

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

October 2021 Newsletter No 49



Results of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir's (SOTY) Competition 2021

As indicated in our earlier newsletters, Victoria's COVID-19 restrictions meant that the Choir's SOTY competition had to be judged, once again, based on the video performances which the competitors submitted.

All the artists submitted two videos, one being an aria or operatic item and the second being a classic song or one from musical theatre.

24 competitors submitted videos which were viewed and analysed by our MD (who is a respected adjudicator), who then produced a short list of artists videos which were passed on to our chief adjudicator *Margaret Arnold* who selected the following prize-winners:

The Winner and MWMC Singer of the Year 2021 is:

Samantha Hargreaves



Our winner, soprano Samantha Hargreaves will graduate with a Master of Music (Opera Performance) degree at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium at the end of 2021.

As part of her course, she has sung Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart), Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* (Humperdinck), Poppea in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Monteverdi), and in November will perform Beth in *Little Women*.

In 2019, Samantha understudied two principle roles for Victorian Opera in Simon Bruckard's premiere of *The Selfish Giant*.

Samantha received third prize in the prestigious Melbourne Conservatorium Concerto-Aria Competition in 2020.

Samantha received the MWMC Singer of the Year winner's cheque for \$5000.00

The *Singer of the Year* Runners-up and equal \$1000.00 prize-winners were:

Michael Dimovski - Tenor and **Amelia Wawrzon** - Soprano

Michael Dimovski - Tenor

Michael is a Melbourne based tenor with a Bachelor of Music from the University of Melbourne. Michael is an associate member of the Richard Divall Emerging Artist Program, a member of the Ten Tenors, and a recipient of the Rotary New Generations Service Exchange to Germany in partnership with Melbourne Opera.



Michael was also a finalist in the 2019 Australian Music Event's Aria Competition.

Michael's most recent engagements include: *Ten Tenors 25th Anniversary National Tour*, Malcom in Melbourne Opera's *Macbeth*, Chorus in Opera Australia's *Ernani* and *Aida*,

Froh (Cover) in Melbourne Opera's *Das Rheingold*, Jaquino and First Prisoner in Melbourne Opera's *Fidelio*, AME's Aria competition Finalist, Tenor Soloist for Melbourne Opera's *The Messiah*, Don Curzio in RDEAP's *The Marriage of Figaro* Showcase, Snow in Victorian Opera's *The Selfish Giant*, Don Basilio/Curzio Cover in Australian International Production's China Tour of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Steuermann cover in Melbourne Opera's *Die Fliegende Holländer*, Gondolier in Melbourne Opera's *Otello*, The Innkeeper in Melbourne Opera's *Der Rosenkavalier*, Tenor soloist in Essendon Choral Society performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, The Shepherd and Young Sailor cover in Melbourne Opera's *Tristan und Isolde*.

Michael also frequently performs as a chorus member in Victorian Opera's recent productions of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Parsifal*, *E Capuleti I Montecchi* and *Guillaume Tell*.

Amelia Wawrzon - Soprano

Amelia is a Melbourne-born soprano who graduated from her Master of Music (Opera Performance) degree at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music with First Class Honours in 2020 at the age of 22.



She also completed her BMus (Performance) at the MCM and undertook an international study exchange at Royal Holloway University of London.

Her early performance highlights include Victorian Opera's World Premiere of "*The Magic Pudding*", the QANTAS *I Still Call Australia Home* Ad campaign, Hugh Jackman's *Broadway to Oz Arena Tour*, Channel 9's *Carols by Candlelight* and singing as a soloist at the MCG Boxing Day Test in 2015. She is a current member of the Richard Divall Emerging Artists Programme with Melbourne Opera and a 2021 scholar with Opera Scholars Australia. Amelia has sung the roles of Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart), Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi* (Puccini), Cupidon and Juno in *Orphée aux enfers* (Offenbach) Miss Wordsworth in *Albert Herring* (Britten), Soeur

Constance in *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Poulenc) and has studied the role of Susanna in Mozart's *Le Nozze Di Figaro*.

She was an ensemble member of Victorian Opera's *Alice Through the Opera Glass* (2019), a soloist at *White Night Melbourne* (2018) and has appeared in concert with the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, Moorabool Light Orchestra, the Austral Salon of Music and on 3MBS Fine Music.

Other performance highlights include *Passion, Lament, Glory* (Pergolesi's Stabat Mater) and *GLORIA* (Vivaldi's Gloria and Beatus Vir).

How can you view the artists' performances?

The winner and the runners up will be invited to perform as soloists with the choir in future events.

