

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

August 2021 Newsletter No 47



Concert Rescheduling Saga

Who would want to be a concert organiser in these uncertain pandemic lockdown times?

As you will hopefully have heard, our July concerts at Federation Estate had to be rescheduled, as has the August 1st concert, due to continuing COVID distancing and hence capacity constraints.

All of the booked-out *Melbourne Welsh Re-United* concert tickets for July 18th will now be transferred to Sunday August 22nd, just change the date (again) on your tickets.

Those with tickets for the August 1st *Melbourne Welsh Re-United* concert will be transferred to the *Singer of the Year (SOTY) Finals concert* on 18th September. Please note that the program for choir's *SOTY Finals concert* will be totally different (and a little shorter to accommodate the finalists' solo contributions and the award ceremony).

We will be happy to accommodate those who wish to attend both concerts or alternatively require refunds.

The raffle will be drawn at the August 22nd concert.

Singer of the Year 2021 – Applications open

Applications are open for the Singer of the Year competition in 2021. Singers, 35 years and under, are invited to participate in this annual competition, sponsored by the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir.

Alan Stevenson (0403 271 468) continues as the coordinator and application forms are on the choir's website at :-

www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au

With a first prize of \$3,000, we have already received entries from some amazing young artists and we invite other talented young singers to apply. While challenging, it is fun and rewarding, with every competitor receiving a professional performance critique and the finalists having the opportunity to perform live in concert with the Choir, in addition to receiving their cash rewards.



Our last physical SOTY concert in 2019 with David-Ashton Smith and the three finalists.

Forthcoming Concerts

While nothing is ever certain in this continuing pandemic, in anticipation of a return to performing on stage, we have some exciting potential concerts lined up for later in the year, these include a concert with the *Australian Youth Band* and performing for clients of *Tuckers Funeral and Bereavement Services* in Geelong.

- We have been invited to perform as guests of the wonderful *Australian Youth Band* on Sunday 5th Sept 2021 in the James Tatoulis Auditorium, at Methodist Ladies College in Kew. You may recall that we last performed with them in 2018 at the Melbourne Town Hall for the wonderful concert celebrating the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1.
- Our annual concert for *Tuckers*, in the wonderful Geelong Basilica, is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. Friday 1st October 2021.

Please note these dates and watch this space and our website www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au for details and dates of other concerts.

More about the Choir's repertoire

Continuing our series of articles describing the history and meaning of many of the Welsh songs which the choir sings, there is one song which is known by every Welsh person, and which features at the start or end of many of our concerts - the *Welsh National anthem*.

“Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau” or ‘*Land Of My Fathers*’ in English, is Wales’ rambunctious National Anthem. The song is traditionally sung at the beginning of sporting matches and at national events. (Note: As with the Australian National Anthem, the words of the second and third verses are rarely sung.)

The song talks of Wales’ rich heritage and culture of poetry, music, patriotic heroes, linguistic pride and of course, Wales’ inimitable landscape. It translates as the following:

*Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi,
Gwlad beirdd a chantorion, enwogion o fri;
Ei gwrol ryfelwyr, gwladgarwyr tra môd,
Tros ryddid gollasant eu gwaed.*

This land of my fathers is dear to me
Land of poets and singers, and people of stature
Her brave warriors, fine patriots
Shed their blood for freedom

Chorus:

*Gwlad, Gwlad, pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad,
Tra môr yn fur i'r bur hoff bau,
O bydded i'r heniaith barhau.*

**Land! Land! I am true to my land!
As long as the sea serves as a wall
For this pure, dear land, may the language endure for
ever.**

*Hen Gymru fynyddig, paradwys y bardd;
Pob dyffryn, pob clogwyn, i'm golwg sydd hardd,
Trwy deimlad gwladgarol, mor swynol yw si,
Ei nentydd, afonydd, i mi.*

Old land of the mountains, paradise of the poets,
Every valley, every cliff a beauty guards;
Through love of my country, enchanting voices will be
Her streams and rivers to me.

