

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir June Newsletter No 37



We hope all our supporters are well and keeping safe during the COVID-19 crisis. As we explained in our last newsletter the choir is continuing to practice on Wednesday evenings using the ZOOM technology. While nothing is as good as being all together in our rehearsal rooms at Federation Estate, our Zoom session serves its purpose as a means of getting the choir together to sing a few established songs, practice a new song or two, get the latest information about the choir's future and, of course, enjoy the banter.

One of the benefits of the video medium has been the ability to have 20 minutes or so allocated for an interview with interesting people. We started with one of our older choristers - **Bob Williams** recounting some of the events from the early days of the Choir's inception.

This has been followed, in subsequent weeks, by interviews with some of our recent guest artists who joined in our Zoom meeting from their own homes.

In recent weeks we have had separate fascinating sessions with two of the guest artists from our St



David's Day concert - **Chloe Harris** and **Amelia Wawrzon**, who explained to us how they kept their voices in good health during the lockdown. Chloe had planned to sing for us during the interview session, but her poor internet connection (despite being close to the airport) made that impossible and she later sent us a video of her song, which was played for the choir at a later Zoom rehearsal.

Amelia had a much better internet connection and in addition to learning that she was the youngest person to

graduate with a degree in music from VCA/MCM, we also heard about her history with the Australian Girls' Choir including their experiences in producing the quintessential QANTAS commercial "*I still call Australia home*" in various amazing places throughout the Australian continent. She then sang a ballad for us which was very beautiful.

The internet also allowed us to have a guest from Wales join us for our Zoom session - **Alwyn Humphreys** - who as well as being the choir's patron and creator of a number of our choral arrangements, is a world renowned music director.

In a question and answer session with him, Alwyn gave us an understanding of how the choirs in UK are faring during their COVID lockdown.

In addition, Alwyn in his inimitable fashion provided an insight into the politics of the choral community in UK.

In response to the question of "What was his most memorable choir experience?", he recounted the Morriston Orpheus Choir's trip to sing at Carnegie Hall in 2001 just weeks after the 9/11 disaster. Despite initial concerns about the viability of the trip, 102 Morriston Orpheus choristers made the trip to New York. The audience response to the



concert was overwhelming and the choir's rendition of Alwyn's arrangements of *American Trilogy* and *New York, New York* brought the house down. Incidentally Alwyn thought that the acoustics at Carnegie Hall were the best he'd ever experienced (but he has never been to the Melbourne Recital Centre). In future Zoom rehearsals we look forward to speaking with our friend, Welsh soloist, blue riband National Eisteddfod winner and farmer - **Erfyl Tomos Jones** from his home in Aberhosan, Machynlleth, North Wales. (*Erfyl is shown with our other female soloists Chloe and Amelia in the top photograph above*)

Upcoming Events

While the choir is unable to perform for some time, we still plan to hold our annual **Singer of the Year** competition.

Since we anticipate (due to social distancing) we will not be able to hear the contestants in our normal rehearsal rooms for the elimination heats or in concert (usually at MLC) for the finals, we will be inviting competitors to submit their own videos, to be evaluated by our judges who will determine which three singers should be in the final. We will then hold (and record to video) the finals, which we hope may be able to be performed live, at Federation Estate, albeit (due to social distancing requirements) before a restricted audience.

While full details are yet to be finalised, entries will close on 21st August with the competitors' videos being adjudicated by 29th August. The final will be held (hopefully live) on 20th September 2020 and the entire performance will subsequently be streamed for all to see via YouTube and Facebook.

The prize money may be somewhat less than in previous years but will still be substantial.

Alan Stevenson (0403 271 468) continues to be the competition administrator while **Will Morton** (0404 092 212) will be responsible for the technology.

The stories behind some of our Welsh songs

In our last newsletter we outlined the story behind one of the songs which we sing in Welsh and provided the English translation. In this edition we provide some background and stories for one of Wales' and



the choir's favourite folk songs - *Calon Lân* and its composer - **Daniel James** (also known by his bardic name *Gwryrosydd*).

The story of the song's author is as fascinating as the song itself. It is almost the archetypal Welsh story. Daniel James was born in 1848 to a working class family in Swansea. Aged 13, he went to work, becoming a "puddler" at a tin producer. His hot, brutal and profoundly dangerous work was to pour out the liquid metal. Most puddlers' arms were singed black and they tended to go blind from staring into the intense glare. A splash of molten metal could burn through the puddler's body, burn through muscle, through nerves, crippling them.

But when Daniel James was done with his work, he studied poetry.

