

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 69 June 2023

We oughta' be in pictures!

This is an account of filming the choir at Tamale Studios on Saturday 15th April 2023.

Leading up to this filming day, the choir had sessions where the creative team at Splice Boys appeared at our Wednesday night rehearsals with lighting and many video cameras moving about, and sometimes necessarily 'in your face'.

So, we got used to performing to the 'magic' that is documentary filming by following the rules; "look and be normal and don't look at the camera". Michael Brandon had quite subtly been coaching us in this craft of 'looking natural' and I think by then it was starting to show. So far so good.



Filming underway at the Tamale Studios

The 15th of April session was to be an added but 'different' experience, as we took a well-rehearsed group of choristers, accompanist Simon and of course our music director David Ashton-Smith (DAS), to a day of filming at Tamale Studios in Brunswick. How was it different? For a group of well-seasoned concert performers arranging a group on familiar stands at venue and belting out the songs was nothing new. But we were shooting for what was to be a documentary-style of production, so the filming was about recording all of our movements and interactions but obviously with a focus on the choir singing in its performing format. Here's how that day went!

As well as the many details of preparing our repertoire and dress code, on the day there were the added logistics of 'bumping in' while the studio was being set up. The piano had been hired and the tuner was at work fine tuning it. A number of cameras, a dolly and boom (very heavy and expensive) numerous gantries and microphones were wired in, and all pointed at the 'sacred' filming space which was lit with attention to sundry visual details. In other words, a lot of gear and clutter. Studios are sophisticated technical spaces somehow bringing this average Brunswick warehouse into another dimension.



Ready to roll

The lads were arranged for performance. Again, it's all about the aesthetics for video. We found our best 'marks' and so moved on to what is that ultimate and most anticipated and tense moment of the day - how would this room sound?

We sang to test the room. DAS with his signature technical ear described the room's sound as acoustically clear but very crisp. Not surprisingly, this room didn't have that ideal acoustic warmth, but the technicians conferred on microphones and that could be 'ironed-out' in the post-production suite. The lads could hear each other, and we could hear Simon on his well-tuned Yamaha Grand.

So, we were set to go to film and get the magic 'in the can' as they say. All the time there were thoughts of the predicted rainstorms and how rain on a tin roof would further influence the sound. Film production is a fickle affair, isn't it?!

There were numerous runs and takes of songs. The clapper board appeared numerous times for 'marking' the video and sound feeds. *Calon Lan* was the tune which was most worked on. It was sung in what seemed like dozens of takes, but I think six times was closer to reality. Various takes had the boom sweeping before our eyes. Sometimes we were asked to look at the camera as it panned and other times not to! Mostly we focussed on an imaginary single spot in the distance somewhat to the right and above of the hand-waving DAS. We could still see his hands conducting but not always those signature expressions on his face! And that was... very different.

As subjects or objects during the filming, one never knows what the camera itself is seeing. How small? How distant? As the boom passed by, my mind sometimes strayed! We all rely on sensitive post-production editing, don't we?

The day was punctuated by numerous breaks. We were feasted like royalty through Michael's formidable catering connections. The lads could get very used to this!

By day's end there was the feeling that good quality material was safely in the recorded database. Extra filming was done too. Bits, like choristers arriving at the venue were shot at the end of the day, whereas these get edited into day's start. That's 'movie magic' isn't it!

We are having this video produced to tell our choir's story and once finished it will promote the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir collectively. It will also start to unpack our individual endeavours and motivators as choristers - about who we are and why we do what we do. Explaining the benefits ourselves shows us in at our authentic best - albeit within the artificiality of shooting in a different setting and context. So, a documentary, like the one on the way, will be an important tool for the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir.

This article goes nowhere near enough in explaining and acknowledging the many organisers and planners for this day. Clearly, their hard work and attention to detail was most evident on the day. The MWMC is an awesome production team worthy of any Hollywood set.

Take a look at the Choir's Facebook page for further images from the day's shooting. We will advise where and when the finished product can be seen.

Upcoming Concert

Mooroolbark Concert

July 15, 2023, 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm

Mooroolbark Community Centre,

125 Brice Ave, Mooroolbark, Victoria, 3138, Melbourne

Following the success of our last July concert at Mooroolbark, we will be returning with an exciting program this July. The program will include a beautiful blend of musical hits, spiritual melodies, and Welsh repertoire - all delivered in exquisite four-part harmony.

The Mooroolbark Community Centre Hall is a comfortable environment but with limited seating, so be sure to book early for this afternoon concert.

Book via the Mooroolbark ticketing site - [1300 368 333](tel:1300368333)

Background to another of the choir's favourite songs - "They Call the Wind Maria"



"*They Call the Wind Maria*" is an American popular song with lyrics written by Alan J. Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe for their 1951 Broadway musical *Paint Your Wagon*, which is set in the California Gold Rush.

It has been called *Paint Your Wagon*'s "best known song" and "rousing but plaintive."

Musicologist Stephen Citron wrote, "Perhaps the most unusual song in the score is a beautiful ballad of lonely prospectors hungering for their women, "*They Call the Wind Maria*" - not chauvinistic in this case, for each man is yearning for his own girl."