*Os treisiodd y gelyn fy ngwlad dan ei droed,
Mae hen iaith y Cymry mor fyw ag erioed,
Ni luddiwyd yr awen gan erchyll law brad,
Na thelyn berseiniol fy ngwlad*

Though the enemy have trampled my country underfoot,
The old language of the Welsh knows no retreat,
The spirit is not hindered by the treacherous hand
Nor silenced the sweet harp of my land.

The history behind the creation of - *Hen wlad fy nhadau* - from dance tune (and a counter to the NZ rugby “*haka*”), to full national anthem status.

With Wales’ impressive choral heritage in mind, it is no surprise that the national anthem of the “Land of Song” is one of the most memorable anthems in the world.

Its creation was a family affair: the lyrics were written by Evan James and the melody composed by his son, James James, in January 1856.

Glan Rhondda (Banks of the Rhondda), as it was known when it was composed, was first performed in the vestry of the original Capel Tabor, *Maesteg* (which later became a [working men's club](#)), in February 1856, by Elizabeth John from [Pontypridd](#), and it soon became popular in the locality.

[James James](#), the composer, was a harpist who played his instrument in the public house which he ran, for the purpose of dancing. The song was originally intended to be performed in 6/8 time but had to be slowed down to its present tempo when it began to be sung by large crowds.

The popularity of the song increased after the Llangollen festival of 1858.

Thomas Llewelyn of [Aberdare](#), won a competition for an unpublished collection of Welsh airs, with a collection that included *Glan Rhondda*. The adjudicator of the competition, “*Owain Alaw*” ([John Owen](#), 1821–83) asked for permission to include *Glan Rhondda* in his publication, *Gems of Welsh Melody* (1860–64). This volume gave *Glan Rhondda* its more famous title, “*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” and was sold in large quantities, which ensured the popularity of the anthem across the whole of Wales.

At the Bangor Eisteddfod of 1874, “*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” gained further popularity when it was sung by Robert Rees (“*Eos Morlais*”), one of the leading Welsh soloists of his day.

It was increasingly sung at patriotic gatherings and gradually it developed into a national anthem.

The anthem was also one of the first Welsh-language songs recorded, when Madge Breese sang it on 11 March 1899, for the Gramophone Company, as part of the first recording in the Welsh language.

“*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” was the first national anthem to be sung at the start of a sporting event.

In 1905, the Welsh national rugby team hosted New Zealand’s first touring team, who started every match performing a “*haka*” - an intimidating Maori war dance ritual. In response, Wales’ winger - Teddy Morgan led the capacity crowd at Cardiff Arms Park, in singing the anthem. Although crowds often sang anthems during games, there was no precedent for an anthem to be sung before a match.

The Welsh team (who were the UK triple crown champions,) won the match, by 3 points (one try) to nil, against the previously undefeated New Zealand team (later known as the “*Originals*”).

Tradition has subsequently established “*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” as an unofficial Welsh anthem since that match in 1905, when it was first sung by fans at a rugby game, although the official anthem at the time was “*God Bless the Prince of Wales*”.

“*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” slowly established itself as the more popular anthem over the next four decades and was sung along with “*God Bless the Prince of Wales*” and “*God Save the Queen*” before sporting events until 1975, when sports officials decided that “*Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*” should be sung alone.

Like other British anthems, it has not been established as a national anthem by law, but it has been used as a national anthem at official government ceremonies, including the opening of the Welsh Parliament / Senedd Cymru (formerly the Welsh Assembly), and at receptions of the British monarchy since the 1970s.

It is recognised and used as an anthem at both national and local events in Wales.

New Choir member - Hugo Stephens - Bass

Hugo's heritage is Greek (on his father's side), English (the Stephens' come from the Cornwall), and Irish (on his mother's side – an O'Sullivan from County Mayo) .



Hugo's parents were living in Singapore in 1992 when he came along.

