

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

## Newsletter No 56 May 2022



The concert may have been delayed but what a way to restart our new year. While the concert was a delayed celebration of St David's Day (March 1) and emphasised our Welsh tradition and culture, the date (23<sup>rd</sup> April) was actually St George's Day!

It mattered little, the audience were served a smorgasbord of Welsh traditional and modern folk songs, songs from opera in English and Italian, a reading from Dylan Thomas' famous play for voices - "*Under Milk Wood*" and two brilliant guest artists, our Singer of the Year - **Samantha Hargreaves** and our youngest ever guest artist 10-year-old boy soprano - **Zethan George**.



Comperre - Bill Spawton thanking the artists at the end of the concert

Based on the thunderous applause at the end of the concert, the audience loved it.

With the choir sporting blue and yellow lapel ribbons, as a sign of support for Ukraine, the concert opened appropriately with Martin Shaw's "*With a voice of singing*" followed by "*Sing Rhondda*" an evocative song of the mining community in the Rhondda valley, which has become uniquely associated with our choir.

The choir then completed the bracket with one of Wales' most popular hymns, with music by Caradog Roberts, the rousing hymn "*Rachie*".

Our beautiful guest soprano and winner of our 2021 Singer of the Year competition - **Samantha Hargreaves** then sang "*Poor wandering one*" from the *Pirates of Penzance*, with the choir providing a very enthusiastic chorus. She then demonstrated her operatic artistry with "*Le Violette*" by Scarlatti and another Gilbert and Sullivan favourite from the *Mikado* - "*The Sun Whose Rays*".



Samantha Hargreaves

The Choir's next bracket included Eric Bogle's tribute to his adopted country "*Shelter*" followed by an old Welsh favourite "*Gwahoddiad*" and then a modern Welsh folk song "*Ysbryd y Nos*" (*Spirit of the Night*). To close the bracket the choir sang the beautiful song about the bard - Dafydd - calling for his harp on his death bed - "*David of the White Rock*".



Zethan George

The diminutive **Zethan George** then took the stage and wowed the audience with his rendition of two songs made famous by Aled Jones as a boy soprano - "*Walking in the air*" and the traditional Welsh lullaby (which Zethan sang in Welsh) "*Suo Gan*". The clarity of his pure voice and his stage composure, for one so young, is a tribute to him and to his mentor, accompanist, and Co-Artistic Director at the National Boys Choir - Andrew Bainbridge .

The final bracket of songs by the choir in the first half of the concert contained two songs of lost love, Joseph Parry's "*Myfanwy*" followed by the song made famous by Bette Midler in the film of the same name - "*The Rose*". The bracket ended with the rousing song which every Welsh schoolchild learns in school and which is often sung at the Millennium stadium in Cardiff when Wales are playing an international match "*Calon Lan*".

After the interval the choir returned in their Prosser tartan waistcoats and bow ties to perform a traditional Welsh folk song, which is relatively new to our repertoire - "*Hiraeth*".

This was followed by a modern folk song “*Y Darlun*” (which relates to the picture of two hands in prayer hanging over the bed at night). The final song in the bracket was the great hymn “*Llanfair*” with its majestic *maestoso* section and uplifting amens.

These three Welsh songs provided an excellent musical introduction to the reading of an extract from Dylan Thomas’ play for radio - “*Under Milk Wood*”.

Introduced by compere Bill Spawton and read by members of the choir, the play recounts the tale of the Welsh fishing village of Llareggub and its inhabitants (ghosts and all!). The extract ended with the Rev Eli Jenkins (and the choir) reciting the Sunset Poem.

The choir returned to the risers to sing the stirring “*Prayer*” from Wagner’s *Lohengrin* which set the stage for the operatic part of the concert which continued with “*Va Pensiero*” from Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*, sung in Italian.

Samantha demonstrated her range by singing Puccini’s “*O Mio Bambino Caro*” followed by Musetta’s Waltz “*Quando Men Vo*” from *La Boheme*.

The final bracket of songs started with the choir’s rendition of “*Aberystwyth*” which has both Welsh and English verses.

