

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

September 2021 Newsletter No 48

Concert Rescheduling Saga - take three

Just as it appeared that we would be able to sing in public again, the Victorian Government Lockdown was extended and we are in for third “Groundhog Day” experience, which means yet another change of dates and some devastating cancellations.



Here are the changes:

- Our *Melbourne Welsh Re-united Concert* is now scheduled for Saturday 13th November at 11:00 a.m. at Federation Estate and to compensate for the reduced seating capacity necessitated by COVID rules, we will perform a **second concert** at 2:00 p.m. At the moment, there are still some seats available.
- The Choir’s Singer Of The Year (SOTY) competition has been changed to a video version only with the same closing date for entries but judging will now take place, and the winners announced, at the end of September.
- Tickets for the *Singer Of The Year Concert* will be automatically transferred to the *Melbourne Welsh Re-united Concert* 2:00 p.m. concert on 13th November. There may be an opportunity to transfer to the 11:00 a.m. concert if that is your preference or you can ask for a refund.
- As we did last year, we expect to issue a video, to be shown on Facebook and YouTube, of the winners’ performances in the competition.
- Since we cannot proceed with the SOTY concert, we hope to feature the three finalists as soloists in one of our future concerts.
- The raffle will be drawn at the November 13th concert.
- The concert with the Australian Youth Band on the 5th September has been postponed and we will advise you of the new date when details have been confirmed.
- We are also sad to advise that based on health advice from the Geelong Council, our annual concert for *Tuckers*, in the wonderful Geelong Basilica, scheduled for 2:00 p.m. Friday 1st October 2021, has been cancelled.

Singer of the Year (SOTY) 2021 changes to the entry requirements and adjudication

Applications have now closed for the Singer of the Year competition in 2021. Because of COVID constraints the Choir committee resolved to run the elimination heats via video as we did last year.

The adjudicators will judge the artists based on the two videos requested i.e., an operatic aria plus one other song e.g., a song from musical theatre or other classical or popular repertoire.

Alan Stevenson (0403 271 468) continues as the coordinator, while Will Morton (0404 092 212) is responsible for all technical questions relating to the submission of the videos.

With a first prize increased this year to \$5,000, we have already received more than two dozen entries and have advised all applicants of the revised conditions.

In today’s COVID environment, young musical artists have become used to generating videos of their work, so we do not expect any reduction in entries as a result of the changed conditions.

Forthcoming Concerts

While nothing is ever certain in this continuing pandemic, we have one concert date (but two performances) lined up for later in the year, which is our traditional Christmas concert at Mooroolbark.

Please watch this space and our website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au for details and dates of this and all our future concerts.

More about the Choir's repertoire - *Gwahoddiad*

"*Gwahoddiad*", which is possibly the choir's favourite Welsh [hymn](#), has an American origin.

Also known as *Arglwydd Dyma Fi* and by its first line *Mi glywaf dyner lais*, *Gwahoddiad* ([Welsh](#) for 'invitation'), is and was originally the English-language [gospel song](#) "I Am Coming, Lord", the first line of which is *I hear thy welcome voice*.

The English words and the tune were written in 1872 by the American [Methodist](#) minister and gospel songwriter [Lewis Hartsough](#) (1828–1919) during a revival meeting at [Epworth, Iowa](#), where Hartsough was [minister](#).

Hartsough was musical editor of *The Revivalist*, a published collection of [hymns](#) which had begun in 1868 and continued through 11 editions. The English words with Hartsough's tune first appeared in the 1872 edition.

The Welsh version *Gwahoddiad* was translated by Calvinistic Methodist minister and musician Ieuan Gwyllt (literally John the Wild, bardic name of John Roberts) (1822–1877). It has become so well known in Wales that, despite its American origin, many people believe it to be an indigenously Welsh hymn.

During World War 1, Hartsough expressed gratification not only for having heard the song in various languages but also for having learned of its popularity with soldiers in the trenches of Europe.

Here are the lyrics which the choir sings, with the Welsh version printed first.

