

Mrs Nancy Malseed was then Mrs Nancy Edwards in 1945 when C.E.M.A. began. Mrs Malseed would you like to tell us what you remember of the start of C.E.M.A., Council for the Encouragement of Music and the arts in Portland in the early 1940's.

That was the year that I came here in 1945 Lesley. My first husband was the first Deputy Principal of the High School, which only started that year. It had been a higher elementary before then and he was the Science Master. It was war time and it was very, very difficult to get a house. When I look at all the 'for sale' notices we have got about now, I think of those days, when there was never a 'for sale' notice. We never even heard of a house, it was a deep secret and you did not dare mention it. There were all sorts of problems, being war time of course, it was very, very grim.

So that when in July 1945, I saw a notice in the paper for a public meeting to form a branch of C.E.M.A., which was Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts – and there were a number of branches around then – I thought well this should be very interesting and so I went along to what was the Old Town Hall (*which is now History House). There was quite a good crowd, very hard to estimate. I would think probably about 50, which was very good for something new starting in war time, because of the black outs. It was not very easy to go out at night. So, the branch was formed and everybody said "of course, it won't do any good, nothing like this ever lasts in Portland, it will die out after a while". John Harris was the first President, Lila Carthew and Joan Beglen were the joint Secretaries. But from that meeting, we decided on different groups (that is a pattern that lasted right up until today).

We had the Music Group, and the Drama, Literary and Historical Group. I was mostly interested in the Music. Later on, I became interested in the Drama too. So that was in July and we formed a Choir and an Orchestra straight away. John Harris was conducting the Orchestra and Eva Hogan began to collect the Choir together. That was my main interest. Although for our first concert, it was on December 20th 1945, I did play for the Orchestra too, because Eva was too busy with the Choir and with all the other items and this was a major thing for us to take on. We felt, of course, we were fortunate in that afterwards the war ended and then there was great jubilation and after all those long dreary years, people were looking for something like that. So, the Choir went very, very well. We used to meet at the Oddfellows Hall every Tuesday and then it was changed to a Wednesday. No one ever thought of not going to Choir, unless there was a good reason such as illness or absence from town, because everybody was there and Eve put a lot into it. I was the pianist.

And we did some from very interesting music, all of which is still down at C.E.M.A. centre. Two or three years ago after 'Fiddler on the Roof', we did attempt another

choir, but there was not enough interest in it, so we had to give it up, because now of course, people had television. We did not have television in 1945 and radio was the

only things for the home, so our practices went along. I had a lovely photo of the Choir which I have lost.

Oh we must find it from someone else

We did have very good balance, we had good singers and they were all keen and we would practice from 8 to 10. once a week. Of course, when it got nearer a concert, it was more often.

The Drama Group, they had their own arrangements. I think very often they rehearsed at Harry Moody's flat. He was the Principal of the High School and he lived over what is Coles now. There were no houses for teachers then. I think there was only one in the town then and I think that was for the primary school Headmaster. So, we all had to find our own. But that suited him because it was central and it was new at the time. He and his wife were back teaching and they had the Drama Group and they would have play readings and rehearsals.

So, then we began working towards our first concert and I have the report of it here, I won't read you all of the report. Look at it Lesley,

It's wonderful

Even for the ballet or the Orchestra, we do not get a report as good as that.

Equivalent to a half page at least, wouldn't it in today's paper.

I will just read you a little bit of the beginning, because you will see we made quite an impact.

"On Friday last at the free library hall in Portland ...

Which of course where the library is now and my little girls used to say "Mummy who do you call it the free library hall; we always have to pay when we go in?

"... the local branch of C.E.M.A., Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, presented its premiere concert to a crowded house. Much speculation as to what the success or otherwise of the event would be was evinced by some prior to the concert, but the result was never in doubt after the first item given by the recently formed C.E.M.A. Orchestra under the baton of Mr J.S. Harris, who is to be heartily congratulated with the players under his command ..."

I think there were about 10, I think.

“... on the very excellent first night showing which they made. Their playing was excellent from any point of view and in this combination of music, Portland has a company of musical artists of whom they may well be proud and in whom great things can be expected later.”