Samantha then led the choir as they performed the song (by Mai Jones), which reminds all Welsh people of home - “*We’ll keep a welcome*” and finished with “*The World in Union*”.

Following the presentations to our guest artists and thanks to the organisers, the concert ended with the audience joining with the choir in singing the Welsh National Anthem “*Mae Hen Wlad fy Nhadau*”.

It was so good to be back doing what we love - performing for an appreciative audience!

### **Background to another of the songs in the choir’s repertoire - *Ysbryd y Nos***

This song, which the choir performed in the concert at MLC, was first introduced to the choir as part of the program for the **21st Festival of Voices** concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London in October 2008.

The Melbourne Welsh Male Choir was invited by the London Welsh Male Voice Choir to join with them and other choirs from all over the UK and overseas, to form a 1000 voice ensemble. ***Ysbryd y Nos*** was one of the Welsh songs which the combined choir was asked to learn specifically for this occasion.

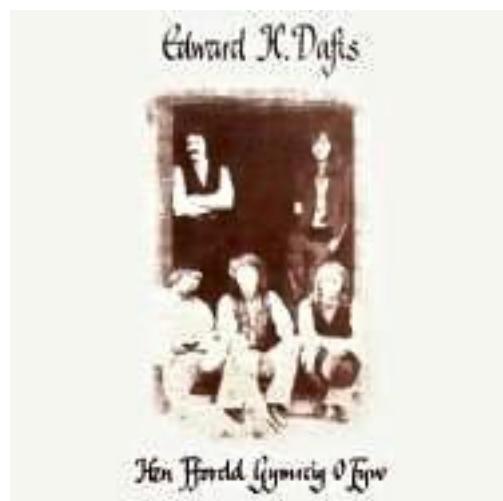
The song was composed by a Welsh pop group *Edward H. Dafis*, which was a Welsh language band which existed from 1973 to 1980, comprising the five members Cleif Harpwood, Hefin Elis, Dewi Pws’ Morris, John Griffiths, and Charli Britton.

On Sunday, 21 February 2021, a unique video of artists and school pupils performing a re-arrangement of the song, ***Ysbryd y Nos*** was released to celebrate UNESCO’s international *Mother Language Day*

The aim of *Cenedl Mewn Cân* (Nation in Song) is to create a list of 10 songs that represent the Welsh language and culture, which will be used to raise international awareness of Welsh tourism ‘The Wales Way’ when the time is right to do so.

Following a public vote, with hundreds of responses, ***Ysbryd y Nos*** by Cleif Harpwood and Hefin Elis was the unanimous favourite. Osian Huw Williams was responsible for the re-arrangement of the song, which included performances by well-known artists and secondary school pupils.

A translation of the song is given below:



## **'Ysbryd y Nos'**

### **Welsh Lyrics:**

Pan ddaw lleisiau'r nos i 'mhoeni,  
a sibrwd gwag y gwynt i'm hoeri,  
ti sy'n lliwio'r blode  
a mantell gwllith y bore;  
tyrd, Ysbryd y Nos.

A'r tonnau'n llusgo'r cregyn arian  
i siffrwd yn ei lifrai sidan,  
mi wn y byddi yno  
yn barod i'm cysuro;  
tyrd, Ysbryd y Nos.

Ysbryd y Nos, tyrd yma'n awr,  
gwasgara'r ofnau cyn daw'r wawr;  
diffodd y t'wyllwch, tyrd a'r dydd:  
gad im ddod o'r nos yn rhydd.

Pleth dy wallt mewn rhuban euraidd  
yn gynnes yn dy olau peraidd,  
a bysedd brau y barrug  
yn deffro hun y cerrig;  
tyrd, Ysbryd y Nos.

Ysbryd y Nos, rho d'olau mwyn,  
Ysbryd y Nos, rho im dy swyn,  
Ysbryd y Nos, fel angel y dydd,  
Ysbryd y Nos, enaid y pridd.

