

19 March 2003

Dear sisters

I am so full of feeling after the beautiful sounds we made together in Parliament House that I have hardly slept. I want to begin a conversation between us all that might take several forms.

It's only five days since I uttered to Jolanta Gallagher the vision that had been in my mind for weeks as this war loomed nearer: of Parliament House filled with the song of lament and the renewing strength of women's sorrow and love. Judy Clingan was supposed to be with us, but her diary had somehow missed this date for our occasional improvisational singing meetings. She came the next day when Jolanta couldn't and by then I had written some words. Judy took up a blank page of manuscript paper and within an hour 'Lament' was complete. We rang some friends and they rang others. We had two rehearsals at my house. Others happened as the song was learned over the telephone, through emailed music and at other small gatherings across the city. Three days later some 150 of us filled the Foyer of the Parliament with women's voices. Many more wanted to come, but couldn't make that time. Last night millions of Australians heard our song on ABC News and the 7.30 Report. Our song was the only lovely thing on those bulletins.

What I've been dreaming about overnight is probably too much. I hope you'll forgive that. I'm not a *very* mad woman. I've been thinking about these things for a long time and believe that when a great, beneficent community spirit moves, as has happened among us in the past few days, it should be nurtured. What follows are a few suggestions about some ways of fostering what we have begun.

WOMEN'S BUSINESS

In many indigenous cultures, including Australia's, there is a division of women's business and men's business in relation to maintaining the stories and songs that instruct people in how to live properly. The matters of our song—peace, wisdom, the power of love and the expression of grief—are central to what it means for a community to live harmoniously with each other and the natural world. I propose that we continue with how we have begun—as women engaged in safe, serious, deep communion with each other. This is a suggestion about being deeply related; not separatism. From this way of proceeding might spring some more outcomes of use to other women, men and children in our dear, suffering city.

MAKING SONGS

Judy and I spoke yesterday about writing some more songs. We'd like to propose a series of composition meetings with anyone else who would like to join us. The qualifications are a love of words and/or music and a capacity to work collaboratively. Diverse musical styles will be great.

I suggest that the first song might be an expansion of two phrases in Lament - 'the wisdom of women' and 'the power of love'. The song could be a 'conversation', this

time in 4/4, between two groups of women. The first group begins 'Sing of the wisdom of women' and the second group responds by elaborating this wisdom. The last line of this part might be 'It comes from the power of love.' Then the first group again: 'Sing of the power of love, our sisters' and the second group elaborates what this is. So we need words about these matters and music to carry them, sisters!

PLACES TO SING

We have begun our business in a way that relates us very directly to the ideals and purposes for which this special city was designed and built. I'd be happy to call the parliamentary security chief I spoke with yesterday to see whether we could have a regular date at 1pm Tuesdays on sitting weeks in the Foyer of Parliament House. He and his colleagues were very gracious. We could show them the words of our songs so they know we're creative types, not illegal protesters!

Where else could we sing? As suggestions come up – like the Friday 12.30pm date in the exhibition space of the ACT Legislative Assembly and now the big Peace Concert at the National Folk Festival on Easter Sunday with an audience of 2000 – perhaps someone could be their collector and arranger?

We can keep meeting at my house for rehearsals, but if everyone shows up it will always have to be in the garden and winter is approaching. Any ideas? School of Music??

PHILOSOPHY MEETINGS

I would love to help start a regular meeting, preferably in a space in the Parliament building, where women meet to discuss philosophy. I propose that the only subjects be Love and Wisdom, the meaning of the two Greek words from which we have our English word 'philo-sophy', usually translated 'love of wisdom'. We could invite women parliamentarians and staffers and all other women who are interested. Is anyone interested in developing this idea with me?

A NAME

Several media people asked our name. In the absence of one the ABC TV news called us 'a chorus of women'. In the Greek dramas of 2500 years ago, from which Western theatre is a continuation, the Chorus speaks for the citizens and its function is often to comment on events. Our words 'choir' and 'choral' come from the same Greek root and from that tradition. So I suggest that we call ourselves that: A Chorus of Women. Alternatively, Women's Chorus.

CONTACTS

Jill Parliament has agreed to be the keeper of contacts among us and any other women who wish to take part in what we're doing, so please call or email her on phone 6257 7711 or at jill_parliament@hotmail.com The list will be used for no other purpose than contact between us.

With love,
Glenda Cloughley