

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 64 January 2022



For our first concert in 2023 we will be returning to the James Tatoulis Auditorium at MLC in Kew to celebrate St David's Day.



As is becoming the custom, we will have, as one of our guest artists, the winner of the Blue Riband at the 2022 Welsh National Eisteddfod, mezzo soprano ***Ceri Haf Roberts***.

Ceri has been brought out, by the Welsh Church in Melbourne, to sing at their Gymanfa Ganu, which is on the following Sunday afternoon.

Members of the Melbourne Welsh as well as the other Welsh male and female choirs in Victoria will be singing in the Gymanfa Ganu, which this year will be held at the Baptist Church in Collins Street.

Ceri has a degree in Law from Bangor University and a Masters in Professional Legal Practice from the University of Law, Chester and is a practising solicitor in

Denbigh, North Wales. In her spare time, Ceri is an avid singer and performer and has competed regularly in the National Eisteddfod. She has recently formed a choir and is eager to continue in the role as a conductor in future. What a talented young lady!

We are indebted to the Welsh Church for allowing her to perform with us in our celebration of St David's Day.

Our other guest is a local - Melbourne-born baritone, ***James Emerson***.

James has performed in professional operatic productions and concerts since the age of eight and has won numerous awards from many prominent vocal competitions and Eisteddfods in Australia. These include Adelaide Eisteddfod's Arnold Matters Scholarship Award and finalist in the prestigious 2021 Herald Sun Aria competition. James has also been a finalist in the Australian National Liederfest competition.

In 2019, James made his debut as a soloist in the Melbourne Recital Centre with the Melbourne Bach Choir's performance of ***St Matthew Passion***. The Age newspaper stated that "baritone James Emerson enjoyed a laudable debut."



In 2022, James was selected as one of the artists for the prestigious Melba Opera Trust. He also recently performed the role of *The Cowardly Lion* in Victorian Opera's Australian premiere of *Il Mago di Oz* and performed in the world premiere of *The Butterfly Lovers*.

The Melbourne Welsh Choir are looking forward to performing with these wonderful young artists in this splendid auditorium. It will be a great celebration of our Patron Saint - Dewi Sant's anniversary. We look forward to seeing you there.

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir
presents
St David's Day Concert 2023

Guest Baritone James Emerson, Finalist in the prestigious Herald Sun Aria competition

James Emerson

Guest Mezzo Soprano Ceri Haf Roberts, Blue Riband Winner - Welsh National Eisteddfod 2022

Ceri Haf Roberts

James Tatoulis Auditorium, Methodist Ladies' College, 207 Barkers Rd., Kew
Saturday 25th February 2023, starting 7:30pm

Tickets:
<https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/>

St David – Patron Saint of Wales *by Ben Johnson*

March 1st is St. David's Day, the National Day of Wales and has been celebrated as such since



St David's Cathedral

the 12th Century. Today the celebrations usually involve the singing of traditional songs followed by a Te Bach, a tea with bara brith (famous welsh fruited bread) and teisen bach (welsh cake). Young girls are encouraged to wear national costume and leeks, or daffodils are worn, being the national symbols of Wales.

So, who was St. David (or Dewi Sant in Welsh)? Not much is known about St David except from a biography written around

1090 by Rhygyfarch, son of the Bishop of St. Davids.

David was reputedly born on a cliff top near Capel Non (Non's chapel) on the South-West Wales coast during a fierce storm. Both his parents were descended from Welsh royalty. He was the son of Sandde, Prince of Powys, and Non, daughter of a chieftain of Menevia (now the little cathedral town of St David's). The site of David's birth is marked by the ruins of a tiny

ancient chapel close to a holy well and the more recent 18th century chapel, dedicated to his mother Non, can still be seen near St. David's Cathedral.

In medieval times it was believed that St David was the nephew of King Arthur. Legend has it that the patron saint of Ireland, St. Patrick – also said to have been born near the present day city of St. David's – foresaw the birth of David in approximately 520AD.

The young David grew up to be a priest, being educated at the monastery of Hen Fynyw under the tutorage of St. Paulinus.