Ac yno yn y dyffryn tawel  
mi glywaf gân yn sŵn yr awel  
a neges hud y geirie  
yn hedfan dros y brynie;  
tyrd, Ysbryd y Nos.

Ysbryd y Nos, tyrd yma'n awr,  
gwasgara'r ofnau cyn daw'r wawr;  
diffodd y t'wyllwch, tyrd a'r dydd:  
gad im ddod, o'r nos yn rhydd.

## **'Spirit of the night'**

### **English Translation:**

*When the night's voices come to taunt me,  
and the empty whispers of the wind to chill me,  
with dew you paint the flowers  
throughout the early hours;  
come, Spirit of the Night.*

*And when the waves haul the silver shells  
to rustle in their silk uniform,  
I know you will be there  
ready to comfort me;  
come, Spirit of the Night.*

*Spirit of the Night, come to me,  
banish my fears before the dawn;  
dismiss the darkness, bring on day,  
free me from the night, I say.*

*Braid your hair with golden ribbons  
tenderly in your sweet light,  
while winter's icy fingers  
spread frost upon the windows;  
come, Spirit of the Night.*

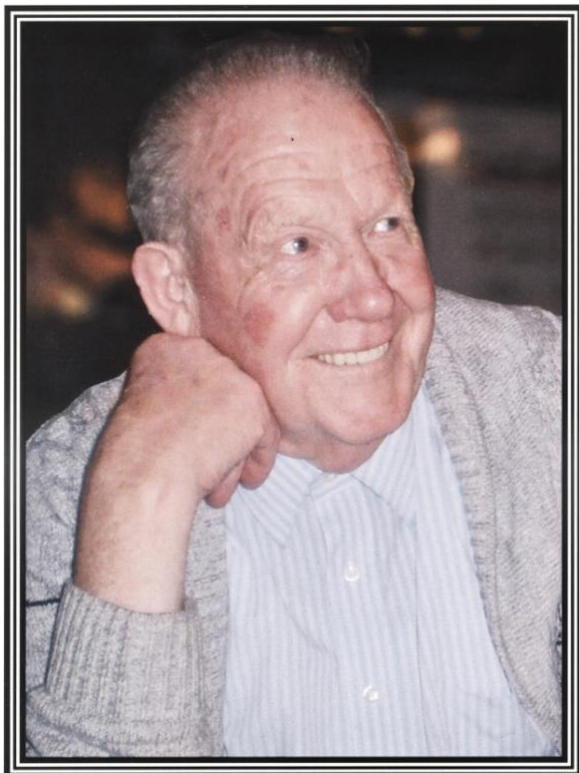
*Spirit of the Night, give your gentle glow,  
Spirit of the Night, enchant me now,  
Spirit of the Night, like an angel of light,  
soul of the earth, Spirit of the Night.*

*And here in this peaceful valley  
a breeze-borne song rings out so sweetly  
and the magic in its meaning  
brings comfort to my dreaming  
come, Spirit of the Night.*

*Spirit of the Night, come to me,  
banish my fears before the dawn;  
dismiss the darkness, bring on day,  
let me come, let me come free.*

## Vale - Pieter Kooy (1940 - 2022)

On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022, the choir lost one of its longer serving members - Dutchman and first tenor Pieter Kooy.



A large contingent of the choir attended the Celebration Service for the life of Pieter Kooy at North Ringwood Uniting Church on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April.

In accordance with Pieter's wishes, we sang *Eli Jenkins Prayer*, *Gwahoddiad* and *Aberystwyth*, to help send his spirit home.

Pieter was born in Hillegom in the Netherlands and emigrated to Australia with his family in 1972. He joined the Melbourne Welsh choir in 1985 and has been a regular performer since that time.

A perfectionist by nature, both as a landscape gardener and a singer, Pieter was always ready to point out faults within the choir's performance at rehearsal, but his criticism was always constructive and no one was more passionate about the success of the choir.

Pieter and wife Thea enjoyed being part of the contingent from the choir on its last overseas trip to Cornwall for the International Male Choral Festival and subsequent concerts in Wales and England.

