

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 66 March 2023

Our Patron Saint would have been proud

Those who attended the *Celebration of St David's Day Concert* at MLC on Saturday 25 February would have gone home with a feeling of satisfaction that the quality and enjoyment of this event keeps getting better year by year.



Our soloist **Naomi Flatman's** performance of *Una voce Poco fu* (Barber of Seville) and *Laudate Dominum* (Mozart) together with **James Emerson's** stirring *Aprite Un po' Quegli Occhi* (Mozart) and *Listen Mary* (Mae Brahe) clearly demonstrated that the future of Australian classical singing is in good hands.

Naomi's later performance of *Can't help lovin' that man* (Gershwin) and *So in Love* (Cole Porter) and **James' Some enchanted evening** (Rodgers/Hammerstein) and *Stars* (Schonberg/Boublil) which was sung with choir backing, showed these artists to be equally at home in the world of musical theatre.



Our talented guest artists Konrad Olszewski, James Emerson and Naomi Flatman with our MD David Ashton-Smith OAM

The choir's stirring opening bracket of *Llanfair*, *Hiraeth* and *The World in Union* set the tone for a wonderful evening's entertainment.

The evening ended with **Naomi** and **James** joining the choir for the evocative *You'll never walk alone* followed by the *Welsh National Anthem*. The resounding applause at the end of the evening said it all.

We were lucky to have James perform with us since he is shortly heading off to London to continue his studies at the Royal Academy of Music. Thank you, James and Naomi, we wish you well in your studies and your future careers.

Thanks too, to Konrad Olszewski whose artistry at the piano brought out the best in all the performers.

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 once again hosted the Gymanfa Ganu to celebrate St David's Day.

COVID concerns and visa restrictions for the guest artists, meant that there were no overseas guest performers, apart from the pastor of several Welsh churches in London Rev. Richard Brunt (who led the devotions), so the conducting of the Gymanfa Ganu (community singing) was shared between the conductors of some of the Welsh choirs in Victoria i.e., Faleiry Koczkar OAM (*Victoria Welsh*), Jeanette John (*Geelong Welsh Ladies*) and Tom Buchanan OAM (*Australian Welsh*).

Representatives of all the local choirs were seated in the balcony (limited to 100 members) and led the singing and performed two pieces designed for the massed choir's 4-part harmony, *Rachie* and *Gwahoddiad*. The introduction and the prayers were performed by the inimitable Rev. Sion Gough Hughes resplendent in his Hughes welsh tartan kilt complete with sporran.

The lack of overseas guest artists was compensated by having a local, classically trained, soprano of Welsh origin (originally from Bangor, North Wales) and former principal soprano at *Theater und Orchester Heidelberg* - **Carly Owen**, now married to an Australian and living in Melbourne. She sang several Welsh songs including the beautiful *Cymru Fach* and finished with *Climb every mountain*. A novel, but beautiful way to end her Gymanfa Ganu debut.



Soloist Carly Owen

As the stirring final notes of *Mae hen wlad fy nhadau* faded and we made our way onto the sunny streets of Melbourne, it was nice to have the Gymanfa Ganu back!

2026 Commonwealth Games Update



Many of you will remember when we sang for the Welsh Commonwealth Games team at a reception in the RACV Building in the city in 2006.

In 2026 the Games will be held across Victoria with most events in the provincial cities and regions of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton and Morwell.

Bill Spawton and his wife Chris were in Ballarat for the weekend and were tipped off that Cathy Williams and Matt Cosgrove of the Welsh Commonwealth Games Team were doing a whirlwind reconnaissance tour of all the regions involved.

Bill sent Cathy a message and they met up for coffee and a chat. Cathy and Matt were thrilled to make contact and the Choir will receive an invitation to sing at Team Cymru House in 2026.

Matt was here in 2006 and remembers fondly our singing and the socialising on that warm afternoon quite well.

Can we pick ‘em

A recent article in the Melbourne Age brought back memories of the choir’s 2012 *Singer of the Year* elimination heats in Ringwood, when a fresh-faced young mezzo soprano arrived breathless and distressed about running late for her heat, after her taxi had had difficulty finding the location.

She had travelled by train from her hometown of Mildura.

After making it through the elimination heats, she went on to win our 2012 *Singer of the Year* final.

That young mezzo soprano - **Siobhan Stagg** went on to gain a place in *Deutsche Oper Berlin*’s young artist program and moved to Berlin in 2013 (no doubt buoyed by the *SOTY* prize money).

