

What Gospel Manna Community Choir Means to Me

Sometimes in life we have to go back before we can truly go forward, & for you to understand how much I appreciate the gospel Manna coming into my life I need to do just that.

Many, many years ago (but post dinosaur era) a man that I'd never met before told me that when he looked at me he was being shown Harry Secombe and told that one day I would be singing religious songs just like him. At the time Harry Secombe was presenting a religious programme on television called "Stars on Sunday" & every week he would perform at a different church around the country and sing with various choirs.

I was with a friend at the time & I didn't just laugh, we both laughed until our bellies hurt. Sure I believed in God & prayer & I was a songwriter but I didn't write or sing gospel stuff. Rap to rock yep but not gospel, and singing with or joining a choir wasn't anywhere on my musical radar & as for friends & family they would tell you that I would be the last person on earth to have ever joined a choir.

But alone with my thoughts I was scared there might be some truth in it. I'd always felt that God wanted me to go in a different direction than the one I wanted to go in & I also believed that with me being very stubborn & him being very clever, if it happened it would happen without me even realising it & that's what scared me. I had visions of me waking up one morning to find my trainers & hoodies replaced with a bun placed neatly on the back of my head and little spectacles would sit on the end of my nose and I'd no longer be able to drive everyone crazy with my sense of humour & I'd forget how to have fun.. yep I was scared, so I put it to the back of my mind & just got on with my life.

About eight years after this I became very ill and it took a further six years before a diagnosis of M.E. was given, I eventually lost my job, social life, friends who couldn't deal with long-term illness, my confidence, independence & the life I'd known & been secure in had suddenly gone, probably forever I was told. I was also too poorly to continue with music & was told any chance of a music career was over as I would be too ill and it was best to think of a new subdued life of cocoa & slippers.

Thankfully, my stubborn nature kicked in at this point and determined to prove them wrong I started making music again. During this time I came up with a couple of pop tracks that I imagined a gospel choir on just like they have on X-Factor, but it was just a dream, something in my head. I happened to mention it to my mum whose reply was to change everything & set off a chain of events that led me to the gospel Manna "If you can hear a choir then make it happen" she said.

Quite frankly I thought she was crazy, how was I going to rustle up a choir? But just out of curiosity I Googled in choirs. I bypassed many without even clicking on them, I can't tell you why, I just instinctively knew they weren't right, but as soon as I saw the Watford Gospel Manna Community Choir name I clicked on it and that was it, I knew that this is who I had to approach.

I sent off an email to the director Susan Watt, but expected a thanks but no thanks reply, so I was filled with joy to receive the warmest wonderful email back & once again I felt in my heart the Gospel Manna was the right place to be.

When I met Susan, she was as warm & wonderful as the email had been and I felt as if I'd known her for ages. It was the same when meeting the other choir members. The first thing that struck me was the amount of love & caring in one room. This was nothing how I'd imagined it to be; there were no tweed suits, nobody looking at me disappointedly through those little spectacles on the end of their nose, nobody asking lots of questions, nobody judging me, there was however, plenty of laughter & it was a fun and happy atmosphere where I was welcomed with open arms, it felt like you imagine a family should be. Having not sung in front of people for 20 years I found myself singing which felt like a massive achievement.

By the time the tracks were recorded I knew I didn't want it to come to an end, I didn't want to leave, because I'd not only come to like these people but I'd come to love them too. It still came as a shock to me however because right up until that point joining a choir was still nowhere in my plans.

The feeling of being with the Gospel Manna is one that's hard to explain unless you've experienced it, acceptance is one of the many things they bring to the table, anyone who comes along out of curiosity, or anyone who joins, despite appearance, class, religious belief, is accepted without judgement & that was something that really struck a chord with me because I believe that to be real love. I still have M.E. so I can do very little with them & sometimes I can only sit and watch them rehearse, but they don't make me feel any less worth, & no matter how ill I am, when I'm in their company my spirits are well & truly lifted. When I get home my mum always comments on the fact I'm glowing, a bit like the children in the Ready Brek advert, only my spiritual glow is all down to the Gospel Manna.

Since joining I've also felt a closer connection with God and it all simply feels right. Having now joined the Gospel Manna choir, if this is the direction I'm meant to go in then I'm now more than happy to go. By being in their company they have taught me a lot and I'm sure I will continue to learn with them from them. There needs to be Gospel Manna Community Choirs all over the country because it would certainly make the world a better place & I'd recommend to anyone to give it a go... As for me ending up like Harry Secombe.. I guess anything is possible now, & I'm learning never-to-say-never.

Thanks for taking the time to listen.

Stay blessed

Stacy Hart ;) xxx

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