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presented by **Sandy McCutcheon**
on Wednesday 14/5/2003

Glenda Cloughley

Summary:
Lament

Transcript of this program:

In the weeks before the war in Iraq I kept imagining the sound of women's lament filling the Australian Parliament.

The grief I felt for Iraqi people was deeper than my anger about the collapse of peaceful processes; stronger than my boredom during adversarial speeches at peace rallies.

Sorrow doesn't oppose anything. It's a form of love. Often, it's more original and potent than rage. In many myths about the eternal cycle of the seasons and generations the song of grief brings life out of death.

But no-one else in Canberra was singing laments.

So was I feeling a personal or communal grief?

This story is the answer to that question.

My reason for telling it is to encourage others to be bold: to follow the human capacity for empathy and imagination into actions that are similar in kind to the lament that did fill Parliament House.

Five days before the Prime Minister announced that Australia would participate in the war I told my idea to a friend.

'Ooh, that's powerful,' she said. 'You should do something about that.'

So I wrote some lyrics that night.

I met my composer friend Judy Clingan the next afternoon. Within an hour she'd written a beautiful melody.

News of the plan spread quickly. We emailed the music, taught it over the phone, encouraged women who wanted to practise at home with their neighbours.

At rehearsals there was a current of strength in the voices that was unmistakably linked to the idea that had possessed me in the previous weeks. On the 18th of March we scattered ourselves over the huge foyer of the Parliament so we didn't look like a choir. None of us knew everyone or how many we were.

At 1 o'clock, when Judy and I sang 'Open the doors of the chambers (of your hearts)' and the glorious sound of 150 other voices began to soar through the high, resonant marble space, I was so full of love and grief that I missed a few bars.

Many people wept as we sang. 'This is different to revolution and counter-revolution!' a man said to me between verses. Later, the women – aged from 18 to 81 - said they didn't feel impotent anymore.

We were in newspapers, on national news, current affairs and radio programs. Choirs from all over the country asked for the music.

There was no question of not continuing what we'd begun.

We named ourselves 'A Chorus of Women' from the description of us on the 7:30 Report by Fran Kelly, the ABC's political editor.

In taking this name we stand in an ancient lineage. In the Greek theatre Chorus speaks for the citizens, comments on events and foretells the future.

A robust, articulate Chorus is integral to the idea of democracy that's embedded in English from the Greek words *demo* *kratos*, meaning 'the strength, influence,

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power, authority' (of) 'the people'.

Since then, we've been busy— perhaps because no-one was cast in our role for such a long time.

We've helped open The Children of the Gulf War photographic exhibition in the ACT Legislative Assembly; performed 'Lament' with some Sydney friends to 50,000 people at a peace rally in the Domain; given a concert in the Australian War Memorial; sung at the opening of the Rachum Labyrinth near Canberra, and in the peace concert at the National Folk Festival to an audience of 2000 people. This month we perform with Mirramu Dance Company.

Meanwhile, several members of A Chorus of Women have written new songs. Theatre and multicultural projects are brewing. We meet regularly with the aim of reviving the original meaning of philosophy, which is 'love of wisdom'.

And now 'Lament' is to be presented in the Masters of Analytical Psychology programme at the University of Western Sydney as an example of cultural therapy—as a modest yet imaginative way of redressing some imbalances and sounding voices that were silent, so that our country may become more creative and humane.

Glenda Cloughley is an occasional songwriter and singer who works in Canberra as a Jungian analyst and psychotherapist. Formerly, she worked as a newspaper journalist, public affairs and management consultant.

Guests on this program:

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Keri Phillips

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