

# FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

## THE CHOIRBOY

I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that my grandkids are exceptional. Okay, you probably think yours are, too. But mine REALLY are! They're exceptionally good looking ... exceptionally bright ... exceptionally fond of their Granddad ... exceptionally talented. And you'd know what I mean if you could just hear them sing ...

Like, I've got this cute four-year-old granddaughter with a voice like an angel. And when she sings, "I'm a little green frog, swimming in the water ..." her lovely liquid notes give me goosebumps!

I've got two other granddaughters whose favourite song is one I taught them – my homemade version of a French song I learned in a previous lifetime when I was at school: "Frere Jacque, Frere Jacque, dormez vous, dormez vous ..." And they're now old enough to add their own made-up, in-English, giggle-girly verses – wonderful!

I've got two giant grandsons who're both into hip-hop – and they do these fine sound-effect renditions of songs I can't understand by artists I've never heard of with names I can't pronounce. And I've got a younger grandson who once entertained me

Haa-AA-le-luu-jah!  
HA-A-A-LE-LU-U-JAH!



and his grandmother by singing 'The Warehouse' jingle, over and over again, while we drove the entire length of the South Island.

I've got this cuddly one-year-old, the youngest in our tribe, who can hum (in perfect pitch) the first few bars of a tune that Barney-the-Purple-Dinosaur sings: "I love you, you love me, we're a happy fam-i-ly ..."

And I've got this miniature two-year-old, with sticky-outy blonde hair, who welcomes every chance he gets to sing, at the top of his squeaky little voice ...

Bob da Builda, can we fux it?  
Bob da Builda, yes we dan!

ATHEISTS HAVE NO VISIBLE MEANS OF SUPPORT.

*Stoop Muck and Bivvy, Rolly too  
Ofien da Lendy joined da frew.  
Bob danda dang, so much fun  
Wörting todeva, get da shob done.  
Bob da Builda can we fux it?  
Bob da Builda yes we dan!*

Cute? Oh yes, VERY cute!

**M**y wife and my adult children find this hard to believe, but I know where this musical talent comes from. Because some 300 years ago, before guitars ruled the world, I was a choirboy. Not a begowned, becardled, cathedral-type choirboy. No. More a working-class choirboy. But with a voice (according to my mum) that was as pure as a bellbird.

It was all Mum's doing, actually. She was in the choir. She used to sing solos. And I grew up knowing that, one day, I would inherit a place up there in the terraced rows of earnest songsters.

My career as a choirboy was supposed to begin when my voice broke. But I was a late-developer, and my voice never broke – it just bent. Which is how I came to join (you guessed it) the *sopranos* – the only

short male amongst 20 tall females.

My sense of calling was strong enough, however, to overcome my sense of embarrassment. And I bravely held my own through anthems and cantatas, quavers and crescendos.

Puberty finally came my way (albeit a mild attack), and I got acne plus my first pair of long trousers. I started shaving on Sundays, which helped me sing a little deeper, and I was promoted – YEEHAA! – to the men's row as a tenor.

My dad was a tenor. And my mum was so proud. And singing beside Dad the night we did the *Hallelujah Chorus* was a peak moment in my unfolding life.

It's comforting to know that my personal contribution to the Cooney family's gene-pool is alive and well. And it looks like staying that way for generations to come! ❁

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IT WAS IN THAT LONG-AGO CHOIR THAT JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER & EDITOR) FELL IN LOVE WITH HIS WIFE-TO-BE. AND THEY'VE BEEN MAKING MUSIC EVERY SINCE ...

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## THORT



**Before you criticize someone, make sure you've walked a mile in their shoes. That way, you're a mile away AND you have their shoes!**