It goes on to detail the whole programme and then at the end it says:

“The Major, Cr. J.G. Murrell, in the brief address at the conclusion of the performance said he felt he spoke on behalf of those present when he extended the heartiest congratulations to all concerned at the programme given that night. He had thoroughly enjoyed it himself and looked forward to the next one with anticipation. Portland should be well proud of its talent and it was only necessary to encourage the young folk of the community to bring out all the best that was in them. It had indeed been a real treat, both musically and dramatically and he wished them all the success in their efforts to educate the public in music and the arts”

He then presented many beautiful flowers and posies to the musicians and artists. That was the reaction, in the street, even a week after. Everybody was talking about the concert. There were a lot of visitors there. We were all so very proud. There you are you see, they said it would not last and that was still 1945.

A lot of people used to become confused with C.E.M.A., they thought it was for education with the ‘E’. It was music and the arts. I understand, I am not sure, but I think Eva Hogan and perhaps H. Walker went down to Melbourne beforehand; to ask about starting on here and all sorts of laws were laid down. In those days, the early days, we had to submit our programme to them down in Melbourne, before we were allowed to put it on.

We did not try to raise money for ourselves. We tried to raise money for other organisations. I do not know about the first one, that one might have been for ourselves. We had some money to start with. The admission was 5 shillings and if you compare it with today, 45 years later, with inflation and dollars and cents, it would be very similar to today. After a while, the other C.E.M.A. branches in the State and all over the country closed down and became the Arts Council. We did not want to lose the name, because we felt that meant more to people. As you know here, C.E.M.A. and the Arts Council are really one. We think it is good that we kept the name, because that was what we started with and that was what people understood.

When I was in England in 1983, I went to the Arts Council of Britain and asked them if any of their branches had kept the name and they had not, so as far as I know, Portland City is the only branch left in the world who kept the same name.

That is good, isn't it. There was one other at the time, but I cannot think where it was who kept the name, but of course, it may be defunct by now. So, it has lasted a long time.

Here is a programme to be divided between the Gold Raiders Appeal, for the new children's ward at the hospital and C.E.M.A. Now the Gold Raiders, as you know, were a group of ladies who worked hard for the old hospital, for the present hospital.

That is the 1946 programme you have there?

Yes. It was August 20th 1946, but we may have had some others in between. Sometimes they were just Drama ones and sometimes just Music. That made it very difficult, because there were some people who were interested in both. Also, we had to get dates which were suitable. It is only just before we put 'Fiddler on the Roof' this year, that we decided at a public meeting, at our general meeting, we decided to amalgamate and become the Theatre Group and that is really the music and the drama.

This concert here, just says that the associate artists were Stephen Haag and Halinka DeTarczynski and Nancy Braithwaite, the violinist from Mt Gambier and they were top artists. There was the C.E.M.A. Orchestra and the C.E.M.A. Choir did items for that.

This one in 1946, only a month after the other one, was in aid of the Portland Citizens' Brass Band Uniforms Club. That was a very good, varied programme, an old-fashioned sort of programme.

What are some of the items?

C.E.M.A. Orchestra 'Hungarian Dance', C.E.M.A. Choir 'Ciribiribin', 'Hey Diddle Diddle', which was a novelty number we used to do. I played Impromptu and the C.E.M.A. Orchestra 'Naughty Marietta' and then there was a play by Doris Moodie. All in all, a very varied programme.

And another wonderful crit from the Portland Guardian. It is really very interesting.

"When the C.E.M.A. movement was first mooted in Portland, it was stated that it would be a good thing for the town and district and as time goes on, this assertion has been more and more fully drawn out. It has gained

strength and much popularity, by the hard work put in by the foundation committee since its inception and the further it goes, the higher the standard of the performances is raised.”

These facts were referring to the free concert given in the library on Thursday night for the Citizens' Band. They really gave us a good write up in those days. A full programme printed. It is nice to give out, it is nice to know what went on.

Then this was a drama on 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' by Ian Hannaford and a play produced by Doris Moody. Here is one that we put on for the Salvation Army. I think they organised it and we gave items. A drama on 'Mr. Pimm Passes By'. Of course, we had all those comedies, because it was comedies that filled the hall and they still do. In Fact, in those days people went along to see a comedy and if it was not a comedy, they felt cheated.

Our Christmas party in 1947, that may have been our first Christmas party. The first was a concert in 1945 and then we had concerts in 1946, but in 1947 we had the idea we put on a Christmas party and invite people and they would not have to pay and provided supper. It was in St Stephen's I think. We had to have something different. We would put on a comedy, because we felt that the people would be our friends and they were held for several years and were very popular as you can imagine.