According to legend, David performed several miracles during his life including restoring Paulinus' sight. It is also said that during a battle against the Saxons, David advised his soldiers to wear leeks in their hats so that they could easily be distinguished from their enemies, which is why the leek is one of the emblems of Wales!



St David Patron Saint of Wales

A vegetarian who ate only bread, herbs and vegetables and who drank only water, David became known as Aquaticus or Dewi Ddyfrwr (the water drinker) in Welsh. Sometimes, as a self-imposed penance, he would stand up to his neck

in a lake of cold water, reciting Scripture! It is also said that milestones during his life were marked by the appearance of springs of water.

Becoming a missionary, David travelled throughout Wales and Britain and even made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he was consecrated bishop. He founded 12 monasteries including Glastonbury and one at Minevia (St. David's) which he made his bishop's seat. He was named Archbishop of Wales at the Synod of Brevi (Llandewi Brefi), Cardiganshire in 550. Monastery life was very strict, the brothers having to work very hard, cultivating the land and pulling the plough. Many crafts were followed – beekeeping was very important. The monks had to keep themselves fed as well as provide food and lodging for travellers. They also looked after the poor.

St David died on 1 March 589A.D., at Minevia, allegedly over 100 years old. His remains were buried in a shrine in the 6th century cathedral which was ransacked in the 11th century by Viking invaders, who plundered the site and murdered two Welsh bishops.

After his death, his influence spread far and wide, first through Britain and then by sea to Cornwall and Brittany. In 1120, Pope Callactus II canonised David as a Saint. Following this he was declared Patron Saint of Wales. Such was David's influence that many pilgrimages were made to St. David's, and the Pope decreed that two pilgrimages made to St. David's equalled one to Rome while three were worth one to Jerusalem. Fifty churches in South Wales alone bear his name.

It is not certain how much of the history of St. David is fact and how much is mere speculation. However, in 1996 bones were found in St. David's Cathedral which, it is claimed, could be those of Dewi himself. Perhaps these bones can tell us more about St David: priest, bishop and patron saint of Wales.

Recent Choir concert – Christmas Carols at Mooroolbark

Our traditional two concerts in a day at Mooroolbark, while quite demanding of the choristers, proved to be a great hit with the audience. Featuring a mix of Welsh songs, Christmas carols, community carols and solo items by members of the choir the two encores and thunderous applause at the end of the concert said it all.

The choir themselves were surprised and delighted by the West Indian carol “*Born*” sung

as a duet between Richard Bolt with his guitar and Mark Coffey on double bass. It was the first time we had heard that combination in a concert and it really went down well with the audience. I suspect we might be hearing from them again in future concerts.

Our president - Kevin Seerup demonstrated his musical theatre background with his rendition of “*This is the moment*” while Tony Meeuwssen and our Music Director David Ashton-Smith contributed the more traditional “*the Christmas Song*” and “*Mary’s Boy Child*” respectively. Not to be outdone, our accompanist Simon Walters demonstrated his skills with intricate variations on a carols theme.



Strange Welsh connection



Nansi Richards

The reason Kellogg’s Corn Flakes has a cockerel on them is thanks to the Welsh language.

During a tour of America, Welsh harpist, Nansi Richards met the king of cereal, W. K. Kellogg. She told him that his name sounded like the word *ceilog* - the Welsh for cockerel - and he liked it.

Soon after, there was a cockerel on the box and, according to legend, he even coloured the bird to match the flag of Wales!



Background to another of the songs in the choir's repertoire – *Benedictus* How does a Welsh Choir singing a four-part harmony chant, in latin, composed by a Welsh composer sound? Well quite wonderful.

The melody was composed by one of Wales best modern songwriters - **Robat Arwyn**.

He wrote *Memory of Stars* (Atgof o'r Sêr) for the National Eisteddfod in 2001 and *Benedictus* (from Er Hwyllo'r Haul) for the National Eisteddfod 2005 which was recorded originally by *Bryn Terfel and Rhys Meirion* and was later included by *The Priests* on their classical album in 2008. This reached No.1 in Ireland and Norway, Belgium and Sweden as well as holding the No.1 position in the USA for 23 weeks.