In later years, he became a miner in Blaengarw

and then for 15 years at Nixon's colliery, Mountain Ash. Legend has it that he once scrawled an ode to a derailed dram (coal cart) on the side of it:

<i>Dyma fi o dan y ddaear</i>	Here I am underground.
<i>Yn scwto, scwto</i>	Pushing, pushing
<i>Cael fy maesddu gan hen ddram</i>	Having been beaten by an old dram
<i>O damo damo.</i>	Oh damn it, damn it.

And when he wasn't studying poetry, he was down the pub. Nobody suggested Daniel James wasn't fond of his pint. The King's Head in Treboeth maintained a special chair reserved exclusively for him, which is now preserved.

It is said that he wrote *Calon Lân* there on the back of a cigarette packet, though there's no evidence of whether that's actually true or not.

Likewise, various stories are advanced to explain how the words were handed to his co-worker **John Hughes** (not the John Hughes who wrote *Cwm Rhondda*). One of them suggests James offered them to Hughes in the street, but Hughes replied that he had no time for Welsh songs, insisting he was late for his tea. However, something struck a chord in the words, and the next day, Hughes handed James the completed manuscript.

Since then, *Calon Lân* has become almost Wales' second national anthem. Immensely loved, it turns heads wherever you hear it performed.

*Nid wy'n gofyn bywyd moethus,
Aur y byd na'i berlau mân:
Gofyn wyf am galon hapus,
Calon onest, calon lân.
Calon lân yn llawn daioni,
Tecach yw na'r lili dlos:
Dim ond calon lân all ganu
Canu'r dydd a chanu'r nos.
Pe dymunwn olud bydol,
Hedyn buan ganddo sydd;
Golud calon lân, rinweddol,
Yn dwyn bythol elw fydd.
Hwyr a bore fy nymuniad
Gwyd i'r nef ar adain cân
Ar i Dduw, er mwyn fy Ngheidwad,
Roddi i mi galon lân.*

I don't ask for a luxurious life,
the world's gold or its fine pearls,
I ask for a happy heart,
an honest heart, a pure heart.
A pure heart full of goodness
Is fairer than the pretty lily,
None but a pure heart can sing,
Songs of the day and songs of the night.
If I wished for worldly wealth,
It would swiftly go to seed;
The riches of a virtuous, pure heart
Will bear eternal profit.
Evening and morning, my wish
Rising to heaven on the wing of song
For God, for the sake of my Saviour,
To give me a pure heart

Chorister Profile – Andrew Gibson

Our profile this month is that of the Choir's Treasurer.

My life in Song

I have been in the MWMC for about seventeen years but I was most grateful for the singing and camaraderie some twelve years ago in July 2008.



My middle daughter, then aged 39, contracted an infection in the blood which ultimately led to her having an infected heart valve, which had to be replaced with an artificial one. The operation was successful but unfortunately Sarah developed a severe infection in the lungs which took weeks to get better. She was in the Alfred Hospital all up for three months. My wife, Jane, used to visit her every day during the day and I used to go in with Jane every evening for an hour. On Wednesdays, I used to go to choir practice after the hospital visit, arriving for the second half and the singing used to lift my spirits, especially when Sarah was having great difficulty overcoming the infection and a certain treatment they were giving her had not succeeded.

It was especially worrying because I was due to go away with the choir in the October to Wales and London for the concert of massed choirs at the Albert Hall and I was not sure I would be able to go, because of

Sarah's health. Fortunately she recovered, however she was still in hospital when I left for Wales, but by that time well on the road to a full recovery. As I said, going to the choir practice in the dark days of Sarah's illness certainly lifted my spirits.

I have been involved in choirs off and on all my life. Born and bred in Leicester in the English East Midlands, I started in my local church choir aged seven and was a member for the next thirteen years progressing from soprano to alto and then bass. The choir was all male and I was pressured to sing alto when my voice broke because altos were hard to get. At the time I joined, I was having piano lessons so, what with those and the choir, I learned to read music. I can remember to this day, when I was about nine, being asked whether I could read music and not knowing what they meant!

I went to London, to train to be a Chartered Accountant, so what with study, no money and the distractions of London, I did not sing again for about six or seven years.

I met my wife Jane in London in 1966. We married in her home village of Winchcombe in the Cotswolds and almost immediately set sail, literally, to Cape Town, South Africa where I had obtained a three year contract with Deloitte. It was a wonderful three years and during that time I joined the Cape Town Gilbert and Sullivan Society, singing with them for three years.

The boat trip both ways was a wonderful experience, as we realised that this was likely to be the end of the regular ocean liners before air travel took over completely.

Returning to England, I worked in Birmingham for a year before moving into industry and getting a job with a beer and soft drink can manufacturer. This job involved a lot of travel, mainly around the English Midlands, which precluded me from joining a choir.

In 1974, I transferred within the company to the head office of a subsidiary they had recently purchased in the picturesque town of Henley-on-Thames (famous for its annual rowing regatta). We bought a new house in the Oxfordshire countryside and we were very happy with our three young girls.

