

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir Newsletter No 38 July 2020



Despite the recent extension of the social distancing constraints we hope all our supporters are well and keeping safe during the COVID-19 crisis.

This crisis has forced the choir to use video technology not only for our weekly rehearsal but also for our renowned **Singer of the Year** competition. Entries have just opened for this event and will close on the 29th August. Competitors are advised to send a video of their performance, which will be evaluated by our usual judging panel and the three finalists will be invited to compete in the final, hopefully live, to a restricted, socially distanced, group of judges and possibly a restricted audience at the choir's rehearsal facility at Federation Estate. The event will be videoed for later access by our patrons (and choristers) via YouTube and Facebook and we will advise you when that happens.



As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, one of the previously unforeseen benefits of the video medium has been the ability to have 20 minutes or so allocated for an interview with some of our recent guest artists who joined in our Zoom meeting from their own homes. This is now a permanent feature of the choir's Zoom rehearsal sessions.

In recent weeks we have had separate fascinating sessions with another two of our guest artists. The first, one of the stars from our St David's Day concert – **Erfyl Tomos Jones**, joined us from the lounge room of his farm in Aberhosan, North Wales. Erfyl and his wife Ebrillwen loved their short trip to Australia and he enjoyed his experience singing with the choir in Melbourne. They had to return promptly to Wales because, with 1200 ewes and 50 cows requiring lambing and calving indoors, March to May in Wales is a very busy time. Unfortunately, Ebrillwen was not able to join us for the Zoom session since she was

on duty as a nurse at the local hospital (where they have a few active COVID cases).

Their son Tomos had looked after the farm in his parent's absence "down under". Erfyl confessed to having hardly sung a note since his return. The National Eisteddfod for 2020, where he was scheduled to sing at the Bardic ceremony has been cancelled. He does however have a TV performance scheduled for 28th August. Both of the choirs he sings with have cancelled all rehearsals and concerts. As an essential service, farmers are allowed to take their stock to the livestock market, but because of 'distancing' they cannot stay and see them sold. Erfyl answered a number of questions from the choir members, mainly about farming and the local choirs and then, in closing, offered to sing a song for us in a duet with his daughter Lliwen. The song they chose was "Y Darlun", which is one the choir has recently introduced to its repertoire (the story behind the song was given in our April newsletter). Erfyl and Lliwen's performance was magical - obviously singing runs in the blood of the Jones family.



Our second guest was **Mike Brady** who was one of our guest artists in November 2018, when we performed at the Melbourne Town Hall for the concert to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the end of WW2. He spoke to us in splendid isolation (except for his

daughter) from Separation Creek (a village on the Great Ocean Road with a population of 19), however, the video reception in that part of the world was not the best.

Mike, as a stage performer, has had a whole year's worth of engagements cancelled and is concentrating on song and jingle writing (the AAMI theme - "Lucky you're with AAMI" is one of Mike's) to keep the wolf from the door.

Mike gave us an insight into his history. Born in 1948 in Croydon near London - where the first bomb was dropped on the UK during WW2 - Mike's dad was a Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) in the British army. With Mike suffering from Tuberculosis the family emigrated to Australia in 1959. They lived in a migrant hostel for 4 years before moving into a brand-new housing commission flat. Mike's mother played piano and the whole family would sing together. Mike left school at 14 and later moved to Brisbane, where music "saved his soul". He was one-third of the 1960s pop act MPD Ltd (Mike, Pete and Danny) and toured with them in Australia and the UK. He told us about going to Ireland and getting a masterclass from Irish folk musicians until 4.00 a.m. in the morning!

When asked about his favourite song Mike said it was Ben E King's "*Stand by me*". He confessed to loving the sound of a male choir and will be pleased to sing with us any time. Mike, we love your performance and your songs and look forward to performing with you again.

Upcoming Event

Invitations have recently gone out for our annual **Singer of the Year** competition.

As stated earlier, we anticipate (due to social distancing) that 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. Hence, we are 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 still hope may be able to be performed live, at Federation Estate, albeit (due to social distancing requirements) before a restricted audience.

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.

Prospective entrants should contact **Alan Stevenson** (0403 271 468) who continues to be the competition administrator, while questions relating to the video and audio technology should be directed to **Will Morton** (0404 092 212) who is the person within the choir, responsible for all aspects of the technology.

The stories behind some of our Welsh songs

Continuing with the stories behind some of the popular songs in the Choir's repertoire here is some background to one of the most popular hymns in Wales today.

Rachie: The hymn that's 102 years old

In an interval between items at one of the concerts held in the Millennium Centre in Cardiff Bay during the 2018 National Eisteddfod, almost the entire audience - those who were Welsh speakers at least, which was the vast majority, spontaneously broke out into a rendition of a famous Welsh hymn. The hymn is known as *Rachie*, which is the name of the tune.

