

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

July 2021 Newsletter No 46



In what has been a frustrating few weeks for the choir, we have, due to COVID lockdown, had our fund-raising concert, scheduled for the 30th May at our rehearsal venue of Federation Estate postponed until the 18th July (See the flyer attached to this newsletter). As a result, we have had to revert to our online video Zoom rehearsals which, while useful, are nothing like being part of an entire choir singing in harmony.

In addition, a number of our choir members, including most notably our music director, have been impacted by the recent storms which devastated parts of Victoria. This caused our MD, in particular, to move from his damaged home in the Dandenongs and temporarily hand over his role for the Zoom rehearsals to his deputies. We are pleased to report he now has power restored to his house and he and his wife will return home as soon as their water supply is fixed.



The entrance to our rehearsal rooms at Federation Estate - the venue for our next concert.

Nevertheless, the choir is very resilient and we look forward to the end of the current COVID restrictions and to demonstrating our capability to entertain an audience within our own rehearsal environment.

The *Melbourne Welsh Re-United* concert will feature some of the talented members of the choir performing as soloists. The original concert, with its COVID-restricted 140 seat limit, was a sell-out (and provided the same capacity restrictions apply, then this one is likely to be the same).

We already had plans for a repeat performance to cater for those who missed out on tickets, so we plan to do the same for the upcoming concert. The second concert will be on 1st August 2021. Please book through Trybooking.

We have some exciting potential concerts lined up for later in the year with the Australian Youth Band, our regular concert for Tuckers (in the Geelong Cathedral) and one with the Legends of Brass, as well as our usual two Christmas concerts in a day at Mooroolbark. Please watch this space and our website www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au for details and dates.

New to the choir's Welsh repertoire – *Hiraeth*

The choir has added a traditional and very beautiful song to its repertoire - "*Hiraeth*" - which is the word for a uniquely Welsh feeling.

As *Niall Griffiths* states, "Wales is a place which informs the peculiarly and wholly Welsh concept of *Hiraeth*. Often translated simply as "longing" or "homesickness", it is actually much, much more than that. It is more closely related to the Portuguese *saudade* or the Spanish *duende*: a kind of affirmative sadness, of attachment to a place so physically and spiritually profound that it can be heartbreaking, as well as a powerful spur to creation. It has nothing to do with wearing patriotic garb or singing the national anthem (even if "*Yr Hen Wlad fy Nhadau*" sung at the Millennium Stadium does make the soul soar); instead, it's bound up with a recognition that the blood beats in your arteries in the

same way that the seas and streams around you boom at their shores and banks. It's to do with a calmness, which, like the calmness that comes with finding a god, has absolutely nothing to do with comfort”.

“Hiraeth is a Welsh word for an untranslatable deep nostalgia for a place or time that will never be again, or a place and time that never really was. A longing for home”

Here is the translation of the song’s Welsh lyrics.

Hiraeth

Dwedwch, fawrion o wybod aeth
O ba beth y gnwaeth pwyd hiraeth:
A pha ddefnydd a roed ynddo
Na ddar fyddo wrth ei wisgo.

*Tell me, masters of wisdom
from what thing is hiraeth made.
And what is put in it that it never
fades through wearing it.*

Derfydd aur a derfydd arian
Derfydd melfed, derfydd sidan;
Derfydd pob dilledyn helaeth
Eto er hyn ni dderfydd hiraeth.

*Gold fades, silver fades,
velvet fades, silk fades,
Every sort of clothing fades
but hiraeth never fades.*

Hiraeth mawr a hiraeth creulon
Hiraeth sydd yn torri ‘nghalon
Pan fwy dyrma’r nos yn cysgu,
Fe ddaw hiraeth ac a’ m deffry.

*Great hiraeth and cruel hiraeth
hiraeth breaks my heart,
When I am sleeping deeply at night,
hiraeth comes and wakes me.*

The tale of a tail

Have you ever looked carefully at the choir’s dragon logo? Notice anything strange?

If you said “no” then you are in the majority.



Our logo is based on the Welsh dragon as shown on the Welsh flag but there is one intriguing difference. Have you found it yet?

