

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

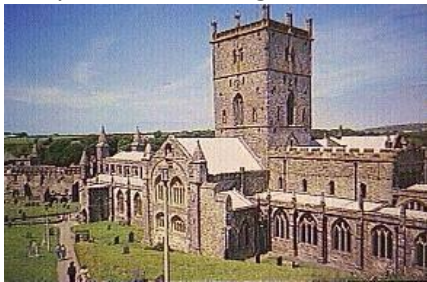
January 2020 Newsletter No 32



We wish all our Friends of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir a Happy New Year or in the language of Heaven – Y Blwyddyn Newydd Dda. We look forward to seeing you at our concerts in 2020. For the new year we have changed the format of the newsletter to a single column which we believe makes for easier reading. Please email us and tell us whether you like it.

St David, Patron Saint of Wales

St David of Wales or Dewi Sant, was a saint of the Celtic Church. He was the son of Sandde, Prince of Powys, and Non, daughter of a Chieftain of Menevia whose lands included the peninsula on which the little cathedral town of St David's now stands. St David is thought to have been born near the present town of St David's. The ruins of a small chapel dedicated to his mother - Non, may be seen near St. David's Cathedral



David became the Abbot of St David's and died on 1st March 589. A.D. An account of his life was written, towards the end of the 11th century, by Rhygyfarch, a monk at Llanbadarn Fawr near

Aberystwyth. Many miracles were attributed to him. One miracle, often recounted, is that once when Dewi was preaching to a crowd at Llandewi Brefi, those on the outer edges could not hear, so he spread a handkerchief on the ground, and stood on it to preach, whereupon the ground rose up beneath him, and all could hear.

He was buried in, what is today, St David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire. His holiness was such that medieval pilgrims equated two pilgrimages to St David's were worth one pilgrimage to Rome - a great saving in journeying at that time! Fifty churches in South Wales alone bear his name.

March 1st, St David's Day, is now the traditional day of the Welsh. March 1st, is the date given by Rhygyfarch for the death of Dewi Sant, was celebrated as a religious festival up until the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. In the 18th century, it became a national festival among the Welsh and continues, as such, to this day.

The celebration usually means singing and eating. St. David's Day meetings in Wales are not the boisterous celebrations that accompany say St Patrick's Day in Ireland, but that may be because Welsh nationalism is kept in check. The singing of traditional songs, followed by a *Te Bach*, tea with *Teisen Bach* (small cake) and *Bara Brith* (baked yeast bread with dried fruit) is traditional.

Y Ddraig Goch, the Red Dragon, is flown as a flag or worn as a pin or pendant, and leeks are worn, and sometimes eaten.

St David's Day is now celebrated by Welsh people all over the world.

*A Welsh Celebration for
St David's Day*



MELBOURNE
WELSH MALE CHOIR

David Ashton-Smith OAM
CONDUCTOR



Erfyl Tomos Jones
INTERNATIONAL GUEST ARTIST
2019 Blue Riband Winner
at the Welsh National Eisteddfod

Simon Walters
ACCOMPANIST



Chloe Harris
MEZZO
Runner Up Sun Aria 2019



Amelia Wawrzon
SOPRANO
Finalist 2019 Singer of The Year

SATURDAY,
FEB 29TH, 2020
3:00 PM

THE JAMES TATOULIS AUDITORIUM
METHODIST LADIES COLLEGE
207 BARKERS ROAD, KEW

Adult \$38 | Group (6 or more) \$32 | Children (under 15) \$15

www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au/tickets 9800 3889

The Melbourne Welsh Male Choir will be celebrating St David's Day in traditional fashion on Saturday 29th February (yes, it's a leap year) with a veritable feast of song at the marvellous James Tatoulis auditorium at MLC in Barkers Road, Kew.

The program will feature two of our Singer of the Year contestants mezzo-soprano **Chloe Harris** and soprano **Amelia Wawrzon** together with the glorious baritone voice of our visiting guest artist - **Erfyl Tomos Jones**.

Erfyl, a farmer who hails from Aberhosan, Machynlleth, North Wales, was the winner of the David Ellis Memorial trophy - the Blue Riband for soloists at the 2019 National Eisteddfod in Llanwrst, North Wales. The Melbourne Welsh Church secretary, **Christine Boomsma**,



made contact with Erfyl whilst in Wales and he indicated his delight at being offered a trip to Melbourne for our 2020 St. David's Day celebrations as part of his prize, and he and his wife are already planning their trip 'down under'. We congratulate Erfyl on his win and look forward to his visit in February / March



As a separate but related piece of information, Christine (to whom we are indebted for allowing Erfyl to feature in our concert) was honoured as a blue bard of the Gorsedd on August 9th in Llanwrst, for contributions to Welsh culture. The barding ceremony was solemn and respectful, and was televised throughout Wales. It was indeed a very

special and emotional occasion for Christine, whose bardic name is **lorlyn** - lor for lorwyth (her father) and Lyn (her mother).

