

## **NVN President's Update - October 2019**

### **by Frankie Armstrong**

Today my head and heart have been gladdened by receiving the link to Helen Yeomans' powerful version of an Extinction Rebellion (XR) song, and yesterday Peggy Seeger sent her strong yet up-tempo XR song which will be sent out to all our members too. They are both great songs that I hope many of you will sing and teach. I know there are many more of our members who have written songs and chants to bring songful solidarity and strength to this essential movement. Stephen Taberner's spirit-lifting video with his "Glorious Rabble" is inspiring and I was sorry I couldn't get to any of his rehearsals.

I was thrilled to hear that Liz Terry started off the Grief March on Sat 12th October with the song I wrote 40 years ago, "Message From Mother Earth". Here in Cardiff, numbers of our South Wales NVN members have been involved either in London or at home. The trio of Pauline Down, Laura Bradshaw and myself (Bread and Roses) sang at the April action and we're hoping to set up a local musicians' group to engage composers and instrumentalists as well as singers.

As many of you know, I've been involved with a range of movements since the anti-Vietnam War and the early days of CND, but now XR and the environmental protests seems to me the most important and crucial movement of my lifetime - 79 years. I feel so proud of being involved with a Network that over the years has supported many causes to do with social justice, women's rights, diversity, anti-war and nuclear weapons along with the environment. From the earliest days in the mid 70's, when I started running workshops, it was especially women's issues that took much of our focus. These haven't died, and the engagement with social issues has broadened over the decades as we formed and grew the NVN.

I still hold to the sense that "finding one's voice" holds true both personally, literally and metaphorically. I'm aware that we're a membership which holds to certain professional standards and a code of practice which hold to certain ethical approaches such as inclusivity and a non-judgemental approach to each person's unique voice and musicality. These seem to commit us all to something that is "political" in the broadest sense - i.e. that we all need to question the assumptions and impact of the status quo and feel we have the right to challenge this when it closes down the right to people having a voice - in all the senses referred to above.

As our member Stuart Jones wrote some years back, "A cultural crime was perpetrated on the British people ... with the introduction of the supposed 'fact' that only certain people were able to sing. This makes our work inevitably political, not in any party political sense but in the way of challenging and questioning 'received wisdom'. These so called wisdoms are happily being questioned by science and observation, and so the underlying belief that singing is an essential and natural part of being human has been confirmed over recent decades.

And while I'm on this subject, I was delighted to get James Sill's book yesterday - a wonderfully affirmative and encouraging plea to get us all believing we can sing - that it's our birthright. I was chuffed to hear James is going to be one of the teachers in Tasmania's Festival of Voice next year - with my strong connection to Australia it's great to have a UK Network member taking part in this prestigious festival, and of course James is part of Stephen's Spooky Men's Chorale, which is also committed to singing songs of social justice as well as glorious Georgian and Beatles material.

How privileged we are at troubled times like these to bring the power and beauty of song to warm hearts and lift spirits.

With warm wishes and support to all of you doing this wonderful and valuable work, Frankie.

P.S. Since writing this, Darien and I went on the final day's action last Friday in London - a song-filled and moving experience. I'm now off to start learning Helen and Peggy's songs!