

Since this is the last newsletter before Christmas, may I, on behalf of the Choir, wish all our friends “Y Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newyth Dda” in other words a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

This has been a big year for the choir with major concerts with Teddy Tahu Rhodes and Kate Amos at the Melbourne Recital Centre and at Ulumbarra Performing Arts Centre in Bendigo plus the “Till they all come home” concert at Melbourne Town Hall (described below) with Marina Prior and Mike Brady being the standout items. Choir numbers have increased and under our musical director David Ashton-Smith the sound and balance of the choir has improved. We are developing some interesting programs for next year including having (courtesy of the Welsh Church) the Blue Riband winner from the Welsh National Eisteddfod - baritone Andrew Peter Jenkins as our guest artist for our celebration of St David’s Day concert at MLC, in Kew on 2nd March, so watch this space for future concert announcements

Till they all come home

Isn’t it great when a good plan comes together.



After many months of planning, rehearsing new songs and promoting the concert via interviews on the radio (e.g. with Jon Faine and the choir at the ABC and with our MD David Ashton-Smith’s interview with Denis Walter on 3AW) plus seemingly endless promotions via RSL and other service clubs, the time finally arrived for us to perform. On Sunday at 3:00 p.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month one hundred years after the end of WW1, more than 1200 people at the Melbourne Town Hall enjoyed a concert given by a cast totalling over 120 including choristers, band and guest artists, which would have made all our Diggers proud.

At the conclusion of our “Till they all come home” concert at the Melbourne Town Hall, the Choir and our guest artists enjoyed thunderous applause after, what many of the audience said, was the best concert we had ever produced.

From the measured tone of our compere Bill Spawton, who invited the audience to stand while the choir sang “For the fallen” followed by a moment’s silence, to the uplifting final choruses of “We are Australian”



performed by the choir and guest artists Marina Prior and Mike Brady (with Michael Cristiano) and the Australian Youth Band, the audience was rapt.

“For the fallen” was followed by a poem, “The next war” narrated by Bill, written by Robert Graves, a captain of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, who was wounded and left for dead at the Somme (he later died at the age of 90). In the poem he refers to boys playing “with bows and arrows and wooden spears, playing at Royal Welch Fusiliers...” which was the perfect segue into the choir’s rendition of “Lest we forget”, which opens with “See how the little children play, always a game of war...”.

This was followed by the choir medley “Till the boys come home” (from which the concert’s title was derived), supported by the Australian Youth Band, and including such well known songs as “It’s a long way to Tipperary”, “Roses of Picardy” and “Pack up your troubles”.

“You raise me Up” from the choir led into a Vera Lynn (the Forces Sweetheart) medley sung by our guest artist and Australia’s sweetheart - Marina Prior including “Yours ‘til the stars have no glory”, “White Cliffs of Dover”, “Lili Marlene” and “Auf wiedersehen”

This was followed by the beautiful “We’ll gather lilacs” by Ivor Novello written in 1945, which reflected the emerging optimism of the ending of WW2.

The choir then launched into Mansel Thomas’ “Men of Harlech” which relates to the seven year siege of Harlech Castle between 1461 and 1468. This was sung to piano accompaniment only, which allowed the 50 member Australian Youth Band to gear up for their stunning performance of Eric Coates “Dam Busters March” from the film of the same name.



Our second guest Mike Brady then performed, with the choir, a patriotic song “This Place”, written especially for the RSL and first performed publicly on ANZAC day this year at the MCG (with some of our choir providing a backing chorus).

“Calon Lan”, performed with the band, proved a good way to end the first half of the music program and an effective way

to introduce our two guest speakers at the middle of the concert (rather than as is more traditional) at the close of the concert.





Brigadier Mike Annett commented on the significance of the Centenary of the Armistice and highlighted the role, which the RSL and Legacy have played, in looking after our veterans and their families since WW1.

This was particularly relevant bearing in mind the focus, which the recent Invictus Games has brought, on the need to support those Australians who have served their country in times of war.

As Sally Capp, our second female Lord Mayor of Melbourne pointed out, the Town Hall was the perfect place to hold such a tribute to the anniversary of the end of WW1, since the Hall had played such a significant role both as a recruitment centre and as an aid centre throughout those dark years.

The second half of the concert began with the haunting “In Flanders Fields” sung by the choir with the Australian Youth Band.