What is the Gorsedd?

The Gorsedd of the Bards is an association made up of poets, writers, musicians, artists and other people who have made a distinguished contribution to the Welsh nation, the language, and its culture.

Gorsedd y Beirdd members are present on stage during three of the main Eisteddfod ceremonies dressed in their white, blue and green robes, being led by the Archdruid. The colours of the robes denote the different ranks. In the same way that the Gorsedd emblem has three shafts, the Gorsedd has three orders of merit:

1. The Ovate Order - green robe, which includes the Bardic Ovate, the Musician Ovate and the Literature Ovate. Membership is gained on passing the first two Gorsedd examinations. Honorary members on the recommendation of the Gorsedd Board in recognition of service to Wales.
2. The Order of Bards, Linguist, Musicians and Literati - blue robe. Membership of this Order can only be obtained on passing the final Gorsedd examination. Graduates who have been successful in Welsh and Welsh Literature, or Music, in their Final Examination may also apply.
3. The Druidic Order - white robe. This order is restricted to those honoured by the Gorsedd Board for their substantial contribution to Literature, Music, Scholarship, Science or Arts in Wales. Green and blue robed members can be elevated to this order. Chief Bards and Prose Medal winners are also accepted to this order.

A Chief Bard (Prifardd) is one who has won the Chair or the Crown of the National Eisteddfod and wears a laurel garland on his head-dress. The Archdruid is elected from the Prifeirdd and winners of the Prose Medal. Every applicant for membership of the Gorsedd must be a Welsh speaker (except for members of the Royal family).

Christine is in good company, Bryn Terfel, the actor Ioan Gruffudd and ex-Welsh rugby star Gareth Edwards are all members. Once again, llongyfarchiadau (congratulations) Christine.

Our new choir recording – The World in Union

The response to our new recording from early purchasers has been most encouraging.

To all our old and new friends this recording is for you. It's been six years since our last CD and there have been quite a few changes within our ranks in that time. We continue to share a love of singing and proudly enjoy being part of the rich tradition of Welsh Male Choirs.

Our song catalogue covers a great variety of songs from many countries and cultures. The title track of this, our latest CD, is a plea for goodwill and cooperation that is even more relevant today, with the huge global challenges we face, than when it was first recorded in 1991. We are indebted to our soloists on this album, David Ashton-Smith, Roy Best, Kate Amos and Chloe Harris for their solo contributions and Claire Little on recorder. Our accompanist, Simon Walters has added his solo track, *Hymn for Freedom*.



Over the lifetime of the choir we've been blessed to have Musical Directors who have inspired and taught us to a consistently high standard. David Ashton-Smith OAM agreed to become our Musical Director in 2016 and has brought a wealth of experience and technique as a performer and MD. David's love of singing drives his passion for improving not just our vocal techniques and diction but the emotional feel of the song we perform.

To you, our audience, thank you for your support, we hope you enjoy this collection.

Orders for this new CD can be placed via the website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au

or by calling Phil Tomlinson on 9800 3889

Recent events

Christmas Concert Sunday 15th December 2019

Mooroolbark Community Centre, 125 Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark

This concert maintained its reputation as a sell-out event and both the choir and the audience had a great time. Unfortunately, our guest artist, the lovely soprano - Catherine Bolzonello - who wowed us at rehearsal earlier in the week, was taken ill at the last moment and could not appear, but her omission from the program was ably covered by solos our conductor, David Ashton-Smith (who is also her father) and accompanist Simon Walters and were very well received.

As our readers may be aware, because of the size of the hall at the Community Centre, the choir performs two concerts in the one day, the first being at 11:00 a.m. and the second at 3:00 p.m. The concerts include audience participation items, with community carols, directed by our music director and with the choir providing support from their seats at the rear of the stage. One of the best received items in the program was the wartime medley "*Till the boys come home*" which, as our compere - Ray Kitto stated, had nothing to do with Christmas except that the war was supposed to be over by Christmas!

Despite the limitations associated with fitting a choir of our size onto the relatively small stage, we love our traditional Christmas concerts at this charming intimate venue and look forward to a return engagement next year.

Brothers (and sisters) in song

Those of you who watched the Carols by Candlelight, TV broadcast on Christmas Eve may have caught glimpses, in the 230 strong CBC choir, of a couple of Melbourne Welsh members (and a wife). One of them was sitting next to a member of the Australia Welsh Choir, who in turn was acting as chaperone to one of the (two) blind choristers in the CBC choir. Such is the camaraderie which exists within the choral community. One of the highlights of the show was the stunning performance by *Sylvie Paladino*, who was our guest artist at the choir's concert at the Melbourne Recital Centre in June and who will be appearing in concert with us again at Bendigo's Ulumbarra Theatre, later this year.

