

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 74 November 2023

St Alfred's Anglican Church

Blackburn

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023



The choir accepted an invitation to perform in St Alfred's Anglican Church *Night of Music* at their church in Blackburn North. This was a new venue for the choir and a new and different audience, so we were not sure what to expect.

From the response to our opening bracket of *Sing Rhondda, Gwahoddiad, You raise me up* and *Benedictus*, we knew we were in for a good evening and so it turned out to be.



Who would have thought that combination of a comedic Master of Ceremonies - *Noddy Sharma*, a talented group of musicians including cellist *Hayden Taylor*, flautist *Dennis Wang*, pianist *Rachael Zhou* and trumpeter *Andrew Pemberton*, together with a short but truly inspirational talk from an Agronomist *Tony Rinaudo* (who has transformed deserts into fertile land) and an international opera soprano *Joanna Cole* would combine with the forty plus men of the *Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir* and bring so much pleasure to the, near capacity, audience that the concert ended with a standing ovation and the audience wanting more.



We look forward to performing again at this lovely venue.

## ***Upcoming Choir Concert***

***Nadolig Llawnen (or Christmas Concert) – 9 December at North Ringwood Uniting Church***

After a gap of some years, the choir is once again holding a Christmas concert at this acoustically beautiful and audience-friendly venue, with two wonderful guest artists, ***Roy Best*** and ***Carly Owen***

**Tenor - Roy Best** is well known to Australian audiences and has performed on numerous occasions with the choir.

Roy is hailed as one of Australia's most loved and dynamic tenors. He established his singing career in spectacular fashion after successfully competing in ABC television's *Operatunity Oz*. He then performed the role of *the Duke* in Opera Australia's *Rigoletto* at the Sydney Opera House and was rewarded with a standing ovation from a packed house and a television audience of over one million viewers.



After studying voice for several years in Melbourne, Roy completed an Associate Diploma in Music through the Australian Music Examinations Board. He now delights audiences with his varied repertoire and captivating stage presence.

Roy's principal roles in opera include: *Alfredo* – *La Traviata* (Melbourne Opera), *Ferrando* – *Così fan tutte* (Melbourne Opera), *Rodolfo* – *La Bohème*, (Melbourne Opera), *Nemorino* – *Elixir of Love* (Victorian Opera) (Green Room Award nom.), *Duca* – *Rigoletto* (Opera Australia Sydney), *Turiddu* – *Cavalleria Rusticana*, (Melbourne Opera) (Green Room Award nom.), *Camille* – *Merry Widow* (Melbourne

Opera), *Count Almaviva* – *Barber of Seville* (Melbourne Opera), *Elvino* – *La Sonnambula* (Pacific Opera, Sydney), *Arturo* – *I Puritani* (Melbourne Opera), *Brueys* (plus others) – *Nelson* by S. Greenbaum (More than Opera) as well as *Prisoner* – *Dead Man Walking* (Alexander Prods, Sydney).

Roy is in high demand as an entertainer at corporate functions and major events. He performs a wide range of classics from jazz to musical theatre and, of course, opera.

His many concert appearances have seen him performing alongside some of Australia's finest artists including Yvonne Kenny, Marina Prior, Silvie Paladino and James Morrison.

**Welsh soprano - Carly Owen** on the other hand is making her debut performance with the choir.

For Carly, Welsh is her first language, so expect something special from her in the "*Language of Heaven*"

The winner of the *2015 London Welsh Young Singer of the Year Competition* and a semifinalist in the *2017 Kathleen Ferrier Awards Competition*, Carly Owen came to Australia following her stint as principal soprano at Theater & Orchester Heidelberg.

Prior to that she was a member of the National Opera Studio in London with whom she took part in residencies across the UK, performing with Opera North, Scottish Opera and as Romilda in *Seise* for Welsh National Opera.

**Recent engagements:** *Gilda Rigoletto*, *Ilida Idomene*, *Pamina Die Zauberflöte*, *Hanna Glawari Die lustige Witwe* (Theater & Orchester Heidelberg).