His family is originally from New Zealand where his father had established a livestock import/export business – “*Goldkiwi.*”

They moved to Singapore to promote the export of NZ sheep and beef to Southeast Asia and China. The family, comprising of parents Paul & Liz, Hugo and three brothers - Henry, William and twin brother Jack, moved back to Wellington, New Zealand in 1998.

Hugo's Dad sold the business but still works on various projects in the industry. Mum is a primary school teacher and the suspected source of his interest in music. Brother Henry lives in Oslo where he works as an architect, and William works with Dad in one of his new ventures - eggplant relish! Jack is a lawyer in Wellington.

Hugo himself is a Community Psychiatric Nurse with Alfred Health. After finishing his nursing training in 2014 in Dunedin he moved to Melbourne in 2015.

Hugo was first exposed to choral music from his regular weekly attendance at the local catholic church during his childhood. His Mum noted that he had some natural ability in singing. He later joined the choral choir in high school, and at the University of Otago in Dunedin he sang in the Southern Youth Choir for two years. He played piano from age 6 to 19, up to grade 5 level. At High School he also dabbled with the bagpipes and bass drum.

Hugo's interests and hobbies are mostly sports-related: AFL (a North Melbourne FC member), keen supporter of the NZ Black Caps (NZ's cricket team), and the All Blacks (NZ's Rugby union team).

As a competitor, he runs half marathons, is an open water swimmer, and does trail running. He also enjoys reading various journals from both NZ and Australia, especially dealing with finance and the stock market.

Overseas travel is also on his agenda. In 2017 a group of friends participated in the Mongol Rally, an intercontinental car rally that begins in Europe and ends in Mongolia. They drove two Ford Fiestas from London to Mongolia (and back - most of the way!). A once in a lifetime experience.

Why join the Melbourne Welsh? Well, Hugo has always had a keen interest in Welsh singing. It was borne out of watching the All Blacks beat Wales at Cardiff Arms Park and hearing the beautiful rendition of the Welsh National Anthem.

He has visited Wales twice; both occasions involved a visit to Cardiff Arms Park. The second visit was watching the band Coldplay in concert in 2017. During the performance the lead singer, Chris Martin, invited Rob Brydon, the Welsh actor and comedian, onto the stage where he invited the entirety of the 80,000 people in the stadium to sing “*Hen Wlad Fy Ndadau*” with him; it was a truly special experience and cemented his desire to one day sing in a Welsh choir. Singing has always been something that Hugo enjoys, however he has not made time for it over the last few years. Re-engaging with the Arts this year and returning to singing has made him realise what he was missing.

In making a decision to re-join a choir, he knew that he had a strong desire to one day sing in a Welsh choir, and his experiences of the passion of Welsh singing from the 2017 concert helped him decide to contact the MWMC. He also came across the MWMC on Spotify, and thoroughly enjoyed the repertoire and sound. He feels the MWMC is something he can commit to and be an active participant moving forward.

Hugo, welcome to the Melbourne Welsh, we look forward to your contribution to the bass section.

Communicating with the Choir

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 performances (whether video or live). Please introduce us to your friends and let us know what you would like to see us perform in our future live concerts.

Come join the choir.

The choir is always keen to attract new members, even during these COVID times.

We have had two new members join us in our Zoom rehearsals while we were in lockdown, with another waiting for us to resume full on-site rehearsals, so please don't wait until the pandemic is over before checking us out.

While our heritage is Welsh and 25% of our concert programs are Welsh songs (not all in the Welsh language), we are fundamentally a multicultural choir with probably only 50% of us having a Welsh background. The choir is open to people of any nationality and among our current and past members we have singers with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, South African, Tongan, Samoan and Australian heritage!

Whether you are a young buck, or an old timer, whether you've been involved in music all your life or you only sing in the shower, you are welcome to come along to any of our rehearsals at Maroondah Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood to see how the choir performs. You will be made most welcome, whether you wish to sit within the body of the choir and sing with us or simply listen and observe, alongside our other guests, until you are happy with the music and the environment.

