

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

December 2021 Newsletter No 51



We wish all of our choir members, families, and our loyal supporters a *Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*, or as they in the language of heaven – *Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda*

Our latest event - two concerts in one day

The *Melbourne Welsh Re-United Concert* finally took place after many postponements, at the choir's home and rehearsal facility at Federation Estate, Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood and what a show it was.

To accommodate the expected number of patrons, including those who booked tickets for the *SOTY* concert we performed two concerts on the day with the **first** concert at 11:00 a.m. and the **second** commencing at 2:00 p.m.

While the more restrictive COVID rules on seating density no longer applied, we still had capacity constraints and patrons were required to show proof of their double vaccination status in order to be admitted into the venue. However, masks were not required to be worn in the audience.



Simon, Catherine and David and the choir at the end of the concert

The packed concert program featured solos from two of our choristers - tenor *Tony Meeuwsen* who sang the beautiful "*Santa Lucia*" in English and Italian and our guitar-playing folk singer - *Raymond Crooke*, who sang the verses and led the choir and audience in the chorus of the rollicking Australian Ballad "*The Queensland Drover*"

In addition, we had contributions from our music director *David Ashton-Smith* including an *Everly Brothers*' song "*Crying in the rain*" in a duet with our talented pianist *Simon Walters* (who also treated us to a piano solo later in the program). *David* also combined with the choir and our guest artist *Catherine Bolzonello* (David's daughter) in the beautiful ballad from *Carousel* "*You'll never walk alone*".

In her solo spot *Catherine* demonstrated her range and delighted the audience with the ballad "*Come to the fair*" and "*Think of me*" from *the Phantom of the Opera*.

After an exhausting but enjoyable day's singing the choir was rewarded with a standing ovation.

It's great to be performing for live audiences again!

Glowing reports relating to the video of our SOTY competition finalists

Featuring our Music Director - David Ashton-Smith interviewing the three SOTY finalists, Samantha Hargreaves, Michael Dimovski and Amelia Wawrzon together with the adjudicator - Margaret Arnold, the recently released video provides an illuminating insight into the *Singer of the Year* competition and the artists who entered.

The video, which runs for around 30 minutes, includes each of the finalist's prizewinning performances and is compelling viewing. It was produced by our own technology guru and baritone - Will Morton and is currently available to viewers of the choir's Facebook page and the web page at:

<https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/singer-of-the-year/>.

Watch out for these talented young artists whom we hope will be performing with us as soloists in future events.

Gymanfa Ganu Concert

Melbourne's traditional Gymanfa Ganu concert run by the Welsh Church, which in normal (i.e., non COVID) times is held at St Michael's Church in Collins Street to celebrate St David's Day has, (understandably) once again been cancelled.

The event usually features the Blue Riband winners from the Welsh National Eisteddfod together with a well-known conductor from Wales, as well as representatives of all the Welsh Choirs in Melbourne (including Geelong and Frankston). However, the cancellation of the 2021 Welsh National Eisteddfod and the travel and quarantine restrictions has meant there are no guests from Wales for the 2022 Gymanfa Ganu.

The organisers have advised us that they plan to have a scaled down ceremony at the (much smaller) Welsh Church in Latrobe Street, possibly involving video recordings, which the local Welsh choirs produced during COVID.

They hope to stage a major Gymanfa Ganu spectacular in 2023.

St David's Day Celebration concert with the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir



While other Welsh institutions may be scaling down their patron saint's concerts *the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir* will be celebrating St David's day in 2022 with a wonderful afternoon concert on Saturday 26th February at the audience friendly and acoustically brilliant, James Tatoulis auditorium at MLC in Kew.

In addition to our traditional program of Welsh oriented ballads and anthems, plus some audience favourites, our concert will feature the 2021 Singer of the Year winner *Samantha Hargreaves* as our guest artist.

Tickets will be available via Trybooking or from any member of the choir.

Please watch this space and check on our website

www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au

for details and dates of this and all our future concerts.

John Ceiriog Hughes

Continuing our series about the background to the songs which the choir sings, here is the profile of the wonderful poet responsible for the lyrics of a number of Welsh songs including *Nant y mynydd*.

The man who wrote the lyrics for a number of songs which the choir sings and loves was - **John Ceiriog Hughes** (25 September 1832 – 23 April 1887).