It was sung on this particular occasion with great gusto, complete with four-part harmony, much to the bemusement and delight of a scattering of non-Welsh speakers in the audience.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cymrufyw/45156738?SThisFB>

Today, *Rachie* is one of Wales's most popular hymns. It's the energy and appeal of the tune that does it, because the words which are usually used with this tune seem oddly anachronistic these days, for they are the words of what is essentially a temperance hymn.

The tune itself was sung for the first time one hundred and two years ago this year, on Sunday 7th April 1918, the very day on which Germany launched the second stage of its great Spring Offensive in the Great War. Indeed, both the words and the tune together seem oddly and incongruously strident, with a strongly militaristic feel, which is rather surprising given the time in which they emerged; for they came

together as the bloodiest conflict in human history was then drawing towards its agonised close, when people had long since become disillusioned with the 'war to end all wars'.

Caradog Roberts

The tune's composer was probably the greatest Welsh composer of hymns and sacred songs of his time



- **Caradog Roberts**. He was born in Rhosllannerchrugog in North Wales in 1878. The son of a brickmaker, his beginnings were fairly humble, but cultured nonetheless, and exclusively Welsh-speaking. From a very early age, he demonstrated a great aptitude for music, and entered a number of local eisteddfodau, winning several prizes. Caradog Roberts' success in competitions encouraged him to concentrate on music, and he studied piano and organ, eventually, in 1894 at the age of just sixteen, being appointed organist at Mynydd Seion Congregational Chapel in Ponciau.

He spent a few years around this time working as a pupil teacher in an elementary school before giving up the role up to study carpentry, which he did for three years with the firm of Jenkins and Jones, with whom he served an apprenticeship.

It is said that on one occasion he was fashioning an organ stool at Capel Mawr while the great organist Dr Roland Rogers (1847-1927) of Bangor was practising on the organ itself. While the Doctor went to the vestry for a break, the young Caradog got up to the organ and began playing it himself, with a rendition of Guillemant's Grand Fugue in G Major. Dr Rogers was so impressed by what he heard that he went on to broker, with the

carpenter and the boy's parents, the possibility of Caradog giving up his carpentry apprenticeship to study music full time.

By 1901, still living with his parents, his father by that time having been promoted to foreman brickmaker, he himself had become a music teacher. Then, having served in the chapel at Ponciau for almost ten years, in 1903 he resigned and the following year became the organist at Bethlehem Chapel, Rhosllannerchrugog - a larger chapel with a much bigger organ. This was a post he filled for the remainder of his life.

He went on to study music at Oxford, being awarded a Bachelor of Music in 1906, and a Doctorate in 1911. He was the youngest Welshman to receive the degree, and the first from North Wales. During this time, he began to be much in demand as a conductor and adjudicator of music, not only at home, but in other places in Wales as well.

From 1914 until 1920, the period during which *Rachie* was composed, he also served as Director of Music at Bangor University.

Caradog Roberts died in Wrexham on 3rd March 1935 at the young age of 56 and was buried in the cemetery at Rhosllannerchrugog.

The first performance of *Rachie* was at the Resolven Cymanfa Ganu (singing festival) in 1918.

Rachie was one of two tunes Caradog Roberts specially composed in the spring of 1917 for a Cymanfa Ganu to be held at Resolven later that year. Of the two tunes, he submitted the other, which he considered the better of the two, and put away *Rachie*. The following year the Resolven committee approached him again for another entry, and having little time to respond, Caradog Roberts remembered the still unused *Rachie*, composed the previous year, and sent that off, hoping it would do. It was paired with the words of **Henry Lewis (ap Hefin)** and sung in Jerusalem Congregational Chapel in Resolven in their 1918 Cymanfa Ganu. It was very successful.

The hymn is named after the daughter, then a child, of the pastor of the Congregational Church at Resolven the Reverend R.E. Williams and is pronounced 'Ray-chee', which is short for 'Rachel'.

Ap Hefin

The lyrics for *Rachie* were written by **Henry Lloyd**, better known by his bardic name of **ap Hefin**, who was born in 1870 at Tyddyn Ifan, a farm at Islaw'r Dref, on the north side of Cadair Idris, just to the south-west of Dolgellau in North Wales. Henry Lloyd was educated in the school at Arthog on the coast before being apprenticed to a printer in Dolgellau.

In 1891 he moved to South Wales to work on the staff of *Y Darian* in Aberdare and the *Aberdare Leader* - both influential newspapers at that time. He then worked for nine years on *Y Tyst*, in nearby Merthyr, before returning to the Aberdare newspapers in 1902, and he remained there for the rest of his working life. He retired in 1940.