"*Gwahoddiad*"

*Mi glywaf dyner lais yn galw arnaf fi,
I ddod a golchi meiau gyd yn afon Calfari.
Arglwydd, dyma fi, ar Dy alwau Di,
Golch fi'n burlan yn y gwaed a gaed ar Galfari*

*Yr Iesu sy'n fy ngwadd i dderbyn gyda'i saint
Ffydd gobaith, cariad pur, a hedd a phob rhyw nefol fraint
Arglwydd, dyma fi, ar Dy alwad Di,
Golch fi'n burlan yn y gwaed a gaed ar Galfari*

*Gogoniant byth am drefn y cymod a'r glanhad
Derbyniad Iesu fel yr wyf a chanaf am y gwaed
Arglwydd, dyma fi, ar Dy alwau Di,
Golch fi'n burlan yn y gwaed a gaed ar Galfari
Amen, Amen, Amen.*

I hear thy tender voice calling me
To come and wash my sins in the river of Calvary.
Lord, here I am at Your call
Wash my spirit in the blood that flows from Calvary

It is Jesus who invites me to receive with His saints
Faith, hope, pure love and peace and all of heaven's honours.
Lord, here I am at Your call
Wash my spirit in the blood that flows from Calvary.

Praise be forever for the order, the atonement and the cleansing
I accept Jesus as I am and sing of the blood.
Lord, here I am at Your call
Wash my spirit in the blood that flows from Calvary.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Chorister Profile: Matthew William Walter Thomas, Second Tenor



'Eclectic'. That's how I'd probably describe my musical repertoire – as well as my life's many *happy musical memories*.

From my earliest childhood, I began to develop a real affinity for different styles of music, where such interests could never be confined to any one genre: and those interests remain today, just as deep, as ever they were. Yet who would have thought that, whilst perhaps arguably guilty of 'boasting' of such a *'mixed repertoire'* I would actually one day perform alongside some of the very best of fellows, in one of the finest Welsh male choirs to be heard anywhere in the world, including even in *'Mozart's own'* Vienna!

As a child, I simply loved to sing along to a wide variety of music with my younger brother. To this day, we still love to sing aloud one (or all!) of our beloved tunes of old.

My own love for music and song had its roots in a number of origins: our mother had a well-trained singing voice, having studied classical music from

a young age at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Later, she contributed to a number of A.B.C. Radio choral recordings, while later again, she continued her study of classical music under the tutelage of a famous Hungarian diva, *'Madam Markita'*. Our mother seemed to be forever practising her scales and diction at the piano, or so it seemed to us, her 'poor' children, who were bound to silence *'under pain of death!'*, or, *far worse*, be deprived of our favourite television programs during her practice-sessions! However, Madam Markita seemed to almost pity us in our 'obvious' agonies, and so, we children too, were occasionally favoured with personalised music lessons, which we could only, later in life, truly appreciate.

Of major significance, too, was my Germanic-Celtic heritage. My mother's father was of German extract, whilst my grandfather's mother was Welsh born. My father's mother was English-born, but also had strong Irish roots and his father was of Welsh-origin, whose forebears had emigrated from Cornwall to Australia in the 1830's, later settling in the area of Melbourne which was eventually to be gazetted as *'Thomastown'*. My late father, as I so fondly recall, was ever ready to sing (and play) a traditional Welsh, Irish, or Scottish tune. As children, we adored the magic and intrigue that his songs would evoke in all who heard them.

And, of course, there was always Sunday Mass, a liturgical tradition that further sowed the seeds of my deep love for sacred music, and which for me especially, included Gregorian Chant. Fortunately, I still retain plenty of capacity to enjoy some of today's truly wonderful contemporary Christian music and some other traditions' sacred music, too.

Despite my having, at one point, shown some aptitude for a promising business career, it was whilst studying at the University of Melbourne, that I one day decided I was never going to allow my future qualifications to 'relegate' me to some 'oh-so-boring' stereotypical accounting career. Such prophetic thinking remained with me for quite some time, until eventually I happened upon some very exciting curricula prospects, in the area of business marketing.

I took to this new-found 'discipline' like a bird to the air, relishing its academic imperatives, but more especially, by embracing its creative and musical potential with enthusiasm.

I became totally engrossed with it and, after a number of short stints at radio and television work, was fortunate to be appointed to some fairly prominent promotional roles within the automotive industry.

Shortly thereafter I found myself busily engaged in helping direct key advertising campaigns for such companies as Ford Australia, and later, Mercedes-Benz Australia.