A poet and collector of Welsh folk tunes, he is sometimes termed the “Robert Burns of Wales”.

John was born at Penybryn Farm, overlooking the village of Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog in the Ceiriog Valley of north-east Wales, then in Denbighshire, now part of Wrexham County Borough. One of eight children, he was a favourite of his mother, Phoebe - a midwife and herbal-medicine expert.

At 18, Hughes left the village for Manchester to work as a grocer. He opened his own shop in 1854.

There he met and was befriended and influenced by William Williams (Creuddynfab), a station master in the Pennines, who found him a job on the railway. Williams had been appointed first secretary of the National Eisteddfod Society. Hughes decided to sell his shop and concentrate on writing poetry.



Hughes returned to Wales in 1865 as station master at Llanidloes. From 1868, he was also manager of the Van Railway at Caersws railway station. He died in 1887 at the age of 54 leaving £96. He is buried at Llanwnnog.

His Poetry

Hughes made his first attempts at poetry while a pupil at Nant y Glôg School, after his father had given him a book on Welsh grammar, including a section on the sound arrangement known as cynghanedd.

Ceiriog's desire to restore simplicity of diction and emotional sincerity to Welsh poetry did for it what Wordsworth and Coleridge had done for English. He is noted for an attempt to create a new Welsh culture and raise the status of the Welsh people, after the publication of the notorious Blue Books on education in Wales.

His lyric poetry rested on traditional folk songs and earned national attention when he won the Llangollen Eisteddfod in 1858 with a love poem, “*Myfanwy Fychan o Gastell Dinas Brân*” (Little Myfanwy from Castell Dinas Brân).

Ceiriog's first poetry collection of poetry appeared in 1860 as *Oriau'r Hwyr* (Evening Hours). He also wrote light-hearted lyrics, which he adapted to old Welsh tunes or to original composed music. Such lyrics include “*Dafydd y Garreg Wen*” (David of the White Rock) and “*Ar Hyd y Nos*” (All Through the Night). He also wrote Welsh lyrics for the song “*God Bless the Prince of Wales*” and the Charles Dibdin song, “*The Bells of Aberdovey*”, which he translated as “*Clychau Aberdyfi*”.

Ceiriog's fascination with Welsh folk music led him to probe its history, particularly the music of the harpists, who would often accompany songs. This led to a grand project of four planned volumes of Welsh airs, of which only the first appeared in print, in 1863: *Cant O Ganeuon* (A Hundred Songs).

A Welsh-language version of “*The Ash Grove*” is putatively attributed to Ceiriog Hughes as well. Another source attributes to him the Welsh words of “*Men of Harlech*” first published in 1890, remarking that the English words followed only in 1893.

Like many Welsh poets, Ceiriog adopted a bardic name – “*Ceiriog*” from Ceiriog Valley, where he was born. The hall in his home village contains a memorial inscription to him.

Nant y Mynydd

The folk song “*Nant y Mynydd*” (Mountain stream) was written when he was working in Manchester but yearning for his native Ceiriog valley. The English translation is given on the right.

Nant y Mynydd groyw loyw,
Yn ymdroelli tua'r pant,
Rhwng y brwyn yn sisial ganu;
O na bawn i fel y nant!

*Mountain stream, fresh and sparkling
Twisting and turning toward the hollow
Between the whispering-singing rushes
O that I were like the stream!*

Grug y Mynydd yn eu blodau,
Edrych arnynt hiraeth ddug
Am gael aros ar y bryniau
Yn yr awel efo'r grug

*The mountain heather in flower
Looking upon it brings hiraeth [longing]
To be able to stay on the mountain
In the breeze with the heather.*

Adar man y Mynydd uchel
Godant yn yr awel iach,
Godant yn yr awel iach,
O na bawn fel deryn bach!

*Little birds of the high mountain
Rising in the clean, fresh air
From one peak to another they fly
O that I were like a little bird!*

Mab y Mynydd ydwyf innau
Oddi cartref yn gwneud cân,
Ond mae 'nghalon yn y mynydd
Efo'r grug a'r adar man.

*I too am a son of the mountain
Away from home making a song
But my heart is on the mountain
With the heather and the little bird*

Vale Brian Phillips

Brian Phillips, who died this month aged 85, was one of the longest serving members of the choir, having been a member for over 30 years.

