

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

## February 2021 Newsletter No 43



### We're back....

On January 27, after nearly eleven months, we were finally able to sing as a choir at our rehearsal rooms in Federation Estate!

With hand sanitising and social distancing, plus wiping down of chairs at the end of the rehearsal, it was not quite back to normal, but it was a good start. Maroondah Council had designated our room as being suitable for up to 75 "socially distanced" occupants, so with 46 choristers seated 2 metres apart and our Music Director and accompanist, we were well within their limits. Despite the amount of time we've been physically apart, the choir sounded pretty good. Perhaps our Zoom rehearsal sessions have actually worked!



*The choir standing and singing "You'll never walk alone" as a tribute to Sir Tom Moore.*

As many of you will be aware, at this time of the year we are normally rehearsing for our St David's Day concert with the winner of the Welsh National Eisteddfod's Blue Riband (courtesy of the Welsh Church in Melbourne) as our guest artist. Last year, of course, COVID19 caused the cancellation of the Welsh National Eisteddfod. With this and the related travel restrictions, the Welsh Church has had to cancel its 2021 Gymanfa Ganu, which traditionally features a guest conductor and other artists from Wales. Our choir is normally an integral part of the program, together with the other Welsh choirs from Melbourne and Geelong. This year the Welsh Church will be making their guests' performances available via video and we hope to be included in their presentation.

### Our next concert - 20<sup>th</sup> April - Morning Music, Karralyka Centre



Provided the current level of restrictions remain in place, our first concert in 2021 will be a Morning Music concert at Karralyka function rooms, with the lovely **Kate Amos** as our guest artist.

The choir will be performing for Maroondah Council's **Toe Tapping Tuesdays** program at the Karralyka Centre venue. Originally planned as part of the Centre's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, last year, the performance had to be cancelled because of COVID19.

In this instance we will be performing to a socially distanced audience in the function rooms at the Karralyka Centre. Patrons will not only get musical but edible treats as well. The program for this concert will predominantly feature, in keeping with the "toe tapping" theme, songs from many popular and well-loved musical shows.

Soloist **Kate Amos** is a previous winner of the Choir's *Singer of the Year* competition. For further details and tickets, please phone the Karralyka Centre on 9870 2888

## Future Concerts

We have a number of concerts in planning for the rest of the year, hopefully in a COVID19 free environment. These will include gigs with some of the guests from our concerts at Melbourne Recital Centre as well as joint concerts with the Australian Youth Band and Legends of Brass.

We also hope to feature some of the artists from our latest *Singer of the Year* competition, in the flesh, rather than via video, as we were forced to do in 2020.

We will advise you of the dates of these concerts as soon as they are confirmed.

Please check our website [www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au) for details.

## Zoom Guest

One of the great benefits of our Zoom rehearsals was the ability have a 20 minute chat with some very interesting people.

Our Zoom guest for 2nd December was opera star, teacher, mezzo soprano ***Suzanne Johnston***.

In her work with the Melbourne conservatorium of music during the COVID19 crisis she had been giving 25 lessons a week via video and this was the first week she has had face to face lessons, and it felt quite strange!

Suzanne has sung with us before at the Blackwood Hall in 2009 with Lucas de Jong, Jacqueline Porter and Roy Best. One of our tenors, John Poppenbeek has fond memories of her swishing her red dress and running her fingers through his hair, during her dramatic performance of *Habanera* from *Carmen*.

Suzanne started singing from an early age, despite not having parents with a musical background. In school at Kilvington Grammar she did Gilbert & Sullivan musicals in year 11. Her teacher, Patsy Venn said she should have singing lessons. Suzanne did and had an HSC audition with Brian Hansford from the Victorian College of Arts (VCA) and went on to do a diploma there. Suzanne believes her entire career has been a happy accident. She has been happy to sing anywhere and everywhere, whether church, VCA or the Victorian State Opera (VSO), it just didn't matter.

She met up with Roger Loveday, Ken Mackenzie-Forbes and Richard Divall from the VSO and sang initially in the chorus and later as a principal in a number of performances including *Die Fledermaus*. It was there that she was seen by Jennifer Eddy, an agent who was instrumental in furthering her career.