This was followed in lighter mood by the “War Songs Medley” comprising “the Army the Navy and the Air Force, Bless ‘em all, Roll out the barrel. There’s a boy coming home on leave, Kiss me goodnight Sergeant Major, We’ll meet again, When we’re home sweet home again”.

Marina returned with a brace of songs from the WW1 era associated with Gracie Fields “Sally” and “Wish me luck” and demonstrated her multilingual capability by following them with the signature song of popular French singer Edith Piaf “La vie en Rose” sung in French.

“Colonel Bogie” was the AYW’s second major piece and their performance had many of the audience whistling the evocative chorus!

Mike Brady together with Michael Cristiano provided the guitar accompaniment as well as combining to sing Eric Bogle’s song about visiting the graveside of a WW1 soldier Willie McBride entitled “No man’s land” with the choir providing the chorus. At the song’s conclusion there would have been hardly a dry eye in the house.

“He ain’t heavy”, the beautiful song made famous by the Hollies was performed by the Choir with piano only accompaniment and the New Zealand lullaby “Hine e Hine” was sung as a tribute to the New Zealanders who are an integral part of the ANZAC legend.

The concert ended with three uplifting songs. “The World in Union” the unofficial anthem of the Rugby World Cup, was sung by the Choir with the full support of the

Australian Youth Band and must have raised the rafters of the old Town Hall.

Mike Brady then sang another of his own songs, part uplifting prayer, part anthem “Let it Shine”.

As befitted such an occasion the final song performed with everyone on stage was the Seekers favourite “I am Australian” which provided a wonderful ending to a memorable show.



Choir Chorister Profile – Robert (Bob) Williams

Our profile this month is of our second longest serving chorister - bass Bob Williams. Bob was awarded Life Membership of the Choir earlier this year.



I was born in Wales in the upstairs front room of 25 Valley View Street in 1935. We had a wonderful view over the Aberdare valley, at that time dotted with coal mines and slag heaps spoiling the lovely mountain sides. I had a very happy childhood roaming and playing on the mountain behind our street or fishing for minnows or sticklebacks with jam jars in the Cynon River.

During the war, as children, we suffered little except perhaps that we were introduced to school dinners! The Americans arrived and that was exciting. We followed them and called “Any gum chum” and were often favoured with some chocolate or chewing gum. We must have been pests. The Yanks disappeared suddenly just before D-day.

As the war ended I entered grammar school after doing well enough in the 11+ examination. It was here that I started to take a real interest in four-part harmony singing. Looking back I think the school had three main aims, exceptional scholarship, wonderful singing and a rugby team that could beat other schools for miles around.

I was introduced to tonic solfa notation and we used it for the first two years of secondary school and then



moved on to staff or stave notation in latter years. This was a wonderful introduction to four-part harmony singing. The school housed 400 boys and at least half of them attended choir practice, often held after school. Many teachers also joined in to strengthen the tenors and basses.

It was at this school that I think my love of sport was fostered and it has stayed with me ever since. I have played competitive sport nearly all my life and still enjoy playing bowls every week

I left school and spent a year working in an office for Aberdare Cables. My parents then decided to migrate to Australia to join my mother's brother and, much to my chagrin, I was dragged along. Life was miserable until I was accepted as a student teacher at Ballarat Teacher's college. It was there that I met the beautiful Clare, but it was quite some time before I could convince her that I was the one.

After college we both taught in country schools and were married in Flinders in 1957. We continued to live in the country from the Western District to Gippsland. During this time we both sang in local choirs. In 1962 I was appointed to a large school in Traralgon and after five years we moved and built a family home at Wantirna South where we lived until moving to Mornington in 2011.

We have three children, four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. My career was cut short after suffering a heart attack in 1981 and after a few years working in an administrative position I retired.

At the end of 1984 I decided that it was time that I should join a choir.

I was introduced to Bill Dorman, the choir's first President and he brought me to the first rehearsal of the year in 1985. I settled in and was delighted to go back to some of my Welsh roots. The choir then consisted of about 20 members. I was appointed treasurer in 1986, then Vice President and was President from 1991 until 1994 when I led the choir on its tour to Atlanta, Georgia. We also started the Singer of the Year competition during this time. I retired from the committee for a couple of years but was soon back again with my last year serving as Phil Tomlinson's Vice President.