U.S. military meteorologists started the informal practice of giving women's names to storms in the Pacific during World War II. The practice became official in 1945. In 1953, a similar system of using women's names was adopted for North Atlantic storms. This is said to have inspired Lerner and Loewe to write a song for their play about the California gold rush, and they too gave a wind storm the name *Maria*.

The song has had an impact in other unusual areas for example:

- The American singer, songwriter and producer Mariah Carey was named after this song.
- Maria Creek, a glacial meltwater stream in Antarctica, was given its name on account of the strong winds in the area.
- An episode of the TV series *M*A*S*H* is called "They Call the Wind Korea"
- Robin the Frog twice breaks into the song on *The Muppet Show*

The choir's version has been arranged by our musical director David Ashton-Smith.

Listen out for the simulated blast of air at the end!

Chorister Profile - Mark Coffey - Bass - joined Jun 2022

As mentioned last month, Mark's new chorister profile was not included in a 2022 newsletter due to the COVID 19 hiatus, and he is, by now, an established member of the Bass section and has even appeared on stage with his double bass as part of a duet in one of our recent concerts. Here is his profile: Mark lives with his wife Susan in Blackburn South, where they have lived since 1980. They've been together for 44 years, and their two daughters, Eleanor and Stella, are now making their own ways in the world.



Mark Coffey - Bass

Mark is a former Gippslander, born in Maffra where much of his family is still located.

He began his working life as a greenkeeper (following his love of golf) and in horticulture. Mark gardened and curated in many beautiful places and, for a while, was the private gardener to the Governor of Victoria!

He branched out into the land management side of land restoration, running the technical and business service aspects of a Non-Government Organisation.

Then in another change of direction, he moved to and is currently working for Melbourne Water.

His role involves managing their planning and approval processes. Should other agencies and developers want to build things in the area, such as roads, railways, airports and pipelines, then they need his approval.

But, if he's asked what he does professionally, he simply describes himself as a "Glorified Gardener". Mark had the good fortune of growing up in a musical family.

They were all pretty much self-taught by the osmosis of his family's involvement in amateur theatre, choirs and church, at a time when country folk were self-sufficient and entertained themselves by necessity.

There were always musical instruments in the house - piano, piano accordions, ukuleles, mouth organs and guitars to fiddle with and it was the guitar that started his musical journey. He recalls playing and busking in Melbourne when that was a novelty.

The downside of having a 'good ear' for music is that he's never been strong with music theory and notation, but he has picked up the basics over time.

Mark always found his ears to be drawn to jazz. He recalls two things that occurred early in his life that confirmed his destiny with jazz.

Firstly, he discovered jazz on the radio and listened often, usually to an ABC identity called Ralph Rickman, who had the quintessential show "Music to Midnight".

The second moment happened when he was around 9 years old. He saw, on TV, a clip of the Miles Davis Trio, with trumpet, piano, and double bass. Who knows why some black American musicians captivated a 9-year-old Aussie kid's imagination, but let's put it down simply to the skill and spontaneity of that performance on a grainy black-and-white television. He found that "these guys were the coolest" and he wanted a piece of that somehow, so he made a pact to one day play the double bass and he acquired his first one at age 23.

Mark has played in bands for about the last 35 years, eventually teaching himself to sing while playing. He has an album of his own compositions with an outfit called "*Malt and Rye*"!

He's learned to perform several Antônio Carlos Jobim pieces, singing songs like "*The Girl from Ipanema*" in Brazilian Portuguese.

His singing idols are many; Sinatra for inspiration as a performer, with Bubl  and Sami Davis up there too. Julie London, Sarah Vaughan and Peggy Lee are his great female exponents of the art. That Nat King Cole could sing and play piano all at once is surely a sublime package.

Despite his predilection for jazz, he is interested in all kinds of music, from opera and operettas to blue grass and music hall.

Asked about his hobbies, Mark indicated gardening remains a great passion, as does propagating weird and wonderful plants - particularly our rarer native species.

He's also a volunteer with the SES (State Emergency Service).

Why join the Melbourne Welsh? A good friend of Mark's is a member of the choir and of course it caught his interest. Knowing that the repertoire was musically challenging and sophisticated (and to support his friend), he came to one of our recent concerts at MLC and was impressed.

What about his family heritage? Other than the fact that he celebrated his 21st Birthday on Anglesey, an island off the north-west coast of Wales, there is no direct Welsh link, but he is 'sympathetically' Welsh! Mark is of Irish/Scottish heritage and lived and travelled around Great Britain and Ireland in the late '70's, so he gained an appreciation of regionalism, the strong cultural identity of the Celtic folk and of the value of preserving languages like Welsh.

Mark's late father-in-law, as a child during WWII, was relocated for safe keeping to Wales. He spoke some Welsh and its sound intrigued Mark, as if it was connecting him in the present to an ancient civilisation.

When his daughter Eleanor was born, his gift to the family was the full recording of "Under Milkwood" - with Richard Burton's narration. They listen to that a lot!