It was during this time, that I married my university sweetheart - Michelle, a lovely English girl, who coincidentally also had a passion for singing, and was a mezzo-soprano with the Melbourne University Choral Society. Once married, and employing some rather artful persuasion, she quickly convinced me to audition for various parts alongside herself in a number of amateur musical productions.

Those were truly wonderful years! My first role included a minor acting and chorus part in the classic Lerner and Loewe stage production of “*Brigadoon*”; this was followed by a small principal role in the ever delightful “*The King and I*”. Later, I performed multiple minor roles in an all-time favourite, “*Fiddler on the Roof*”, after which, I was invited to accept my first-ever lead role, in what was then, the Australian premiere of the stage-musical, “*Tilly*”.

For this performance I was honoured to be nominated for the ‘Best Actor - Musical’ award, in that year’s eastern regional (Melbourne) ‘Lyrebird Awards’.

Next, along came our four beautiful children, all in rather quick succession, I might add! Needless to say, there came the mandate, halting anything further in the way of stagecraft (except, perhaps, to do with child-raising!). Thankfully, however, such privations did not extend to our choir-singing at Church on Sundays.

Then, quite suddenly, mostly for family reasons, I decided to change my career altogether and become a Catholic school teacher. In this change I had unwittingly finally found my ‘niche’, a role in which I have been so happy for the sheer privilege and responsibility of teaching the imperatives of ethics and morality to our younger generations.

I later undertook post-graduate studies in theology, completing my master’s degree in Religious Education in 2009. Within this degree I developed a substantial thesis on ‘*The Music for the Mass*’, for which I was deeply honoured to receive an offer of a full Ph.D. scholarship, which I commenced several years later.

To this day, I remain very happily employed as a teacher of both Commerce and Religion within the very same school at which I was first employed, some twenty years on.

Meanwhile, I have also just celebrated my twenty-sixth consecutive year as a volunteer, now as a Track Patroller, with Melbourne’s iconic ‘*Puffing Billy Railway*’.



Life continued on, with our children all growing up, and with that, inevitably, the return of a deep desire to sing again. And so it happened that on a cold winter’s morning one day back in 2012, as I sat enjoying a hot cup of cocoa in front of a warm, cheery blaze, the A.B.C. Radio’s *Classic F.M.*

My volunteer job helps keep Puffing Billy going

program sleepily murmuring away in the background, I suddenly heard ‘***It***’.

I never will, forget the moment, when ‘***It***’ seemed simply to float from the radio, ever-so-gently, across to where I sat, caressing my every sense with the softest of tones: an all-male choir of masterful harmonies, haunting, mystical sounds, divinely inspired, a sheer masterpiece, subtly imbued with the most beautiful of *Welsh* lyrics. I sat bolt-upright, desperate to capture every last elusive note and sound, my heart aching, yearning, just to, once again, hear such vocal perfection.

I resolved instantly, to seek out and join a Welsh male choir as soon as I possibly could.

Logging on to the internet, I typed in the first words that rushed to mind: “***Welsh Male Choir – Melbourne***”. One can probably guess the first result that appeared directly before me on the screen, from that one and only search. Just a few short months thereafter, I found myself excitedly preparing to undertake my qualifying audition to join the highly renowned *Melbourne Welsh Male Choir*.

The very next week, I could scarcely believe my blessings, as I stood proudly alongside my new-fellow choristers, my heart racing with such anticipation, and about to perform before a full house, in the exquisite *Hamer Hall*, of the prestigious, *Melbourne Performing Arts Centre*.

Everything I have since experienced with this wonderful choir, the *Melbourne Welsh*, has only added to my life's love of music, but even more, has increased by so much, my ever-growing repertoire of *happy musical memories*.

New Chorister Profile: Paul Weldon

Paul Weldon was born in England to an English father and Welsh mother, which always made life interesting when Wales was playing England in the rugby!

He scraped through his O-levels and left school at 16 (Year 10) as was common then. Eventually he headed to University at 24 where he met an Australian lass and followed her out here to get married.

He's still married to that Australian girl - Liz, and they have two kids, Joshua (14) and Anna (11). They've been here in Melbourne since 1999, except for a two-year stint living and working in China. For the last 10 years they've been living in Lower Ferntree Gully.

