

The Victory Sisters

By Victoria Bass

The Victory Sisters are one of The UK's most popular vintage trios. Liz Chadwick, middle harmony (the jam of this harmony sandwich), sole Northerner between two soft Southerners and general salt of the earth musical whiz kid. Loves a tombola.

Karen Moses, twinkly top notes and twinkly toes, top layer of the harmony trio, hardest working soprano in the biz, usually to be found with a coffee in her hand. Loves all the snacks. Marcia Sommerford, bassy bottom line, designated driver and vintage hair enthusiast (#rollsnotholes - if you know, you know). Will never have a top 'C', but has a bottom one. Loves a rummage in a charity shop.

As well as being wonderful singers, The Victory Sisters are also fabulous friends of mine, I thought I'd get to know a bit more about how they met, how they came upon their name, their favourite eras and fashion, their influences and much more!

Karen explained how they met way back in 2014 when "we were all cast in a production of a musical that Liz was also producing. Liz knew she wanted to start up a 1940s inspired trio and so she asked me and Marcia to be involved."

Liz added that " We got along really well during this time and became really good friends."

Liz had been wanting to start a vintage group for a long time but hadn't found the right ladies with the same drive and passion as herself for this style of music. "In early 2014, I approached Karen and Marcia about the idea and they were both really excited about all the possible opportunities. We then didn't really do anything about it until later that year when Karen's dad was helping to organise a charity concert down in Sussex. Karen suggested it'd be a great first gig for us, and it was a huge success! It was such a thrilling experience for us to have something we'd worked really hard on to be appreciated so much by an audience. We now have a huge fan base in Sussex and do many gigs down there. "

Marcia explained "we were so nervous before that first gig! We sang three songs I think, and I remember physically shaking backstage before we went on. I also remember the buzz afterwards, and feeling like I couldn't wait to do it again!"

Their wonderful name was formed by the help of all of them, as well as their other halves. Liz told me, "We originally had a slightly different name, but as there was another group in the US with the same name, we wanted to change it. So Karen's Victory Mister (we call our other halves Victory Misters), sealed the final name adding "Sisters" and we've never looked back."

The girls perform mostly songs from the 1940s as a trio but they also have some numbers ranging from the 1920s all the way through to the 1950s. The girls also sing with their friend Marc Kelly on numbers like That's Life, Sway and My Way.

"He's our swoony crooner - the Bing to our Andrews Sisters", Marcia says.

As a trio, The Andrews Sisters are obviously a huge influence of theirs, not only with their amazing harmonies but also their humour and their individual down to earth style. But legends like Vera Lynn, Doris Day and Gracie Fields are also strong influences and their songs are a treat to sing too says Liz.

Marcia added that although we stick to traditional early 1900s repertoire, contemporary artists like The Puppini Sisters and Caro Emerald are wonderful. "They've really brought vintage music to the masses, showing that these songs that are almost 100 years old never really age - I love that there are so many young people who enjoy our gigs as well as older folk who remember the music from the first time round! "

As well as loving vintage music, the girls are crazy for vintage fashion. They have a wide variety of attire, ranging from land girl outfits and uniforms, to tea dresses, to full sequined evening gowns. Liz tells me "We choose our outfits based on what event we're performing at. We are super lucky to have two brands who we work with, who provide some amazing outfits to give us that authentic look; the fabulous Seamstress of Bloomsbury who have the most elegant day time outfits and Collectif Clothing from whom we have some drop dead gorgeous evening wear. "

Karen especially loves The Seamstress of Bloomsbury and has worked with them several times now at the alternative clothing trade show London Edge. "Their clothes are all based on authentic patterns and prints, are beautifully lightweight and easy to move in, and made from natural materials - rayon crepe de chine."

Along with voices of songbirds and clothing straight from the 1940s, they have to have the perfect hairstyles to complete the retro look! Liz emphasised that they've all come a long way in our hairstyling. "And by we, I mean Karen and me! Marcia has always been wonderful at vintage hair and she used to do ALL our hair in the beginning. But with a bit of practice, Karen and I can now style our own hair, much to the relief of Marcia. Although I still call on her to do my victory rolls as I haven't quite mastered those. My go-to style is curled and voluminous with lots of big flower hair clips."

