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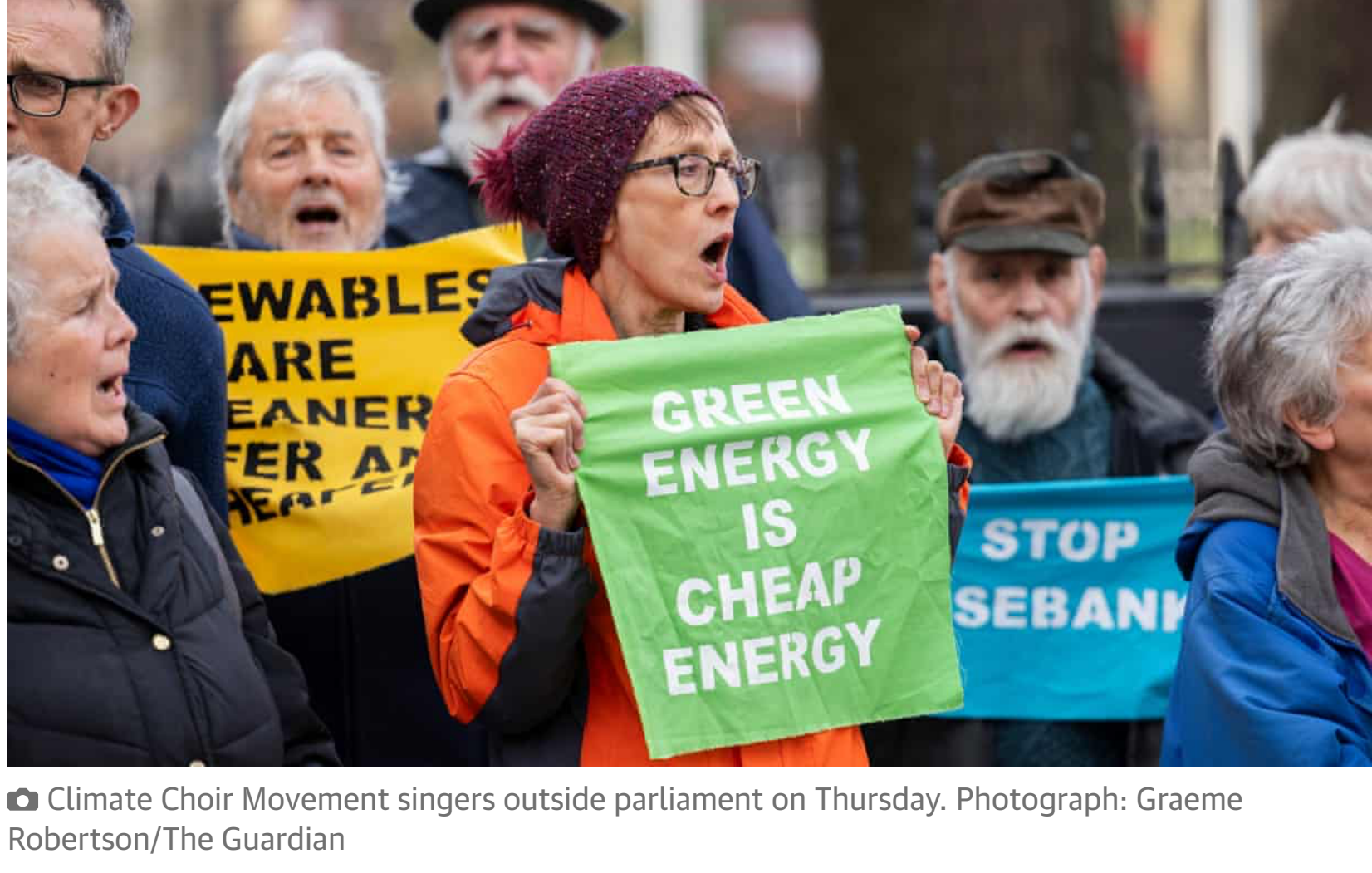
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**Environmental activism**

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# 'No drilling! No drilling!': climate choir sings truth to power in Palace of Westminster

Voices of Climate Choir Movement fill St Stephen's Hall in group's most dramatic protest yet



Climate Choir Movement singers outside parliament on Thursday. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Making an elaborate, distracting fuss, the climate choir's 100-strong decoy choir gets into position on the pavement outside parliament. Police gather and hover nearby.