In response to David Ashton-Smith's question as to why she elected to be a mezzo soprano when she had such a good top range, Suzanne said in 1995 Robert Gard called her a "lazy soprano" but she chose to sing as a mezzo soprano because they have better roles!

Suzanne got to know David in the 1980's through the Australian Pops Orchestra (APO) and was heavily influenced by composer, jazz pianist, music and film score arranger - Douglas Gamley (who also did arrangements for such greats as Richard Bonyngne, Joan Sutherland, Kiri de Kanawa and Luciano Pavorotti). Douglas did a lot of arrangements for her and also for the APO. She made a CD of jazz classics and songs from the American Songbook with him in London.

In response to David's question about her time in the UK and Europe, Suzanne told us she went to London to audition singing teachers and was looking for someone who would say "you have a good voice but we need to fix...". Her favourite coach was Janice Chapman, who did a lot to improve her voice.

While with Opera Australia, Suzanne had played the role of *Tisbe* in *La Cenerentola* (Rossini's Opera based on the story of Cinderella) directed by an Austrian director. Later in the middle of a season of *The Gondoliers* with the Opera Australia, she received an urgent request from the same director to fly to Salzburg, to perform in *La Cenerentola*, at the Salzburg Festival, as a replacement for one of his stars who had fallen sick. While in Salzburg, she was flown to the UK by the Glyndebourne Festival management to audition for *Così van Tutti* with Simon Rattle. She did two seasons at Glyndebourne, the second one included singing with Rene Fleming.

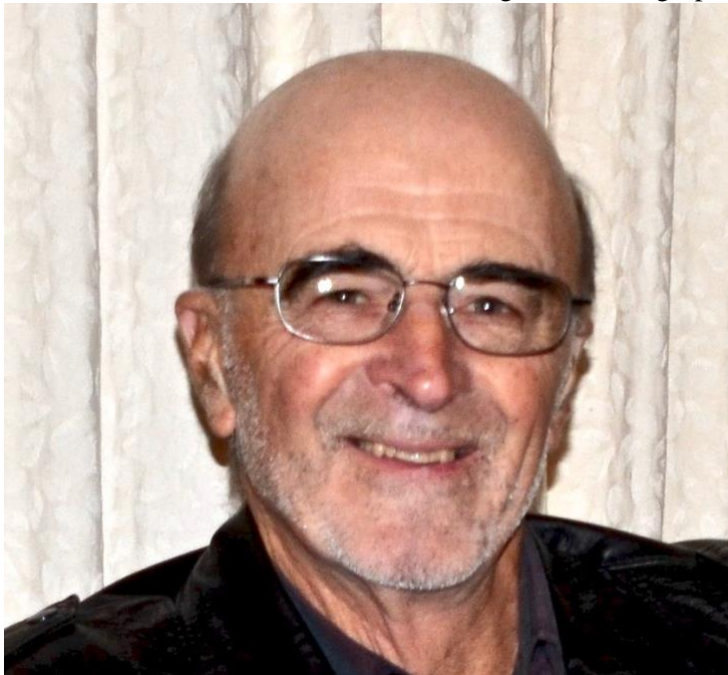
Asked about her favourite performances, Suzanne stated she loved her 15 years or so with the Australian Opera, which was a very closely knit company. While Glyndebourne and Salzburg were wonderful and singing in *Carols by Candlelight* was enjoyable, her most memorable performance was as *Urbain* in *Les Huguenots*, for Joan Sutherland's final performance.

Questioned about her most impressive students, she mentioned Rebecca Rashley (Sun Aria winner), Gabriel Penney (our SOTY winner) and Emilia Bertolini (SOTY runner-up).

We look forward to having Suzanne back on stage with us in the not too distant future.

## **Choir Chorister Profile - Alan Hughes - Baritone**

I was born in Bristol in the West of England. Having spent all of my early formative years in a



reasonably strict Methodist family, I was exposed, as so many other members of the Melbourne Welsh choir were, to the robust spirited hymn singing of the Methodists at a very early age. So, singing was always a strong part of family life.

