

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 58 July 2022



Getting organised

The long lasting Covid crisis threw all of the choir's concert schedules into disarray from which we are only just emerging. Unfortunately, other musical groups are also returning from their enforced absence from the stage and competition for performance venues has become intense.

As a result, as a choir, we have a performing "dry spell" up until the end of July and then the "floodgates" open with concerts every few weeks. We have concerts at **Mooroolbark** on 30th July, followed by a return to **Rosanna Uniting Church** for a concert on Sunday 14th August.

Our Annual *Singer of the Year* Competition is on 3rd September, and this year will be held at **North Ringwood Uniting Church**. This is a relatively new venue for us but the layout and acoustics are perfect for a concert and competition like SOTY.

The elimination heats for SOTY will, as in earlier years, be held live, at our rehearsal facilities at **Federation Estate**, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood and will provide those with an ear for music a perfect evening's free entertainment, listening to the best of Australia's up and coming opera and musical theatre talent competing to make the *MWMC Singer of the Year 2022* final.



The Stage and Hall (minus audience seating) at Ivanhoe

Our performance in the *Last Night of the Proms* concert as guests of the Legends of Brass (and also featuring the Rats of Tobruk Pipe Band) at the beautiful Art Deco, **Ivanhoe Centre**, is scheduled for Saturday 18th September. This fun event is often a sell-out, so be sure to book, via the Choir's website as soon as the ticket sales are announced.

A fortnight later we will be singing in the majestic, gothic, **St Mary's Basilica in Geelong** for our traditional annual concert at the beginning of Senior's week on Friday 30th September, which is sponsored by Tuckers Funeral and Bereavement Services.



St Mary of the Angels, Geelong

Our major concert for the year with a brilliant international guest artist is scheduled for Sunday 30th October at the **Ulumbarra Theatre** (in the former jail complex) **Bendigo**.

Bernadette Robinson will be our guest artist.

More about Bernadette in our next newsletter, suffice to say she has incredible talent and versatility as a voice impersonator of Edith Piaf, Judy Garland, Patsy Kline, Maria Callas etc., and her recent one woman show "*Songs for nobodies*" at the Melbourne Arts Centre was a sell-out. Barry



Humphries announced after that show that "Bernadette is a major talent and a spellbinder". We agree with him totally

Summary of upcoming events and concerts

Mooroolbark Community Centre - Saturday 30th July 2022

As usual at Mooroolbark, because of the limited seating in the Community Centre, we plan to perform two concerts in the day, one at 11:00 a.m. with a repeat concert at 3:00 p.m.

To book please contact Yarra Ranges on 1300 368 333 or via email to boxoffice@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

Rosanna Uniting Church - 2:30 p.m. Sunday 14th August 2022

21 Arden Crescent, Rosanna

To book please contact the Church on 03 9457 2595

Final of MWMC Singer of the Year Competition & Concert - 2:00 p.m. Saturday 3rd September 14 Dickson Crescent, Ringwood North, 3134

Bookings via the Choir website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au

Legends of Brass - 2:00 p.m. Sunday 18th September 2022

Ivanhoe Centre, 275 Upper Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe 3079

Bookings will be via Trybooking or via the choir website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au

Tuckers Geelong - 2:00 p.m. Friday 30th September 2022

St Mary of the Angels Basilica, 136-148, Yarra Street, Geelong 3022

Tickets will be available from Tuckers Funeral and Bereavement Services 03 5221 4788

Wales newest anthem – “Yma o Hyd”- Still here!

Australia’s very recent qualifying win against Peru and the UAE in Qatar reminded us of Wales’ earlier victory in qualifying against Ukraine for this year’s Soccer World cup and the part which a Welsh folk song played in it’s achievement.

In 1982, a Welsh-language folk singer from Brynamman, Carmarthenshire, called Dafydd Iwan sat down to write a song about his country. At the time Iwan “felt demoralised” about Wales. The main reason being a 1979 referendum, in which just under 80% of voters decided against forming a Welsh parliament, instead favouring the status quo: Westminster rule.

Iwan, a devout nationalist who was briefly imprisoned in the 1970s for defacing English-only road signs and would later go on to be the president of Plaid Cymru between 2003 and 2010, wanted to write a song to “raise the spirits, to remind people we still speak Welsh against all odds. To show we are still here,” he says. He called it *Yma o Hyd* (“Still Here”).

