



The Melbourne Welsh Male Choir



More than two decades of glorious harmonies

The Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir was formed in **1984** and since then it has grown from a small group of enthusiastic singers into one of Australia's most acclaimed male choirs with an on-stage strength of more than 60 choristers.

Operating under the musical direction of **Bill Mead**, a former tenor with the Welsh National Opera, the Choir flourished. On his retirement the Choir elected to secure the services of a professional conductor and accompanist to lead the Choir into the next decade - a bold choice and commitment for an amateur group.

From early 1995 until September 2000 **Phillip Smith** provided the musical direction for the Choir. In that time he introduced a new onstage uniform, broadened the repertoire and raised the musical capability and performance quality of the Choir. For this he received wide praise from audiences and peers alike.

Douglas Heywood OAM assumed the mantle of Music Director at the end of 2000 and, based on the feedback from audiences at our concerts, he enhanced the musical development of the choir and improved its tone and balance. One of the best known and respected Music Directors in Melbourne, Doug was probably better known for his annual role as Choir Master for the broadcast by Channel 9 of the "Carols by Candlelight" concert at the Myer Music Bowl. Surprisingly, in a long and distinguished career conducting many choirs and orchestras, this was the first male voice choir he had conducted.

The Choir benefited greatly from the experience, which Doug brought to the role and the strong relationships he had within the music community within Australia.

Doug resigned at the end of 2006 and **Grazina Pranauskas** took over the conductor's role briefly, early in 2007 and conducted the choir for a number of concerts but resigned for personal reasons after only 4 months.

Our current Music Director **Lucas de Jong** was appointed, after an exhaustive search and audition process, in September 2007. A highly accomplished professional musician with more than 20 years Australian and international experience as a principal operatic baritone and classical voice teacher, Lucas brings a new perspective to the Music Director's role.

During his distinguished career, he has performed with some of the world's leading opera companies, including Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, English National Opera and Welsh National Opera. He has also performed in Australia with Opera Australia, Victoria State Opera, Opera Queensland and West Australian Opera.

He is currently a classical voice teacher and conductor for the School of Music at Monash University and privately. Current students have achieved roles in Opera Australia and Opera Melbourne productions.

".... The choir is truly splendid. They sing as one and their sound is as smooth as the green valleys of Wales. A great choir that has perfected the Welsh repertoire while not shy to explore other musical forms."

Catherine Lambert (Melbourne Herald Sun. 21/12/2003)

Whilst the Choir receives strong audience support from the Welsh community and maintains a comprehensive Welsh repertoire, it now attracts a widely diversified audience because of the very breadth and variety of its repertoire.

The Choir strives to achieve the highest possible musical standard and to this end has invited well-known Australian and overseas musical educators to conduct choir

improvement workshops. We have been warmly encouraged in this by the great choirs of Wales and their musical staff. The Choir has brought to Australia conductors of the calibre of **Alwyn Humphreys MBE**, (Retired Musical Director of the world famous **Morrison Orpheus Choir**); Glynne Jones, (the late Musical Director of the Pendyrus Choir); and Colin Jones, (Musical Director of the Colin Jones Singers and formerly founder of the Rhos Male Choir). These musicians have directed the Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir both in concert and workshop, to impart their experience in Welsh Choral styles and choral singing.

Alwyn Humphreys, probably the best known of this group, has become a very close and supportive friend and in 2003 graciously accepted the Choir's invitation to become patron of the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir.

"As you listen to the Melbourne Welsh, you are immediately transported to a world of tradition and excellence. I can listen to them time and time again and always hear something new in the music.

A most professional organisation."

Wendy Page - Mid Eastern Palliative Care Association

The Choir has supported the cause of Palliative Care for many years. Over a 12 year period the Choir worked closely with Eastern Palliative Care to produce special Christmas Concerts, as a fund raising event. These concerts are very much audience participation occasions and are greatly enjoyed by both audience and the choristers. Over \$200,000 has been raised from the proceeds for this worthy cause.

The " Singer of The Year " Competition (*link*)

In 1993 the Choir initiated this annual competition as a performance contest for singers up to 35 years of age. Its objective is to encourage and enhance the performance capability of young singers by providing them with the opportunity to perform and compete in front of a large audience at the Choir's

Annual Concert held in the Robert Blackwood Hall each September. The finalists share \$6000 in prize money provided jointly by the choir and our sponsors. In addition they have the opportunity to appear in the Choir's major concerts and recordings as solo artists.

On average, 25-35 young singers audition for this event. In the most recent competition in September 2008, the three finalists selected to perform were **Jacqueline Porter, Liu Jingping** and **Angela Hogan**, with Jacqueline winning on the night.

Australian Concert Tours

The Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir has performed in many of the major venues in Australia including the **Melbourne Concert Hall** and **Regent Theatre**, **The Sydney Opera House**, the **Theatre Royal** and the **Federation Concert Hall** in Hobart, the **Performing Arts Centre Geelong**, the **Robert Blackwood Hall**, the **National Tennis Centre**, and **Government House**.