During my time with the choir I have been heavily involved in organising concerts, looking after uniforms and helping new members through their induction into the choir.

I also initiated the, now regular, supper nights, much against the wishes of some members and am now simply a contributing member of the bass section.

New Chorister Profile - Robert Mits

Rob Mits hails from Croydon Hills, just 15 minutes up the road from the Choir's rehearsal rooms. He is married to Leanne and has 3 children, two of whom are married; he also has 2 grandsons and another grandchild on the way.



Rob is a motorcycle paramedic; he rides a BMW F700GS, which is specifically designed for emergency services. The Paramedic Motorcycle Unit responds to more than 3000 emergency calls a year, and 80% of calls are life threatening or urgent cases. The motorcycles are able to move through heavy traffic faster than a road ambulance.

Rob was introduced to the MWMC by his wife. She attended one of our Mooroolbark Christmas Concerts a couple of years ago and thought Rob would like it. He came to the same concert a year later and was hooked. Robert has a musical background stemming from his involvement with a high school band; this has progressed to playing various instruments with the Alexander & District Brass Band. Welcome to the choir Rob, it is comforting that we can now add paramedic to our ranks (in addition to our resident doctor - baritone Doug Utley).

Upcoming Concert - Sunday 16th December

Mooroolbark Community Centre
125 Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark

The choir's last concert of the year is the traditional "Two shows in one day" at Mooroolbark. The community centre at Mooroolbark only holds around two hundred people and because the single Christmas concert by the Choir was always sold out, we agreed to do two concerts in one day. This has been going on for a while and for the past five years the second concert has been a sell-out too.

This year's performances will be on Sunday 16th December at 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. So if you live in the area and want to be part of the event please phone 1300 368 333 or book online through the Yarra Ranges Council website





Would you like to join the choir?

The choir had a number of new members on deck for the recent "Till they all come home" but we are always on the lookout for new members, whether experienced choristers wanting a new challenge or young inexperienced singers who would benefit from the coaching and direction of our professional music team (which we believe to be the best in the business) and the mentoring of our established choristers.

Our web based learning aids enable newcomers and established choristers to come up to speed with new and existing material very quickly.

Rehearsals are held every Wednesday (excepting school holidays) and run from 7:00 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. when the choir is updated by the choir president and secretary about upcoming events and related choir matters.

We always welcome younger members, although potential members of any age are encouraged to come for an audition.

As one of our relatively recent recruits and admittedly, a chorister who had sung in Wales, said, "There are male choirs and then there are Welsh male choirs..."

If you are interested give Gwyn Harper (0419 562 353), or any choir member, a call and we will be pleased to introduce you to an irreverent but highly motivated group of guys who love the company of fellow choristers and enjoy the challenge of singing in 4-part harmony.

Would you like to sponsor the choir?

The choir is actively seeking sponsors in particular for the annual funding of our famous Singer of the Year Concert.

The number of winners and runners-up of this competition who have gone on to make careers on concert and opera stages worldwide is testament to the significance of this event. The choir provides opportunities for the finalists to perform as guest artists with them in concerts during the year.

If you would like to be associated with this wonderful event or simply wish to have your name or product associated with the choir, please contact any member of the choir's committee and we will be delighted to work with you to make the most of your sponsorship.

Would you like to hire the choir?

As can be seen from the results of the "Till they all come home" concert, the choir has the skills, capability and contacts to produce and run major concert events. In addition, the choir is available for community, corporate and sporting events, dinners, anniversaries, weddings etc.

So if you require anything from a short rousing opening for a conference (say) to a full two-hour concert, complete with the choir's risers and electric piano (if required), please contact Colin Brown (0409 188 109), or any committee member to discuss your needs. Please bear in mind that we're talking about an amateur choir of up to 60 voices plus a professional accompanist and Music Director so we don't come cheap but we provide great value for the investment.

A Welsh Celebration for St David's Day

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Conductor **David Ashton-Smith OAM** Accompanist **Simon Walters**

Associate Artist **Andrew Jenkins**

2018 Blue Riband winner
at the Welsh National Eisteddfod

and **Chloe Harris (Soprano) 2017 Singer of the Year Finalist**

The James Tatoulis Auditorium Methodist Ladies College, 207 Barkers Road, Kew

7.30 pm Saturday 2nd March 2019

www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets or Phone 0413 488 569

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