

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

## May 2021 Newsletter No 45



### Our first post COVID concert

Our first concert of the year, on April 20<sup>th</sup>, was held at the function rooms at the Karralyka Centre, where the patrons thoroughly enjoyed Maroondah Council's *Morning Music* which featured the choir and our special guest artist – the lovely *Kate Amos*.



*Before the audience came in – our final run through before the first concert of the year at Karralyka with David Ashton-Smith and Kate Amos putting the final touches to the joint items.*

It was great to have the concert suits on again and to hear the harmonies of fellow choristers seated around you.

The choir's hard work via the Zoom sessions throughout COVID and at our subsequent rehearsals at Federation Estate, really paid off, and at the end of the concert we received a standing ovation. The items featuring Kate and the choir i.e. "You'll never walk alone", "World in Union" and the medley from "Sound of Music" - which included some audience participation, were seen as highlights by an extremely appreciative audience.

### A great fund-raising afternoon concert at our home base Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> May

As with many choirs, because we were unable to perform during COVID, our revenue has been severely impacted and new engagements are slow to emerge after the enforced layoff.

We have therefore elected to hold a Sunday afternoon concert at our home base at Federation Estate, Ringwood, to act as a fundraiser for the choir. Come along and see and hear us where we rehearse.

Free parking is available and for those who prefer public transport, Ringwood railway station is a five-minute walk away. Who knows, this might even entice some budding choristers to join!

The concert will feature some new songs as well as a smattering of the old favourites so there will be something for everyone to enjoy.

Due to the continuing COVID restrictions there is a limit of 140 seats so be sure to book early.

We will also be holding a raffle with some outstanding prizes which will be drawn during the concert.

The flyer for the concert is shown below.

THE MELBOURNE WELSH MALE CHOIR

**THE MELBOURNE WELSH  
RE-UNITED!!**

**We are so pleased to finally be able to present this  
COVID breaking concert,  
intimately presented to a limited audience.**

**Tickets can be purchased from Choristers or online**  
**Adults \$35**  
**Concession \$32**  
**Group of 6 or more, per ticket \$30**

**Featuring a Raffle with exciting prizes**  
**See next page for more details**

**May 30th 2021 from 3pm to 5pm**  
***Maroondah Federation Estate***  
**32 Greenwood Ave, Ringwood VIC 3134**

Concert and Raffle Tickets can be purchased at  
<https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/>

### Raffle Prizes – in order of value

	Prize	Value	Notes
1	Framed painting by Ray Kitto	\$320	Great Ocean Rd coastline [60 x 45cm]
2	Portrait piece painting by Linda Weedon	\$175	Pastel pet portrait [30 x 42 cm]
3	Framed Drawing by Reg Gordon	\$175	Eagle, [30 x 42 cm]
4	Three Brothers Reunited Shiraz 2017	\$145	12 bottles
5	Karralyka theatre tickets [2] to “Margaret Fulton The Musical”	\$120	For Friday 30 July (8.00 pm)
6	Kim Crawford Pinot Gris	\$110	6 bottles
7	St Huberts “The Stag” Chardonnay 2020	\$100	6 bottles
8	Riedel Vinum Shiraz Glasses	\$99	Twin pack
9	Penderyn “Legend” Single Malt Welsh Whisky	\$83	700mL
10	Katherine Hills Cabernet Sauvignon 2020	\$80	12 bottles
11	A two-tiered celebration mud chocolate cake.	\$80	Fully decorated.
12	Drovers Lane Cabernet Sauvignon 2019	\$72	12 bottles
13	Cumquat tree	\$70	Suitable for pot or in-ground

### An ANZAC Day contribution



*Eight of the Waverley Welsh Choir members who are also current MWMC choristers*

As mentioned in previous newsletters many of our choristers sing in other choirs.

The photograph shows some members of the “Waverley Welsh Choir” which sang for the Waverley Sub-Branch of the RSL at their annual ANZAC Day ceremony at the local cenotaph.

Afterwards, they moved back to the club, where they entertained the servicemen and women, participants in the march and ceremony and members of the public, all of whom were welcomed.

The “Gunfire Breakfast”, (a sausage between two slices of bread and a cup of tea or coffee with a dash of rum (if wanted)), was served.

After the breakfast, the choir did its stuff, singing a number of the affectionately known war songs plus old show songs from that era.

