

TOGETHER ONE VOICE

Orla Parkinson.

Bláithín Gallagher

'TOGETHER ONE VOICE' really lived up to its name on October 20th at the Glens Centre Manorhamilton, when Valerie Whitworth, the choir leader fully engaged the "Cabaret" audience and had them on their feet joining in with the singers, who had entertained them earlier in the evening.

"If you can speak, you can sing".

That's the philosophy of Frankie Armstrong who pioneered the natural voice technique, and taught it to Valerie who uses this method in the singing workshops she facilitates on Monday nights at the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton.

All songs are taught by ear (listening and copying) so participants don't need to be able to read sheet music. Valerie teaches a mixture of songs from different parts of the world, ranging from simple chants/rounds that are repeated over and over again and which relax and lift the spirits, to more complex songs, in three- and four-part harmony, that create a joyful communal experience.

Medical research indicates singing is good for your mental health and general well-being. However in addition to learning to sing new songs in harmony, participants from the Manorhamilton group are enjoying making links and building positive relationships with other communities, and forming new friendships.

Singing groups from Enniskillen and Omagh (and a fledgling one in Derry) joined members of the of the Manorhamilton group in the Glens for the fundraising cabaret comprising over 50 singers on stage. Many of the singers spent a fun weekend at the Benwisken centre, singing, walking, and relaxing with the event in Manorhamilton a highlight of the weekend. A great night was had by all!

We are very grateful to Kevin McAleer who



Together One Voice, perform at the Glens, Manorhamilton Photo by: *Fiachra Gallagher Lawson*

performed a highly entertaining routine for over 30 minutes on the night. By all accounts the audience were in stitches. We are grateful also to Anna Legge and all at the Glens Centre, and a special thanks goes to Ray Duffy who sorted out our lights, sound, stage, music stands, etc. on the night, and was really very helpful in setting up the event.

This was just one of the many events that the singers have participated in outside of the regular weekly singing sessions. To date, members of this fledgling group have performed at:

- *Songs from Zimbabwe workshop with Brendan Taaffe, Enniskillen*
- *Come and Sing fundraiser in aid of Marie Curie charity, Enniskillen*
- *he Big Sing in the newly-opened Ebrington Square, Derry*
- *Sing for Water concert at Strule Arts Centre, Omagh (£3000 was raised for Wateraid which will help over 200 get access to clean water in Africa)*
- *Northern Ireland Wateraid Annual Fundraisers lunch at the Titanic Centre, Belfast*
- *Bluegrass Festival, Omagh Folk Park*
- *Harvest Gathering, Baronscourt, Tyrone*
- *The Glens Centre Cabaret, Manorhamilton*
- *W Ali Burns workshop, Enniskillen*

The Manorhamilton group consists of about twenty-five people, male and female, from far and wide, who currently attend regularly. New members are more than welcome, and are needed, as we want participants to be able to drop in and out of the project, as other commitments allow. We want to ensure

that the group can be as inclusive as possible, including people of all ages and backgrounds. Why not come along some Monday evening and sing with us? All are welcome and no previous singing experience is needed. Workshops usually begin with exercises to loosen and relax the body and voice. The atmosphere is supportive, and much is accomplished at a relaxed pace. Most of all, it is great fun, very energising and a great way to make new friends! Currently the Monday night session runs from 7 to 9pm and cost €8 or €6 concession. No need to book, just turn up and you will be made feel very welcome! For more information, contact val@valeriewhitworth.co.uk or see www.valeriewhitworth.co.uk

Kevin McAleer & Valerie Whitworth