Robat was born in Talysarn, in the Nantlle Valley and was educated at Talysarn Primary School and Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle, Penygroes.

He has a degree in Music from Cardiff University and a Diploma in Librarianship from Aberystwyth. He was Denbighshire County Council's Principal Librarian for over twenty years but has now retired to concentrate on his music.

He lives in Rhuthun with his wife Mari and has two grown up children, Elan and Guto.

He has been a member of Côr Rhuthun (Rhuthun Choir) since 1981 and has been the accompanist and has composed pieces for the choir since 1987. Sadly, in October 2007, the choir's founder and conductor, Morfydd Vaughan Evans died, and Arwyn took over as conductor.

He was also a member of Trisgell between 1982 and 1995. This was a trio formed by Arwyn and two friends Arwyn Vaughan and Llion Wyn, who sang with him in the basses in Côr Rhuthun,

Robat Arwyn has published 13 volumes of songs, a variety of individual choral pieces and nine musicals, including *Er Mwyn Yfory* and *Plas Du*.

Now retired, Arwyn is busy composing and adjudicating at various Eisteddfodau. He also presents a programme of music on Radio Cymru on Sunday morning.

The lyrics for *Benedictus* are those for the traditional chant.

Benedictus

Benedictus, Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini.
Benedictus, Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini.
Benedictus, Benedictus, qui venit, qui venit in nomine Domini
Benedictus, Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis, Hosanna in excelsis, Hosanna, Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus, qui venit, qui venit in nomine Domini.
Benedictus, Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini.
Qui venit in nomine Domini



Vale - Tony Such - Bass

17 Feb 1941- 31 Dec 2022

The choir were sad to hear of the passing, after a long illness, of one of our longest serving basses – Tony Such.

Tony and his wife Heather were with us on two tours to the UK. Firstly, when we sang at the Royal Albert Hall and latterly when we toured Cornwall.

Tony was born in Bedford, England.

As a boy, he sang in the church choir at St Mary's in Cardington where he also practised the art of campanology i.e., bellringing.

Tony joined the R.A.F. at 15 years of age as an apprentice and served at various locations both in the U.K. and overseas as an Electronic Instrument Fitter on various aircraft, including Victors, Vulcans, Hercules, and the Blue Steel Missile.

During his service, he met his wife to be - Heather, who was serving in the W.R.A.F. They married in 1970.

In 1968, there was a marathon car rally starting in London and ending in Sydney organised by the Daily Express (U.K) and the Daily Telegraph (Australia). Tony came to Australia as aircrew on the Hercules aircraft that picked up the RAF and Army participants to take them and their cars back home.

Whilst here, he had time to travel from Sydney to Melbourne to visit his family (Mum, Dad, sister and brother) whom he hadn't seen since they emigrated in 1966. Impressed with what he saw of Australia and the quality of life his family were experiencing, he returned home and told Heather about the trip and his impressions. She of course, was keen to meet his family.



Heather and Tony in the choir bus in Cornwall

After completing his tenure in the R.A.F., he applied for a position as Electronic Instrument Fitter with British Aircraft Corporation working on the Concorde. The application was successful, but he elected not to take up the position, because that same night he had received notification from Australia House of a date to emigrate to Melbourne.

They set off as “Ten Pound Poms” in June 1971.

Tony always loved singing and Heather and he often attended concerts presented by the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, at the invitation of Alex Young, one of our tenors, whom Heather knew through Church. Tony was coerced into joining the choir by Heather and Alex and thoroughly enjoyed the experience over the last seventeen years.

Heather and Tony have two children - Melanie and Mark.

They each presented them with two beautiful grandchildren – both girls. Our thoughts go out to them at this sad time.

A large section of the choir performed at Tony's funeral service at Rosebud to sing his spirit home.

Vale Tony you will be missed.

Interested in joining the choir?