However, as we did last year, we are planning to produce a video featuring interviews with these three artists and the adjudicator - Margaret Arnold, together with the artists' prizewinning performances and will make this available to viewers of the choir's Facebook and web pages.

We will advise choir supporters and members as soon as this is available - watch this space!

The Choir's upcoming concerts

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.

Since the SOTY concert had to be cancelled, 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.

The raffle will be drawn at the November 13th concert.

Forthcoming Concerts

While nothing is ever certain in this continuing pandemic, we have one additional 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.melbournewelshchoir.com.au for details and dates of this and all our future concert

Background to another song from the Choir's repertoire - Sing Rhondda

One of the choir's favourite Welsh, mining-oriented, melodies is the rousing *Sing Rhondda*.

The subject of our latest Zoom release, the song was originally written by an English socialite, Eleanor Purdy.

Little is known about the history of the song, but it seems to relate to the end of the miner's strike in 1926. Ms Purdy's view as expressed in the song, was idealistic since the nation-wide strike did not achieve its aim of improving miner's conditions (in fact quite the reverse occurred).

We are not sure where the choir obtained the original score, but it appears that we are the only choir to have sung and recorded the song.

When our choir first performed Eleanor Purdy's original score in the 1990's, under our then music director - Bill Mead, the song had only one verse which was repeated. This arrangement irked one of our basses, who wrote a second verse based on his knowledge of the Rhondda valley. This is the version which we now sing.

This second verse reflects the mixture of mining and farming, common to the valley at that time, together with the choral tradition for which the Rhondda valley is famous. The valley had and still has two of the most famous male voice choirs in the world, the Treorchy Male Voice Choir and the Pendyrus Male Choir - both of which, at the time of the strike, would have been composed predominantly of miners.

Sing Rhondda

*Listen the ring of men who sing again in the valley
Men of the mine, their work is long, their backs are strong.
Sing of the years of hope and fear, the life of the valley,
A mighty throng, valley of song.
The men who walk among the mountain tops that echo
Send up the coal, send up the coal, send up the coal.*

*Where the roses bloom, where the hearts are stronger
Where a laugh rings longer in the Rhondda vale.
Where the choice is taken by the men of vision
And the nations waken to the promise given.*

*Empty wagons filled again, empty ships are laden
Filled the empty hearts of men and the whole world knows*

*Listen the ring of men who sing again in the valley
Men of the mine, their work is long, their backs are strong.
Sing of the years of hope and fear, the life of the valley,
A mighty throng, valley of song
The men who walk among the mountain tops that echo
Send up the coal, send up the coal. Send up the coal*

*Where the pit wheels turn, where the sheep meander
There's no place that's grander than the Rhondda vale
Where the sound of singing sets the rafters ringing
And the vale rejoices to the blend of voices.*

*Empty wagons filled again, empty ships are laden
Filled, the empty hearts of men and the whole world knows*

*Here the dawn is breaking, and the world remaking.
Freedom's voice is waking.*

*Sing the men of the pithead.
Sing the men of the mine,
Sing the men of the mountain
Sing Rhondda.*

The song is featured on our latest recording *World in Union* and the Zoom recording can be found on the choir's website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au as well as the choir's *Facebook* page.

Choir Chorister Profile - Felix O'Neill - Baritone

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1931. My early years were growing up in a new housing estate on the outskirts of Glasgow, away from the old tenement pre-war buildings.



I am the second oldest of five children, with 2 brothers and 2 sisters, my father was a labourer most of his life and my mother a housekeeper and they provided the best they could offer the family.

We all grew up to be responsible and respectful children and we all had good singing voices.

I joined the local Church, where I sang in their choir, as well as singing in school choirs, I was also in the "Boys Brigade" for 7 years, where we put on concerts regularly to raise funds for music and equipment.

When I completed secondary school, I took up an apprenticeship as a Draughtsman, working through the day and attending evening classes to achieve my Engineering Certificates.

Upon completion of my apprenticeship, I was called up for National Service with the Royal Air Force and 3 months of my training was spent at St Athans in Wales as a jet engine mechanic.

I was then posted to Leuchars Air Station near St Andrews in Scotland for the remainder of my time.

While I was in St Athans, I watched a soccer game between Wales and Scotland at Arms Park in Cardiff where I heard the marvellous singing of the Welsh supporters and little did I think then, that I would become a member of a Welsh Choir.

I have been employed in various jobs over the years, mostly as a draughtsman and/or a projects engineer.