A plumber and gasfitter by trade, he was a quiet, honest, loyal, gentleman.

Born in Swansea, South Wales, his main interests outside his work and family were soccer (especially the performance of Swansea City), golf and the Melbourne Welsh Male choir.

The choir was well represented at Brian's funeral, which was held at Lilydale Crematorium.

We performed two of his favourite songs, *Gwahoddiad* and *American Trilogy*, to sing his spirit home. Two former members of the Choir, tenors - Charlie Sharpe and Doug Hardy joined us on stage for the singing.



Communicating with the Choir

Please feel free to copy or circulate this newsletter to any of your friends and relatives or if you would like us to add them to our distribution list, so they get their copy direct, simply 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 our preferred way of communication with supporters, so please email us and we'll respond promptly to whatever queries you may have.

Your feedback is important to us, so please write and let us know what you think about 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.

Would you like to join the choir?

The choir is always keen to attract new members, so please don't wait until the pandemic is completely over before checking us out. Singing is good for the mind and body and rehearsing the choir's songs during lockdown has been therapeutic. Ask any of our choristers!

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

While our heritage is Welsh and around 25% of our concert programs are Welsh songs (not necessarily all in the Welsh language), we are fundamentally a multicultural choir with probably only half of us having a link with Wales. The choir is open to people of any nationality and our current and past members have included people with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, South African, Tongan, Samoan and Australian backgrounds! We even have a Kiwi as the current president!

Whether you've been involved in music all your life, or 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 operates. 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.

During the times when our rehearsal rooms were closed because of COVID constraints, we had Zoom rehearsals, which allowed us to practice our repertoire (albeit without hearing our fellow choristers), kept us up to date with the choir's concert program and enabled 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 section mentors 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 act as mentors for the duration of the probationary period and will answer any questions you might have.

There is a break for tea or coffee during rehearsals, 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 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 Choir's 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.

It has been a while since the Choir's last tour to Cornwall and Wales and we are currently planning our next tour, which, bearing in mind the continuing impact of COVID outside of Australia, is likely to be within Australia - possibly Tasmania. Watch this space for further details.

Would you like to hire the choir?

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 is 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 an 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 entertainment value for the money.

Would you like to donate to or sponsor the choir in 2022?

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.

Alternatively, if you have a product or service which you believe might appeal to our audiences, then please contact us and we will be delighted to promote your product in our concerts, marketing material and promotions.

Our audience ranges from the baby boomers to later generations in their 30's and 40's, 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 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 COVID19 restrictions the last two SOTY competitions had to be adjudicated based on video performances and as mentioned above, the winners' interviews and examples of their performances are available via the choir's website or our Facebook page.

In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir gives the finalists 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 opportunity to be involved in the SOTY presentation ceremonies on the night and in the elimination heats. One of our videos produced and released during the COVID19 period 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.

The choir is able to perform at a sponsor's nominated site if required, as we have done in the past (e.g., at the opening of a legal conference in the city, the Eureka Stockade anniversary in Ballarat, the opening of the State Library or even at a vehicle dealer's showroom in the suburbs).

If you would like to be associated with this wonderful event or indeed any of our other prestigious concerts, please contact 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

Female Medical Examination

During the medical examination of a female patient, the British doctor says,
"Your heart, lungs and blood pressure are fine. Now let me see the part that gets all you ladies into trouble"

The lady starts taking off her undies but is interrupted by the doctor.

"No! No!...just stick out your tongue!"

Religious Cowboy

The devout cowboy lost his favourite Bible while he was mending fences out on the range.

Three weeks later, a cow walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth.

The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the cow's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," said the cow. "Your name is written inside the cover."

In-flight incident

Shortly after a British Airways flight had reached its cruising altitude, the captain announced:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. Welcome to Flight 293 non-stop From London Heathrow to New York. The weather ahead is good, so we should have an uneventful flight. So, sit back, relax, and...OH...MY GOD!"

Silence followed..... complete silence!

Some moments later, the captain came back on the intercom.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm sorry if I scared you. While I was talking to you a flight attendant accidentally spilled coffee in my lap. You should see the front of my pants!"

From the back of the plane, an Irish passenger yelled "For the luvva Jaysus, you should see the back of mine!"

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

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