Apart from the style differences, the major difference is the coil on the dragon’s tail.

On the Welsh flag the coil is up, whereas on the choir’s logo it’s down.

Whether it’s because, as an Australian choir, we’re “down under” and hence the coil goes down rather than up, is a moot point, however the choir’s logo has remained the same since the choir was formed.

Our brother choirs in Victoria, the Australian Welsh, and the Victoria Welsh both have logos incorporating dragons with upward facing coils.

Whether the secretary at the time of the choir’s formation - John Wilkinson (now deceased) - wanted to make our logo unique, we will never know.

Sometimes it’s good to be a little different from the rest of the pack.

Choir Member - Charles Gorman - Tenor 1

I was born in 1935, in Alexandria, Egypt, of Maltese parents.

We spoke both Maltese and Italian at home, I went to a French school and we had Greek neighbours. In 1949, at the age of fifteen, my family migrated to Australia.

I spoke four languages, but not English (nor Welsh!). Back in Egypt, I had nearly completed my baccalaureate, but here in Australia I had to start from scratch. So, for the first five years, I was busy at school, trying to master the English language.

I got a Diploma in Marketing and was eventually made an Associate Fellow of the Australian Marketing Institute.

In 1991, I retired from The Victorian Railways, after 38 years as the State Marketing Manager Parcels.

I then went to the Metropolitan Traffic Education Centre (METEC) as its General Manager. I retired from there in 2002.

My wife Brenda and I have between us eight children and eighteen grandchildren. We both played a lot of sport in our younger days. Brenda was a very good swimmer and played a lot of tennis. I played soccer and then pennant tennis until injuries forced me to me to take up golf.

I am very good at golf. My handicap is 36 and I hope to turn pro shortly!

We belong to PROBUS, we are very keen gardeners and we love travelling, especially cruising. However, because of our age, we don't intend doing many more overseas cruises. Next June we are planning a cruise to Japan, COVID permitting, which will be probably our last trip.

As far as singing is concerned, because of my studies I didn't get involved in choirs until I was 27 years old.

The first choir I joined was *Our Lady's Parish Choir*, in Ringwood. When the Parish split, we formed the *Holy Spirit Parish Choir* in North Ringwood.

For approximately eighteen months I relieved the Musical Director, who was recovering from a motorbike accident.

In 1994 I was invited to join the *Melbourne Male Choir* (previously known as the *Australian Dutch Male Choir*) and sang with them until their demise.

I joined the *Melbourne Welsh Male Choir* in 2018 and I have found the members of the choir very friendly and welcoming. I am enjoying my time with the choir, although I am still having trouble with the pronunciation of some of the Welsh songs, but apparently I am not the only one.

As they say practice makes one perfect!



New Choir Member – Bass Richard Bolt

We are pleased to introduce our first PPA [post pandemic applicant], Richard Bolt.



Richard's parents were born in the Netherlands, before World War 2, married after the war, and emigrated to Australia in 1958. Richard himself was born in Adelaide and has lived in Darwin and many parts of rural and remote South Australia until seeing the light and moving to Victoria in 1983 for work.

He now resides in Blackburn. He has an older brother and two younger sisters, one of whom passed away in 2016.

By trade, Richard is a consultant mainly on energy and reducing carbon emissions. He started his working life as an electrical engineer, but then shifted to being a researcher for a political party.

Later he joined the Victorian public service, where he ran three departments over a period of 12 years, before moving to his current job.

Richard is married to Morgen (a good Welsh name but she has no Welsh heritage) and they have four children and two granddaughters, aged 2 years and 1 month. Their daughters are Leonora (the heroine from Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*) and Matilda (a

reference to Australia's folk anthem of course). The boys are named Huw and Owen, after the main character and one of his brothers from '*How Green Was My Valley*'.

Richard's musical background is pretty low key [pun intended]. He played guitar in a very forgettable dance band in Murray Bridge in the late 1970's, but apart from that, he's sung to his wife and kids and occasionally to friends. However, he did once have a private sing-along with Peter Garrett from Midnight Oil, presumably after several glasses of wine were consumed!

