

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 77 February 2024



We welcome all our members and supporters to a new year of choir performances with our new Music Director - Mitch Meyer whose musical journey is described later in the newsletter.

Mitch has substantial experience specialising in both performance and in the many styles of choral singing. He is currently rehearsing us for one of our favourite annual concerts - the **Celebration of St David's Day** at one of our favourite venues the James Tatoulis Auditorium at Methodist Ladies College, Barkers Road, Kew at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024.

## What a surfeit of talent for our upcoming St David's Day Concert!

In addition to the Choir performing a traditional St David's Day repertoire of hymns and ballads in English and Welsh, two delightful ladies, both Blue Riband winners at the Welsh National Eisteddfod will be joining us (courtesy of the Melbourne Welsh Church) for our concert.

### *Heulen Cynfal*



*Heulen Cynfal*

**Heulen Cynfal**, a soprano from Llyn ac Eifionydd, is the most recent winner of the prestigious *David Ellis Blue Riband Award* at the 2023 Welsh National Eisteddfod.

She is a classically trained singer who attended the Royal Academy of Music, London where she gained her master's degree in Music.

In addition, she is a gifted harpist, a skill which **Heulen** often combines with her singing.

She has toured Europe singing in operas for 10 years.

As well as maintaining an active professional life performing opera, musical theatre and events in the UK and abroad, **Heulen** enjoys singing for weddings, personal and corporate events on a regular basis throughout the year.

**Heulen** comes from a farming family and is currently the regional manager for the RABI (Royal Agriculture Benevolent Institute) for North Wales. She said: "I've been away for ten years, so it's nice to return to agriculture and get back in touch with farming. Farming is still my goal; my partner and I hope to work on a farm in some capacity in the future."

Our other soloist - **Ceri Haf Roberts**, is a lawyer from Henllan, near Denbigh. Standing up to make her case should hold few fears for the 27-year-old mezzo-soprano who in 2022 wowed the judges at the National Eisteddfod in Tregaron to win the Blue Riband Award.

That success also won her a trip to Australia to sing at Melbourne's traditional St David's Day concerts. However, the COVID crisis delayed that trip until this year.

**Ceri**, from a Vale of Clwyd farming family, followed that up as a conductor by taking the choir she had founded, *Cor Dyffryn Clwyd*, to second place in the Mixed Youth Choral competition at the National Eisteddfod at Boduan, near Pwllheli.



*Ceri Haf Roberts*

She states: “I did consider classical singing as a career and did the round of the conservatories when I was 18 but I had my heart set on the law from quite an early age.

“They are similar because you have to stand up and make your case or perform in each and I wanted a career where I could do both and advocacy is what I enjoy the most.

“Performing and singing when I’m not in work is the way I get the best of both worlds.”

*Ceri* studied Law at Bangor University where she gained her Bachelor of Law degree and then completed her studies at the University of Law in Christleton, near Chester, before joining a North Wales law firm.

“Providing legal advice in the Welsh language in a comprehensive way is something I am passionate about and in family matters it is important to speak to clients in the language they are most comfortable in.”

For tickets to this wonderful concert visit the choir’s website [www.melbournwelshchoir.com](http://www.melbournwelshchoir.com)

## **Our new Music Director - MITCH MEYER’s musical journey**

My personal and musical journey has been one of constant change, serendipity and reinvention.



I was born in New York City but emigrated to Australia when I was in high school. At the time, New York and most major American cities were experiencing very difficult social and economic issues and my parents decided to leave that all behind.

How Australia got on the radar, however, is shrouded in mystery but the fact that the government actually assisted in paying for the passage for us may have sealed the deal.

I gained entry to Melbourne High School (MHS) through a very fortuitous back door.

It was at MHS that I met many American teachers who had been brought out by the Education Department in order to fill shortages in subjects like Science, Physical Education and Music.

One such teacher was Rodney Rothlisberger who remains, to this day, an inspiration to not only me but to many singers who came into contact with him.

MHS had an annual stage production and one of my friends wanted to audition for it. He asked me along to lend some moral support. Mr. Rothlisberger was conducting the audition and,

when we were all assembled in the music room, I was told to stand up and sing the set song from our recent house choral competition. Now, I wasn’t there to audition but all the students knew that Rod could explode at the slightest provocation, so I stood up, sang the song, and sat back down, after which all the attendees repeated the process. The next day my friend went to check on whether he’d made the chorus, which he had. He also advised me that I, too, had made the cut. Of course, the same rationale applied, and I wasn’t about to buck our music teacher’s decision and so it was that I found my way into my first singing role in the chorus of Gilbert & Sullivan’s *‘Ruddigore’*.