Mark welcome (belatedly) to the Melbourne Welsh.

Vale - Elwyn Martin - 24 August 1930 - 16 May 2023

The choir was saddened to hear of the death of one of our Welsh born choristers Elwyn Martin after a long fight with dementia.



His quiet and unassuming personality belied an accomplished scientific mind as a qualified microbiologist (with Fray Bentos in the UK and Rosella in Victoria) as well as a fierce on-field presence as a soccer player, with a passion for all things Everton. Many at the funeral wore blue as a sign of respect.

Born in Holyhead, on the Isle of Anglesey, Elwyn did not speak English until the age of 11. One of the few native Welsh speakers in the choir, he was often called upon to provide the correct pronunciation of our Welsh phrases.

He was proud of being a "Ten-pound Pom"

As a member of the choir for over twenty years he travelled overseas with the choir on several occasions including the trip to South Africa in 1997 and when we contributed to the *1000 Voices* concert at the Royal Albert Hall, London in 2008.

A significant contingent from the choir attended his funeral and contributed to the singing of two of his favourite songs - *Cwm Rhondda* and *Take me Home* to help sing his spirit home.

Want to join our choir

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 Melbourne Welsh Male Choir is all about.

The choir is open to people of all ages and nationalities, we even have a Kiwi as the current president!

Our current and past members include people with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, South African, Tongan, Samoan and Australian ancestry.

So, whether you are in your teens or your eighties, provided you pass the (relatively simple) audition, you will be made most welcome.

While our musical heritage is Welsh, and we aim to have Welsh songs as a quarter of our concert programs (not necessarily all in the Welsh language), we are fundamentally a multicultural choir with possibly less than half of us having Welsh ancestry.

We have an excellent rehearsal facility at Maroondah Federation Estate. 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.

David Ashton-Smith, our Music Director, has a background as an opera singer, teacher and adjudicator, which 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 the new members, to ensure they are introduced to other members and are properly equipped with the relevant music scores. These mentors oversee the new members for the duration of the probationary period, help with pitch or pronunciation where appropriate, and answer any questions, they 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 our 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 for an introduction to the choir. Otherwise, just come along on a Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m., introduce yourself and you will be made most welcome.

Once you decide to join, we will provide you with access to our web-based aids, which will enable you to learn and practice the individual parts at home. This makes the process of getting up to speed with the Choir's repertoire 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.

Would you like 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.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, a recent event was the very well received gig at *Royal Melbourne Golf Club* where the choir were invited to perform three encores.

So, if you are 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



The choir performing at Royal Melbourne Golf Club

contact **David Field (0418 175 584)** or any committee member.

The choir is available for community, corporate and sporting events, dinners, anniversaries, weddings etc., at most times in the year.

Please bear in mind that we're talking about a choir of 40 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.

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 been a problem for the choir during the COVID pandemic, when we weren't able to perform in any concerts.

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 company and product or service 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 him on 0419 562 353.

Your feedback is important to us, so please 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 might like to see us perform in our future concerts.

Laughter is the best medicine.

Bowling Balls

A little old man boards a bus with a bowling ball in each of his front pockets.

He sits down next to a beautiful young blonde lady, and she can't help but glance quizzically at the man and his bulging pockets.

It's an uneasy few minutes before, finally, the little old man can take no more.

"Bowling balls," he nods reassuringly.

The blonde seems a little shocked, and stares on.

Moments later, she says: "Does it hurt as much as tennis elbow?"

Religious Cowboy

The devout cowboy lost his favourite Bible while he was mending fences out on the range.

Three weeks later, a cow walked up to him carrying the Bible in its mouth.

The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the cow's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," said the cow. "Your name is written inside the cover."

Confession

A man goes to Confession to talk to his priest. "Father, something terrible is happening and I have to talk to you about it."

The priest asks: "What's wrong?"

The man replies: "My wife is poisoning me."

The priest, very surprised by this, asks: "How can that be?"

The man then pleads: "I'm telling you, I'm certain she's poisoning me. What should I do?"

"Tell you what," the priest offers. "Give me her name and let me talk to her. I'll see what I can find out and I'll let you know."

A week later the priest calls the man and says: "I spoke to your wife. I spoke to her on the phone for three hours. You want my advice?"

The man says yes, and the priest replies: "Take the poison!"

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. The articles on They call the wind Maria were taken in part from Wikipedia. Note: the feature article was written by Mark Coffey, since the usual scribe was overseas for the shoot at Tamale studios.

CHOIR DIRECTORY

President:	Kevin Seerup	president@melbournewelshchoir.com.au
Vice-president:	Bill Spawton	vicepresident@melbournewelshchoir.com.au
Secretary:	Michael Kenny	secretary@melbournewelshchoir.com.au
Treasurer:	Phil Tomlinson	treasurer@melbournewelshchoir.com.au
Music Director:	David Ashton-Smith OAM	
Committee:	Richard Bolt, Michael Brandon, Geoff Cooke, David Field, Robert Mits, Ieuan Thomas.	