Politicians rush past on their way into the House of Commons, smiling benignly as the decoy choir launches into a hearty, opening song. Distracted by the music, they do not notice that most of the well-dressed people entering St Stephen's Hall with them are looking nervous and walking stiffly.

It is hard, after all, to walk properly when you've got a large protest banner stuffed down the leg of your trousers - and are worried that in less than five minutes, you're going to be arrested in the home of the UK parliament.

Johnny Devas is a retired architect, specialising in the gothic architecture that makes parliament one of the most recognised buildings in the world. But on Thursday, his expertise is a ruse - and "architecture" a code word.

Once all 100 of the real climate choir protest singers have successfully passed through the airport-style security outside the medieval hall and gathered round, Devas says the magic words: "The architectural tour is about to begin."



A decoy choir took up a position outside while the real climate choir entered parliament. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

And then they're off: with rousing voices that soar up to the lobby's 10-metre high, lofty stone octagon ceiling, echo round its rich mosaic-covered vault and bounce back off the lobby's intricately tiled floor, the climate choir sing truth to power - directly to the people making decisions in their names.

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"Fossil fuel profits are outrageous - **Stop Rosebank!** Stop Rosebank!" they sing to the tune of Handel's Hallelujah chorus. "Runaway climate change is very dangerous!" the altos, tenors and basses politely belt out. "We're in an ecological emergency: no drilling! No drilling!" the rest of the choir harmonise.

Jo Flanagan, the co-founder of the **Climate Choir Movement**, has been planning this protest for months. "We wanted something pretty dramatic: to make a powerful message to all politicians that, the day after the budget, we want more investment in cheaper, renewable energy, not in further extraction of oil and gas from the North Sea.

"And in the middle of the present clampdowns on protesters, I hope our different approach flies the flag for peaceful protest too," she adds. "But goodness, this is nerve-racking!"

The Climate Choir Movement has grown rapidly since its inception in autumn 2022. From its Bristol beginnings, there are now more than 700 members in 12 climate choirs in **England** and **Wales**, with three more choirs pending.



There are now more than 700 members in 12 climate choirs in England and Wales, with three more choirs pending. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Their protests so far - creative, urgent and peaceful calls for environmental change - have been eye-catching: in December, the choirs donned black suits and bowler hats to **serenade financial decision-makers** in the City in London.

Last October, they organised a 100-voice **flash choir at the Science Museum**. There were songs for Gaia at Bath Abbey in September, and in May dozens of singers from London, Bath, Stroud, Oxford and Southampton interrupted the Barclays Bank AGM.

On Thursday they last two and a half minutes before being hustled out by a smiling security guard: "Thank you. Please keep going. There you go."

They file out of the hall extremely slowly, still singing loftily - the conductor waving her hands above to maintain time, to join the decoy choir outside. Their exit takes almost 10 minutes: tourists gape and schoolchildren giggle as they pass.

Outside, the two choirs meet and together walk across to College Green and finish their performance.

Kate Honey, the composer who rewrote Handel's lyrics, is ecstatic: "We brought choirs from all over the country to send a simple message to politicians today to 'Stop Rosebank now: renewables are cleaner, safer and

cheaper," she says.

"Rosebank is a pretty name for a dirty business. It will contribute to destroying the climate but will not lower our bills. The soaring cost of fossil fuels is the cause of much of the current cost of living crisis and people - from UK farmers to its firefighters - are now awake to what is being done to our planet by profiteering oil and gas companies. People want a reliable, affordable energy supply that doesn't put the planet at risk."

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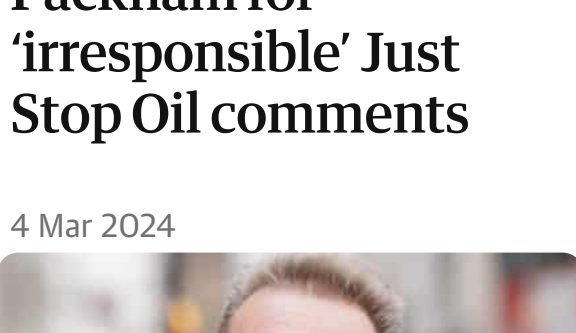
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