

Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 80 May 2024



Forty years of four-part choral harmony

The choir celebrated its 40th birthday this April and what an amazing four decades it has been.

Appearance

From dinner jackets to maroon blazers to grey suits to the current dark suits and Welsh (Prosser) tartan waistcoats and bow ties, the choir's physical appearance has been a continually evolving process.



Dinner jackets at the 1988 Centenary concert at Hamer Hall | Tartan waistcoats for the 2024 St David's Day concert at MLC

Music

In terms of music, while we have a current repertoire of around 70 songs, we have more than 250 arrangements of songs in our music library ranging from traditional and modern Welsh ballads to operatic choruses, songs from music theatre, African chants, ballads and pop songs, most of which have been performed at some time by the choir.

Collaboration

We've performed with different music ensembles including the Australian Pops and Cammerata orchestras, the AYB (Australian Youth Band) and bands such as the Legends of Brass, RAAF band, Salvation Army, Traralgon and Kew brass bands.

Guest Artists

The choir has been privileged to work with a many talented international artists including the likes of *Judith Durham, Bryn Terfel, Aled Jones* and *Rhys Meirion* as well as the cream of local talent including *Teddy Tahu Rhodes, Marina Prior, Sylvie Paladino, Roy Best* and *Mike Brady*.

Our relationship with the Welsh Church in Melbourne has given us access to the Blue Riband winners from the Welsh National Eisteddfod including this year's guests *Ceri Haf Roberts* and *Heulen Cynfal*. The *Singer of the Year* competition, which the choir initiated, has provided us with the opportunity to expose many of these talented young singers to our audiences as our guest artists and we have been delighted to see how many of them have subsequently made their way onto the world stage.

Conductors

Mitch Meyer our current music director is the eighth to fill the role. In addition, over the years we have had the pleasure of being rehearsed and conducted by many of the conductors from visiting Welsh choirs, including our patron - Alwyn Humphreys, many of whose arrangements we now use.

Venues

Flexibility is what the choir has always offered to our clients.

From the banks of a lake for a chilly dawn service in Ballarat to an early morning call, to welcome delegates to an international law conference at Parliament House in Melbourne, we have acceded to and exceeded most of our clients' requirements.

From a tent in Frankston (to celebrate the rugby world cup's visit) to old churches and famous buildings (including the Melbourne Goal) throughout Victoria to record in different acoustic environments the choir has always been willing to perform.

The choir has graced such famous stages as Sydney Opera House, Hamer Hall, Melbourne Town Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre, the Great Hall at the NGV and the Theatre Royal Hobart as well as many community and school halls throughout Victoria.

Overseas tours

The planning required for international tours is substantial and the choir has been fortunate in having the skills and capacity to travel overseas on seven occasions during its history.

While the visits to UK for combined concerts at Cardiff Arms Park (as it then was), Royal Albert Hall and Cornwall were predictable for an expatriate choir like ours, those to South Africa, Canada and Austria were challenging and rewarding. As ambassadors for Australia, we made a positive contribution in those countries and in many cases formed life-long friendships. Such is the power of music.

The future

The choir is well equipped to perform in the coming years. As always, we are on the lookout for new members and new clients, so please contact us if you want to join or want us to perform in concert. We guarantee you won't be disappointed!

Upcoming Events

Robert Burns Celtic Festival

Sunday 23rd June 2024 2:30 p.m.

Camperdown Theatre Royal,

2 Bath Street, Camperdown, Victoria 3260



the exterior of Theatre Royal, Camperdown



the comfortable interior of the theatre

The organisers of the above festival have invited us to perform a full concert for this festival.

As a result, we have added some new Scottish, Irish and Cornish songs to our repertoire, as mentioned in our last newsletter, as well as the well-loved Welsh hymn *Bryn Calfaria*, whose background is described in this newsletter (see below).

Tickets will be available soon on www.trybooking.com/events/landing/1056482.

Mooroolbark Concert

Saturday 27th July 2024 2:30 p.m.

Mooroolbark Community Centre

125 Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark, 3138

One of the choir's favourite venues - this intimate theatre, with its limited seating, fills quickly so book early to avoid disappointment. For tickets, which will be available shortly, book via:

www.trybooking.com/eventlist/melbournewelsh

Choir performance at the MCG

Wednesday 10th July 2024

We are pleased to be providing the entertainment for this welcoming dinner for the Welsh Rugby team who will be here for a two match test series against Australia.

The Rugby Club of Victoria is proud to present



**WALLABIES
V
WALES**

TEST MATCH PREVIEW DINNER
WITH SPECIAL GUESTS WARREN GATLAND & JOE SCHMIDT

WEDNESDAY 10TH JULY
At the iconic MCG - Olympic Room

3 Course Dinner & 4 Hour Drinks Package from 6.30-10.30pm
Early Bird Pricing: \$185 (RCV Members) | \$195 (Non-Members)



*With Special appearance
from the Melbourne Welsh
Male Choir*

Scan this QR code for tickets

Event partnership opportunities available, please contact president@rugbyclubvic.com

Background to our newest Welsh song – *Laudamus or Bryn Calfaria*

Bryn Calfaria (“Calvary Hill”) is a Welsh hymn tune written in 8,7,8,7,4,4,4,7,7 meter. The melody by William Owen is used as a setting for several hymns, most notably the English hymn “*Lord, Enthroned in Heavenly Splendour*” by George Hugh Bourne and the Welsh hymn “*Laudamus*”.