Overseas Tours

The Choir has accepted invitations to perform overseas on five occasions. In 1992 the Choir travelled to *Wales* to participate (as a founder member) in the first performance of the *World Choir* at the **Cardiff Arms Park**. This event featured **Tom Jones & Dame Gwyneth Jones**.

In 1994 the Choir flew to **Atlanta Georgia, USA** to participate in the last of the **World Choir** concerts.

In 1997 the Choir was invited to compete and perform in the **South African International Eisteddfod** at **Roodepoort, Johannesburg**. The Choir also sang in

Durban, Cape Town and several regions of **Johannesburg**, and received standing ovations for its singing, empathy with the audiences, and unique repertoire which included African songs and chants which the Choir had learned specifically for the trip.

On this tour the Choir sang in concert with the **Durban Male Choir**, **The South African Welsh Male Choir** and the **Cwmbach** Choir from Wales. The Choir was honoured to be the first international white choir to perform with the renowned black South African choir - **Cenestra Male Choir**, and has formed a lasting bond with this talented group.

Venues as diverse as a tent in Johannesburg, a boarding school hall in Durban, a Zulu kraal in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, and the **Baxter Theatre** in Cape Town - all resounded to the Choir's harmonies.

In 2002 the Choir travelled to compete at the ***Kathaumixw International Music Festival in Powell River***, 160 kilometres north of Vancouver, in British Columbia, Canada.

The week-long festival involving singers from all around the world culminated with a massed choir of 1200 voices, performing with orchestra to a large and appreciative audience in the town's indoor stadium in Powell River. The Choir made a lot of **friends** both personally and chorally during the festival, and made even more on the tour of the lower Rockies region, which took place the following week. This tour took us from the ski resort of Whistler to the lakes at Vernon and Salmon Arm, with the Choir singing to packed audiences and standing ovations wherever it performed.

The Choir's most recent overseas tour



The Choir accepted an invitation from the **London Welsh Male Voice Choir** to be part of their prestigious **21st Festival of Male Choirs (1000 voices)** concert at the **Royal Albert Hall**, London on 18th October 2008. It was a unique experience to be singing with 14 other choirs, including 4 other overseas choirs (from Hong Kong, Slovenia, New Zealand and Boston) in such a wonderful and historic venue.

In addition to this major concert in one of the world's most famous auditoriums, the choir gave concerts and received standing ovations in a number of venues in England and Wales.

On the Isle of Anglesey the choir sang with the renowned **Hogia'r Ddwylan** choir (the name literally means "the boys from two shores" and refers to the fact that its members come from villages adjacent to the Menai Straits, on the fringes of Snowdonia, one of the most beautiful areas of Wales. In Anglesey (and Oswestry) we had the pleasure of being conducted by our patron **Alwyn Humphries**. It was a nostalgic moment for Alwyn, since Moriah chapel, the concert venue in Anglesey, was where he was first married!

Ray Kitto took over the baton for our performances with the **Maesteg Gleemen** in Maesteg Town Hall and with Ray's former choir in Weybridge.

Australian Concert appearances

In February 1999, in keeping with the Choir's increasing tally of "firsts", the Choir gave its first concert at the Melbourne Concert Hall and performed for the first time in Australia, the great works of *Mansel Thomas* accompanied by the *Australian Pops*

Orchestra. We understand this was the first time that a Welsh Choir had been accompanied by a full symphony orchestra in Australia. The concert was hailed as a triumph by the large and supportive Concert Hall audience, and created an event, which reflects the "hwyl" of the Choir and its appreciation by an ever-increasing audience.

"The best choir I've heard in Australia ... unique ability to engage and hold its audience."

Professor Jane Highfield of the Guildhall School of Music, London

In March 2002 the Choir took on its most ambitious project ever, a concert with Australian musical legend **Judith Durham**, and a full symphony orchestra (the Camerata Orchestra) at the Melbourne Concert Hall. This concert proved to be highly successful both in terms of audience satisfaction and as a fund-raiser for the Choir. The **CD** of excerpts from this concert went on sale in September 2002, and enquiries have been coming in from all over the world ever since.

December 2003 saw the Choir reinforce its reputation as one of the most popular Concert Hall drawcards with two performances in one day featuring the Choir, the Camerata Orchestra and our guest artist the popular international singer and compère **Aled Jones**. Almost four and a half thousand people enjoyed two wonderful concerts, which covered a wide selection of music and song from the majestic stirring rendition of "Deus Salutis" by the Choir and orchestra, to the quiet pure simplicity of Aled's "Suo Gan" and in keeping with the time of year, Christmas carols.

The Choir's tradition of putting on world class Christmas Concerts at the Melbourne Concert Hall continued in 2004, with our guests the "Singing Cobbler" **Peter Brocklehurst** and Australia's favorite songstress **Rhonda Burchmore**

In 2005 the Christmas concert featured two young operatic stars, tenor **Rhys Meirion**, a principal with the English National Opera, and mezzo-soprano **Sally Anne Russell** fresh from her season with the Australian Opera. The Choir is particularly proud of Sally Anne's achievements, since she was our 1995 Singer of the Year.