The audience was encouraged to join in the singing and the choir sang many of their requests. This year was the 25th year that the choir has performed. There are about 12 to 14 men, mainly current and former members of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, who form the choir. Unfortunately, because many of the members live so far from each other, they are unable to rehearse together, but audience comments suggest that they sing well enough as they are! It seems (or so we are told), that they sound better after their throats have been “lubricated”, which also brings out some budding soloists. They do this gladly, for a very good cause and while they take their singing and presentation seriously, they really do enjoy singing to this responsive audience and especially for those who have served in the forces.

## Choir Member Profile – first tenor Raymond Crooke

Raymond has been a valued member of the first tenors for 12 years and is an accomplished folk singer, this is his story:

I was born in Melbourne, but my first memories are of Ballarat, where I started school. My father was working at Ballarat Teacher’s College. I remember him rowing me in a small boat on Lake Wendouree,



singing “*Toorali-oorali-addity, we’re bound for Botany Bay.*”

After I completed prep grade, we moved to Maldon, where my grandparents lived. On my first day at Maldon State School, the teachers decided I was too tall for Grade One. This was the only reason I was given for skipping a grade, which resulted in my being the youngest in the class all through my school life. Half-way through second grade, we moved back to Melbourne, and I went to Ashburton State School.

I always loved music. Waiting for a haircut at the barber's shop, I used to hum to myself. The barbers called me “*Bing*”.

My wife complains that I still do it!

I grew up listening to my father’s collection of Burl Ives records. I learned several of his songs by heart, my favourite being “*Barbara Allan*”, and used to act them out with my

brothers and sisters.

After three years at Camberwell Grammar, I transferred to Ashwood High School, where I joined the School Choir, my first experience of choral singing. One memorable afternoon our English teacher played us the first Joan Baez album. I immediately fell in love with her voice and bought the album, thus beginning my collection of folk music records.

Although I learned piano up to Matriculation level, my main musical interest was in singing, particularly folk music. I would strum my mother’s violin as I sang, pretending it was a guitar, something I desperately wanted. At last, in 1963, at the end of Form Five, I had managed to save enough money to buy my first guitar. I bought a songbook with an addendum on how to play guitar and used that to teach myself the chords and strumming techniques. I had a classmate who introduced me to the music of folk musicians like Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie and we started singing together.

My debut as a folksinger was towards the end of first term in 1964, when I sang with another friend at an Inter-School Christian Fellowship Social. I soon started singing at events of the Ashburton Baptist Youth Fellowship. With my parents' encouragement, I started entering radio and television contests like 3UZ "Radio Auditions" and GTV9 "New Faces" and over the next few years I also performed regularly on 3DB's "Country and Western Hour." I was their token folksinger.

In 1965, at the age of seventeen, I began studying for a B.A./Dip. Ed at Monash University, majoring in English and Pure Mathematics.

My first year of teaching, 1969, was at Bacchus Marsh and I had to drive every day from St Kilda, where we lived, because Yoong was working in the city. At the end of the year, I asked the Education Department to transfer me to anywhere in the metropolitan area - and they sent me to Belmont High in Geelong! Still an hour's drive, but we had moved to the other side of the city, to Yarraville.

At the end of 1970 I was posted to Footscray High School and Yoong and I, now married, bought a house in West Footscray. I taught for fourteen years in the Western suburbs and Yoong worked as the accountant at Western General Hospital. When our oldest boy reached High School age, we bought a house in East Bentleigh, so he and his brother could go to McKinnon High School. I taught at Moorleigh High, until it was closed by Jeff Kennett in 1992.

As a full-time teacher, I had little time to focus on singing, although I did join a church choir and often used songs in my lessons.

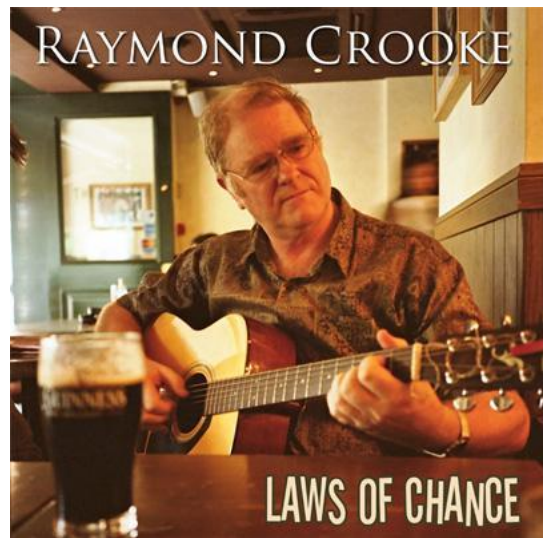
After 25 years teaching in Victoria, I felt it was time to experience working overseas. I taught for six very enjoyable years in Singapore, then two and a half years in Brunei and finally five years in Hong Kong. In Singapore, I joined the Teachers Choir, which consisted mainly of retired principals.