Our rehearsal facility at Federation Estate is excellent, with comfortable seats, good acoustics and we have 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 in teaching us new songs. He is ably assisted by our accompanist, Simon Walters, himself a music director of some note, whose keen ear picks up any problems with pitch or timing.

Established choristers 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 the probationary period and will answer any questions you might have.

In normal, non-COVID times there is 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, 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 getting up to speed with the repertoire so much easier. We also have Welsh language sessions, given by some of the Welsh speaking members of the choir, to assist choristers 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

Want to hire the choir?

Like all choirs worldwide, COVID restrictions have meant that we have been able to perform only one live concert (at Karralyka) for much of the past 18 months. However, we have been rehearsing on the basis that we will be performing 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 50 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 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. Alternatively, if you would simply like to donate to the choir, please contact any member of the committee. We are a registered charitable body and all donations will be acknowledged and are tax deductible.

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 forties", so for those organisations which have this demographic as a target market, sponsoring the choir provides a unique and cost-effective way of getting your message across.

The choir is seeking sponsors for the funding of the prizes for our prestigious *Singer of the Year (SOTY)* concert which, hopefully, we will be able to hold before a large live audience, in September this year. 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 with our “virtual” competition 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 the 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 produced and 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.

We are able to perform at a sponsor’s nominated site if required, as we have done in the past (at the opening of a conference).

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 trying times like these, laughter is still the best medicine

Loving memories

An elderly gent was invited to his old friend's home for dinner one evening.

He was impressed by the way his buddy preceded every request to his wife with endearing terms -- Honey, My Love, Darling, Sweetheart, Pumpkin, etc...

The couple had been married almost 70 years, and clearly, they were still very much in love.

While the wife was in the kitchen, the man leaned over and said to his host, “I think it's wonderful that, after all these years, you still call your wife those loving pet names.”

The old man hung his head. “I have to tell you the truth,” he said, “I forgot her name about 10 years ago”.

Cunning Poodle

A wealthy old lady decides to go on a safari in Africa, taking her faithful, aged poodle named Cuddles along for company.

One day the poodle starts chasing butterflies and before long, Cuddles discovers that he's lost. Wandering about, he notices a leopard heading rapidly in his direction with the intention of having him for lunch.

The old poodle thinks, “Oh, oh! I'm in deep poo-poo now!”

Noticing some bones on the ground close by, he immediately settles down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the leopard is about to leap the old poodle exclaims loudly, “Boy, that was one delicious leopard! I wonder if there are any more around here?”

Hearing this, the young leopard halts his attack in mid-strike, a look of terror comes over him and he slinks away into the trees. “Whew!” says the leopard, “That was close! That old poodle nearly had me!”

Meanwhile, a monkey who had been watching the whole scene from nearby tree, figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the leopard. So off he goes, but the old poodle

sees him heading after the leopard with great speed, and figures that something must be up.

The monkey soon catches up with the leopard, spills the beans and strikes a deal for himself with the leopard.

The young leopard is furious at being made a fool of and says, “Here, monkey, hop on my back and see what’s going to happen to that conniving canine!”

Now, the old poodle sees the leopard coming with the monkey on his back and thinks, “What am I going to do now?”, but instead of running, the dog sits down with his back to his attackers, pretending he hasn’t seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old poodle says: “Where’s that damn monkey? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another leopard!”

Moral of this story... Don't mess with the oldies ... age and treachery will always overcome youth and skill! Cunning and brilliance only come with age and experience!

Teaching the parrot manners

An old lady walked into a pet store, found a parrot, and asked the owner if she could buy it.

The owner said, “Heck no! That parrot has a bad mouth! Trust me - you do not want that parrot!”

She said, “I can teach it good manners.”

But, when she got home the parrot said a bad word, so she put it in the freezer for 10 seconds.

She took it out and said, “Did you learn your lesson?”

It said another bad word, so she put it back in for 30 seconds.

She took it out and asked if it learned its lesson yet.

The parrot said “Brr... Yes, I learned my lesson, but what did the chicken do?”

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