

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 76 January 2024



A fitting way to exit.



At the close of our wonderful Christmas concert on 9th December 2023 at North Ringwood Uniting Church, our compere Bill Spawton announced that this would be our Music Director, David Ashton-Smith's last concert, in Melbourne, with the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir.

After eight years in the role of Music Director, David will be handing the baton over in the new year to our new conductor Mitch Meyer.

During David's tenure we have had many wonderful concerts such as the one to celebrate the



Concert at Melbourne Town Hall to commemorate End of WWI

100th anniversary of the end of WWI at the Melbourne Town Hall with Marina Prior, Mike Brady and the wonderful Australian Youth Band and their MD Richard O'Toole. Others included concerts at venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre and smaller Performing Arts Centres such as MLC and Karalyka and the Geelong Basilica.

David's ability to communicate with experienced performers such as Marina Prior, Sylvie Paladino, Roy Best etc., as well as with young performers and experienced adjudicators via his involvement in Opera Scholars Australia meant that under his direction, the Choir always had the ability to access existing stars and emerging singers as guest artists.

A testament to his popularity was seen during COVID, when the choir was communicating via Zoom. David was able to introduce us to many of his friends and colleagues from all over the world to add a bit of spice to our weekly "rehearsal" on Zoom.

David led us on a memorable trip to Cornwall for the Festival of Male Voices followed by a trip into Wales and England with some very enjoyable sightseeing and concerts.

His rapport with guest artists and in particular our wonderful accompanist Simon Walters brought out the best in the choir at all our concerts.

He will be remembered within the choir for the way he improved our performance in terms of projection, diction, colour and tone and for his generosity of spirit, gentle humour and responsiveness to all members of the choir.

David has been involved in the appointment of his successor and has agreed to assist in any way during the handover and has indicated he will be happy to use his skills and contacts should the choir need them.

Farewell David, you have had a major influence on the choir for which we thank you. We wish you and Norma and your family well in your ventures outside the choir.



David and choir members in Truro, Cornwall

Choir's Christmas Concert - North Ringwood Uniting Church – Dec 9th

A capacity audience, wonderful acoustics and two great guest artists, what more could you ask? The audience at the Choir's afternoon Christmas Concert had a wonderful afternoon's



entertainment. Our guest artists, young soprano – **Lucy Schneider** (who was drafted into the concert with a week's notice when Carly Owen our Welsh artist withdrew through illness) gave a wonderful performance of *O Holy Night*, *Ave Maria* and the *Christmas Song* (the one that



starts with... "Chestnuts roasting by an open fire...") and our favourite tenor **Roy Best** brought his high notes to *Panis Angelicus* and *I'll walk with God*, as well as the Christmas traditional songs *The Holy City* and *I'll be home for Christmas*. Together, our guest artists delighted the audience with their rendition of *The Prayer*.

The Choir were in good voice both accompanying the artists and in their own right, with new and traditional carols plus a few choir staples.

At the end of the afternoon, the packed hall's applause showed their appreciation of a wonderful program

Choir Concert at Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre

For our last performance of the year, the Choir made its way, for the first time, to the Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre.

After a slow start, perhaps the aftermath of the tortuous traffic conditions en route to the venue, the choir warmed to the task and the audience similarly warmed to the smorgasbord of Welsh, Latin and New Zealand ballads.

This was followed by a piano medley arranged and played by our maestro of the keys - Simon Walters - *Santa Claus is coming to town*.



Onstage in Wonthaggi in our Prosser Tartan waistcoats

Later Raymond Crooke demonstrated his guitar playing and language skills with a French Carol *Flambeau Jeanette, Isabella*, followed by a traditional Australian one *Aussie Jingle Bells*. The first half ended with an audience participation carol - *Joy to the World*.

After the interval the choir demonstrated its versatility with *I believe*, followed by *American Trilogy*.

As tribute to the mining heritage for which Wonthaggi is famous, Ieuan Thomas recited a poem "*My father was a miner*" about his own father who was a miner in the Rhondda valley in Wales.

This was followed by *Y Darlun* a song about a picture of two hands clasped in prayer.

A set of carols - *the First Nowell, Peace Peace/ Silent Night* (with audience participation), *Mary's Boy Child* and *Christ was born on Christmas Day* completed the festive theme, and the choir ended the concert with *My wish for you* and the Welsh National Anthem "*Mae hen wlad fy nhadau*" to a standing ovation. We look forward to a repeat engagement next year.

Memories

A chance, recent conversation with one of our longest serving choristers - Alex Young brought back memories of our choir's trip to South Africa in 1997.

He had a personal video recording of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir performing the call and response song - *Senzenina* on stage in the circus tent auditorium on the last night of the International Eisteddfod in Roodepoort, Johannesburg, South Africa.

This can now be seen on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sya5u37a1xI>

What is significant about this video and the occasion, is the song we sang had been banned in South



Our Choir onstage in the Eisteddfod in Roodepoort

Africa under the Apartheid rules and this was possibly its first airing under the Mandela government and was being sung by a visiting Australian choir!

Those of you who are regular newsletter readers will recall an article - *Memories of a Multicolour Musical Miracle*, about a South African journalist Cliff Buchler and his relationship with a charismatic Englishman - Keith Fleming, whose concept it was to establish an international eisteddfod to maintain a cultural channel to the world outside South Africa during Apartheid, when all international sporting contact was banned.

When we performed in 1997, Nelson Mandela had just come to power, so the political necessity for the eisteddfod had diminished, but the process of integration of black and white communities was in its infancy and highly sensitive.

Our conductor at that time - Phillip Smith, had acquired and arranged *Senzenina* and another African song *Somagwaza* prior to our visit to South Africa and the choir had recorded them as part of a CD which we took with us to sell on tour.

Little did we know at the time the impact those songs would have on our South African audiences.

The response, as you can hear, to what was an impromptu item, after we had finished our scheduled eisteddfod program, was quite astonishing.

Music really does have a way of igniting passion in people.

We are recruiting new choristers, would you be interested in joining?

While the choir is maintaining its ability to regularly put between 45 and 55 choristers onstage, we are keen to increase our numbers and hence we are embarking on a recruitment drive.

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 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 any 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 possibly the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

Mitch Meyer, our new Music Director, has a background in music and management. He was previously music director of the Buderim Male Voice Choir in Queensland.

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. Note that we recommence rehearsals after the Christmas break on the first Wednesday in February.

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 vocal parts at home. This makes the process of getting up to speed with the Choir's repertoire very 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.

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 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 (with an electric piano). 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 e.g., savings and investment, insurance, real estate, retirement homes etc., 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.

Feed-back

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.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 (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 welcome your feedback on our recent YouTube videos.

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

Sunday morning argument

A husband and wife get up on Sunday morning.

After breakfast, the wife notices that her husband isn't dressed for church.

"Why aren't you dressed for church?"

"Simple. I'm not going."

"Why not?"

"Well, I'll give you three pretty good reasons why I'm not going.

First of all, the church is cold in the morning. It's just cold.

Second, no one there likes me. Everyone is always talking about me behind my back.

And third, most important of all, I just don't feel like going!"

"Well, I'll give you three pretty good reasons why you ARE going.

First of all, the church isn't cold in the morning; it's warm.

Second, I think, or I'm pretty sure, that there are some people there who do like you, and third you're the minister, so get dressed."

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