and Tess's pancakes
Then we went off to sing like men

Jackie's fingers were nimble and they were quick,
Meredith made a solo trip
And all the girls in Perth were texting Jen.

Liz's head was banging free
To Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody
The neighbours were awoken
Frog stroking was verboten

And three girls that we think are swell
Are Deb B, Robin and Michelle
And Lesley wasn't there as well
The day we wrote this poem

The Women We Are*By Saani*

*I remember my first 'Denmark' so clearly.
It was the first time I'd had the chance to
get to know many choir members a little
better. As I collected a number of people's
'life histories' over the weekend, I was
overwhelmed by what an incredible group
of people we have - what wonderful things
people have done, their hidden talents, what
they've dealt with and who they are. This
year, my experience in Denmark was much
the same once again - I am still so inspired
and amazed at who you are. Thankyou.*

Banter flies, tapped lightly
to and fro whilst flippancy bounces
around the table, joining laughter
in creating festivity.
Beneath the costumes worn
at this party, I see sparkles of soul
and I hear pieces of past – stories
which sing of the women we are:

We are women of passion –
we have fought for our rights, for
social justice and for the freedom
to be ourselves; in the streets, on
the stage and in our families.
We have loved deeply and dared
to live proudly. We have brought
dreams to life and followed our
hearts.

We are women of strength –
we have stood at the edge of death
and returned to life. We have wept
through dark nights of the soul
and faced our fears with courage.
We have been alone, we have
known pain and we have found
compassion.

We are women of brilliance –
we have visited many lands and
learnt much. We have worked
hard to achieve and we have
cultivated numerous talents and
gifts. We have played and read
and sang and built and studied and
created with humour, wisdom
and vision.

The fancy dress misleads us some-
times and we are fooled into
thinking that we are no-one special
or forgetting the depths,
the power and the magnificence
within each other,

yet for now, between spaces
in the joking and cheerful chitchat,
I know the women we are.

Dr Seuss Dines in Denmark

At the far end of South, where the pricklegrass grows,
and the wind smells blue and green when it blows,
lay a dubious town where once every year,
singers would gather from far and from near,
to sing with great zest - both strangers and pals,
and the best of these singers was a choir called GALS.
These GALS they could warble, they'd yodel and trill,
they could chant, croon and hum, both deeply and shrill.
And the thing they loved best in this town of Denmark,
was to gather for dinner once day became dark.
And there they would hoe in with gusto and zeal,
but they'd also sing sweetly to improve their meal.

Now as it so happened, one year in this place,
something terrible happened, a shocking disgrace –
when the GALS went to dine upon hot soup one night,
they found it had vanished, which gave them a fright.
And in the Café of Bazzo, some people say,
if you look hard enough you can still see today
where the vegetable soup once stood in its' pot,
til it suddenly vanished and now there it is not.
Oh where could it be, this grand pot of soup –
this grobbulous grub, this grubbulous gloop?
Who could have taken that soup where it lay?
What devious fiend could have whisked it away?
And what would those lesbian singers so gay,
now eat for their dinner at that spiffing café?
The waitress at Bazzo's, she offered them fish,
she offered them burgers and some kind of squish.
She offered them gooseberry-jam-flavoured sloop,
but those GALS shouted out "we want vegetable soup!"

"And we would eat it in our beds,
and with our beanies on our heads.
And we would eat it on the stage,
because we think it's all the rage.
And we would eat it in the fog,
and we would eat it strokin' the frog.
And we would eat it in the church –
we'd leave the preacher in the lurch.
And we would eat it in the car,
and we would eat it in the spa.
Yes we would eat it anywhere at all,
we'd even eat it at the ambulance hall."

And after they yelled this they moaned a bit more,
for without soup in their bellies they felt a bit sore.
And as they wondered, so sad and so grave,
outside the town in a gloomy, old cave,
a soup-thief chortled and grinned with some glee,
thinking that he'd wrecked the singers' tea.
For this soup-thief's heart was frozen and bland,
and this jubilant singing he just couldn't stand.
(Just why this was so, I don't rightfully know,
but this year he wanted those singers to go).

Then as the old soup-thief stood there in the trees,
he heard a strange sound wafting in with the breeze –
Every gal in GALSWA was singing a song,
in voices so merry, so loud and so strong.
The missing soup hadn't stopped them at all,
for there they were singing – the short and the tall.
He hadn't stopped them from having their fun,
for somehow or other, they had it – each one.
And the soup-thief he thought til his thinker was sore,
and he had an idea he had not had before –
"maybe, just maybe, fun doesn't depend,
on dinner or soup, but on having a friend.
Or on having a song in your heart to share,
and maybe our fun can be found anywhere..."

Denmark Highlights

This year, I thought I'd look at our Denmark experience from a different perspective explore what this event means to us in a wider context. The quotes are paraphrased from things people have said to me over the last few months.

