

PHOTOGRAPH: EUAN ROBERTSON



Clockwise from left: Roddy Woomble; his band Idlewild; and Brian Eno – one of the inspirations for his new electronic solo album

then eventually it was to make a demo. And then it was to put out a seven-inch single. And then eventually, when you make that seven-inch single, you think, 'Well, actually maybe we'll go and play in London.'

"All these things happen and eventually we got signed to EMI and that was one reason we existed. Because they had the infrastructure and the money to support us. So, we went on tour all over the place and made records and because of that we developed this fan base that allowed us to continue beyond the EMI record deal when that finished.

"The longevity of the band is because we've never tried to have longevity. We've just stumbled along. And we're all self-taught. None of us are proper musicians so we've always found our own way around it."

When it comes to influences on the new solo album Woomble will admit to listening to Brian Eno's Music for Films, Night Tracks on Radio 3 and NTS radio.

"And, of course, people like Dylan, Bjork, long-time favourites I go back to again and again and find inspiration."

But, he points out, when working with Mitchell, they never talked about other records while making the record. "We never talk about, 'Oh, let's

reference this.' That way, if it does end up sounding like something, it was done by accident.

"I put that down to the fact that we [Idlewild] never started off playing cover versions. A lot of bands start playing cover versions. We always tried to write our own songs straight away. Psychologically that made us ... I don't know ... We've never been a band that references other bands."

He pauses, smiles. "I mean, a lot of people think we sound like loads of other bands."

We talk more about how life has changed for all of us this last year. He thinks it is not necessarily a bad thing.

"I think there has to be points of change in life, doesn't there? And either they are instigated by yourself or instigated by things outwith your control. My feeling is life can't always be the same. It has to change sometimes."

Life and music. Roddy Woomble has a new record out. It's not like the ones he has made before. Isn't that a good thing?

Lo! Soul is now available on digital release. The vinyl and CD release follows in August. There will be an online launch of the album on Tuesday at 8pm. Tickets from <https://roddywoomble.bandcamp.com>

'I sing from the heart. It's glorious'

Bearsden Choir: Phil Malloch, tenor

AFTER 39 years as a Church of Scotland minister, Phil Malloch retired in 2009, moved with his wife to Torrance, joined the local church – and Bearsden Choir. He is looking forward to the relaxation of the ban on communal singing, for churches and choirs alike.

How did you begin singing, and be involved in Bearsden Choir?

"With musical parents, I have sung since infancy. No-one in our house could sing a melody without others adding the parts. In the school choir I sang treble in first year and moved through alto to bass as my voice broke, although I ended up singing tenor. I remember a fellow pupil inviting me to his home for tea once; his dad had sung with Glasgow Orpheus Choir, so I had a voice coaching as well!

"Piano lessons in youth meant I could read music, and at university I shared a room with a guitarist, who started me off playing that. Over the years I often sang with the guitar in worship, especially with young people. As a minister, singing meant hymns in church and carols at Christmas. I helped out in church choirs. In Killearn, the Strathendrick Singers met on Mondays, which was my day off. That widened my repertoire and gave me 15 years of delight.

"When I retired and moved, a friend in Bearsden Choir invited me to join. Knowing its high standard, I tentatively auditioned, and have enjoyed 12 years as a member of the tenor section."

What has being in the choir meant to you in the pandemic?

"When everything stopped in March 2020, I lost choir, church services and my exercise class in one fell swoop. The gym had provided one hour of exercise each week and lockdown allowed us to walk for an hour a day. Without missing a Sunday, church started meeting on Zoom. At least watching from home we can sing along – communal singing spreads the virus.

"The Choir was a different kettle of fish. The time-lag with



Zoom means we cannot sing together – unison, let alone harmony, would be chaotic. It was a real loss, till the director Andrew Nunn gathered us on Zoom, to sing with our microphones muted. He is a great encourager: in normal practice, he picks up our errors, not to reprove but to improve. I am so grateful he still encourages, even though we're muted. He'll say, with a twinkle, 'That was great! I don't think I've ever heard you sing better!' We laugh – and keep going."

What has been the choral highlight of your singing life?

"There are so many it is hard to choose. I once conducted Stirling Presbytery in Dunblane Cathedral, singing Psalm 24, 'Ye gates,' unaccompanied, facing each other in the choir stalls. Many knew the harmonies. The final, heartfelt Hallelujahs had me wondering if music in heaven would sound any better. I was so awe-struck I almost forgot to conduct."

What has been the best part of your time with Bearsden Choir?

"Singing glorious music joined to words that express my own beliefs. We are a secular choir, but I can sing Vivaldi's 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace...' from the heart, and hope that shows in my face. Whatever our varying beliefs, knowing millions are anxious about illness or income, we all wish peace to the world today."

The Bearsden Choir's "virtual choir" performance of Vivaldi's Gloria will be free-to-view online at 4pm on Sunday May 30. www.bearsdenchoir.com