



## Melbourne Welsh Male Choir “Winter Solstice Concert”

featuring Silvie Paladino & Roy Best  
Saturday 22 June, 2pm

Elizabeth Murdoch Hall, Recital Centre

The Choir will mark the winter solstice on Saturday 22 June by teaming up with Silvie Paladino and Roy Best in a concert at the Recital Centre.

David Ashton-Smith, OAM, the choir’s musical director, said that the winter solstice was traditionally associated with ceremonies celebrating regeneration, renewal and the rebirth of the Sun.

“But you don’t have to go to Stonehenge to mark this natural phenomenon. Just join us at the Recital Centre for an afternoon of uplifting music that offers hope and joy. Songs such as ‘You Raise Me Up’ do raise us up. Music keeps the choir young; it keeps us all young.”

David said that the choir was delighted to be returning to the Recital Centre.

“The Recital Centre is one of our favourite performing spaces. Its magnificent acoustics mean that the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir can perform without amplification – the result is a much richer, much more compelling sound. Silvie Paladino’s soaring voice and Roy Best’s dynamic tenor are a perfect complement to the choir’s four-part harmonies,” he said.

Silvie Paladino is best known (and perhaps best loved) for her regular performances at Carols by Candlelight. She performed in London in Les Misérables for two years, played the lead role of Donna in the smash hit Mamma Mia! throughout Australia and Asia, and performed in The King and I in 2010, in Chess in 2012, and Jerry’s Girls in 2015. Silvie won the Green Room Award for her lead role in Chess. Apart from her theatrical credits, she is well known to Australian audiences through her regular television appearances and tours with different symphony orchestras.

Roy Best established his singing career in spectacular fashion after successfully competing in ABC television’s Operatunity Oz. He performed the role of the Duke in Opera Australia’s Rigoletto at the Sydney Opera House and was rewarded with a standing ovation from a packed house and a television audience of over one million viewers. After studying voice for several years in Melbourne, Roy completed an Associate Diploma in Music through the

Australian Music Examinations Board. He has performed in musical theatre and a large number of operas.

The Winter Solstice concert repertoire will include favourites from musical theatre (in several different languages), traditional choral pieces, and an array of songs that lend themselves to the choir’s strengths, including Welsh standards ‘Sing Rhondda’, ‘Calon Lân’ and newer compositions like ‘Ysbryd y Nos’ (Spirit of the night). Silvie and Roy will give individual performances, team up for songs in Italian and then join the choir in singing the popular Neapolitan song, ‘O Sole Mio’.

David Ashton-Smith, who has been our choir’s director in since 2016, said the male voice choir makes a unique sound.

“The reduced musical range creates a warm, rich sound. It’s a bit like an orchestra full of cellos. The sound made by a four-part male harmony is simply superb,” he said.

“The lyrical lilt of the Welsh language also enriches the voices. When I sang with the English National Opera Company, I was always struck by the distinct harmonies of the Welsh singers.”

The Choir has performed all over the world, from Wales and London to Salzburg, Atlanta, Vancouver and Johannesburg. It was accorded standing ovations at the 2017 Cornwall International Male Voice Choir Festival.

Here in Australia it has starred at events as disparate as the Melbourne Commonwealth Games and the 150th Anniversary of the Eureka rebellion.

“But whether it’s at the Royal Albert Hall, Hamer Hall, Sydney Opera House or the Recital Centre, what defines the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir is the richness and harmonies of the combined voices. The choir embodies the great strength of the Welsh choral tradition,” David said.

“Since the choir sings without music, the choristers have to put in the work to memorise all their songs. It means they have a very focussed attitude when it comes to rehearsals. Then when it comes to performing, they visibly rise to the occasion. You can see their collective spirits lift.”

### Tickets for this concert are:

A Reserve \$70.00 (\$65.00 concession)

B Reserve \$60.00 (\$55.00 concession)

C Reserve \$45.00 (\$40.00 concession)

and available from <https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/> or Phone 03 9699 2228



## Recent concert by the choir

“The World in Union” - Joint Concert with Frankston Ladies Choir Bunjil Place, Narre Warren – 3:00 p.m. Saturday 13th April

With a view to breaking new ground, the choir joined the Frankston Ladies Choir (FLC) for a concert at Melbourne’s newest Performing Arts Centre in the City of Casey.

We had not performed at Bunjil Place before but understood a lot of attention had been given to making this 800 seat venue an excellent place to sing and listen as well as being an easy place to get to and park.