Clearly, I enjoyed it, sang in the school choir and attended a music camp from which the Melbourne Youth Choir was formed. Here I became the Tenor section leader which started my interest in conducting. I became our house conductor during the previously mentioned MHS choral competition. This entailed conducting 300 belligerent and non-conforming comrades in two songs, a smaller house choir and an instrumental ensemble. This was made worse by the selection of the set song which all

houses had to sing; *'They Call the Wind Maria'*. I can still remember the first time the lyrics were sung: *'The rain is Tess, the fire is Joe, and the call the wind Mitch Meyer.'*

Still, I became enthusiastic about conducting but enjoyed actual choral singing more.

The *Melbourne Youth Choir* were invited to sing at the renowned *Three Choirs Festival* in England and a tour was undertaken. The itinerary included performances in Tokyo, England, Cardiff and France but it was quite rigorous.

25 concerts in 28 days was a ridiculous workload but having 75 hyped up adolescents of varying ages from 14 to 21 certainly made it more possible. Our time in Wales was incredibly short. I remember a four-hour bus ride from London, a snowball fight at Cardiff Castle and two concerts, one at a mayoral reception in the Town Hall and then four hours back to London all on one day!

My own personal all-time highlight was the opportunity to sing Maurice Durufle's sublime *'Requiem'* as the baritone soloist, in the presence of the composer, at the Australian embassy in Paris. I had been gifted this part after it was offered to another singer who decided he thought it was too high for him. Another case of fortunate chance.

After the tour, I returned to New York to go to university but decided that it was too expensive and difficult and higher education was still free here in Australia, so I returned to attend the Conservatorium at the University of Melbourne. I also had the opportunity to sing with a couple of choirs while I was there.

I studied for my B. Mus. at the Conservatorium of Melbourne University majoring in Vocal Studies. My vocal teachers included Bettine McCaughan as well as Ruth Guthrie at the Melba Conservatorium of Music.

During this time, I worked with notable Melbourne based choirs such as *Polyphony*, *Musica Antiqua*, *Melbourne Chorale* and was engaged widely as a soloist.

My stage work included roles with *Opera Melbourne* and the *Whitehorse Theatre Company* as well as the acclaimed comedy vocal á capella comedy group *The Phones* that featured regularly on shows such as *Hey, Hey It's Saturday*.

I was also Assistant Music Director with the *Faye Dumont Singers* that later became the *Melbourne Chamber Singers*.

In 1985 I decided to concentrate on a business career and music making became less prominent though I continued to perform as a soloist and in choirs regularly.

In 1988 I returned to New York and worked in the textile industry.

I had joined a pick-up choir at the time but had to stop singing altogether due to my work and study commitments. It wasn't until 2014 that I returned to singing when I joined the *Sunshine Coast Choral Society* and *USC Singers*. I also joined *Noosa Chorale* and *Cantate Singers* where I returned to solo work reprising my work on the Durufle *'Requiem'*.

Around this time, I saw a post that U3A was going to run a course singing Rachmaninov's *'All Night Vigil'*. I contacted the coordinator who was the Russian tutor, who mentioned that he had not been able to secure someone to take the class. I mentioned that I had experience and would help him get started and once he got a REAL conductor then that person could take over. Needless to say, he didn't find anyone! Once that was completed, the class wanted to continue so, I then developed a class on Choral Music Singing.

I was then asked if I would consider conducting the *Buderim Male Choir*. I added choirs at *Caboolture* and a staff and volunteer choir at *Buderim Private Hospital*. I also prepared a portion of the 150 strong choir that performed *'Carmina Burana'* at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary concert for the naming of the Sunshine Coast at Sunshine Coast Stadium.

Over the years I've also held vocal workshops with individual singers, choirs and even rock bands. I was also a student of Electronic Music with Felix Werder before the words music and digital came into contact!

My wife Jo and I have now returned to Melbourne and my role with the Melbourne Welsh is my first appointment since returning.

# The Melbourne Welsh Church's Gymanfa Ganu

The Melbourne Welsh Church will again be celebrating St David's day with their traditional Gymanfa Ganu and as usual, there will be representation from all the Welsh Choirs in Victoria, including ours (plus Excelsis) in addition to a number of esteemed guest artists from Wales.

This year the event is being held at St Paul's Cathedral, Swanston Street, Melbourne at a later time than in the past i.e., 3:00 p.m.

For a great afternoon of community singing Welsh style don't miss it, and it's free!