His last appearance with the choir was at Wesley Church, in Lonsdale Street, where we recorded a number of videos of songs from our repertoire. His death, from lymphoma, only a few weeks later, surprised and saddened us all.

Pieter was a character within the choir and we will miss him

## Joining the choir

The choir is always keen to attract new members but particularly now that the major COVID restrictions are over.

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 any Welsh heritage. 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.

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.

Our Music Director, David Ashton-Smith's background as an opera singer and adjudicator, shows 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. Mentors for each section look after all new and prospective members, to ensure they are introduced to other members of their section and are properly 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 with other choir members. On the first Wednesday in the month, one of the sections provides 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 promptly 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 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, given by some of the Welsh speaking members of the choir, to assist choristers in understanding and pronunciation of the words 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.

## Hiring 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, or smaller venues such as MLC, 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 to a conference (say) to a full two-hour concert, together with quality guest artists and an orchestra or band (if required), please contact **Gwyn Harper (0419 562 353)** or any committee member. 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 and value for money.

## Sponsoring the choir

The choir is a not-for-profit organization and relies on revenue from concerts, membership fees, sponsorship and donations for its continuing operation.

If you would simply like to donate to the choir, please contact any member of the committee. The choir is a registered charitable body and all donations are 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.

The choir is actively seeking donors and sponsors for the support of our prestigious *Singer of the Year (SOTY)* concert which, in 2022, we expect to be able to hold before a live audience.

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. A testament to its success and drawing power is the number of winners and runners-up of this competition who have gone on to make careers on concert and opera stages worldwide. Our 2013 Winner *Stacey Alleaume*, is currently performing as *Violetta* in Opera Australia's production of *La Traviata* at the State Theatre, Melbourne.

In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the finalists, the choir gives them an opportunity to perform

as guest artists in our concerts during the year.

All sponsors are acknowledged in our programs and publicity material and are given the opportunity to be involved in the SOTY presentation ceremonies on the finals' night and in the elimination heats.

Some of our videos produced and released during the COVID19 period were viewed by over 30,000 viewers and for the 2020 and 2021 SOTY events, the videos of the final three competitors on YouTube had both local and international exposure. We expect the videos of 2022 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.

If you would like to be associated with any of our 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.

## **Communicating with the Choir**

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.melbournewelshchoir.com.au](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.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 our supporters, so please send us an email and we'll respond promptly to whatever queries you may have. Alternately if you want to speak with the newsletter author about any of the content, please phone 0419 562 353.

Your feedback is important to us, so let us know what you think about the choir, our newsletters, or our recent performances, whether on video or live.

Please introduce us to your friends and be sure to let us know what you would like to see us perform in our future concerts.

## **In times like these, laughter is still the best medicine.**

### **Directions for Tourists**

A tourist sauntered into a pub in Llandrindod Wells and said: "what's the quickest way to get to Brecon from here?"

Rhodri the landlord answered: "Are you walking or going by car?"

The tourist answered: "By car, of course."

Rhodri said: "Well, that's the quickest way."

### **Rules and regulations**

Hospital regulations require a wheelchair for patients being discharged.

However, while working as a student nurse, I found one elderly gentleman already dressed and sitting on the bed with a suitcase at his feet, who insisted he didn't need my help to leave the hospital.

After a chat about rules being rules, he reluctantly let me wheel him to the elevator.

On the way down I asked him if his wife was meeting him.

"I don't know," he said. "She's still upstairs in the bathroom changing out of her hospital gown."

## **Different interpretations**

Bob was in trouble. He forgot his wedding anniversary.

His wife was really angry.

She told him, "Tomorrow morning, I want to see a gift in the driveway that goes from 0 to 200 in 6 seconds AND IT BETTER BE THERE!"

The next morning, he got up early and left for work.

When his wife woke up, she looked out the window and sure enough there was a box gift-wrapped in the middle of the driveway.

Confused, the wife put on her robe and ran out to the driveway, brought the box back in the house.

She opened it and found a brand-new bathroom scale.

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## **CHOIR DIRECTORY**

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