The song consists of rousing acoustic guitar, backing vocals that sound like a small male voice choir, synthetic organ and a snare drum that evokes a marching band.

In the 39 years since it was released, *Yma o Hyd* has become an anthem for “Welsh nationalists, Welsh-speaking culture and the industrial working class of Wales,” says Martin Johnes, professor of history at Swansea University. Iwan himself remembers singing it on picket lines, many times, for miners,



Dafydd Iwan Jones

quarrymen and farmers. “The effects of Thatcherism were so blatant, so far-reaching. And Welshness was in turmoil. *Yma o Hyd* was a deliberate antidote to that,” he says.

Today, the song (or at least the chorus) is known to most who have lived in Wales. In schools and stadiums, pubs and clubs, you will at some point hear people singing: “*Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth / Ry’n ni yma o hyd*,” which translates as “Despite everyone and everything / We’re still here”. In total, the phrase “we’re still here” is sung 19 times across the song’s four-and-a-half minutes.

“Despite everyone and everything” refers to the troubled history of Welsh identity.

The song starts with the Romans leaving Wales in AD383 thanks to “Macsen” (the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus, who withdrew his troops to Gaul), “a myth but commonly attributed as the start of modern Wales”, says Johnes. It ends with Margaret Thatcher (“*Er gwaetha ’rhen Fagi a’i chriw*”; “Despite old Maggie and her crew”), evoking an era that felt to Iwan like an existential threat to Welshness. In 1983, Thatcher led the Conservative party to its then best general election result in Wales, and by the following year, the miners’ strike was under way. By 1986, fewer than 40% of Welsh households were headed by someone in full-time employment.

Culturally, Wales has been surviving on scraps for even longer. “Wales was politically annexed in 1280; we haven’t had a totally self-governing political unit since,” says Johnes. Add to that the language being banned by Henry VIII in 1536, a law that lasted until 1942 and “the survival of Welsh identity is pretty remarkable”, he adds. The symbolism the song carries has never been more palpable. Last year, a poll conducted by Savanta ComRes found that 40% of Welsh people were in favour of independence. Welsh nationalism is stirring once again and its main stage is not before a rugby union match at the Principality stadium, as many might think. It’s at Cardiff City stadium, where Wales’s national team play the “other” sport - soccer.

There has been a sea change since Wales’s historic European Championship campaign in 2016, their first appearance in the tournament. That year, Wales reached the semi-final, having knocked out Belgium (then favourites) 3-1 in the quarter final. That particular moment marked a shift in Welsh culture for many. In footballing terms, the country showed Europe it was able to perform as well as any other nation. Five years later, Wales would be on the same stage once more at the COVID-delayed Euro 2020.



This year, Wales have set their eyes on the prospect of playing in the World Cup for the first time since 1958. Most recently on this journey, they played a qualifying play-off semi-final against Austria at the Cardiff City stadium. While the terraces have reverberated to *Yma o Hyd* for a few years, this time around the players requested that Iwan perform the song himself, shortly before kick-off. Against Austria, he did just that, in front of Wales’s most fervent supporters, the “red wall”.

Comedian, broadcaster and avid Welsh football fan Elis James, from Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire, doesn’t remember a time before the song existed. He was at the Austria semi-final. To his surprise, “the entire crowd sang it. And it just felt like this tremendous symbol for how the Welsh language is now seen by Welsh people.”

“You could see my tears,” Iwan says, reflecting on singing the song at that moment. “The tears were because I’ve been singing the song for 40 years, and I felt as though in that moment, the message finally came through *and* crossed the language barrier.”

The song, as Josh Millar, a lifelong football fan and Welsh speaker who has “Yma o Hyd” tattooed on his biceps, points out “is very simple. Non-Welsh speakers can grasp the meaning and pronunciation far more easily than the national anthem.” Its catchiness was proved again in January 2020, when the pro-independence campaign Yes Cymru managed to get *Yma o Hyd* to the top of the iTunes UK chart.