After leaving one of the local grammar schools in Bristol, I became an apprentice with one of the local engineering companies. I worked there for approximately 8 years but always had a desire to look further afield.

Sport has always been a big part of my life. Football (soccer) was always the number one sport, but I was also playing competitive table tennis and it

was at another local church youth club that I met Gwen. I only went there to play table tennis ...well that's my excuse!

As mentioned, football was always important, so it should come as no surprise that I played in a soccer match on our wedding day.

A wedding at 12:00 o'clock noon and playing football at 3:00 o'clock all seemed perfectly natural!

We returned from our honeymoon on the Friday in order for me to be able to play again on the following Saturday. These events have always drawn much mirth from the male members of our family, although I have not been able to understand the consternation shown by the female side!

We emigrated to New Zealand six months after being married. I was sponsored by an engineering company in Wellington and, as no doubt even the Kiwis within the choir will admit, winter in Wellington can be quite challenging. The wind, the rain and the consequent dampness, had serious negative effects on Gwen's health. Thus, after two years in Wellington we decided to relocate to Melbourne in the hope of a better climate.

I worked in several workshops in Melbourne and also on several large construction sites including the construction of the Cardinia Reservoir near Emerald and the underground rail loop in Melbourne.

I then joined an engineering company that supplied personnel to work on the oil rigs out in Bass Strait. I spent four years working on the rigs, which in its way was convenient, as the roster of two weeks on and two weeks off, allowed me time to work on our house.

With this company I also made two trips to Bougainville to work on the vast copper mine. However, after being rostered on to work on the rigs on Christmas Day for two consecutive years, I decided that, with two young children, we should have a more stabilised/normal life. So, for the last 25 years of my working life, I worked as a subcontractor within the Altona petrochemical complex.

Gwen is second cousin to Dorian Turner, a former chorister, who will be remembered by the longer serving members of the choir, and it was Dorian who persuaded me to reawaken the voice and join the Melbourne Welsh.

I have really enjoyed being part of the Melbourne Welsh, even though I am still struggling with the Welsh pronunciation and with words that have no vowels!

I look forward to many more years with the Melbourne Welsh.

## **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 please let us know their email address.

Alternatively, they can subscribe directly to the newsletter via our website:

[www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au)

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

Email is the preferred way of communication with our supporters, so please send us an email and we'll respond to whatever query you may have.

Your feedback is important to us, so please write and let us know what you think of the choir, our newsletters, or our recent video performances. Please introduce us to your friends and let us know what you would like to see us perform in our future live concerts.

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

The choir is always keen to attract new members. Whether you are 18 or 88 years of age, if you are interested in seeing how the choir works, then come along to any rehearsal at Federation Estate, 32

Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood and you will be made most welcome. Whether you wish to listen and observe, with our occasional guests, or to sit within the body of the choir and sing along with us, the choice is yours.

The rehearsal facility is excellent with comfortable seats, good acoustics and probably the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

We have the benefit of our Music Director, David Ashton-Smith's background, as an opera singer and adjudicator, in coaching our voice development and projection as well as teaching us new songs. He is ably assisted by our accompanist Simon Walters, whose keen ear picks up any problems with pitch or timing.

We have established choristers nominated to look after all new and prospective members, to ensure they are properly introduced to other members of their section and are equipped with the relevant music scores. They will also act as mentors for any questions you might have.

There is a break for tea or coffee at every rehearsal, which gives us the opportunity to chat to other choir members over a cuppa and, on the first Wednesday in the month, one of the sections will provide the choir and visitors with a (sometimes) sumptuous supper.

Car parking is plentiful and free, while Ringwood station is a 5-minute walk away.

If you call us on the numbers shown in this newsletter, we will arrange to meet you, otherwise just come along on a Wednesday evening, introduce yourself and you will be made very welcome.

Once you decide to join the choir, we will provide you with web-based aids to assist you in learning and practising the individual parts at home, which makes the process of learning the repertoire that much easier.

Following a number of rehearsal sessions and a formal audition you could be singing in one of our concerts within weeks and possibly joining us on our next tour.