During all that time he was a preacher with the Wesleyan Methodists and was also a keen bard and teacher of other poets, who won many eisteddfodic awards, and a keen supporter of the Welsh language and culture. He died in Aberdare in 1946.



So, here are the words of the hymn written by Henry Lloyd (ap Hefin). Basically, it's a temperance hymn, already slightly out of touch with the times when it came to be used with Caradog Roberts' tune. Most choirs (including ours) omit the 2nd verse *...Medd-od fel Goliath..* (..Drunkenness like Goliath)

*I bob un sydd ffyddlon
Dan Ei faner Ef
Mae gan Iesu goron
Fry yn nheyrnas nef
Lluoedd Duw a Satan
Sydd yn cwrdd yn awr:
Mae gan blant eu cyfran
Yn y rhyfel mawr.*

For each one who is faithful
Underneath his flag
Jesus has a crown
On high in heaven's kingdom.
Hosts of God and Satan
Are in conflict now:
Children play their part
In the great battle.

*I bob un sydd ffyddlon,
Dan Ei faner Ef
Mae gan Iesu goron
Fry yn nheyrnas nef*

For each one who is faithful
Underneath his flag
Jesus has a crown
On high in heaven's kingdom

*Medd-dod fel Goliath
Heria ddyn a Duw;
Myrdd a myrdd garchara
Gan mor feiddgar yw;
Brodyr a chwiorydd
Sy'n ei gastell prudd:
Rhaid yw chwalu'i geyrydd,
Rhaid cael pawb yn rhydd.*

Drunkenness like Goliath
Challenge to man and God;
Myriads in prison
Such audacity;
Brothers and sisters
Trapped in castle sad.
Its strong walls must come down
All must be set free

*Awn i gwrdd y gelyn,
Bawb ag arfau glân;
Uffern sydd i'n herbyn
A'i phicellau tân.
Gwasgwn yn y rhengau
Ac edrychwn fry;
Concwrwr byd ac angau
Acw sydd o'n tu!*

Let us face the enemy,
Each with holy arms;
Hell is set against us
With its spears of fire
Let us go all go forward,
And let us look above;
Victor over world and death
Is with us all around!

In times like these, laughter is still the best medicine...

The lightbulb

Paddy and Murphy are working on a building site. Paddy says to Murphy "I'm going to have a day off, I'm gonna pretend I'm mad!"

He climbs up the rafters, hangs upside down and shouts "I'M A LIGHTBULB! I'M A LIGHTBULB!"
Murphy watches in amazement!

The Foreman shouts "Paddy you're mad, go home. So, Paddy leaves the site.

Murphy starts packing his kit up to leave as well.

"Where the hell are you going?" asks the Foreman.

"I can't work in the bloody dark!" says Murphy.

Chorister Profile - Alex Young - second tenor

Alex is one of the longest serving members of the choir.



I was born in East Kilbride, a small village 10 Miles south of Glasgow. After finishing secondary school, I got a job in horticulture in one of the biggest nurseries in the Clyde Valley which had four acres of glass houses, this would be in the 1950s.

I had enjoyed music at school and it was at this time I started to sing in the choir of our local church. I also joined the local music society.

In 1955-1961 I got a job as a propagator, working under glass, in Glasgow Botanic Gardens. When I left in 1961 to get married in Southport, England I found work in their Parks and Gardens. It was a bad move, as I did not get on with the director, so in June 1964, I changed my career to psychiatric nursing at Moss Side Hospital, Magull, near Liverpool, where I trained and worked until I left in 1969 to emigrate to Australia. Moss Side was one of three top security hospitals in England. It was rebuilt in the 1980s and renamed Ashworth Hospital.

Our daughter Jackie was born in 1964 and it was for a better life for us all that we came to

Australia. Before I left the UK, I had applied to the Victoria Nursing Council for registration and got a job at Kew Cottages as a staff nurse. We lived at a Migrant hostel for two months before we bought a house in Frankston.

Whilst living in Frankston I joined the Peninsula Light Opera Society and started singing again.

In 1970, unfortunately, our marriage ended in a divorce when my wife went back to the UK and took Jackie with her. This was a major blow in my life, which took me a while to get over. In 1976 I met my second wife Barbara, through a good friend and work colleague. Barbara had two children, Lorraine and David aged 10 and 11. It was during this time that I moved to Croydon to start a new life.

Whilst living in Croydon, I joined Whitehorse Music Theatre Group and sang with them in the chorus and in small cameo roles for 16 years. By now Lorraine and David were teenagers and I found with the heavy work schedules it was time to leave the Whitehorse Music Theatre. It was then that I heard about the Melbourne Welsh Choir, through a friend of Terry Thomas and bought a ticket for the first annual

concert in 1985, at Talent Street Church in Croydon. We enjoyed the concert immensely and made enquiries about joining.