The National Anthem of course, God Save the Queen and the orchestra and the choir and different plays. They all had little verses on them. That was a lovely programme. Now this was one in 1948 with the Mt Gambier Choral Society, which I remember we put it on at Easter, which was a very difficult decision, because they said everybody goes away at Easter, but we had to push that one. That was for the War Nurses Memorial Appeal. We did have a good programme with the Mt Gambier singers, some of them ours most of them Mt Gambier. Eve and I played a duet, Eva and I, we loved playing that. We had a great variety.

When we used to play 'Invitation to the Waltz', you know how it has the little introduction of the man inviting the lady to dance and then it closes with that, but before closing, that opening phrase is repeated at the end, a very brilliant finish and everybody that it was the finish and they would all clap and then we never knew whether we should go on and play the rest or stop there. It depended on the audience, how we thought they would react.

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Here is another one we put on in 1949 for the furnishing a ward at the Portland Hospital. They were nearly all the same format, but we would have different artists very often. Now here is the part songs 'Water Lillies'. That was a great favourite of Eva's she just loved it. We would go along singing and lillies would be floating, I was playing for it of course and we knew it very, very well. So if we were a bit stuck for

the programme, we would put on 'Water Lillies' and say it was 'by special request'. One man came once and heard us and just said 'water lillies do not float' and I have thought of this ever since.

I was at the ... Gardens in Geelong, where there was this lovely water lily pond and I had a look at them and I thought they do not move, they just sort of stand up and sit on the water. But it was a very popular number and is still down there among the C.E.M.A. music.

And, sometimes we used to rehearse at Rita Naismith's and that is where Dr. Myles' clinic is now, it was nice and central. I have forgotten why this was I think perhaps the hall was in use or something, so we used to have many a happy night there and she used to have the Literary Group there too and various ones. With our different groups, we did not have Presidents and Secretaries. We did have Secretaries but we did not have Presidents. We thought it could be confusing. So, we had Convenors. At one stage I was Convenor of the Music Group. At one stage I was Vice-President of C.E.M.A., but I did not want to go on, because I wanted to have my little family.

Now...Here is the C.E.M.A. float, Music and Drama.

This was a concert we put on for the 'Back to Portland' celebrations, November 18th 1949. The same sort of programme, I always enjoyed it we always had different plays.

See that photo, that is the C.E.M.A. float. Joyce insisted every detail had to be correct. We had Shakespeare and Liszt. We had different composers all around this huge float and there were the girls. They were all in pale gold. We had a harp. I do not know where we got the harp, it does not look make believe, it certainly looked real. And there's Lynette Brewster, Gwen Hodge and I forgot who that girl was and there were more of them on the float. But it was very effective. We sat down and made all these big notes of music and put then down the side.

There is the Christmas party in 1948, mistletoe galore and holly by the yard and the light from the wayside window streaming in and a white moon rising and one star gleaming, that was written on the front of it. Here is the programme for that and we had a Christmas party 'Joy to the World', which Mrs Moodie produced.

And so, they go right through. The Town of Hamilton Festival Choirs, November 5th 1950. Price was six pence.

For the programme or to get in?

I was just wondering I don't know. I think it was the programme. I do not think it was anything to go in, because there were all these choirs. There was Mt Gambier, Portland, Tarrington and districts and it was a great night and there were people everywhere. It featured excerpts from Handel's Oratory 'The Messiah'. I think we all did that together with about one rehearsal. There was Bach, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, etc. I think I played for that combined one and Eva was conducting it. I remember people looking at the programme that night and saying "Portland C.E.M.A, what does that mean?". One chap said "I don't know, I think it might be the Church of England Men's Association" and then they thought that could not be right because there were ladies too. It took a while to educate them to that.

Here is another one 'C.E.M.A. concert an unqualified success'. A big long write-up again. Here is another Choral Festival at Hamilton in 1951. We really enjoyed those in November, which was a good time of the year to travel. It was great to hear other choirs. Mt Gambier Choral Society, Alexandra Girls' College Choir, which was before the Hamilton College combined with it. Christ Church of England Hamilton, the Lutheran Choral Union Choir, Hamilton City Band Choir and the Stawell Choral Society and C.E.M.A. Musical Group. Portland Choir sang 'Vagabonds' and 'The Hamilton Civic Choir. All those choirs that were about then.