In Brunei we were given an absurdly large house in a small town called Kuala Belait, not far from the oil town of Seria, where I was teaching. When the Sultan of Brunei visited our school, he came in to observe my class but, as the students had to stand up while in his presence, he just shook my hand and didn't actually see any teaching.

There was a large expatriate community made up of Shell workers and teachers, and we had to provide our own entertainment. I joined up with an Englishman, an Irishman, and a Scotsman (no, it's not going to be a joke) to form a folk group, which we called *The Belaiters* (pronounced Blighters). We put on concerts for an enthusiastic expat audience. I wrote a song called "I Love Kuala Belait" which made fun of the eccentricities of our little town. When I sang it on YouTube a few years later, it reached a much wider audience than the expats for whom it had been intended. It became a big hit in Brunei, especially with people living in Kuala Belait, who didn't get the irony and thought I was genuinely praising their city. I even had a telephone interview with a journalist who was writing a story about it.

In Hong Kong, I met an Irish singer at the Hong Kong Folk Society, who persuaded me to come along to the Hong Kong Welsh Male Choir with him. That was my first experience of a Welsh choir, and during my five years with the choir, we had many overseas tours, including an annual trip to Bangkok to sing at the St David's Day Ball, an annual trip to the Philippines, doing charity concerts organised by the Rotary Club, concerts in Saigon and a mass choir event in London. Of course, there were regular concerts in Hong Kong, the highlight being the Christmas season when we had several performances at venues like Yacht clubs, always with plenty of food and drink. My last tour was to Beijing, where we sang on the Great Wall of China.

In 2007, back in Australia for holidays, my son told me about an internet platform called YouTube, and suggested I try uploading a few songs. My first attempt was a song called "Axis of Evil" which I had



One of Raymond's CDs

written after the USA invaded Iraq. I soon became addicted and started putting up a song almost every day. I'm still doing it!

Through YouTube, I met folk musicians from around the world. An Italian friend, who loves the songs of Joan Baez, invited us to stay in his apartment in Rome, where we recorded a number of songs. Another YouTube friend, from Canada, was teaching in Bangkok, so we would meet up and record a few songs when I went to Thailand with the Hong Kong Welsh choir. I also got to know a singer in Montreal, an expert on old-time American music. He organised a "YouTube Strummit" and invited us to stay with him and his wife and perform at various venues. We sang a lot of songs together and recorded a couple of CDs.

At his suggestion, Yoong and I travelled to Newfoundland, where folk music has the status of Pop music. We went to two folk festivals, one in St John's and one in Ferryland, where we had the great pleasure of staying at a B&B run by a wonderful Irish woman called Rita Hagan. I wrote a song about our experience there, called "Rita Hagan's Lawn". I recorded it with my friend, interspersed with humorous bits of conversations we had with her, and put it on YouTube. When Canadian television made a documentary about her life, they included my video in the program.

Another of my videos, which ended up on TV, was when Gesang Martohartono, the writer of *Bengawan Solo* died, and my YouTube rendition was shown on Indonesian television, to show that even foreigners sing his songs.

Yoong and I both love travelling and we try to find music wherever we go. Opera in Milan and other European cities, ballet in Russia, recitals in churches and parks in Paris and music festivals in countries as diverse as Morocco, Latvia, and Bulgaria.

Now that I'm retired, I sometimes perform at South Yarra Senior Centre, mainly with a three-man group called *The Old Fokeys*, and I sometimes sing at services of the Melbourne Unitarian Church, most recently on ANZAC day.

It's great to sing with the Melbourne Welsh, especially now we can get back to live performances!

## Vale - Ross McLean



After a long illness, one of the choir's longer serving and well respected, former first tenors - **Donald Ross McLean** - known simply to us as "Ross" died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2021, he was 76.

Twenty-five members of the choir attended the service of thanksgiving held at North Ringwood Uniting Church on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and as requested by Ross' wife - Jan, we sang "You raise me up" and "Cwm Rhondda" to sing his spirit home.