I joined the Choir in June 1985 and was put in the second tenor section. I have been with the choir for 35 years and continue to enjoy the camaraderie of my fellow choristers.

I have gained extensive knowledge along the way from countless musical directors and guest artists who have sung with the choir. I have been privileged to have travelled on various overseas tours including America, Africa, Europe and the UK. Unfortunately, I lost my dear wife 17 years ago to cancer and in that year the choir travelled to Canada, so I was not able to be part of that tour.

Music and singing have played a big part in my life as it enhances and expresses all the human emotions of life. People have asked what my favourite choice of music is, and it all depends on what emotions you feel at that particular time.

I also found in my working life that music is one of the finest therapies and brings so much joy and relief in times of need. Music is a gift from God that has the ability to touch and move many people through its range of genres.

Now aged 85, though my voice may have changed over the years, I look forward to fulfilling many more years with the Melbourne Welsh Choir.

New Choir Choristor - Graham Cranston - bass



Graham has been part of the choir for the past two years.

He was born in Dandenong in 1953 and lived with his family, on a dairy farm in Narre Warren North until he was 20, along with his nine brothers and sisters.

After completing his painting apprenticeship, he set up his own painting & decorating business which he ran for 40 years.

Graham is married with two sons and four grandchildren ranging up to six years of age. Apart from music, his other main interest is ballroom dancing, which he has been involved in for over 35 years.

Even as a young man, Graham always enjoyed singing and he has played roles in several musical productions such as Annie, Kiss Me Kate and Oklahoma.

He joined his first choir about 10 years ago and is now looking forward to many more years of singing with the Melbourne Welsh.

Communication

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

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

We love feedback so please write and let us know what you think of our newsletter, our performances and our plans. Please introduce us to your friends and let us know 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?

As with all the performing arts community, we depend primarily on the revenue from our performances for our survival. We are currently investigating the concept of a membership scheme for our supporters which would provide special discounts and access to the choir in return for a nominal membership fee. We will be promoting this in due course so please watch this space.

In the interim if you are a business which has a product or service which you believe might appeal to our audiences, then please contact us and we will be delighted to feature your offering 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.

...and some more funny stuff

Good luck Mr Gorsky

In case you didn't already know this little titbit of trivia....

On July 20, 1969, as commander of the Apollo 11 lunar module, Neil Armstrong was the first person to set foot on the moon.

His first words after stepping on the moon, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," were televised to earth and heard by millions of people.

But just before he re-entered the Lander, he made the enigmatic remark – "Good luck, Mr Gorsky."

Many people at NASA thought it was a casual remark concerning some rival Soviet Cosmonaut. However, upon checking, there was no Gorsky in either the Russian or American Space programs.

Over the years, many people questioned Armstrong as to what the “Good luck, Mr Gorsky” statement meant, but Armstrong always just smiled.

On July 5, 1995, in Tampa Bay, Florida, while answering questions following a speech, a reporter brought up the 26-year-old question about Mr Gorsky to Armstrong.

This time he finally responded because Mr Gorsky had died, so Neil Armstrong felt he could now answer the question. Here is the answer to “who was Mr Gorsky?”

In 1938, when he was a kid in a small mid-western town, he was playing baseball with a friend in the backyard. His friend hit the ball, which landed in his neighbour's yard by their bedroom window.

His neighbours were Mr and Mrs Gorsky.

As he leaned down to pick up the ball, young Armstrong heard Mrs Gorsky shouting at Mr Gorsky, “Sex! You want sex?! You'll get sex when the kid next door walks on the moon!”

The haircut

*And that's the way it is..... while this is an American joke it has lessons for all of us.
Blessed are those that can give without remembering and take without forgetting.*

One day a florist went to a barber for a haircut. After the cut, he asked about his bill, and the barber replied, “I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week.”

The florist was pleased and left the shop.

When the barber went to open his shop the next morning, there was a “thank you” card and a dozen roses waiting for him at his door.

Later, a cop comes in for a haircut, and when he tries to pay his bill, the barber again replied, “I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week.”

The cop was happy and left the shop.

The next morning when the barber went to open up, there was a “thank you” card and a dozen donuts waiting for him at his door.

Then a Congressman came in for a haircut, and when he went to pay his bill, the barber again replied, “I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week”

The Congressman was very happy and left the shop.

The next morning, when the barber went to open up, there were a dozen Congressmen lined up waiting for a free haircut.

And that, my friends, illustrates the fundamental difference between the citizens of our country and the politicians who run it.

As Ronald Reagan said: “Both politicians and diapers need to be changed often and for the same reason.”

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

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