"I think it goes without saying that the music is a highlight at Denmark. We're music lovers and it's always a buzz to be around so many talented musicians and fabulous music. At the same time, there are other equally important highlights of Denmark for us."

In thinking about our Denmark experience, I also looked back on our development as a choir through the year. Many people have told me recently how much they're enjoying rehearsals each week and how great they think we're sounding. I think they're right - there is an almost tangible current of excitement about our progress now and as one member said, *"it's like we've seen what we're really capable of and perhaps the times when we don't think we've done so well isn't necessarily because we were bad, it's because we have higher standards for ourselves now."* I started thinking about what has caused this shift and came up with a number of pieces of the picture;

Naturally Frances has played a huge part in our progress. One choir member said, *"I think we've settled in with each other now - Frances knows where we're coming from and that we love her, we know where she's coming from and we've found a comfortable space where we can respond to and respect each other. We also seem to mostly be on the same page as a choir now - having fun at rehearsals but also really wanting to keep improving and achieve a level of excellence."*

Another major factor is the traditions which we've developed as a community. Denmark is one of our most important traditions, an event which we all look forward to and which provides an opportunity for bonding. We also have our specific Denmark traditions - the Monday morning brekky, our musical dinners together, our GALS pancake breakfast, party night, the brilliant films by Tess afterwards, the running jokes about Denmark drama as well as newer traditions such as the scavenger hunt. These things are so much fun, but what is it about our time at Denmark which touches us so deeply? Choir members expressed their views;

"Denmark is a time when we get away together as a choir - away from our everyday lives and we just have each other for the weekend. I think in this situation, we get to know more about each other than we normally would. I love it that we can also bring friends/partners and that they can participate and feel included. This also allows us to get to know each other better."

"I felt a difference in us a group at Denmark this year. In the past, I have sometimes felt left out. I guess in any group you get sub-groups - the 'popular' or 'in-group' scenario and sometimes it seems to me that those people go off together and later the people on the fringes find out that the 'in-group' had all this fun and have all these in-jokes and that we weren't invited or included. Whilst there were still moments I felt like that this year (and yes, that's my stuff), I also felt that there was more awareness of us as a whole community."

"This year at Denmark, I felt remarkably cared for by everyone. I think it's a matter of finding a balance between time with our particular friends, time to ourselves and time together as a whole group - perhaps we're starting to find that balance now, although I think we still have some work to do in being aware of caring for and including everybody. On the whole though, I think we're doing well. On a number of occasions I heard people asking each other where

someone was and whether they were ok and I think that's wonderful. There were also a number of times I saw people waiting for others - there seemed to me to be an attitude of not wanting anyone to be left out, or left behind - a greater inclusion and tolerance of others regardless of our different lifestyles, personalities etc. Personally, I think this shows a real maturity emerging."

I talked to a number of choir members about this idea of us maturing socially as a choir and found that others had noticed it too. Everybody acknowledged the importance of our community traditions - Denmark, the Christmas party, the Rhubarb and so on, as these things have given us a sense of identity as a group and given us our own culture. Choir members shared a number benefits they saw arising from this sense of identity and community;

"I think that the lightness of joking and playing around together helps us relax - many of us have heavy daily lives and when you can come and be frivolous for a while in a safe space, it's easier to show people who you are. I know that for myself as someone who has been a lesbian my entire adult life, I've become quite protective and used to hiding who I am in many ways. I think that making jokes about people's personas (the good girl, the class clown, the ditzy airhead, the chatterbox, the responsible one, the naughty girl and so on) brings them to the surface and makes it easier to see that they are just masks. We're all multi-faceted people and there's more to everyone than just what we see at choir. I think the more we both play with those personas and also be aware of not getting stuck in them though, the more depth we find as a group."

"I think we have a greater sense of belonging now. Things like the Rhubarb and social events give us something to play with and we're too busy inventing creative 'gossip' that we generally don't have time to engage in 'real' gossip or drama or complaining."

"I think the more we learn about each other, the more respect and appreciation we have for each other. This leads to a greater sense of trust and a space where we can communicate more authentically and so on. And who knows what it is, but we're certainly sounding fucking fantastic these days."

"I agree that we have a greater connection together now and I think that the social side of choir definitely contributes to that. Having common goals to work towards (like concerts, going to Melbourne, getting a grant, doing the recording etc) also helps. I think that this connection has in turn affected our music. When we feel more connected, we listen to each other more, we care if someone else isn't getting it or is being left behind (not just whether we're ok) and we want to help them so that everyone moves forward. I guess you could say that we're literally becoming more harmonious."

So, it seems that there is more to our Denmark experience than first meets the eye, but perhaps the best summary of both Denmark and our progress as a choir comes from one member who succinctly said, "Well, I just think that GALS rocks!!"