Seating is limited so make sure you book early via the choir's website - [www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au](http://www.melbournewelshchoir.com.au)





*Nadolig Llawn*  
**A Christmas Concert**

with the  
**Melbourne Welsh**

**Male Choir**

guest artists including  
**Roy Best - Tenor**

and  
from the Welsh National Opera  
**Carly Owen - Soprano**

Conducted by **David Ashton-Smith DAM**

Accompanied by **Simon Walters**

**MC Bill Spanton**

**North Ringwood Uniting Church**

14 Dickson Cres, Nth Ringwood  
Saturday December 9th 2023 at 2:30 pm

Tickets \$45 adult, \$40 concession, \$35 group (6+ ) \$15 student  
<https://melbournewelshchoir.com.au/tickets/>



Sponsors: Bendigo Bank, The Welsh Church, Robert Salzer Foundation

## The background to one of the choir's favourite songs – *Myfanwy*

Dr Joseph Parry, who died on 17 February 1903, was famous for his compositions both in Wales and the USA. One of the most famous Welsh tunes - *Myfanwy* - and perhaps the greatest hymn tune ever written - *Aberystwyth* - came from his pen.

Although these are the only two works for which Parry is still widely known, he was much more prolific than that would suggest, with 10 operas, three oratorios, five cantatas and numerous anthems, songs and orchestral works to his credit.

Born in Merthyr Tydfil in 1841, his family struggled to make ends meet, and Joseph left school and went down the mine aged nine to play his part supporting his parents and seven brothers and sisters. The family emigrated to the US in 1854 and went to live in a Welsh community in Pennsylvania.

Joseph worked in an iron works but also studied music, setting Welsh texts to music and performing widely both in America and in Wales. He returned to Britain to study music in London and Cambridge, then became a stalwart of Welsh academic musical life, teaching and composing in Aberystwyth, Swansea and finally Cardiff, where he died in 1903.

According to legend, there was a real *Myfanwy* in Parry's life, a girl by the name of *Myfanwy Llewellyn*. Like Parry himself, she moved to America, where she became successful as an opera singer using the stage name *Lena van Ellen*.

The story says that when they met, 30 years later, *Myfanwy Llewellyn*, when she was ill, snubbed the Welsh composer and he wrote his famous tune, full of pathos and yearning, as a result.

An alternative view of the origin of *Myfanwy* is that the lyricist Richard Davies, with whom Parry composed his oratorios and operas, based the song on the fourteenth century love-story of *Myfanwy Fychan* of Castell Dinas Brân, and the poet Hywel ab Einion.

That story was also the subject of the popular poem, '*Myfanwy Fychan*' (1858), by John Ceiriog Hughes (1832–87) that won him a silver crown at the 1858 Great Llangollen Eisteddfod, the precursor of today's National Eisteddfod.

### *The Story of Myfanwy Fychan*

The brooding site of Castell Dinas Brân is the backdrop for the sad love story of *Myfanwy*.

She is a princess and renowned for her beauty throughout Powys in Wales. *Myfanwy* is proud of her looks and wants her many suitors to proclaim her beauty in song and verse. Many come to court her but are not able to compose songs that truly reflect her looks. She rejects them all.

However, in the valley beneath the castle lives a poor bard Hywel ap Einion. Taking his courage in his hands the young bard goes to the castle and sings and plays for *Myfanwy*. Whilst he performs his songs to her, she is captivated and will look at no other. Hywel ap Einion believes his love for her to be reciprocated because of this.

His hopes and dreams are thwarted when a rich, handsome and more articulate man comes to seek her affection. The dejected Hywel then wanders the forests and lands of Powys and recites this sad poem to his unrequited love:

*I am without spirit,  
O thou that hast enchanted me,  
as Creirwy enchanted Garwy.  
In whatever part of the world I am,  
I lament my absence from the marble castle of Myfanwy.*



*Myfanwy and Hywel (from Llangollen Museum)*

*Love is the heaviest burden,  
O thou that shinest like the heavens,  
and a greater punishment cannot be inflicted than thy displeasure,  
O beautiful Myfanwy.*

*I who am plunged deeper and deeper in love,  
can expect no other ease,  
O gentle fair Myfanwy with the jet eyebrows,  
than to lose my life upon thy account.*

The writer **Jack Jones** immortalized Parry in his novel *Off to Philadelphia in the Morning*, the story of his struggle for artistic achievement and recognition. It has been made into a film, a suitable tribute to a remarkable man. The greatest tribute the composer could ever have been given, however, lies in the fact that his music is still recognised and still played. He would have wanted nothing more.

Joseph Parry was buried in the churchyard of St Augustine's Church in Penarth. His grave, surmounted by a pedestal and a carved harp, dominates the graveyard, a fitting reminder of a man who grew from abject poverty to become the greatest composer Wales has yet seen.