## 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, whether you've been involved in music all your life or if you only sing in the shower, please come along and see how a choir works, at any of our rehearsals at Maroondah Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood. You will be made most welcome, whether you wish to listen and observe alongside our other guests or 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 most rehearsals, which gives everyone the opportunity to chat to other choir members over a cuppa and normally, 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. This makes the process of learning the repertoire that much easier. We also have Welsh language sessions, given by Welsh speaking members of the choir, to assist choristers who may have difficulty with the pronunciation and understanding of the Welsh songs in our repertoire.

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?**

Like all choirs worldwide, COVID restrictions have meant that we have been unable to perform in concert for much of the past 15 months. However, we are now almost back to normal and as mentioned above, we are rehearsing on the basis that we will be performing in our regular schedule of 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 are, or know of, any organization which might require anything from a short rousing opening for a conference (say) to a full two-hour concert, together with guest artists and orchestra or band (if required), please contact **Gwyn Harper (0419 562 353)** or any committee member and we will follow up all contacts.

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.

Our audience is predominantly the "over fifties", so for those organisations which have this demographic as their own target market, sponsoring the choir provides a great and cost-effective way of getting your message across.

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 last 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 are given the opportunity to be involved in the presentation ceremonies 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 last 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**

### **My Favourite Animal**

Our teacher asked what my favourite animal was, and I said "Fried Chicken"

She said it wasn't funny, but she couldn't have been right because everyone else laughed.

My parents told me to always tell the truth. I did. Fried chicken is my favourite animal.

I told my dad what had happened, and he said my teacher was probably a member of PETA. He said they love animals very much.

I do, too. Especially chicken, pork, and beef.

Anyway, my teacher sent me to the principal's office.

I told him what had happened, and he laughed too. Then he told me not to do it again.

The next day in class my teacher asked me what my favourite live animal was?

I told her it was a chicken.

She asked me why, so I told her it was because you could make them into fried chicken.

She sent me to the principal's office.

He laughed and told me not to do it again.

I don't understand. My parents taught me to be honest, but my teacher doesn't like it when I am.

Today my teacher asked me to tell her what famous military person I admired most.

I told her "Colonel Sanders"

Guess where I am now...



## **Driving qualification**

A teenage boy had just passed his driving test and inquired of his father as to when they could discuss his use of the car.

His father said he'd make a deal with his son, "You bring your grades up from a C to a B average, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut. Then we'll talk about the car."

The boy thought about that for a moment, decided he'd settle for the offer, and they agreed on it.

After about six weeks his father said, "Son, you've brought your grades up and I've observed that you have been studying your Bible, but I'm disappointed you haven't had your hair cut." The boy said, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that, and I've noticed in my studies of the Bible that Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair, and there's even strong evidence that Jesus had long hair."

Dad replied : "Did you also notice that they all walked everywhere they went?"

## **Sex after surgery**

A recent article in the Daily Post reported that a man, Dave Harper, has sued the St Paul's hospital, saying that after his wife had surgery there, she lost all interest in sex.

A hospital spokesman replied:

"Mrs Harper was admitted for cataract surgery. All we did was correct her eyesight"

## **Gourmet eating**

So, I went to this Eskimo restaurant.

I asked to see the menu.

The waiter said "we don't have a lot of options, so I'll just call them out for you"

"We have whale meat steaks, we have whale meat curry, we have whale meat stir fry and of course we have the Vera Lynn"

I said, "What's the Vera Lynn?"

He replied, "Whale meat again!"

*Contributions welcomed from supporters. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the choir. The MWMC Newsletter articles may be reproduced, but we do insist on acknowledgement as the source. All articles, sketches, photographs etc., that are included in the publication are published on this condition. The choir will endeavour at all times to seek permission to reproduce material from other sources and/or acknowledge the source as appropriate.*

## **CHOIR DIRECTORY**

President : Kevin Seerup [president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au](mailto:president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au)  
Vice-president : David Field [vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au](mailto:vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au)  
Secretary : Ieuan Thomas [secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au](mailto:secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au)  
Treasurer : Andrew Gibson [treasurer@melbournewelshchoir.com.au](mailto:treasurer@melbournewelshchoir.com.au)  
Music Director : David Ashton-Smith OAM  
Committee : Colin Brown, Phil Tomlinson, Geoff Cooke, Will Morton, Gwyn Harper, Robert Mits