2020 St David's Day Gymanfa Ganu

St Michael's Uniting Church, Corner of Collins and Russell Street,

Sunday, March 1 at 3:00 p.m.

Those friends of the choir who have not attended a Gymanfa Ganu in Melbourne, have really missed a wonderful free afternoon of Welsh entertainment.

Organised by the Melbourne Welsh Church, the event is held at St Michael's Church on the corner of Collins and Russell Streets, since the Welsh Church itself is too small for the usual audience numbers. Members of all four Welsh choirs in Victoria, the Australia Welsh, Victorian Welsh, Geelong Ladies Choir and of course the Melbourne Welsh (and possibly some of the newer choirs), will be in the balcony to lead the hymn singing and also to perform some special choral items.

From Wales, baritone *Erfyl Tomos Jones* (Machynlleth, the 2019 Blue Riband winner at the National Eisteddfod of Wales), husband and wife team *Eleri and Aled Edwards* (Cilycwm, who are both previous Blue Riband winners) and the popular Welsh conductor, *Dilwyn Price* (Old Colwyn), have all accepted invitations from the Welsh Church and will perform at the 2020 Gymanfa Ganu. *Dilwyn* is a retired teacher with a distinguished career in musical education in North Wales. He is a chapel organist, a conductor of cymanfaoedd canu locally and last year was invited to lead the Welsh Society's Gymanfa in Taranaki, New Zealand.

The event will be introduced by the pastor of the Welsh Church, the inimitable *Siôn Gough Hughes*, who will hand over to *Dilwyn* to conduct the Gymanfa Ganu. What a wonderful afternoon it should be. Entry is free, so come alone and sing or listen to all that is so wonderful about the Welsh choral culture.

Choir Chorister Profile – Trevor Hemmings – Baritone

I was born in 1942 in the mountain mining town of New Tredegar, situated in the Rhymney valley of Gwent, South Wales. I have two brothers and a sister who are all still living in Wales. After attending Junior and Secondary Schools I spent three years at the local Technical College. On leaving in 1958, at the age of 16, I joined the Army Apprentice College and learned my trade and gained my qualifications as a vehicle mechanic.



The next 10 years were spent with the British Army in Germany (two deployments) and in Libya.

I met my wife Val while home on leave in Wales in 1964 at a local dance (where Tom Jones was the local artist performing!). We married in 1968. We have two sons who live in Canberra and Tasmania respectively and three grandchildren.

I left the Army in 1969 to work in the steel industry in Wales and decided to emigrate to Australia in 1981. I had a job offer, as a fitter, at the Yallourn Power Station, which I accepted. Val looked after the children for a few years before resuming her career as a teacher.

We first heard the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir in 1987, at Robert Blackwood Hall, just prior to the choir's tour of South Africa. I knew on that night that this was the choir to which I wanted to belong. I am still here, 22 years later, without any regrets!

I just love the singing, camaraderie and the new musical challenges. Val and I appreciate the friendships and opportunities we have as part of the choir. In order to give something back to the choir, we both have additional roles with responsibility for the choir's CD sales and front of house activity. It is a privilege to serve the choir in this way.

New Choir Chorister Profile – Greg Buck – second tenor

Greg lives in Croydon. Originally, he was a secondary school teacher before he re-trained and qualified as a Clinical Psychologist, his profession for the past 15 years. As a psychologist he's worked across public, private and not for profit sectors, as well as in the education and professional sports domains.

His partner is Katie and they have two beautiful daughter's - Gracie who is 7 and Lucinda who is 3. He has two brothers - Gareth and Heath. His parents, Michelle and James, were married for 53 years before his dad passed away last year. They actually met when his dad was singing in a band on a cruise ship sailing from England to Australia. As the story goes, he won her over with his trademark rendition of Andy Williams' Moon River.

Greg has some good musical credentials; he was trained initially in classical guitar and he developed an interest song writing. He also played in bands in his younger days, but he doesn't play or write enough these days. His only choral experience was in school musicals which he really enjoyed.

When Greg's dad retired from the Vehicle Builders Union, he joined the Victoria Welsh Male Choir and sang in the Baritone section for about 10 years or so. When he passed away last year, Greg thought he would continue the tradition in his memory. He first heard Welsh choir music as a young man and he felt inherently drawn to the sheer vocal force and distinctive



harmonies of what he heard. As a child, his grandmother in New Zealand was sending him cassette tapes of traditional Maori choir singing, with songs such as *Pokarekare Ana*, which he would play continuously, and he still has fond memories of that.