His hobbies include cooking, cryptic crosswords, playing cards (with the same group of friends for more than 30 years), providing labour for Morgen's house and garden designs, riding his bike around Melbourne and country rail trails, travelling when it's legal to do so, and going to films and concerts.

Why the Melbourne Welsh, you might ask. Well, his family have been pushing him to join a choir and a Welsh choir was the best fit; he'd heard of the Melbourne Welsh so tried it out. His father's musical interests included male voice choirs, particularly the *Mastreechter Staar* [the Dutch Royal Choir] and the *Don Cossacks*, an acapella Russian choir conducted by Serge Jaroff. His interest in Wales (caused by watching and then reading '*How Green Was My Valley*') and his inherited interest in male voice choirs led him to buy some LPs of Welsh choirs more than 20 years ago.

Vale – Denzil James

We are sad to advise that Denzil James, a former member of the baritones passed away on the 31 May, aged 90.

A solicitor and public notary by profession, Denzil advised on a number of legal matters relating to the choir including the drafting of our constitution.

Denzil sang with the choir for over a decade and travelled with us on a number of our overseas trips. His son, Michael was also a member of the choir, a father and son relationship which is fairly unique in the choral world.



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.melbournwelshchoir.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 email us 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, even during these COVID times.

We had two new members join us in our Zoom rehearsals while we were in lockdown, so please don't wait until the pandemic is over before joining the choir.

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 sit within the body of the choir and sing with us or listen and observe, alongside with our other guests, the choice is yours.

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

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

Established choristers are 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 normally a break for tea or coffee at our rehearsal, which gives everyone the opportunity to chat to other choir members. On the first Wednesday in the month, health restrictions permitting, one of the sections will provide the choir and visitors with a (sometimes) sumptuous supper.

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

If you contact us on the phone numbers or email addresses shown in this newsletter, we will respond and arrange to meet you personally. 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 access to our web-based aids which assist us in learning and practising the individual parts at home. This makes the process of learning the repertoire so 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, Hamer Hall 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., at most times in the year, so if you are, or know of, an 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 be pleased to work with you to produce an outstanding event.

Please bear in mind that we're talking about a choir of up to 60 voices plus a professional music director and accompanist. 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.

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 concerts, marketing material and promotions.

Our audience is predominantly the "over fifties", so for those organisations which have this demographic as a 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 later 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 gives them an opportunity 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 ability to be involved in the presentation ceremonies on the night and in the elimination heats. 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

No land lovers here

A seaman meets a pirate in a bar and talk turns to their adventures on the sea. The seaman notes that the pirate has a peg-leg, a hook, and an eye patch.

The seaman asks, "So, how did you end up with the peg-leg?"

The pirate replies, "We were in a storm at sea, and I was swept overboard into a school of sharks. Just as my men were pulling me out, a shark bit my leg off."

"Wow!" said the seaman. "What about your hook"?

"Well", replied the pirate, "We were boarding an enemy ship and were battling the other sailors with swords. One of the enemy cut my hand off."

"Incredible!" remarked the seaman. "How did you get the eye patch"?

"A seagull dropping fell into my eye," replied the pirate.

"You lost your eye to a seagull dropping?," the sailor asked incredulously.

"Well," said the pirate, "it was my first day with my hook".

Fishing catch

"Poor old fool," thought the well-dressed gentleman as he watched an old man fish in a puddle outside a pub. So, he invited the old man inside for a drink.

As they sipped their whiskeys, the gentleman thought he'd humour the old man and asked, "So how many have you caught today?"

The old man replied, "You're the eighth."

The letter of the law

Two lawyers walk into a pub. They order a couple of drinks and take their sandwiches out of their briefcases and then they begin to eat them.

Seeing this, the angry publican exclaims, "Excuse me, but you can't eat your own sandwiches in here!" The two lawyers looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, then exchanged sandwiches.

Penguin Parade

A penguin walks into a bar and asks the barman, "Has my brother been in for a drink here today?" The barman looks at the penguin and says, "I'm not sure. What does he look like?"

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