The Brown?? Concert. That always got good. See this is quite attractive.

That one, the Hamilton one, was charged for of course, because that was the admission, but I do not think we charged for the programmes. I am sure we did not. Then at the interval, we would have little orchestral selections too. They had good value for their money really.

(INDICATING) What was that one. We had celebrity artists there, so that must have been for ourselves, which we had to do every now and again to have some money.

Now here are the drama ones. Of course we had Margaret Flynn here, who was a very experience and talented actress and producer. She liked producing better than acting. She really had everybody right up to the minute, there was no detail overlooked.

In 1951 we took an interest in the drama and we used to meet every Sunday night and have play readings. They were over Keith Richard's studio. He was interested in drama and music, as was his wife Joan (they had no family at the time). He had his studio down where the Commonwealth Bank is now and up above it they lived there and we used to go there and have these really good play readings, impromptu, we loved it. There was as much rivalry over getting a good part in the play reading, as there was in getting a part.

Who were some of the people who were in these plays ... this is 'A Murder is Being Arranged'?

Owen Williams, Rene Lyons, Allan Hodge, Dorris Hollamby (who was in charge of the Needle Factory) and Fred Merryweather and his mother Rhoda (she was not in this play, but she was a member), June Grinton (a high school teacher), Leila Carthew (of course Leila is still here), Bob Stuchbery and Ray McDonald and Dawn Barclay (who is now Dawn Turner).

In what year was that ... that was 1951?

That was produced by Joyce Ridley. 'The Shop on Sly Corner' - this was just from the dramatic group in 1953. Harold Salmon, Bernard Hadley, Leila Carthew, Margaret Sainsbury (who married Eric Thorpe), Pam Goodman, Alice Kenny, Fred Merryweather, Robert Newman, Barry Bower and Eric Thorpe and that play was produced by Margaret Flynn.

And that was a three-act play. So, you did not have any music on that one?

No, that was the play 'A Murder Has Been Arranged', because sometimes they just had the play.

There is another Christmas Festival one. We had at the time a little play of the nativity produced by Elaine Blake, Mrs Bobbie Blake who was absolutely wonderful, because she was a professional actress. She came here (her husband was at Borthwicks) and they bought a little farm at Heathmere. We had a separate group, this was not anything to do with C.E.M.A, but a lot of C.E.M.A. members were in it and we used to go out there once a month for Shakespearean readings. She was such an artist and she could tell us the right way to say things. I remember trying to

read for one of the witches once and she did not think I was quite 'witchy' enough. I remember her husband, who was trying to get the right expression, "I have done the deed", you see. He used to go around feeding the animals at work and he would keep saying "I have done the deed" and at last he got it to his satisfaction and he said "I have done the deed" and he reckoned that would pass and he was so happy with that.

How many people would go out there?

The other day I found the little book they gave us when we left. Can read the names if you would like.

Yes, I would.

Of course, Bobbie ... this is the little book of Shakespeare they gave me when we left and she has got written 'parting is such sweet sorrow'. Bobbie and Hal, Maragret Thorpe, Leila Carthew, Hugh Williamson and Roy Williamson, Margaret McDougall (who is now Margaret Luers at Annesley), Olive Meissner, Elizabeth Edwards (who was a high school teacher), Eric Thorpe, Gordon Wilson (another high school teacher), Ian Anderson (who had the Club Hotel), Eileen Hassett (the hairdresser), Elva Carrs, Dianna Patterson (who is still in the town, her late husband Keith Patterson), Doris Holamby, Jeanette Connellan and her husband Tom, Mary Wilson, Ted Hartley (a high school teacher), Doris Merryweather and Rhoda Merryweather, Una Gregory and Dorothy Woolcock and Bunty Yelland and Pam Gorman, Joyce Anderson, Olive Williamson and Maurice Yelland. So that was our group and we enjoyed.

Later on, after I left, Bobbie produced 'Midsummer Night's Dream' which I believe was absolutely wonderful. I was not here, but I heard about one man said "my wife carted me along to this and I did not want to go and it was magical". He was just so thrilled with it, because she was a great artist and sadly is no longer with us.

'Passing Brompton Road' – that was another play that they put on. We went up to Heywood and put on a concert there for the Queen of First Aid, Portland Ambulance. That was 1954. 'A Quiet Weekend', that was a comedy. 'Rookery Nook', of course that was very popular.