Siobhan now has an international reputation and recently returned in triumph to Melbourne as soloist-in-residence with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

Welcome home Siobhan, we are pleased to think we played a minor part in your success story.



The background to one of the songs in the choir’s repertoire – *Hiraeth*

Hiraeth is a Welsh word that has no direct English translation.

The University of Wales, Lampeter, likens it to a homesickness tinged with grief and sadness over the lost or departed, especially in the context of Wales and Welsh culture.

It is a mixture of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness or an earnest desire for the Wales of the past.

Our patron Alwyn Humphreys’ beautiful arrangement of this traditional folk song is the one the choir uses.

The words to the song and its English translation are given below:

Hiraeth

Dwedwch, fawrion o wybod aeth
O ba beth y gnwaeth pwyd hiraeth:
A pha ddefnydd a roed ynddo
Na ddar fyddo wrth ei wisgo

Derfydd aur a derfydd arian
Derfydd melfed, derfydd sidan;
Derfydd pob dilledyn helaeth
Eto er hyn ni dderfydd hiraeth.

Hiraeth mawr a hiraeth creulon
Hiraeth sydd yn torri ’nghalon
Pan fwy’ dryma’r nos yn cysgu,
Fe ddaw hiraeth ac a’ m deffry.

Longing

*Tell me, masters of wisdom from
what thing is longing made;
And what is put in it that it never
fades through wearing it.*

*Gold fades, silver fades,
velvet fades. Silk fades,
Every sort of clothing fades,
but longing never fades*

*Great longing and cruel longing
Longing breaks my heart,
When I am sleeping deeply at night.
Longing comes and wakes me.*

More ways that singing benefits your health

Following on from the five reasons why singing is good for you, published in our last newsletter, here are two more.

Develops a sense of belonging and connection

When you sing together with others, you're likely to feel the same kind of camaraderie and bonding that players on sports teams experience.

In one 2014 study involving 11,258 schoolchildren, researchers found that children in a singing and musical engagement program developed a strong sense of community and social inclusion.

In a 2016 study involving 375 adult participants, researchers found that people who sang together in a group reported a higher sense of wellbeing and meaningful connection than people who sang solo.

One of the neurochemicals released when people feel bonded together is oxytocin, also known as the love hormone. Spontaneous, improvised singing causes your body to release this feel-good hormone, which may help give you a heightened sense of connectedness and inclusion.

Improves mental health and mood

A 2018 study done in the United Kingdom evaluated 20 people in a singing program known as *The Sing Your Heart Out* project. The participants included people with mental health conditions, as well as the general public.

Researchers found that the participants reported improvements in their mental health, mood, sense of well-being, and feeling of belonging as a result of these singing workshops.

How to incorporate singing or music therapy into your life

Not sure how to start? Here are some ways to warm up:

- Jump in the shower, where the acoustics are superior, and sing all your favourite tunes.
- Sing with your kids. You'll make memories you can all cherish.
- Look for a local chorus, choir, or song circle and find out when you can join.
- If you want to sing more confidently before you join a group, book a lesson or two with a singing instructor.

Summary

Research has shown that singing can be good for you on many levels.

It may help lower stress, boost immunity and lung function, enhance memory, improve mental health, and help you cope with physical and emotional pain.

One of the best things about singing is that you don't have to be good at it to reap the rewards. You can sing on your own in the shower or to your favourite tunes on the radio.

Or, better still you can join a choir like the Melbourne Welsh, for even more benefits such as connectedness and a sense of belonging.

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 the experience of 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, please 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 less than half of us having any Welsh heritage.

The choir is open to people of all ages and any nationalities and our current and past members include 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 in your teens or your eighties, provided you pass the (relatively 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 vocal 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 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 some rehearsals and a formal audition, you could be singing in one of our concerts within weeks and possibly joining us on our next tour.

Want 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, 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 like 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.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.

Laughter is the best medicine.

Identity crisis

"Your mother has been with us for 20 years," said John. "Isn't it time she got a place of her own?"

"My mother?" replied Helen. "I thought she was *your* mother."

Shrink rap

Two Hollywood stars ran into each other at the door of their psychiatrist's office.

"Hello, there," said one. "Are you coming or going?"

"If I knew that," said the other, "I wouldn't be here."

The end is near

Every time a little boy went to a playmate's house, he found the friend's grandmother deeply engrossed in her Bible. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him.

"Why do you suppose your grandmother reads the Bible so much?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," said his friend, "but I think she's cramming for her finals."

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