Greg has three generations of Welsh heritage on his father's side. His dad was born in Cardiff and was a Marine Engineer who also played rugby for the Cardiff Barbarians. His mother's family hail from New Zealand; Greg himself was born in Auckland. Her heritage is Irish, English, and further back, French. His grandmother was a Gladstone and descendant of William Gladstone who was the English Prime Minister in the late 1800s.

Greg, welcome to the Melbourne Welsh, and particularly to the 2nd tenors. We hope you continue to enjoy your time with the choir.

Would you like to join the choir?

The choir has grown this year with new members significantly exceeding those retiring. As a result, the average age of the choir has dropped and the balance of the choir has improved. It was good to see at the choir's Christmas party how the newcomers have integrated so quickly into the social and choral structure. There will be another opportunity at the traditional choir BBQ on Australia Day for the new members and their partners to experience the camaraderie of the choir.

We are always on the lookout for new members, whether experienced choristers wanting a new challenge, or young (and not so young), inexperienced singers who would benefit from the coaching and direction of our professional music team 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.

If you are concerned about singing in Welsh, well don't worry! We have a Welsh language class just prior to rehearsal, to introduce newcomers (and experienced choristers) into the pronunciation and meaning of the songs which we sing in Welsh.

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. We all work hard, enjoy what we do and strive to help the choir achieve new heights.

Our concerts often take us around the country and overseas as well as to some of the most prestigious concert halls in Melbourne.

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 begin to 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 some 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 enjoy the company of their fellow choristers and love the challenge of singing in 4-part harmony.

Communication

Despite being an amateur choir, we employ a professional music director and accompanist, who are instrumental in ensuring the choir to presents its professional image. This, together with the infrastructure expenses e.g. rehearsal rooms, website, music scores etc., makes the choir quite an expensive organisation to run (and we receive no external grants).

We depend primarily on hire of the choir for events, plus ticket sales to our own concerts and sales of our CDs for the majority of our income, so your patronage is essential to our survival and growth.

Please feel free to copy or circulate this newsletter to any of your friends or relatives and if you would like us to add them to our distribution list, so they get their copy direct, then let us know their email address.

Alternatively, they can subscribe via our website: www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au

Email is the preferred way of communication with our supporters, so send us an email and we'll add you into our database and include you in all future communications.

We treat all information provided as confidential and our subscribers can opt out at any time.

We value your feedback so please write and let us know what you think of our performances, introduce us to your friends and tell us where and what you would like to see us perform in future concerts.

Would you like to hire the choir?

Anyone who has attended our concerts at major venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre, Ulumbarra Theatre Bendigo and the Melbourne Town Hall, will be aware that the choir has the skills, capability and contacts to produce and run high quality major events.

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 don't come cheap, but we provide great value for money.

Would you like to sponsor the choir?

If you have a product or service which you believe might appeal to our audiences, then contact us and we will be delighted to feature your product in our marketing material and promotions.

The choir is always seeking sponsors in particular for the annual funding of our prestigious ***Singer of the Year (SOTY)*** concert. This event, which has been running for 27 years and 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 quality and significance of the event. In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir provides them with opportunities to perform as guest artists in our concerts during the year.

All sponsors are acknowledged in our programs and publicity material and there is also 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 indeed any of our other prestigious concerts, 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.

Laughter is the best medicine

Just Looking

There was this guy at a bar, just looking at his drink. He stays like that for half of an hour.

Then, a big trouble-making truck driver steps up next to him, takes the drink from the guy, and drinks it all down. The poor man starts crying.

The truck driver says, "Come on man, I was just joking. Here, I'll buy you another drink. I just can't stand to see a man cry."

"No, it's not that" the guy said, "This day is the worst of my life. First, I fall asleep, and I go in late to my office. My boss, outraged, fires me. When I leave the building, to go to my car, I discover it had been stolen. The police said that they can do nothing. I get a cab to return home, and when I leave it, I discover I had left my wallet and credit cards there. The cab driver just drives away. I go home, and when I get there, I find my wife in bed with the gardener. I leave home and come to this bar. And just when I was thinking about putting an end to my life, you show up and drink my poison!"

Disco Dance

The husband takes his wife to a disco.

There's a guy on the dance floor dancing like a king – moonwalking, break dancing, head spins, the works.

The wife turns to her husband and sighs: "You see that man? 25 years ago, he asked me to marry him and I said no."

Husband says: "Yep, it looks like he's still celebrating!!"

Fortune Teller

An Indian woman goes to see an Indian fortune-teller.

"Two men are in love with me," she says. "Who will be the lucky one?"

The swami answers, "Nimesh will marry you. Akshay will be the lucky one."

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