Do you want to experience the joy and rewards that come from joining a choir and our choir in particular? There is nothing quite like being rewarded by an audience's ovation at the end of a concert.

If you are keen, whether you've been involved in music all your life, sing in another choir, or only sing in the shower, feel free to come along to our rehearsals at Maroondah Federation Estate, 32 Greenwood Avenue, Ringwood and join in the fun and the stimulating learning process, that being a part of the choir is all about.

While our heritage is Welsh, and a quarter 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 age and 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!

So, whether you are eighteen or eighty provided you pass the (simple) audition, you will be made most welcome.

Our rehearsal facility at Federation Estate is excellent. It has a grand piano, comfortable seats, good acoustics and facilities for tea and coffee at interval. In addition, 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 his coaching of 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.

We have mentors for each section, who 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. The mentor also oversees the new member for the duration of the probationary period, helps him with pitch or pronunciation, where appropriate and answers any questions, he might have.

There is a break for tea or coffee during rehearsals, which gives everyone the opportunity to get involved 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 introduce you to the choir. 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 the songs 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 new and existing choristers in the pronunciation and translation of the words of the Welsh songs in our repertoire.

Following several 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.

Need to hire a 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 our venue for St David's Day Concert (the James Tatoulis Auditorium at MLC), will be aware that the choir has the skills, 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 40+ voices plus a professional music director and accompanist.

We have an eclectic repertoire, a great sound and provide excellent entertainment and value for money.

Would you care to sponsor the choir?

The choir is a not-for-profit organisation and we rely on revenue from concerts, membership fees, sponsorship and donations for our continuing operation. This has obviously been a problem for the choir during the COVID pandemic, when we weren't able to perform.

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 continuing support of our prestigious ***Singer of the Year (SOTY)*** concert.

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 as was the case with this year's finalists.

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.

As an example, our recent *2021 Singer of the Year*, **Samantha Hargreaves**, has won a full opera scholarship to the Guild Hall in London, one of 12 places available each year from around the world.

In addition to awarding monetary prizes to the SOTY 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.

The choir is willing and 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. We are keen to increase our supporter base, so if you would like us to add them to our distribution list, 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 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.

Children Are Quick...

TEACHER: Why are you late?

STUDENT: Class started before I got here.

TEACHER: John, why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?

JOHN: You told me to do it without using tables..

TEACHER: Donald, what is the chemical formula for water?

DONALD: H I J K L M N O.

TEACHER: What are you talking about?

DONALD: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

TEACHER: Glen, why do you always get so dirty?

GLEN: Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are.

TEACHER: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it. Now, Louie, do you know why his father didn't punish him?

LOUIS: Because George still had the axe in his hand.

TEACHER: Now, Simon , tell me frankly, do you say prayers before eating?

SIMON: No sir, I don't have to, my Mum is a good cook.

TEACHER: Clyde, your composition on 'My Dog' is exactly the same as your brother's. Did you copy his?

CLYDE: No, sir. It's the same dog.

TEACHER: Harold, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?

HAROLD: A teacher

Proof of Debt

A man went to his lawyer and told him, "My neighbour owes me \$500 and he won't pay up. What should I do?"

"Do you have any proof he owes you the money?" asked the lawyer.

"Nope," replied the man.

"OK, then write him a letter asking him for the \$5,000 he owed you," said the lawyer.

"But it's only \$500," replied the man.

"Precisely. That's what he will reply and then you'll have your proof!"

Lift antics

An Amish husband, wife and son travel to the city on vacation.

They visit a shopping centre and while the mother is shopping, the father and son are standing in awe in front of an elevator (having no idea what it is).

As they watch, an elderly lady walks into the strange silver doors and the doors close. The father and son watch as the numbers go up, and then back down. When the doors open, a beautiful young woman walks out.

The father leans over and whispers to the son, "Son, go get your mother!"

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. Much of the information about St David, Robat Arwyn and the Kellogg connection was taken from Wikipedia.

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: Geoff Cooke, Gwyn Harper, Michael Kenny, Robert Mits, Bill Spawton, Paul Weldon.