1954 a night of drama and comedy. We had three one act plays. I liked the three one act play. I thought they were good, because it gave variety to the programme and if people went along and they didn't like one, they might like another. You did not have

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to have everybody together at rehearsals. A lot of people did not like them. Those there were produced, one by Margaret Flynn (I see I was in that one), Allan Hodge and that was produced by Alice Kenny.

This night of musical comedy was in January 1955 and Margaet Luers (who was Magaret McDougall), she produced that. As you can see, it was a lovely programme all round. Items from the show were 'Annie Get Your Gun', 'The Student Prince' and Gilbert & Sullivan selections, musical comedy selections. It was a very good programme. Margaret did a lot to help, because she so conveniently placed there. People would go in and she would rehearse.

That was another Christmas Carol one, sponsored by the RSL Ladies Auxiliary. So that must have been a money raiser for them.?Association, that was another one. So, you see, over the years we have had quite a number organisations.

'Melodious Memories of Gilbert & Sullivan' – That has not got a date on it that one, so I just do not know when it was. Probably about 1956, because the other ones were about that time (on the same page).

'The Owner of Redfields' – that was another drama. We had difficulty getting men for a while, so we put on this all-women's play, but people like to see men in it too. We had Brendan Jarrett (Stage Manager), Dennis Merryweather (Stage Manager). But they were all ladies, but because the play was about a man and they kept referring to him, I think perhaps 'Happiest Days of Your Life', that was riot. It was just so funny and so well done. C.E.M.A. Drama Group scores again. In 1955 this was. "Producer Margaret Flynn and the 13 members of the cast and the behind-the-scenes helpers are to be congratulated on the successful three-night showings and the smooth running of John Daltons hilarious three act play 'The Happiest Days of Your Life' in the Free Library Hall". I put those little things in because of the thought that Margaet had for everything. Just before the show, she gave me this little notice – "Nancy, have no worries, you are doing a good job. Watch volume and movement. Your costume looks good, but your makeup could be a little heavier. Best of luck for tonight". Then at the end, he gave everybody a little handkerchief and it was "Congrats Nancy a grand show, Marg". And another wonderful review.

This is our 21st birthday celebration in 1966.

There is a big gap there of 10 years, is that when you left?

That was when I went away. We left at the beginning of 1957. Very, very sadly, because George and I both loved Portland. We did not want to leave. He got a promotion.

I was in Casterton in 1966 and I came down for this 21st birthday and we had it at the High School Assembly Hall. I stayed with Margaret Luers, who has been a very good friend to me over the years. Here is the programme. We tried to do things that we had done over the 21 years before. See Collin Woolcock was in that. [It's Autumn Now] We had put that one on many years before and Eric Thorpe produced that. Marion Conwyn, Marie Patterson, Dorothy Woolcock, Pam Gorman and Collin Woolcock. When we first did it, Dawn Turner used to do the parts there. It was a very popular one. There are all the programmes there. That is about all I have after that. Of course, the work began on getting a C.E.M.A. building and during all that I was away. I did send money for it to help them. Whenever I came down (they often had a show on in the holiday period in the summer and I would come down and keep up with all my friends), but all that work was done when I was away. I was away 20 years and when I came back and then I remarried and here living on the two corners, opposite me were Annie Urquart and Grace Campbell (who had lived just round the corner and across the road, when I

was living in Palmer Street). Also, lots of my friends are still here. I have been actively involved in C.E.M.A. for a while. In the last two to three years, I have been involved again, because circumstances did not permit it before.

Any thing else I could tell you about?

Let's have a break.

Mrs. McLeod was a key figure in C.E.M.A. in the early days. Could you tell us about her?

She was indeed! Right from the beginning she was a helper-out. I think I am right in saying this, we used to have PA Groups. On stage she was a professional. But her favourite numbers which everybody loved to hear her sings, was 'Little Mr Baggy Britches'. That was a star item, it used to nearly bring the house down with that, even though it was so many years afterwards. She helped a lot with all the shows. She was on the committees and worked hard for it.

When she died some years ago (I was back in Casterton then), all her music was for sale and I was longing to get down to the sale and I was unable to get down. She had a great collection of old items, which are not easy to come by now. She could tell little stories. She was a real old trooper and everybody loved her coming on stage.