## **Would you like to hire the choir in 2021?**

While, like all choirs worldwide, we have been unable to perform for the past 12 months, we are hoping that things will be back to normal shortly and as mentioned above, we are rehearsing on the basis that we will be performing in concerts later this 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 will be available for community, corporate and sporting events, dinners, anniversaries, weddings etc., in the coming year, so if you require anything from a short rousing opening for a conference (say) to a full two-hour concert, with guest artists and orchestra or band (if required), please contact **Gwyn Harper (0419 562 353)** 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. We have an eclectic repertoire, a great sound and provide excellent value for money.

## **Would you like to sponsor the choir in 2021?**

As is the case with almost all other not-for-profit performing arts organisations, the choir's financial position has been seriously impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, we need sponsors more than ever before.

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 seeking sponsors, in particular, for the annual funding of our prestigious *Singer of the Year (SOTY)* concert, which hopefully we will be able to hold before a large live audience in 2021. This event, which has been running for 28 years and is open to singers under the age of 35, draws competitors from all parts of the state and indeed, as was the case this year, from other states.

Many of the winners and runners-up of this competition have gone on to make careers on concert and opera stages worldwide, which 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 will be given the opportunity to be involved in the presentation ceremony on the night and in the elimination heats. As stated earlier, one of our videos released during this COVID19 era was viewed by over 30,000 viewers and for this year's SOTY event the videos of the final three competitors on YouTube had both 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 **Colin Brown (0409 188 109)** or 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**

### **The wisdom of Nelson Mandela**

When Nelson Mandela was studying law at the University, a white professor, whose last name was Peters, disliked him intensely.

One day, Mr. Peters was having lunch at the dining room when Mandela came along with his tray and sat next to the professor.

The professor said, "Mr Mandela, you do not understand, a pig and a bird do not sit together to eat"

Mandela looked at him as a parent would a rude child and calmly replied, "Do not worry professor. I'll fly away," and he went and sat at another table.

Mr. Peters, reddened with rage, decided to take revenge.

The next day in class he posed the following question:

"Mr. Mandela, if you were walking down the street and found a package, and within was a bag of wisdom and another bag with money, which one would you take?"

Without hesitating, Mandela responded, "The one with the money, of course."

Mr. Peters, smiling sarcastically said, "I, in your place, would have taken the wisdom."

Nelson Mandela shrugged and responded, "Each one takes what he doesn't have."

Mr. Peters, by this time was about to throw a fit, seething with fury. So great was his anger that he wrote on Nelson Mandela's exam sheet the word "IDIOT" and gave it to the future struggle icon.

Mandela took the exam sheet and sat down at his desk trying very hard to remain calm while he contemplated his next move.

A few minutes later, Nelson Mandela got up, walked up to the professor and told him in a dignified polite tone, "Mr. Peters, you signed your name on the sheet, but you forgot to give me my grade."

### **Vasectomy Joke**

The bride said she wanted three children, while the young husband said two would be enough for him. They discussed this discrepancy for a few minutes until the husband thought he'd put an end to things by saying boldly, "After our second child, I'll just have a vasectomy."

Without a moment's hesitation, the bride retorted, "Well, I hope you'll love the third one just as if it's your own."

## Hangover

A man wakes up at home with a huge hangover. He forces himself to open his eyes, and the first thing he sees is a couple of painkillers and a glass of water on the side table.

He sits down and sees his clothing in front of him, all clean and pressed. He looks around the room and sees that it is in a perfect order, spotless, clean. So is the rest of the house. He takes the painkillers and notices a note on the table that reads: "Honey, breakfast is on the stove, I left early to go shopping. Love you."

So, he goes to the kitchen and sure enough there is a hot breakfast and the morning newspaper. His son is also at the table, eating.

The man asks, "Son, what happened last night?"

His son says, "Well, you came home at three in the morning, drunk and delirious. Broke some furniture, puked in the hallway, and gave yourself a black eye when you stumbled into the door."

Confused, the man asks, "So, why is everything in order and so clean and breakfast is on the table waiting for me?"

His son replies, "Oh that! Mum dragged you to the bedroom and when she tried to take your pants off you said, "Lady, leave me alone, I'm married!"

**Keep safe and healthy. We look forward to seeing you at our concerts in the not-too-distant future.**

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