The relatively small but appreciative audience was treated to a varied program covering everything from jazz arrangements and Broadway tunes from the ladies to African chants, Gershwin melodies and Welsh Airs from the gentlemen.

The choirs combined in the first half for Anthem (from Chess), Shelter (Eric Bogle’s beautiful anthem to Australia), Hallelujah (Leonard Cohen’s haunting refrain) and You raise me up. In the second half, the joint choirs performed the Queen classic Somebody to Love, and finished the concert with You’ll never walk alone, World in Union (the theme of the concert), and I still call Australia home.



### Choir Chorister Profile

#### Bob Corden - Baritone

I have always enjoyed singing. As a child, my Church of England junior school choir kindled an interest, but an invitation to a Methodist youth club choir showed me what ‘spirited’ hymn singing was all about. No more high-church dirges for me! My Lancashire home was within easy reach of North Wales and the youth club introduced me to the joys of hiking in the mountains where packed churches sang in a language clearly designed to be sung not spoken. The seeds were sewn. Membership of a Welsh male choir was inevitable.

My working life started in the financial services industry, where I worked full time whilst studying accountancy, law and economics. It was a tough schedule and the occasional weekend of climbing in Snowdonia provided a welcome break.



Life took a significant turn when I was offered a job in Switzerland. Sheila and I got married and, after an idyllic honeymoon in Aberdyfi, we moved to Geneva.

It was quite a change. We were provided with a house in the vineyards, the windows of which framed a view over the lake to the Swiss Alps and the mighty snow-capped peak of Mont Blanc. Not only was the country beautiful but it was a tax haven which attracted the rich and famous. Neighbours, such as Peter Ustinov and James Stewart, walked past our door. There was no poverty. Nobody was interested in politics. I never met one local who knew the name of the Swiss President. They basked in their security. In contrast, the investment industry, in which I worked, presented a stressful environment. Money flowed in from around the globe, some of it clearly the product of questionable enterprise. Parcels of cash would arrive bearing no indication of who had sent them other than an account number known only to our company. People driven by the relentless pursuit of wealth can be monsters. The antidote was, whenever possible, to pop the skis on the roof rack and head into the Alps to ski and sing! Alpen melodies with their infectious rhythm, foot stomping, yodelling and the occasional stein of lager restored sanity.

Shortly after our daughter was born, we were presented with an opportunity to work in France. We settled in a tiny hamlet which pretended none of the glamour of Switzerland but practiced the basic concern for the rights of the working man which had fuelled the French Revolution. Family life was cherished. When Sheila arrived home, having given birth to our son, a local official arrived at the door with a hand full of ten franc notes as a gift of welcome from the government. The mayor knew everyone in his area and invited us all to share a glass of wine with him every Friday evening. His piano accordion encouraged us to break into songs of romance uniquely French. The wine he made himself. Its capacity to dye one’s teeth red did torpedo any plan to arrive home pretending to have worked late.

Seeking a respite from the world of high finance I applied for a job in Zambia. The job was in the copper mining industry and involved teaching the business skills required to equip Zambians to manage their country’s most lucrative industry. The people were truly welcoming and the tiny village of Kalulushi provided a safe environment in which to raise our family. It was refreshing to live and work amongst the happy faces of those who had virtually nothing after years of witnessing the glowering greed of the super-rich.

There was wild life, of course, but lions and elephants rarely wandered in to town. The challenge for me was to understand the social structure. How were men to be



appointed to manage men from other tribes with which there was a history of continuing conflict? Men within the same tribe had a different problem “That man works for me but I cannot tell him what to do. He is my chief!”

It was the decision to train young women to take over secretarial roles, which presented the most difficult social challenge. Women had no social status other than the ranking they had as, maybe, the wife or close confidant of the chief. Talented young women selected for training were abused by their husbands for aspiring to a role in which she might earn her more money than he could hope for. Spirits were sometimes low.

Morale needed a boost. The answer was singing! Tribal differences melted away and young women left their cares behind as they instinctively embraced the harmonies and pulsating rhythms of Africa.

After eight years and the job almost finished we left the African bush to find an education for our children.

We had met lots of Australians during our travels and, after a brief spell in the UK, I applied for a job in Melbourne. We bought a house in Mount Eliza and took root. Melbourne’s financial services industry was a high pressure working environment and when a colleague invited me to a MWMVC concert under the baton of Bill Mead I was hooked. In my international wanderings I have seen how singing can lift spirits and build bridges. As a member of this choir I have witnessed basses talking to 1st tenors and baritones feigning amusement at the humor of a notable 2nd tenor. What more proof could one need? Keep singing!