The Welsh lyrics to Myfanwy and the literal translation are given below:

#### **Original**

*Paham mae dicter, O Myfanwy,  
Yn llenwi'th lygaid duon di?  
A'th ruddiau tirion, O Myfanwy,  
Heb wrido wrth fy ngweled i?  
Pa le mae'r wên oedd ar dy wefus  
Fu'n cynnau 'nghariad ffyddlon ffôl?  
Pa le mae sain dy eiriau melys,  
Fu'n denu'n nghalon ar dy ôl?*

*Pa beth a wneuthum, O Myfanwy  
I haeddu gwg dy ddwyrudd hardd?  
Ai chwarae oeddit, O Myfanwy  
Â thanau euraidd serch dy fardd?  
Wyt eiddo im drwy gywir amod  
Ai gormod cadw'th air i mi?  
Ni cheisiaf fyth mo'th law, Myfanwy,  
Heb gael dy galon gyda hi.*

*Myfanwy boed yr holl o'th fywyd  
Dan heulwen ddisglair canol dydd.  
A boed i rosyn gwridog iechyd  
I ddawnsio ganmlwydd ar dy rudd.  
Anghofia'r oll o'th addewidion  
A wnest i rywun, 'ngeneth ddel,  
A dyro'th law, Myfanwy dirion  
I ddim ond dweud y gair "Ffarwél".*

#### **Translation**

Why so the anger, Oh Myfanwy,  
That fills your dark eyes  
Your gentle cheeks, Oh Myfanwy  
No longer blush beholding me?  
Where now the smile upon your lips  
That lit my foolish faithful love?  
Where now the sound of your sweet words,  
That drew my heart to follow you?

What was it that I did, Oh Myfanwy,  
To deserve the frown of your beautiful cheeks?  
Was it a game for you, Oh Myfanwy,  
This poet's golden flame of love?  
You belong to me, through true promise,  
Too much to keep your word to me?  
I'll never seek your hand, Myfanwy,  
Unless I have your heart with it.

Myfanwy, may your life entirely be  
Beneath the midday sun's bright glow,  
And may a blushing rose of health  
Dance on your cheek a hundred years.  
Forget all your promises  
You made to someone, my pretty girl  
So give me your hand, my sweet Myfanwy,  
For no more but to say "Farewell".

Our Choir normally hums the melody and then sings the first and last verses

## **Are you interested in joining the choir?**

Would you like to be singing in a four-part harmony ensemble, everything from full throated anthems to gentle love songs? If so, then whether you've been involved in music all your life, sing in another choir, or have only sing in the shower, just 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 from 18 to 88 and of any nationality, age, colour or ethnicity.

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

So, 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 probably less than half of us having direct Welsh ancestry.

We have an excellent rehearsal facility at Maroondah Federation Estate, with a grand piano, comfortable seats, good acoustics and facilities for tea and coffee at the interval.

In addition, we have the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

**David Ashton-Smith OAM**, 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 new members, to ensure they are introduced to other choristers and are properly equipped with the relevant music scores. They oversee 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 mingle with other choristers. 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 your 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 assist you in learning and practicing 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 help 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 standing in the choir uniform and 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 at 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 and ability to produce and run high quality major events.

So, if you are an organization or an individual requiring anything from a short rousing opening to a conference or entertainment at a formal dinner(say), to a full two-hour concert, together with quality

guest artists and an orchestra or band (if required), please call **David Field (0418 175 584)** or any committee member to discuss how we can tailor a performance to meet your unique needs.

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

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.

## **Sponsorship opportunities**

The choir is a not-for-profit organisation and we rely solely on revenue from concerts, membership fees, sponsorship and donations for our continuing operation.

Our audiences are predominantly middle to older aged citizens so potential sponsors with products to market to this demographic may find this of interest.

Alternatively, if you have a product or service which you believe might appeal to any or every audience, then please contact us and we will be delighted to promote your company and product or service in our concerts, marketing material and promotions.

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.

## **Communicating with the choir**

Please 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](http://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 (Gwyn) about any of the content, feel free to contact 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. In particular, we would like your feedback on our recent YouTube video *Canwn – Let's Sing*.

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.

*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 always endeavour to seek permission to reproduce material from other sources and/or acknowledge the source as appropriate. The parts of the article relating to the origin of the song Myfanwy were taken from Wikipedia.*

## **CHOIR DIRECTORY**

President:	Kevin Seerup	<a href="mailto:president@melbournwelshchoir.com.au">president@melbournwelshchoir.com.au</a>
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Music Director: David Ashton-Smith OAM

Committee: Richard Bolt, Michael Brandon, Geoff Cooke, David Field, Robert Mits, Ieuan Thoma