Karen added "Yes, to start with we had A LOT of assistance in the hair department from our resident in-house hair styling wizard Marcia! Then gradually I learnt to curl

my hair with a combination of overnight rollers and setting lotion and practised and practised my victory rolls until Marcia approved the results!”

Marcia doesn't mind lending a helping hand.. “I have to say, my biceps just aren't as beefy now I'm not styling 3 heads of hair! I tend to favour a damp set on a foam roller, followed by a vigorous brush out to produce that iconic 40s curl, combined with larger-than-life victory rolls. I'm also partial to a poodle - I think the hairstyles of the wartime era are so glamorous and flattering, even if they do make my arms ache from endless back-combing! “

The girls have been lucky to have some amazing gigs over the years. Performing a few times at The Ivy Club in London for a celebrity studded charity event has been quite memorable. “I always enjoy any performance we do, especially the ones where the guests are fully engaged with the theme with costumes and they're all on the dancefloor, singing along. It makes me happy to see that we are bringing happiness to others”, Liz says.

Marcia went on to say “Yes, I love it when they're dancing! It's hard to pick one, as we have so many lovely gigs! Our most frequent repeat gig, and one of my all-time favourites, is the Posh Club, a fabulous afternoon of cabaret and merriment for posh pensioners!! The events are always such a hoot, with everyone up and dancing and singing along.”

“Oooh gosh where to begin!” Karen says, “ I have had so many joyful and thrilling moments performing with The Victory Sisters. I agree, singing at The Ivy Club London always feels very glamorous and exciting! Last year we also sang at a garden party in Sussex where Roger Daltrey was in attendance and afterwards complimented us on our performance! Those are two gigs that stand out in my memory but if I'm honest I totally agree, my favourite gigs are when the audience gets up and gets involved with the dancing, that's what's truly thrilling at an event, when the crowd are right with you!”

Sadly with the current situation everything is a little up in the air with future performances, as it is for all artists. The girls are looking forward to performing their stage show, A Wartime Songbook, for the third time. “We first put this show together in 2017 and it sold out so we're thrilled to be bringing it back later this year”, Liz says.“Then we'll be busy gearing up for a theatre show in September; we're performing as part of a variety show for one night only in Basildon with the lovely Neil Sands who we have worked with before.”, Karen explains.

There's so much to love about the vintage scene, and working with like minded people. I know this as a solo singer it can often be lonely performing at events! It's much nicer when you're part of a team.

LIZ: For me, I love singing with other people who share the same passion for it. It instantly makes work enjoyable. Giggling with others is just generally a lot of fun;

having them there to laugh with and bouncing off their energy during performances. I adore the harmonies you can achieve in a group and we work really hard to get our voices to blend so that we sound almost as one. The vintage scene is continuously growing and helping this music, which I love, become more well known to a younger generation; the older generations just love hearing songs from their youth.

MARCIA: Same Liz, there is something so satisfying about nailing a juicy harmony! We get asked a lot if we're actual sisters (like the Andrews sisters were) to which we reply that we are 'sisters in spirit' - because we really are! Giggling together for almost 6 years has meant that we are not just work colleagues but great friends too, and I think this really comes across in our performance on stage. The vintage scene is ever-growing, but still tight-knit - everyone knows everyone in the best possible way, and it is so lovely to be a part of a scene where everyone is so enthusiastic about all aspects of the job - from the music to the outfits, what's not to love?!

KAREN: The sense of community and nostalgia has drawn me further and further into the vintage scene. It's a relatively small industry still compared to the Musical Theatre world that myself and the other girls have been a part of in the past and sometimes still frequent. I have yet to encounter anyone unfriendly at vintage events and always love it when we get to meet up with, and even occasionally share a stage with, other vintage acts.

So, there's a story about three vintage loving girls who as well as making fabulous music have made lifelong friends.

Make sure you follow them on all social platforms to see what they're up to by searching for "The Victory Sisters", or by visiting their website <https://thevictorysisters.co.uk/>.