That is not to say the song is unconditionally loved in Wales, even among those striving for independence. In response to the song reaching No 1, Welsh news website Nation.Cymru published a comment piece titled: “Wales needs less *Yma o Hyd* and more of a focus on shaping our future”. The piece lamented that the song “succumbs to the idea that our greatest strength is our ability to stubbornly remain in place, like a stain that our enemies have long since given up on removing”. Its author, Joshua McCarthy, is a campaigns officer for the youth wing of Plaid Cymru, Plaid Ifanc.

“My views are my own, not those of Plaid Ifanc,” he says, adding that *Yma o Hyd* “doesn’t say anything about what still being here actually means. We’re not the same nation as we were in 1983, and endurance isn’t everything.”

There are more chapters to come in this story. On 5 June, Wales faced one final play-off game against Ukraine. The prize: a place at the World Cup. Before the game, as he did for the semi-final, Iwan sang the song pitch-side, backed by a stadium full of fans. Wales won that game 1- 0 and are in the 2022 World Cup

“I think that whatever happens, the future of Welsh football is in safe hands, and the song will stick around, too,” says James. It certainly doesn’t look to be leaving the stands any time soon. It is, without doubt, Wales’s other national anthem.

The lyrics and translation of *Yma o Hyd*

Dwyt ti'm yn cofio Macsen
oes neb yn ei nabod o
Mae mil a chwe chant o flynyddoedd
Yn amser rhy hir i'r co'
Pan aeth Magnus Maximus o Gymru
Yn y flwyddyn tri-chant-wyth-tri
A'n gadael yn genedl gyfan
A heddiw: wele ni!

Chorus

Ry'n ni yma o hyd
Ry'n ni yma o hyd
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Ry'n ni yma o hyd
Ry'n ni yma o hyd
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Er gwaetha pawb a phopeth
Ry'n ni yma o hyd

Chwythed y gwynt o'r Dwyrain
Rhued y storm o'r môr
Hollted y mellt yr wybren
A gwaedded y daran encôr
Llifed dagrau'r gwangalon
A llyfed y taeg y llawr
Er dued yw'r fagddu o'n cwmpas
Ry'n ni'n barod am doriad y wawr!

Cofiwn i Facsen Wledig
Adaef ein gwlad yn un darn
A bloeddiwn gerbron y gwledydd

*You don't remember Macsen,
nobody knows him.
One thousand and six hundred years,
a time too long to remember.
When Magnus Maximus left Wales,
in the year 383,
leaving us a whole nation,
and today - look at us!*

*We are still here,
we are still here,
in spite of everyone and everything,
in spite of everyone and everything,
in spite of everyone and everything
We are still here,
we are still here,
in spite of everyone and everything,
in spite of everyone and everything,
in spite of everyone and everything
We are still here,*

*Let the wind blow from the East,
let the storm roar from the sea,
let the lightning split the heavens,
and the thunder shout "encore!"
Let the tears of the faint-hearted flow,
and the servile lick the floor.
Despite the blackness around us,
we are ready for the breaking of the dawn!*

*We remember that Macsen the Emperor
left our country in one whole piece.
And we shall shout before the nations,*

Mi fyddwn yma tan Ddydd y Farn!
Er gwaetha pob Dic Siôn Dafydd
Er gwaetha 'rhen Fagi a'i chriw
Byddwn yma hyd ddiwedd amser
A bydd yr iaith Gymraeg yn fyw!

***“We'll be here until Judgement Day!”
Despite every Dic Siôn Dafydd,
despite old Maggie and her crew,
we'll be here until the end of time,
and the Welsh language will be alive!***

Why join a choir?

We hope you liked Canadian, Robert Rowat's nine reasons for joining a choir, which was featured in our last newsletter.

We'd like to expand on the first three of his points specifically in relation to the MWMC

1. You get to sing great repertoire

When we think about great classical music, we tend to focus on symphonies, concertos, sonatas, string quartets and operas. But the truth is, many of the best composers saved their most inspired creativity for choral music. (Think Bach's B Minor Mass, Fauré's Requiem, Vaughan Williams's Sea Symphony.) In addition, all the great music theatre shows have marvellous chorus'.