William Owen, Prysgol (1813-1893) was a composer of anthems and hymn tunes, including the hymn-tune ‘*Bryn Calfaria*’. He was born in Bangor, Caernarfonshire, and began writing music at the age of eighteen. He later moved to Prysgol, Llanrug, Caernarfonshire.

He composed several temperance pieces, and his anthem ‘*Ffynnon Ddisglair*’ and hymn-tunes ‘*Alma*’ and ‘*Deemster*’ were among his most popular works.

The tune for *Bryn Calfaria* is reputed to have been originally written by Owen on a piece of slate whilst on his way to work at the Dorothea quarry in Gwynedd, North Wales.

[The quarry, now flooded, sits at the bottom of the wide Nantlle valley and consists of six pits, the deepest dropping 106m from the surface. The slate veins here run vertically, allowing unusually deep vertical pits to be dug. Because the pits fell below the water table they needed to be constantly pumped to stay dry. A Cornish beam engine was installed in 1904 to pump the pits; it stayed in use until 1951 when it was replaced with electric pumps This was the last new Cornish engine to be built. It remains in situ in its Grade I listed engine house].

The hymn originally had four verses, however the version which the choir sings is the most common has only three.

Bryn Calfaria

Gwaed y Groes sy'n codi i fyny, 'Reiddil yn goncwerwr mawr:	Calvary's blood the weak exalteth More than conquerors to be,
Gwaed dy Groes sydd yn darostwng, Cewri cedyrn fyrdd i lawr.	Calvar'y blood the strong abaseth Myriad hosts to bow to Thee;
Gad im deimlo, Gad im deilo, Gad im deimlo : Awel O Galfaria fryn. :	O Revive me O Revive me O Revive me : With a breeze from Calvary. :

Cymer, Iesu, fi fel' rydwylf, Fyth ni allaf fod yn well;	Take me as I am, O Saviour Better I can never be
Dallu di am gwna yn agos, Fewyllys i yw mynd ymhell	Thou alone canst bring me nearer Self but draws me far from thee
Yn, dy glwyfau, yn dy glwyfau, : Bydda'i'n unig fyth yn iach. :	I can never, I can never, I can never : But within Thy wounds be saved. :

Ymddiriedaf yn dy allu, Mawr yw'r gwaith a wnest erioed;	I will thrust Thy might unmeasured Great the work that marks Thy way;
Ti gest angeu, Ti gest uffern, Ti gest Satan dan dy droed.	Thou hast death, and Thou hast Satan, Thou hast hell beneath Thy sway;
Pen Calfar-ia, Pen Calfar-ia, Pen Calfaria, : Nac aed hwnw byth om cof! :	Hill of Calv'ry! Hill of Calv'ry! Hill of Calv'ry! : I shall praise for evermore. :

Choral Singing as a health therapy.

A decade ago, any mention of a choir would probably have brought Sunday morning hymns to mind, but there's been a revolution in attitudes towards joining local choirs.

Adding well-known, mainstream music to the repertoire, the screen appeal of television choirmasters, and the increased visibility of choirs on TV talent programs, have attracted a new crowd to the idea of the communal singalong. (As an example, it is estimated that an incredible 2.8 million people in Britain are now members of a choir).

Which is good news - for singing in a choir is beneficial in several different ways.

Membership of a social group has been imperative for survival throughout human evolution and continues to exert a substantial influence on individual health and well-being today

Recently published research that reveals that group singing not only helps forge social bonds, it also does so particularly quickly, acting as an excellent icebreaker.

It has also shown that choral singing is effective for bonding large groups, making it an ideal behaviour to improve our broader social networks. This is particularly valuable in today's often alienating world, where many of our social interactions are conducted remotely via Facebook and Twitter (or X as it now is).

But why are so many people flocking to choirs? There's almost certainly an X Factor effect at play, with people, inspired by TV talent shows, becoming increasingly willing to stand up and perform.

It also has long been believed that music-making can create a strong sense of well-being, but since it's very hard to find a suitable "control" activity, this area is particularly hard to research scientifically.

Although this remains a problem, a number of recent developments have helped us to understand how group singing can improve physical and mental health, as well as promote social bonding.

Body and mind

The physiological benefits of singing, and music more generally, have long been explored.

Music-making exercises the brain as well as the body, but singing is particularly beneficial for improving breathing, posture and muscle tension.

Listening to and participating in music has been shown to be effective in pain relief, too, probably due to the release of neurochemicals such as β -endorphin (a natural painkiller responsible for the "high" experienced after intense exercise).