Paul works for the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) where he's part of a team involved in a wide range of research projects in education, mostly program evaluation and surveys, and looking at issues relating to the teaching workforce.

Music has always been a keen interest for Paul. He plays the piano, more by ear than by reading the score, although he can read music. He has played alto and soprano sax, though he's rather rusty nowadays. When not in lockdown, he leads a small band in his local church.

He's had the privilege of singing in massed choirs on occasion, including, memorably, three times at the Royal Albert Hall, but his recent experience with choirs has been minimal. He

has a home studio and does enjoy having a go at writing his own music. His other hobbies include badminton, kayaking and heading out into the bush. Most recently, he's discovered the Duolingo app, and yes, he's learning Welsh!

As mentioned, his family on his mother's side are all Welsh - South Wales to be exact, mostly the Glamorgan area - Bridgend and Pontypool. The family spent holidays in Towyn, where they were members of the Talyllyn (steam) railway.

Paul has always loved the sound of the Welsh male voice choirs and has long harboured the idea of being able to sing in Welsh. So, when he decided that he wanted to join a choir, he went looking online to see if a Welsh male choir existed in Melbourne. And here he is!

The idea of having to memorise so many parts is daunting, but he is up for the challenge and he has really enjoyed the one chance he's had so far to sing with everyone (even if we were in masks).

Nothing beats the sound of an all-male choir!



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, 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! We even have a Kiwi as president!

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 our choir operates. You will be made most welcome, whether you wish to sit within the body of the choir and sing or simply listen and observe, alongside our other guests, until you are happy with the music and the environment. During the times when our rehearsal rooms may be closed because of COVID constraints we have Zoom rehearsals which keep us up to date and allows us to interact with each other.

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, for the finalists at least we will be able to hold before a 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

More than one way...

An elderly lady went into the bank and handed her bank card to the teller and said, "I would like to withdraw \$10".

The teller told her "for withdrawals less than \$100, please use the ATM".

The old lady wanted to know why...

The teller returned her bank card and irritably told her "these are the rules, please leave if there is no further matter. There is a line of customers behind you".

The old lady remained silent for a few seconds then handed her card back to the teller and said, "please help me withdraw all the money I have."

The teller was astonished when she checked the account balance. She nodded her head, leaned down and respectfully told her "you have \$300,000 in your account but the bank doesn't have that much cash currently. Could you make an appointment and come back again tomorrow?"

The old lady then asked how much she could withdraw immediately.

The teller told her any amount up to \$3000. "Well please let me have \$3000 now."

The teller kindly handed \$3000 very friendly and with a smile to her.

The old lady put \$10 in her purse and asked the teller to deposit \$2990 back into her account.

The moral of this story is....

Don't be difficult with old people, they spent a lifetime learning the skill.

The Hangover Cure

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!"

Golden Phone

An American decided to write a book about famous churches around the world. So, he bought a plane ticket and took a trip to Orlando, thinking that he would start by working his way across the USA from South to North.

On his first day he was inside a church taking photographs when he noticed golden telephone mounted on the wall with a sign that read "*\$10,000 per call*".

The American, being intrigued, asked priest who was strolling by what the telephone was used for.

The priest replied that it was a direct line to heaven and that for \$10,000 you could talk to God. The American thanked the priest and went along his way.

Next stop was in Atlanta. There, at a very large cathedral, he saw the same golden telephone with the same sign under it. He wondered if this was the same kind of telephone he saw in Orlando and he asked a nearby nun what its purpose was. She told him that it was a direct line to heaven and that for \$10,000 he could talk to God. "O.K., thank you," said the American.

He then travelled to Indianapolis, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. In every church he saw the same golden telephone with the same "\$10,000 per call" sign under it.

The American, upon leaving Vermont decided to travel to AUSTRALIA to see if Australians had the same phone.

He arrived in Australia, and again, in the first church he entered, there was the same golden telephone, but this time the sign under it read "40 cents per call." The American was surprised so he asked the priest about the sign.

Father, I've travelled all over America and I've seen this same golden telephone in many churches. I'm told that it is a direct line to Heaven, but in the US the price was \$10,000 per call. Why is it so cheap here?"

The priest smiled and answered, "You're in Australia now, mate - it's a local call".

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