

THE COURIER MAIL
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By Patricia Kelly

Choir reject on Singalong Road

Martin Meader didn't take too kindly to being kicked out of his school choir in London's East End when he was eight, which is why he is so passionate about community singing now.

Today, Meader travels the world giving community vocal workshops. In Brisbane last weekend, he showed about 40 people from teenagers to an 82 year old grandmother that everyone can sing and that singing in a choir can change your life.

Meader's life changed the day he read the review of a Perth choral concert commemorating the experience of women in a World War II Japanese prisoner-of-war camp who saved their sanity by singing together.

The concert in 1990 - the English-born Meader, who came to Australia in 1972, graduated with a diploma and distinction in film making at the Swinburne Film & Television School in Melbourne - ignited his creative instincts.

"The story just leapt off the page at me," Meader said. "I wanted to know more."

He discovered more and then wrote a film script that became the \$25.6 million film *Paradise Road* which starred Glenn Close.

There are no pretensions in a Meader vocal workshop. Everything is relaxed and fun. Singing is to be enjoyed, he keeps telling the group. "Never mind a wrong note or two," he says. "Just let your voices go free. Sing from the heart."

The workshop begins with a few minutes of concentrated humming, then singing continuously on each of the vowel sounds. Co-ordination exercise follow - clapping and singing. It looks like child's play until you try to keep mind, voice and hands going simultaneously. Each song gets more complex. Mistakes are made, melodic lines forgotten but causal Meader never loses his cool.

Meader now combines filmmaking and directing unaccompanied community choirs in Perth while he prepares for his next feature film - a children's adventure story based on the letters of the alphabet which is entitled, *The Way To Alphabeticus*.