I was now in a position where I did not travel too much, so I took the opportunity to join the South Chiltern Choral Society. This was a choir that performed three concerts a year. A Christmas concert, a concert around Easter time with an oratorio or other serious work and a Summer concert in June.

However, in late 1977 we made a momentous decision. We decided to emigrate to Melbourne. Although we were happy in England, especially living in an idyllic location in the Oxfordshire countryside, we were not as financially well off as we should have been. Since moving from the travelling job, I had to forego my company car and we were sending our eldest daughter to a private school, so there was no way I could afford to send another one, let alone two.

In addition, living in South Africa for three years had whetted our appetite for a better climate and standard of living. My wife Jane especially, was getting depressed with the long, cold, dreary English winters.

I had written to several companies in Melbourne for a job and, in addition, the company I worked for had a fifteen percent interest in Containers Ltd (subsequently taken over by Amcor) and they virtually offered me a job but wanted to see me first. That is why I decided to come to Melbourne. As it happened, I was offered a job with them but I received a better offer from Cadbury Schweppes (as it was then) and I accepted that.

Jane was brought up in the country and did not want to live in a big city, especially as we had lived in the country since our return from Cape Town.

I thought we would have to live in the hills, but while I was working, Jane had found this suburb - Park Orchards - which most people had never heard of, where the blocks were a minimum of half an acre, so we bought there. It could be described then, as semi-rural and was not on a through road to anywhere. I joined the G&S Society in Melbourne and sang with them for a few years before changing to night tennis twice a week. I missed singing and joined the Maroondah Singers in the mid-eighties and sang with them for five or six years. The highlight of being with them was that, in those days i.e. the late eighties, they formed the backbone of the choir for Channel Nine's *Carols by Candlelight* concert on Christmas Eve, so I would have sung at Carols for five or six years.

I left them, due to the demands of work, and in 2003, just before my retirement, I joined the Melbourne Welsh. I had heard of them through Charlie Sharpe, the postmaster at Park Orchards, who had been badgering me to join, but the catalyst was a concert I attended at St Mark's Camberwell in 2003 which persuaded me to join.

My first major concert with MWMC was probably the choir's most successful, singing with Aled Jones at the Hamer Hall, where we performed two sold-out concerts in one day.

I have loved being in the choir and hope to continue for many years to come

Communication

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

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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?

While we are unable to perform at present, we anticipate things will be back to normal in the new year.

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 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 normal times, in the elimination heats. For this year's event we plan to put the videos of the finals competition on YouTube so sponsors will have local and international exposure

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.

In times like these, laughter is still the best medicine

What's in a name

A man was sitting quietly reading his paper when his wife walked up behind him and whacked him on the head with a magazine.

"What was that for?" he asked

“That was for the piece of paper in your trouser pocket with the name Mary Lou written on it” she replied.

“Two weeks ago, when I went to the races Mary Lou was the name of one of the horses I bet on, I bought you those flowers with the winnings” he explained.

“Oh darling, I’m sorry” she said. “I should have known there was a good explanation”

Three days later he was watching television when she walked and hit him in the head again, this time with a frying pan, which knocked him out cold.

When he came to, he asked, “what was that for?”

“Your horse phoned”.

Quiz Question

Paddy is on his final question for a million pounds on a quiz program, and he has only one lifeline left... phone a friend.

“Which bird does not make a nest? A sparrow, a swallow, a blackbird or a cuckoo?”

Paddy calls Murphy.

Murphy answers “Be-Jesus it’s a cuckoo 100%”

Paddy wins the million.

Afterwards Paddy rings Murphy “How on earth did you know that?”

Murphy says, “Well Paddy you thick git... it lives in a bloody clock...!”

Olympic meeting

A man goes to the Olympics and walks past a man with a long pole tucked under his arm.

The man stops him and asks: “Excuse me sir, are you a pole vaulter, by any chance?”

The man replies: “No I’m German. But how did you know my name is Walter?”

Strange condition

A man runs to the doctor and says: “Doctor, you’ve got to help me. My wife thinks she’s a chicken!”

The doctor asks: “How long has she had this condition?”

“Two years,” says the man.

“Then why did it take you so long to come and see me?” the shrink asks.

The man shrugs his shoulders and replies: “We needed the eggs”

COVID Jokes

- Quarantine has turned us into dogs. We roam the house all day looking for food. We are told “No” if we get too close to strangers and we get really excited about car rides.
- This virus has done what no woman has been able to do.....cancel all sports, shut down all bars and keep men at home
- When this is over...what meeting do I attend first...Weight Watchers or AA?

We wish all our friends a safe and healthy time during this COVID-19 lock-down period and look forward to seeing you at our concerts in the not too distant future.

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