"One good turn deserves another" is a popular saying and in 2006 it became a fact when the choir was pleased to accept **Aled Jones** invitation to be his guest artists for concerts in Frankston and at the Regent Theatre Melbourne.

Special Events and Performances

The Choir was honoured to be selected, to perform at the opening ceremony of the **13th Commonwealth Law Conference**, held at the Melbourne Convention Centre in June 2003. The Choir's opening choruses and anthems, prior to Prime Minister John Howard's welcoming address, roused the gathering of the greatest legal minds in the Commonwealth, from their early morning lethargy. The Choir then performed a second set of songs representative of the Commonwealth countries in attendance, which included our own unique rendition of the South African chant "Shosholozza" and the beautiful New Zealand song "Hine e Hine", for which we received a standing ovation.

The invitation to reopen, at a formal dinner, the totally refurbished domed reading room of the **Victoria State Library**, allowed us to relive the experiences, we had, when we sang at its closure. The Choir once again sang from the galleries far above the diners, and the dome reverberated with our harmonies. Because of the resonance and the acoustics associated with the dome it was a difficult environment in which to hear the other Choir members, but the end result as reported by the diners at ground level was awesome!

When the Choir accepted the Victorian Premier's invitation to perform at the **150th**

Anniversary of the Eureka rebellion in Ballarat, it was the first time the Choir had sung at daybreak in the open air, at the historic site in Ballarat. The Choir's powerful rendition of "World in Union" echoing through mist rising from the lake in the cold clear morning provided a fitting close to the simple yet moving ceremony.

For the **Melbourne Commonwealth Games**, Welsh team adopted the Choir as their local ambassadors. The Choir welcomed the team in song, at a function held at the RACV Club. After a brief performance, the 250-strong team of athletes and support staff all had tears in their eyes, as the Choir led them in the Welsh National Anthem and finished with the song, which everyone in Wales learns in primary school, "Calon Lan".

The choir travelled to **Hobart** at Easter 2006, receiving a standing ovation for the concert in the Federation Concert Hall on Saturday night. The performance in the ruined church at **Port Arthur** on Easter Sunday was enjoyed not only by the rugged-up audience in the nave of the church, but throughout the site, as the harmonies resounded as far away as the quay and the main buildings.

The Choir's Recordings

Mindful of its audience, the Choir's repertoire is regularly updated in order to maintain its appeal to all tastes.

"Till the Boys come home", contains a selection of songs from the first and second world wars, and was recorded by the choir with Australian Army band in the early nineties. It remains a perennial favourite.

In 1996 the Choir released a recording entitled **"Heritage"**. The concept was bold, combining traditional Welsh music with new titles from an international choral repertoire recorded at several National Trust properties throughout Victoria. Venues included Como House and the Old Melbourne Gaol, drawing atmosphere from these wonderful architectural legacies of Victoria.

"Great Southern Lands", was recorded just prior to the choir's visit to South Africa. The 1997 recording features "Carry On My Wayward Son", which is, we believe, the first ever recording of a Welsh Choir singing a rock song accompanied by a rock band! The album also features new arrangements of classic traditional songs such as "Danny Boy", and the beautiful and haunting Welsh lullaby "Suo Gan".

Released in October 1998, **"Senzenina"** has been another successful recording for the Choir. It features African songs, which were discovered and adopted by the Choir, prior to and during its tour to South Africa to compete in the 1997 South African International Eisteddfod. These African songs have proven to be amazingly popular with Australian audiences. The album also features the beautiful voices of Kim Wheeler, Sally-Anne Russell and Lynlee Davies, all of whom were previous finalists in the Choir's annual "Singer of the Year" competition.

In March 2000 the Choir released its first "live" recording entitled **"Last Christmas"**. This is a recording of the Choir's performance in December 1999 at the Annual Charity Concert for Palliative Care, held at the Crossway Baptist Church in East Burwood, Victoria.

"Millennium Magic" is another live recording of the Choir's St David's Day concert performed at the Melbourne Concert Hall 1st March 2000. It was released on 16th December 2000 - the same week the Choir appointed Douglas Heywood as its new Music Director.

"Melbourne Welsh Male Choir with Judith Durham" is a very special recording of highlights from a very special evening. Judith, with the full 70-man Melbourne Welsh Choir and the 50-piece Camerata symphony orchestra, combined to make this a once in a lifetime experience. This was the first time that songs like "Wales You're a

Dreamland”, “Australia Land of Today” and other memorable songs written by Judith had been performed with full orchestral and choral accompaniment.

“Songs from the heart” is our newest recording, featuring Michelle Cook (soprano) winner of our Singer of the Year competition in 2002 as guest artist. This album includes a number of new songs arranged by Doug Heywood as well as some old favorites, and the first recordings of songs such as “Hine e Hine” and “Rachie”, which are destined to be a permanent part of the Choir’s repertoire.

In response to audience demand, the choir has recently produced two compilation CD’s, one containing only Welsh songs and the other being international favourites. These are titled, not surprisingly, **“The Welsh Collection”** and **“Favourites from Around the World”**.

All of our CD’s can be ordered via the secure purchase facilities on our website, or alternatively they can be obtained at any of our concerts or from any choir member.