**2024**

MELBOURNE WELSH CHURCH

**ST. DAVID'S DAY  
GYMANFA GANU**  
( Songs of Praise Service )

**3:00PM**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 2**

**ST. PAUL'S  
CATHEDRAL**  
Cnr Swanston & Flinders Streets

**Featuring:**  
**Mr. Jeffrey Howard**, renowned choral conductor from Cardiff, Wales

**Ms Ceri Haf Roberts & Ms Heulen Cynfal**

Winners of the 2022 and 2023 prestigious Blue Ribbon at the National Eisteddfod of Wales

The combined voices of **6 local choirs:**

- Australian Welsh Male Choir
- Excelsis
- Geelong Welsh Ladies Choir
- Melbourne Welsh Male Choir
- Mornington Peninsula Welsh Ladies Choir
- Victorian Welsh Male Choir

***One of the Choir's and our audiences' favourite songs is "Shelter", written by a Scottish immigrant, now based in Adelaide, which uniquely captures the Australia psyche.***

The author, **Eric Bogle** (born 23 Sept 1944) is a Scottish born, Australian, folk singer/songwriter. Raised in Scotland, he emigrated to Australia at the age of 25. He now resides near Adelaide, South Australia.

Born in Peebles, Scotland, his father was a railway signalman who played the bagpipes.

Eric started writing poetry when he was eight years old. After attending school until he was sixteen, he worked in various trades as a labourer, clerk and barman. Bogle taught himself to play guitar and joined a skiffle and rock band. He was the leader of *Eric and the Informers* in Scotland. His early influences were Lonnie Donegan, Elvis Presley and Ewan MacColl. He turned to folk music prior to emigrating to Australia and his first written songs concerned his parents.

One of these, "*Leaving Nancy*", speaks of the day he left home for Australia in 1969, being the last time, he saw his mother Nancy. It was often covered, most notably by *The Dubliners* and *The Fureys*.

Eric emigrated to Australia and initially lived in Canberra, where he worked as an accountant. While living in Canberra he joined the local folk music scene and performed occasionally. He later moved to Queensland before settling in Adelaide.

Bogle's songs cover a variety of topics and have been performed by many artists.

Two of his best known songs are "*No Man's Land*" (or "*The Green Fields of France*") and "*And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*", with the latter named one of the APRA Top 30 Australian songs in 2001, as part of the celebrations for the Australasian Performing Right Association's 75th anniversary.



*Folk Singer /Songwriter – Eric Bogle*

Several of his most famous songs tell of the futility of war.

Prominent among these is "*And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda*", written in 1971, covered later by Joan Baez. The lyrics recount the experiences of a member of the ANZACs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps ) in the Battle of Gallipoli. It has also been interpreted as a reaction to the Vietnam War.

Another of his best-known songs, "*No Man's Land*", also has a World War1 theme.

This song is commonly known as "*The Green Fields of France*", a title it was first given by *The Fureys* and which has subsequently been used in many further cover versions. The song refers to the traditional Scottish lament "*Flowers of the Forest*" being played over the grave of a WW1 soldier. Bogle deliberately gave the dead soldier an Irish name ("Willie McBride") as a counter to the anti-Irish sentiment prevalent in Britain during the 1970s.

This song was performed by Mike Brady and the Melbourne Welsh in the Choir's concert on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 2018 at Melbourne Town Hall to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War 1.

Eric Bogle has been a prominent artist at the National Folk Festival in Canberra since Easter 2011, and performs regularly at the Port Fairy Folk Festival, Victoria, held every March.

The lyrics of ***Shelter*** are given below:

*I am drowning in the sunshine  
As it pours down from the skies  
There is something stirring in my heart  
Bright colours fill my eyes  
As from here to the far horizon  
Your beauty does unfold  
And oh you look so lovely  
Dressed in green and gold*

*And I can almost touch the ocean  
Shimmering in the distant haze  
As I stand here on this mountain  
On this loveliest day of days  
'Round half the world I've drifted  
Left no wild oats unsown  
But now my view has shifted  
And I think I've just come home*

*To the homeless and the hungry  
May you always open doors  
May the restless and the weary  
Find safe harbour on your shores  
May you always be our Dreamtime place  
Our spirit's glad release  
May you always be our shelter  
May we always live in peace*

As a choir, we sing all three verses, with the third verse being sung á capella.  
(In Eric Bogle's recordings he repeats the first verse to end the song)

## Why does Wales use the Red Dragon as its emblem?

Although an integral part of the United Kingdom, Wales is not represented on the national flag, or Union Flag, more popularly known as the *Union Jack*.

The proud and ancient battle standard of the Welsh is The Red Dragon (*Y Ddraig Goch*) and consists of a red dragon, passant (standing with one foot raised), on a green and white background.

As with any ancient symbol, the appearance of the dragon has been adapted and changed over the years, and hence several different variations exist.



The current flag was officially adopted in 1959 and is based on an old royal badge used by British kings and queens since Tudor times.

