

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 65 February 2022



Visa Problems cause change in St David's day line-up

Who would want to be a concert organiser in today's environment! The Welsh church has recently informed us that their guest artist from Wales, **Ceri Haf Roberts**, has advised them that, due to visa problems, she will not be able to visit Australia in February 2023 for their *Gymanfa Ganu* or for the *St David's Day* concert with the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir.



Naomi Flatman

While this is disappointing it gives us the opportunity to invite one of our *Singer of the Year* finalists **Naomi Flatman** to be our guest artist instead.

Swiss born Mezzo-Soprano Naomi Flatman completed her Postgraduate studies in Opera (2018), as well as her Bachelor of Music in Advanced Performance (2016), both at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University under Mr Gregory Massingham.

Her stage credits include *Cherubino* in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, with the Lyric Opera Studio in Weimar Germany (2018), *Bastien* in Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* (Brisbane City Opera, 2017), *Lia* in Debussy's *L'enfant Prodigue* (2017), and *Nancy Waters* in Britten's *Albert Herring*, (2016).

Naomi has performed the Mezzo-soprano solos in JS Bach's *Easter Oratorio*, Australian premier of JCF Bach's *Die Auferweckung des Lazarus*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Paukenmesse*, "Nelson" Mass, as well as Mozart's *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*,

Requiem and *Coronation Mass*.

Naomi was the Sun Aria winner in 2021.

The poster features the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir logo on the left. The central image shows a choir performing on stage. Text on the poster includes:

- Melbourne Welsh Male Choir**
- James Emerson (Baritone) and Naomi Flatman (Mezzo Soprano) are featured as guest artists.
- St David's Day Concert 2023**
- Location: James Tatoulis Auditorium, Methodist Ladies' College, 207 Barkers Rd., Kew
- Date: Saturday 25th February 2023, starting 7:30pm
- Tickets: <https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/>

Wedding Capers

The choir recently performed at a wedding celebration which was held at Canvas House in South Melbourne. The groom, a Welshman from Pontypridd, asked that we remain hidden behind a curtain until the end of the formal wedding ceremony.



At the conclusion of the nuptials the curtain was opened and the happy couple and their guests were treated to a rousing rendition of *Mae hen wlad fy nhadau* (the Welsh National Anthem). This was followed by *March of the men of Harlech*, *Hine e Hine* a Maori lullaby (in honour of the bride, who was from New Zealand), *Hiraeth* and *Calon Lan*. The choir was treated to a rousing ovation as they left the wedding party to enjoy their more traditional celebrations.

If you would like to have the choir perform for your celebration (wedding, anniversary, special occasion etc.) please contact the Choir secretary or any member of the committee.

The return of the Welsh Church's Gymanfa Ganu

After the cancellation, due to COVID, of the last three scheduled annual celebrations of Welsh musical culture, St Michael's Church in Collins Street will once again host the Gymanfa Ganu to celebrate St David's Day.

COVID concerns have limited the number of overseas participants, so the conducting of the Gymanfa Ganu (community singing) will be shared between the conductors of some of the Welsh choirs in Victoria.

Representatives of all the local male and female Welsh choirs will be seated in the balcony (limited to 100 members) and will lead the singing. The introduction and the prayers will be performed by the inimitable Rev. Sion Gough Hughes.

Entrance is free, as usual (apart from the church collection), so come along on Sunday afternoon 26th February. The Gymanfa starts at 2:00 p.m.

Five ways that singing benefits your health

People love to sing. Whether or not they can carry a tune, people seem to understand that there's something positive - something healthy - in the act of raising their voices in song.

In fact, there's solid scientific evidence to prove that singing is, in fact, good for your body and your mind.

Let's take a closer look at how singing can benefit your physical and mental health, and how to use singing as a form of therapy

What are the benefits of singing?

Decades of research has shown that singing individually and in groups is good for you on many levels.

Here, according to science, are 5 key benefits of raising your voice in song.

1. Relieves stress

Singing appears to be a stress-reliever. A 2017 study measured the amount of cortisol, the stress hormone, in participant's saliva before and after they sang.

Researchers in that study found that the amount of cortisol was lower after singing, an indication that people felt more relaxed after they'd belted out a tune.

They also found singing reduces stress levels whether the participants were singing in a group or by themselves.

There's a small catch, though: Cortisol only goes down if you're singing in a place that doesn't make you anxious. A similar 2015 study tested salivary cortisol levels after a singing performance, finding that cortisol levels went up in this scenario.

2. Stimulates the immune response

There's some evidence that singing may boost your immune system and help you fight off illnesses.

A 2004 study compared the effects of singing with the effects of simply listening to music. In two separate sessions, research subjects either sang or listened to music.

Those who sang showed higher levels of immunoglobulin A, an antibody your body secretes to help you fend off infections. Listening to music (without singing along) reduced stress hormones but didn't stimulate the body's immune system.

3. Increases pain threshold

When you sing in a group, whether it's a large choir or a smaller group, the act of collective singing causes your body to release endorphins. This hormone can help promote positive feelings, and even change your perception of pain.

A 2012 study found that singing, drumming, and dancing in a group triggers the release of hormones that raise your pain tolerance in ways that just listening to music doesn't.