### New Choir Members Geoffrey and Anthony Cooke

It is fairly unusual to have brothers in a choir (we have previously had two in Alan and David Jones) but even more unusual when they both join at the same time. Brothers Geoff and Anthony are even more different from our usual new choristers coming, as they do, from a truly multi-cultural background.

Their late father, Chris, came from Trinidad & Tobago in the West Indies, but there are traces of English, Spanish, Corsican, Barbarian, oops, Barbadian, Venezuelan and American in their heritage.

The boys’ father Chris was born of an English Baptist father and Spanish Catholic Mother, and he spent many years in boarding schools in England and also in Wales. So the boys grew up listening to everything from Caribbean calypso music to the harmonies of Welsh Choirs.

Geoff and his wife Anna live in Wheeler’s Hill, as does brother Anthony. Anthony runs his own marine outfitting company – Moose Marine – in Chelsea Heights, while Geoff is an Employer Partnership Advocate for disability



services where his role is to build disability employment programs with large companies and source funding for both clients and employers to build supportive environments.

Sue, the boys’ mother lives in Greensborough, where she still teaches nursing.

As far as their musical background goes, Geoff played brass in the high school band for 6 years, mainly trumpet and trombone. Anthony, on the other hand, only played truant, directing the school musicals as an excuse to hang out with friends. But he does have a genuine love of music.

Why choose the Melbourne Welsh? Simply put, the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir is the best! According to Geoff, our concerts are outstanding, the choristers are very welcoming and David is an amazing conductor.

They appreciate the warm welcome they have received and how happy everyone is to help bring them into the fold, and it’s lots of fun.

Anthony & Geoff, welcome to the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, and particularly to the baritone and second tenor sections.

### The Choir’s Welsh Music

In order to give our patrons some background to Welsh music culture we would like to introduce you to some of the composers whose music we perform. The first composer and the one with possibly the most interesting story is Joseph Parry.

Joseph Parry (21 May 1841 – 17 February 1903) was a Welsh composer and musician. Born in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, he is best known as the composer of “Myfanwy” and the hymn tune “Aberystwyth”, on which the African song “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” is said to be based. Parry was also the first Welshman



to compose an opera; his composition, Blodwen, was the first opera in the Welsh language.

Born into a large family, Parry left school to work in the local coal mines when he was nine years of age. He then



went to work at the Cyfarthfa Ironworks, where his father was also employed. In 1854 the family emigrated to the United States, settling at Danville, Pennsylvania, where Parry again found employment at an iron works.

Though Parry had a great interest in music, he had no opportunity to study it until there was a temporary closure of the Rough and Ready Iron Works. Some of his co-workers were also musicians, and they offered music lessons while the iron works was closed. Parry joined a music sight-reading class taught by one of the men. He continued to study harmony with another co-worker, and learned how to read and write while he was learning about harmony.

Parry soon began submitting compositions to eisteddfodau in Wales and the United States and winning awards. During a return visit to Wales for the National Eisteddfod at Llandudno, Parry was offered two music scholarships, but was unable to accept due to family obligations. A fund was established for the support of Parry and his family while he studied music.

Parry went on to receive a Doctorate in Music from the University of Cambridge; he was the first Welshman to receive Bachelor's and Doctor's degrees in music from the University. He returned to Wales in 1874 to become the first Professor of Music at Aberystwyth University, later accepting a position at Cardiff University. {more of Parry's fascinating life in later newsletters}.

### **Would you like to join the choir?**

Why join a choir? Possibly to acquire the ability to move audiences to tears or shouts of joy and the realisation that when these men sing together, it's not a concert, it's an experience - like no other.

Socialising with fellow choristers, forming life-long friendships, laughing, talking, camaraderie second to none, having the occasional drink, oh and learning to sing together!

If you've read this far, you either accept it, because you already belong to a choir or, your heart is beating a little faster because you recognise that belonging to such an exciting group may be something you want to do after all.

We are fortunate at MWMC to have a significant number of younger members and that number is growing all the time. We are equally fortunate to have a number of members who have been singing with the choir for decades. Age, length of service or experience doesn't matter though. If you have even the slightest inkling you might enjoy singing, you should decide here and now to come to one of our rehearsals. You don't have to sing, just come and listen.

We are always on the lookout for new members, whether experienced choristers wanting a new challenge or young (or not so 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.

Whatever your level of musical competence, you will experience a sympathetic conductor and accompanist, a great rehearsal environment and a group of friendly, dedicated and talented choristers. Many of our members had no formal musical training prior to joining, but the choir has helped them to read and interpret our music scores. They work hard, enjoy what they do and are keen to help the choir achieve new heights.