The Melbourne Welsh Male Choir's music library contains:

333 Songs in English including opera chorus', folk songs, sea shantys, negro spirituals, songs from the shows (e.g., Les Misérables, Oliver, Chess, Phantom of the Opera etc.), war songs, romantic ballads, African chants, New Zealand lullabies, etc.,

37 Songs sung in the Welsh language,

13 Songs of Welsh origin which are sung in English (e.g. *Sing Rhondda* and *Cwm Rhondda* or "Guide me o thou great Jehovah"),

41 Carols.

These songs and their 4-part ttbb (first tenor, second tenor, baritone and bass) arrangements have made their way into our repertoire library courtesy of current and previous music directors (and pianists), brother choirs and from festivals we've visited in South Africa, USA, Canada, Austria, Wales, London, Cornwall, Canberra, Wollongong, Tasmania (e.g. some of the South African chants were taught to us during our trip to South Africa to attend the *South African International Eisteddfod* held at Roodepoort, Johannesburg).

About 60 or so songs are in our regular repertoire and members are expected to sing these from memory.

2. It's an excellent stress reliever

You rush to meet deadlines, deal with unhappy clients, cope with an angry boss and if you're lucky eat lunch in front of your computer. By the time you get to your choir rehearsal, you're a nervous wreck. But sitting up straight, relaxing your shoulders and breathing from your diaphragm is a great way to return to your centre and leave the day's stress behind you.

When we sing, large parts of our brain "light up" with activity, says Sarah Wilson, a clinical neuropsychologist and head of the School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne. She led a study which looked at how the brain reacts when we sing by giving volunteers of varying vocal ability MRI scans as they warbled.

"There is a singing network in the brain, which is quite broadly distributed," Wilson says. When we speak, the hemisphere of the brain dealing with language lights up, as we might expect. When we sing, however, both sides of the brain spark into life.

"We also see involvement of the emotion networks of the brain," adds Wilson. Regions that control the movements we need to produce sounds and articulation also light up.

Body and mind

The physical exertion involved in singing - filling of our lungs, the firm control of our vocal cords, the movements of our mouth and body - is among the reasons why it can boost our mood. Singing is an aerobic exercise which sees the release of endorphins, the brain's 'feel-good' chemicals, says Baishali Mukherjee, the Southeast Asia regional liaison for the World Federation of Music Therapy.

“Endorphins are related to an overall lifted feeling of happiness, it gives a feeling of euphoria so it’s all associated with a reduction in stress,” she says. “In any situation whether it is under stress or with any physical ailments, illness, psychological deprivation, music has the potential to affect our body and mind.”

3. You meet new people

Nowadays people make “friends” without ever meeting in person. Joining a choir is an old-school way to meet nice, like-minded people interested in having a good time together. What a concept!

Our choristers are always keen to meet new members and to help initiate them into the wonderful world of four-part harmony. While the Music Director maintains control, there is still room for good-humoured banter throughout the session. Partners and friends are welcome at any rehearsal and there is a coffee/tea break to allow members to intermingle. Social events like the Australia Day BBQ and Christmas party involve partners in a relaxed environment while the Choir’s interstate and overseas tours tend to forge long term, memorable friendships.

If you agree with Robert Rowat and would like to enjoy the many benefits a choir offers, then call me on 0419 562 353 or just come along to our rehearsal rooms at Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood, on a Wednesday evening and you will be made most welcome.

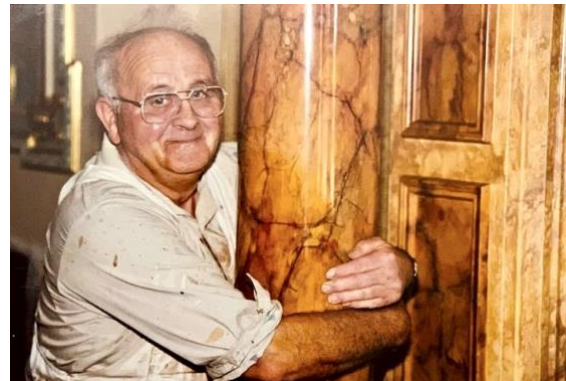
Vale - Derek Oswald Marvelley (24 Feb 1931 - 7 April 2022)

Older members of the choir were saddened to hear of the passing of one of our founding members, who was also a founding member, in 1980, of the choir which preceded it - *Cantorian Cymraeg* - Derek Marvelley.