Researchers note that the feelings of social connection, rather than the music itself, seems to be behind the boost in pain tolerance.

4. May improve snoring

Regular singing may change the way you breathe, even when you're not singing. Researchers in a 2008 study interviewed the spouses of choir members, along with the spouses of people who don't sing.

The researchers found that significantly fewer choir members snored. This led them to recommend regular singing as a potential treatment for snoring.

Studies have also shown that people who play wind instruments also snore less than the general population.

These findings have prompted some experts to suggest that singing and playing wind instruments might be helpful for people with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).

5. Improves lung function

Because singing involves deep breathing and the controlled use of muscles in the respiratory system, it may be beneficial for certain lung and breathing conditions.

Studies have shown that the breathing techniques used with singing may offer benefits for people with the following conditions:

- chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD)
- asthma
- cystic fibrosis
- cancer
- multiple sclerosis
- quadriplegia

While singing doesn't treat or cure any of these conditions, you may benefit from gaining strength in your respiratory muscles.

Singing also increases the amount of oxygen in your blood, research shows. In addition to the pulmonary benefits, singers also experience improved mood and a greater sense of social connection.

Background to one of the songs in the choir's repertoire - *Sing Rhondda*

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

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 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 version is the one 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 whom, at the time of the strike, would have been composed mainly of miners.



Pit wheels no longer turn in the Rhondda valley

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 can be found on the choir's website www.melbournwelshchoir.com.au as well as the choir's *Facebook* page.

Vale - Past President - Mike Lyons

The choir were saddened to hear of the death in Perth on 19th January 2023 of our former president and second tenor Mike Lyons.

As president, Mike led the choir on two overseas tours to Salzburg and Austria and Cornwall and Wales.



Mike in his Tyrolean hat on our Austrian Tour

A pre-war Londoner, Mike narrowly survived the blitz, despite losing two homes to direct hits from German bombers, thanks to the family's under-garden Anderson Shelters.

Schooled partially in overground shelters during air raids, Mike majored in Chemistry at London University, and spent his National Service as an Observer/Navigator in the Fleet Air Arm, on and off aircraft carriers and 'stone frigates'!

He started work with Formica International in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and in Germany, before building their new laminate factory in Poona, India, and running their plywood and particleboard factory in Newcastle. He raised capital on the London and US money markets and built a major new particleboard and medium density fibreboard (MDF) Mill near Stirling in Scotland.

Recruited by the UN as the project manager of a joint FAO/UNIDO Forest Industry Advisory Group for Africa, based in Addis Ababa, Mike worked all over Africa.

He was later seconded by the World Bank to manage an Export Rehabilitation Project in Ghana.

Mike then moved to Kuala Lumpur with an ASEAN Aid project assisting Asian countries with the development of their forest industries. He started a new monthly technical magazine '*Asia Pacific Forest Industries*' published in Kuala Lumpur with 10,000 copies in English distributed throughout the Asia Pacific, and 3,000 copies in Mandarin, distributed throughout China.

Mike met wife Margaret in Kuala Lumpur, where she was establishing a new hospital. They married in Aviemore, Scotland, and moved to Australia, where he bought a vineyard in the Yarra Valley, having studied Viticulture and Oenology from Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, via Holmesglen TAFE. After being squeezed out by the massive new vineyards from the major wine companies, he tried his hand at mortgage broking before finally retiring at 80.

Mike had five children by his first wife, and they are dispersed far and wide. Mike also has multiple grandchildren, whom he loved to visit during his overseas trips.

He sang in choirs all his adult life, starting with the Newcastle and Gateshead choral union, the Motley Singers in Addis Ababa, the Philharmonic Choir in Kuala Lumpur, and finally the Melbourne Welsh.

Among his other interests, Mike was a long time Hash House Harrier and a Scottish Country Dancer.

The choir were obviously unable to attend his funeral, but at his request the Choir's version of *Eli Jenkins Prayer* was played during the service to help sing his spirit home.

Rest in peace Mike, you lived a full life and will be missed.

Interested in joining the choir?

Do you want to experience the joys, health benefits 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 talented accompanist, Simon Walters, himself a music director and arranger of some note.

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 (like the one featured above) 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.

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.melbournewelshchoir.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.

Laughter is the best medicine.

There was a funeral for an old man

The old man had died. A wonderful funeral was in progress and the country preacher talked at length of the good traits of the deceased, what an honest man he was, and what a loving husband and kind father he was.

Finally, the widow leaned over and whispered to one of her children: “Go up there and take a look in the coffin and make sure that’s your pa in there.”

Alien interruption

To awaken the student sleeping in his class, the English Professor threw a book at him.

“What hit me?” spluttered the student.

“That, my lad,” replied the professor, “was a flying Chaucer.”

Eliminating Pests

Three priests are talking.

“I’ve tried everything,” says the first priest. “I still can’t get rid of our rats in my church.”

“Same here!” says the second priest. “We’ve tried poison, traps, and noise. Nothing works.”

“We don’t have that problem,” says the third priest. “We baptised and confirmed them all, and now they just show up at Easter and Christmas.”

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