If you simply want to see and hear the choir rehearsing, please come along to our rehearsal rooms at Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Ave, Ringwood. Visitors are always welcome and if you come on the first Wednesday in the month we'll even offer you a sandwich or a cake. You'll appreciate how a four-part harmony, male voice arrangement is developed to the polished state you see on stage. Having an audience tends to keep our choristers in check, without inhibiting the fun and banter, which is part of every rehearsal!

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 about upcoming events and related choir matters.

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

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 their fellow choristers and enjoy the challenge of singing in 4-part harmony.

### **Would you like to hire the choir?**

Anyone who attended our concerts at major venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre, Ulumbarra Theatre Bendigo and the Melbourne Town Hall, would be aware that the choir has the skills, capability and contacts to produce and run high quality major 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, with guest artists (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 a choir of up to 60 voices plus a professional accompanist and music director, so we provide great value for money.

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### ***Hard of Hearing***

*Three old gentlemen were walking up a ramp. First one says, "Windy, isn't it?" Second one says, "No, its Thursday!" Third one says, "So am I. Lets go get a beer."*



## 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 (SOTY) Concert.

This prestigious event, which is open to singers under the age of 35, draws competitors from all parts of the state (and indeed sometimes interstate)

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 the event. In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir provides opportunities for them to perform as guest artists in our concerts during the year.

All sponsors are acknowledged in our programs and publicity material and there would also be the opportunity to be involved in the presentation ceremony on the night and during the elimination heats.

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 get the best value out of your sponsorship.

## Upcoming concerts

### Singer of the Year Final

Saturday 3 August at

James Tatoulis Auditorium, MLC Barker's Road, Kew

Our annual Singer of the Year (SOTY) concert features the best young talent in Victoria.

The three finalists compete as part of the Choir's Concert with the winner being awarded a prize of \$5,000 and with the runners up receiving \$1,000 each.

The elimination heats, which are open to the public, are held at the Choir's rehearsal facility at Federation Estate, Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood on Thursday evening 25th July at 6:30 p.m. and on Saturday 27th July at a time to be determined, and offer possibly the best free entertainment available in Melbourne.

Our rehearsal rooms can comfortably accommodate a hundred or more people so come along and support these

talented young singers. Singers who may wish to enter this competition should contact our secretary or the Choir's SOTY event manger - Alan Stevenson (0403 271 468) or via email ([astevo3@gmail.com](mailto:astevo3@gmail.com)) and we will arrange for the necessary details and entrance forms to be sent to you.

The competition is professionally adjudicated and every competitor receives a written evaluation of his or her performance.

On the 3rd July 2109, the Choir will be participating in the mecwacare Diamond Jubilee at the opening ceremony for their new facility in Caulfield.

The official opening will be performed by the Victorian Governor, the Hon. Linda Dessau AC .

## Laughter is the best medicine

While singing in the choir is a wonderful way to maintain physical and mental health, laughter is still the best medicine. Here's a joke or two to keep you going.

### Golf Joke

*A man and a friend are playing golf one day. One of the guys is about to chip onto the green when he sees a long funeral procession on the road next to the course. He stops in mid-swing, takes off his golf cap, closes his eyes, and bows down in prayer. His friend says: "Wow! That is the most thoughtful and touching thing I have ever seen. You are truly a kind man." The other man replies, "Yeah, well, we were married 35 years."*

### Wanted man

*A sheriff walks into a saloon, and shouts for everyone's attention.*

*"Has anyone seen Brown paper Jake?", he asks.*

*"What's he look like?", asks one shoddy-looking cowboy.*

*"Well", replies the Sheriff. "He wears a brown paper hat, a brown paper waistcoat, a brown paper shirt, brown paper boots, brown paper pants, and a brown paper jacket."*

*"So what's he wanted for?", asks the same cowboy....*

*"Rustlin'...", replies the Sheriff.*

## Contacts

Marketing - Gwyn Harper and Colin Brown .....	<a href="mailto:marketing@melbournewelshchoir.com.au">marketing@melbournewelshchoir.com.au</a>
President - David Field.....	<a href="mailto:president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au">president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au</a>
Secretary -Kevin Seerup .....	<a href="mailto:secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au">secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au</a>
Vice President - David Simm .....	<a href="mailto:vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au">vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au</a>
Phil Tomlinson, Paul Gawthorn, David Phillips, Ieuan Thomas, Doug Utley .....	<a href="mailto:committee@melbournewelshchoir.com.au">committee@melbournewelshchoir.com.au</a>

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