I married my beautiful wife Rose in 1956 and we have 3 daughters. The family has grown, and we now have 4 grandchildren and 8 great grandchildren.

Rose had family who had moved to Newcastle in New South Wales, and they raved about life in Australia, so we followed them in 1969, where I took up a position with the largest storage and materials handling company in Australia. In 1973, after 4 years in Sydney I was transferred to Melbourne.

Through friends, I joined the Scottish Gaelic Choir. With a few of the members, I attended a rehearsal of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, under the direction of Doug Heywood at that time, just prior to the choir's trip to Canada and we were impressed with the discipline and most of all the magnificent singing of the choir.

My family and I later went to a concert at the Kingston Town Hall where Lucas de Jong was the choir's music director and, shortly after this concert, I auditioned and joined the choir.

I have made many friends and have enjoyed the camaraderie and companionship of the other choir members for a number of years now.

Due to Covid-19, as well as personal health issues, I have been unable to attend rehearsals recently, but have kept in touch with various members through phone calls and smoke signals. My health is

improving and I hope to be back as soon as lockdowns permit. Keep up the good work and take care of each other.

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 or via our Facebook page.

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).

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, especially during these COVID times, so please don't wait until the pandemic is over before checking us out. Singing is good for the mind and body and rehearsing the choir's songs during lockdown is therapeutic. Ask any of our choristers!

The tools for learning the repertoire are excellent and our secretary and other Welsh speaking members provide special lessons both at the venue and via Zoom during lockdown, to assist with the knowledge and pronunciation of our Welsh songs

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 the current 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 are closed because of COVID constraints, we have Zoom rehearsals, which allow us to practice our repertoire, keep up to date with the choir's concert program and enable 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 and arranger 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, as mentioned above 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

Would you like to hire the choir?

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 in the coming year and hopefully some at the end of 2021.

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 adversely impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, we need sponsors more than ever. 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 live audience, in 2022 this year. This event, which has been running for 29 years and is open to singers under the age of 35, draws competitors from all parts of the state and indeed interstate. 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.

As a result of COVID restrictions the last two competitions had to be adjudicated based on video performances and the winners' interviews and examples of their entries are available via the choir's website

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 the 2020 SOTY event, the videos of the final three competitors on YouTube had both local and international exposure. We expect the videos of 2021 SOTY event to have a similar impact.

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

A Painting

A Briton, a Frenchman and a Russian are viewing a painting of Adam and Eve frolicking in the Garden of Eden.

"Look at their reserve, their calm," muses the Brit. "They must be British."

"Nonsense," the Frenchman disagrees. "They're naked, and so beautiful. Clearly, they are French."

"No way! They have no clothes and no shelter," the Russian points out, "They have only an apple to eat, and they are being told they live in a paradise. Obviously, they are Russian."

Construction

A Spanish guy, Korean guy and a Russian guy were all working for the same construction company.

At the beginning of the day the architect comes out and says to the Spanish guy, "You're in charge of the cement."

Then he said to the Russian guy, "You're in charge of the dirt."

Then he said to the Korean guy, "You're in charge of the supplies."

Then he said, "I'm gonna be back at the end of the day to check on your work. It had better be good or you're fired."

So, they all go off to get their work done. At the end of the day, the boss comes back to check on their work.

He looks at the big pile of cement and says, "Good work," to the Spanish guy.

Then he looks at the big pile of dirt and says, "Good work," to the Russian guy.

Then he couldn't find the Korean guy so he asks, "Where the heck is the Korean guy??" All of a sudden, the Korean guy jumps out from behind the big pile of dirt and yells, "SUPPLIES!"

The three fisherman and the Mermaid

Three fishermen were fishing when they came upon a mermaid.

The mermaid offered them one wish each so the first fisherman said: "Double my IQ" so the mermaid did it and to his surprise he started reciting Shakespeare.

Then the second fisherman said: "Triple my IQ" and sure enough the mermaid did it and amazingly he started doing math problems he didn't know existed.

The third fisherman was so impressed he asked the mermaid to quadruple his IQ.

The mermaid said "Are you sure about this? It will change your whole life!" the fisherman excitedly said "Yes" so the mermaid turned him into a woman...

The Devil

A woman, whose husband often came home drunk, decided to cure him of the habit.

One Halloween night, she put on a devil suit and hid behind a tree to intercept him on the way home. When her husband came by, she jumped out and stood before him with her red horns, long tail, and pitchfork.

“Who are you?” he asked. “I’m the Devil!” she responded.

“Well, come on home with me,” he said, “I married your sister!”

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