With an impish smile and an infectious laugh, Derek was loved by all who knew him

A wonderful top tenor, he was a great friend of our choir’s first music director Bill Mead whom he had known since their trade school days in the Swansea Valley. Derek and Bill often sang duets such as *Lausanne* and *the Bold Gendarmes* in our early concerts.

A master painter, it took Derek Marvelley 14 years of night school to learn the extraordinary tricks of his trade in his native Wales. When he migrated to Australia in 1964, at a time when many heritage buildings here were being bulldozed, there was little call for his trade.



For 12 years thereafter he spent his time painting 12-square brick-veneer houses. “I was a slapper”, Derek lamented. The abeyance of his talents was so dispiriting that he eventually just gave up and sat at home “with no job and no money - and then the phone rang” A doctor wanted his period home decorated, and Derek did such a fine job that one thing led to another and, from the late '70s, he found himself busy doing stunning interiors for some of Victoria's most notable heritage properties.

He did Ravenswood - “a job that took two years” and Werribee Mansion. He reinstated Victorian, art deco and art nouveau motifs, the marbling, hand-painted wallpapers, ceiling roses, border cornicing that sometimes had 18 stencils and “intensely detailed effects” inside numerous other period interiors. He also did the faux walnut panelling of Florentino restaurant’s upstairs dining room in Bourke Street.

He did Ravenswood - “a job that took two years” and Werribee Mansion. He reinstated Victorian, art deco and art nouveau motifs, the marbling, hand-painted wallpapers, ceiling roses, border cornicing that sometimes had 18 stencils and “intensely detailed effects” inside numerous other period interiors. He also did the faux walnut panelling of Florentino restaurant’s upstairs dining room in Bourke Street.

Derek, who is the only person in 100 years to receive an Award for Excellence from the *Master Painters Society of Australia*, was so passionate about preserving the old skills that in 1994 he started the *Artisans Guild of Australia*. He was the founding chairman and president of a guild with about 20 artisan members representing all sorts of old and odd crafts.

One of Derek's lasting legacies is the design of the Choir's unique yellow tie with its Celtic scroll imagery background and red dragons. The design was a joint collaboration between Derek and another former choir member - Tim Jones.

Farewell Derek, you will be missed.

Hiring the choir

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. 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 great 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 marketing and promotional material and in our concerts.

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 is open to singers under the age of 35 and 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*, recently performed as *Violetta* in Opera Australia's acclaimed 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 presentation ceremonies on the Singer of the Year finals' night and in the elimination heats.

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 dollar.

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 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 editor 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.

Travel Requirements

While working as an airline customer-service agent, I got a call from a woman who wanted to know if she could take her dog on board.

I told her the dog was welcome, as long as she paid a \$50 charge and provided her own kennel.

I further explained that the kennel needed to be large enough for the dog to stand up, sit down, turn around and roll over.

"I'll never be able to teach him all that by tomorrow!" the customer complained.

Misleading Evidence

A married man was having an affair with his secretary.

One day they went to her place and made love all afternoon.

Exhausted, they fell asleep and woke up at 8 p.m.

The man hurriedly dressed and told his lover to take his shoes outside and rub them in the grass and dirt. He put on his shoes and drove home.

"Where have you been?" his wife demanded.

"I can't lie to you," he replied,

"I'm having an affair with my secretary. We had sex all afternoon."

She looked down at his shoes and said:

"You lying rat! You've been playing golf!"

It's how you advertise

A guy bought a new fridge for his house.

To get rid of his old fridge (still working), he put it in his front yard and hung a sign on it saying:

'Free to good home. You want it, you take it.'

For three days the fridge sat there without anyone looking twice.

He eventually decided that people were too mistrustful of this deal.

So he changed the sign to read: *'Fridge for sale \$50.'*

The next day someone stole it!

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 "Yma o Hyd" was taken from Wikipedia and the UK's Guardian newspaper.

CHOIR DIRECTORY

President : Kevin Seerup president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au

Vice-president : David Field vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au

Secretary : Ieuan Thomas secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au

Treasurer : Phil Tomlinson treasurer@melbournewelshchoir.com.au

Music Director : David Ashton-Smith OAM

Committee : Colin Brown, Geoff Cooke, Gwyn Harper, Michael Kenny, Robert Mits, Bill Spawton