The red dragon itself has been associated with Wales for centuries, and as such, the flag is claimed to be the oldest national flag still in use.

But why a dragon? The answer to that particular question is lost in history and myth.

### Roman Cavalry Draco

One legend recalls Romano-British soldiers carrying the red dragon (Draco) to Rome on their banners in the fourth century, but it could be even older than that.

It is considered that the Welsh kings of Aberffraw first adopted the dragon in the early fifth century in order to symbolise their power and authority after the Romans withdrew from Britain.

Later, around the seventh century, it became known as the Red Dragon of Cadwaladr, king of Gwynedd from 655 to 682.

Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, written between 1120 and 1129, links the dragon with the Arthurian legends, including Uther Pendragon the father of Arthur whose name translates as Dragon Head. Geoffrey's account also tells of the prophecy of Myrddin (or Merlin) of a long fight between a red dragon and a white dragon, symbolising the historical struggle between the Welsh (red dragon) and the English (white dragon).

The oldest recorded use of the dragon to symbolise Wales, however, is from the *Historia Brittonum*, written by the historian Nennius around 820.

The red dragon was even said to have been used as the British standard at the Battle of Crecy in 1346, when the Welsh archers, dressed in their beloved green and white, played such a crucial role in defeating the French.

And although Owain Glyndwr raised the dragon standard in 1400 as a symbol of revolt against the English Crown, the dragon was brought to England by the House of Tudor, the Welsh dynasty that held the English throne from 1485 to 1603. It signified their direct descent from one of the noble families of Wales.



*The coat of arms of Henry VII with the Welsh Dragon supporting the royal arms of England*



The green and white stripes of the flag were additions of Henry VII, the first Tudor king, representing the colours of his standard.

During Henry VIII's reign the red dragon on a green and white background became a favourite emblem on Royal Navy ships.

As the national flag of Wales, the red dragon appears to have regained popularity in the early part of the twentieth century, when it was used for the 1911 Caernarfon Investiture of Edward, Prince of Wales.

It wasn't until 1959 however, that it became officially recognised as the national flag of the country.

The Red Dragon now flies proudly over public and private buildings throughout Wales.

Thousands still cross the border into England every other year, when the two nations meet for their 'historic struggle' on the rugby battlefield known as Twickenham. Welsh men, women and children carrying the dragon as a symbol of pride in their history and culture.

## **Want to be part of the start of a new era?**

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

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, possibly sing in another choir, or only sing in the shower, then 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 of any nationality, age, colour or ethnicity.

Our current and past members include people with Scots, English, Irish, New Zealand, Dutch, French, German, Egyptian, Latvian, South African, Tongan, Samoan, American 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 the best music director and accompanist combination in Melbourne.

*Mitch Meyer*, our new Music Director, has a background in music and management. An accomplished soloist as well as respected conductor of a number of choirs, he was most recently the 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.

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 have already recommenced our rehearsals after our Christmas/New Year break.

Once you decide to join, we will provide you with access to our web-based facilities, which will assist with 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 beautiful Welsh songs in our repertoire.

Following a few rehearsals and a formal audition, you could be standing in a 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 a portable 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 this audience, then please contact us and we will be delighted to promote your company, product or service through our concerts and marketing materials.

If you would simply like to support the choir via a donation, 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**

We are anxious to increase our patronage and would be happy let you copy or circulate this newsletter to any of your friends and relatives. 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](http://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 friends and 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.

## **Laughter is the best medicine**

### **Who do you think you are?**

At a trial in a small town in Nebraska....the prosecutor called his first witness, an elderly grandmother, to the stand.

He walked up to her and said, "Mrs. Williams, do you know who I am?"

The woman replied: "Of course I know who you are, Mr. Rawley.

I have known you since you were a little boy, and frankly, you are a disappointment. You lie, cheat on your wife, manipulate people and talk behind their backs. You think you're somebody, but if you had any sense, you'd realize you're nothing more than a mediocre pencil pusher. I know exactly who you are."

The prosecutor's jaw dropped to the floor. Shocked, he pointed across the room to divert attention and asked: "Mrs. Williams...do you know who the defence attorney is?"

The woman replied: "Of course I do.

I have known Mr. Carbuncle since he was a child. He is a lazy bigot with a drinking problem. He cannot maintain a normal relationship with anyone and is one of the worst lawyers in the county. On top of that, he has cheated on his wife with three different women, including your wife. Yeah, I know exactly who he is."

The defence attorney looked like he was going to have a stroke.

The judge ordered the prosecutor and defence attorney to approach the bench and whispered to them in a low but agitated voice,

“If one of you brats asks her if she knows who I am, I’ll put you both behind bars for life!

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