There's also some evidence to suggest that music can play a role in sustaining a healthy immune system, by reducing the stress hormone cortisol and boosting the Immunoglobulin A antibody.

Music has been used in different cultures throughout history in many healing rituals and is already used as a therapy in our own culture (for the relief of mental illness, breathing conditions and language impairment, for example).

Everyone can sing - however much we might protest - meaning it is one of the most accessible forms of music making, too.

Song is a powerful therapy indeed. Regular choir members report that learning new songs is cognitively stimulating and helps their memory, and it has been shown that singing can help those suffering from dementia, too. The satisfaction of performing together, even without an audience, is likely to be associated with activation of the brain's reward system, including the dopamine pathway, which keeps people coming back for more.

The psychology of singing

Singing has also been shown to improve our sense of happiness and wellbeing. Research has found, for example, that people feel more positive after actively singing than they do after passively listening to music or after chatting about positive life events.

Improved mood probably in part comes directly from the release of positive neurochemicals such as β -endorphin, dopamine and serotonin. It is also likely to be influenced by changes in our sense of social closeness with others.

Increasing evidence suggests that our social connections can play a vital role in maintaining our health - a good social network, for example, can have more health benefits than giving up smoking.

So, it's possible that singing can improve health by expanding our social group.

Indeed, the rapid social bonding that choirs encourage could therefore be even more beneficial.

Even if we don't necessarily talk to everyone in our choir, we might experience a general feeling of being connected with the group, leading to our sense of increased community and belonging.

Our choral ancestors

Being part of a cohesive group has been essential for survival throughout our evolutionary history, but being part of a group also raises challenges, such as conflict over resources and mates. In order to survive, our ancestors needed ways to keep the group together through these conflicts.

Music is found in all human cultures around the world. The oldest bone flute is 40,000 years old, so music has been around at least this long. This, and the fact that music often occurs in social settings, from religious rituals to football games, suggests that music might be an evolved behaviour for creating community cohesion.

In Western societies, music-making is often thought to be the domain of a talented few, but very few people actually have no musical ability. The growth of community choirs open to anyone demonstrates these inherent skills and suggests that we are returning to the origins of communal musical behaviour. In light of mounting concerns about loneliness and isolation and the increasingly urgent search for solutions, it is fascinating that people seem to be returning to an interest in connecting with one another through singing. The evidence indicates that our singing ancestors might have held a key to better social well-being.

Singing provides an inclusive and cost-effective means of combating the disintegration of communities that is becoming endemic in many societies today. So, whether you're more into chamber music, the Beatles or Frozen singalongs, finding the right choir could prove the perfect way to improve your health, well-being, and social life.

Want to enjoy the benefits of being in a choir

To achieve the benefits outlined above why don't you join the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir. Whether you've been involved in music all your life, possibly 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 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 possibly 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 a respected conductor of several choirs, he was most recently the music director of the Buderim Male 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, the new member 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 light 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 member facilities, which will enable you to learn and practice 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 wearing 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), then 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, where required).

We have an eclectic repertoire, a wonderful sound and provide great 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-aged citizens. Hence potential sponsors with products to market to this demographic e.g., those providing services in retail, hospitality, investment, insurance, real estate, retirement homes etc., might find supporting the choir worthwhile.

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, product or service through our concerts and marketing materials.

If you would 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.

Newsletter Feedback

Your feedback is important to us, so please let us know what you think about the choir, our newsletters, and our recent performances, whether live or on video.

In particular, we would welcome your feedback on our recent YouTube videos.

We are seeking to increase our patronage and we are happy for 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, so they get their copy by email from the choir, 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 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

Laughter is the best medicine

Teacher and little Johnny's conversation

Teacher: "Johnny, why are you down today?"

Johnny: "Because my mom is at the hospital and my dad is at the police station."

Teacher: "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, dear. Do you want to go home?"

Johnny: "Yes, please."

After Johnny has left the classroom, the teacher asks the other classmates,

"Why is Johnny's father at the police station and the mother at the hospital?"

Classmate: "Because his father is a policeman and his mom's a nurse."

Divine Observance

The nun ran out of gasoline.

As luck would have it, there was a gas station just one block away.

She walked to the station to borrow a can with enough gas to start the car and drive to the station for a fill up.

The attendant regretfully told her that the only gas can he possessed had just been loaned out but, if she would care to wait, he was sure it would be back shortly.

Since the nun was on her way to see a patient, she decided not to wait and walked back to her car.

After looking through her car for something to carry to the station to fill with gas, she spotted a bedpan she was taking to the patient.

Always resourceful, she carried it to the station, filled it with gasoline, and carried it back to her car.

As she was pouring the gas into the tank of her car, two men watched her from across the street.

One of them turned to the other and said, "I know that the Lord turned water into wine, but if that car starts, I'm going to church every Sunday for the rest of my life!"

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. Some parts of the articles on the benefits of Choral singing came from The Conversation which publishes elements of research at Oxford university. Parts of the article on the hymn Bryn Calfaria came from Wikipedia.

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