



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 acclaimed male choirs.



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 decision 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. During his tenure both he and our lovely accompanist **Linda O'Brien** performed on stage completely without music!

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 is probably best known for his annual role as Choir Master of the "Carols by Candlelight" concert at the Myer Music Bowl. Surprisingly, in a long and distinguished career conducting many choirs and orchestras, ours 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.

Lucas de Jong was appointed in September 2007. A highly accomplished professional singer with more than 20 years Australian and international experience as a principal operatic baritone and classical voice teacher, Lucas brought a new perspective to the Music Director's role. During Lucas' time he increased the operatic content of the repertoire, led the choir on a highly successful tour of Austria and was instrumental in one of the choir's most successful performances with Teddy Tahu Rhodes at the Melbourne Recital Centre.



Our current Music Director **David Ashton-Smith** took on the role as a temporary appointment in January and was confirmed as our fulltime conductor in May 2016.

David is well known to the choir, the music community and many of our audience in his role as adjudicator for the choir's Singer of the Year annual competition. In addition David has his own choir – the Ashton-Smith Singers and is heavily involved with the Australian Pops Orchestra.

A classically trained singer, who rose to become principal baritone during his nine years with the English National Opera, he has performed and taught in many institutions on his return to Australia and brings a wealth of experience to his role with the choir.



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For him, it is the first time he has led an all-male amateur choir who perform without music and sometimes in Welsh.



Simon Walters, our accompanist, emigrated to Melbourne in April 2010 from the UK, lured by his wife who is Australian. A professional musician since 1994, he is a practiced sight reader in a variety of styles, and is still in demand in the UK for arrangements, transcriptions and backing tracks, despite being on the opposite side of the world.

Since arriving in Australia, Simon has been Musical Director of the Frankston Ladies' Choir, accompanied the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir, done a saucy cabaret with international artiste Isabel Hertaeg, and played in various functions and event gigs with a multitude of bands.

One thing's for sure, life is never dull finding out where the next bit of work is coming from, and Simon looks forward to working more closely with both choirs in the years to come.

Links with Wales

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 has brought to Australia conductors of the calibre of **Alwyn Humphreys MBE**, (Emeritus Musical Director of the world famous Morrision 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 concerts and workshops, 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.

The "Singer of The Year "Competition (melbournewelshchoir.com.au/SOTY)

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 each September. The finalists share in a substantial prize 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 each year. In the most recent competition in September 2015, the three finalists selected to perform were Kimberley Colman, Michelle McCarthy and Michael Lampard, with Michael taking the honours on the night.

Australian Concert Tours

The Melbourne Welsh Male Voice Choir has performed in many of the major venues in Australia including the Sydney Opera House, Hobart's Theatre Royal and Federation Concert Hall and Geelong's Performing Arts Centre.

In Melbourne, the choir has sung at the Hamer Hall, the Recital Centre, the National Gallery at the Arts Centre, Melbourne Town Hall, Robert Blackwood Hall, the State Library, Government House, National Tennis Centre (now the Rod Laver Arena) and the Regent



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theatre.

In addition the choir frequently performs in country centres from Warrnambool and Hamilton in the west through Bendigo and Moama in the north to Traralgon and Bairnsdale in the east and for many other towns and communities closer to Melbourne.

Overseas Tours

The choir has accepted invitations to perform overseas on six occasions.

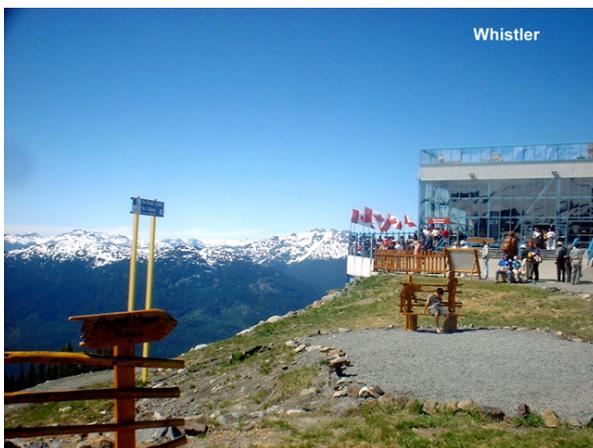
In 1992 the choir travelled to *Wales* to participate (as a founder member) in the first performance of the *World Choir* at the ***Cardiff Arms Park***. This event featured Tom Jones & Dame Gwyneth Jones.

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 *Kathamixw 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.



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The choir at the Albert Hall London

In 2008 the choir accepted an invitation from the London Welsh Male Voice Choir (<http://www.londonwelshmvc.org/>) to be part of their prestigious 21st Festival of Male Choirs (1000 voices) concert at the Royal Albert Hall, London on 18th October. 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 Ddwyfan 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.

The Choir's trip to Austria

In 2014 the Melbourn Welsh Male Choir continued its tradition of travelling overseas to a Music festival every few years. The venue was Salzburg, Austria and the festival was the Cantus Salisburgensis.

Salzburg is a city known worldwide for its music. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one of Austria's greatest sons, was born there in 1756, and many great masters of the Classical Era lived and worked there as well. Salzburg's orchestras and choirs carry on these great musical traditions on the stages and in the concert halls of the city today.

Our choir was invited to share in celebrating these rich musical and cultural traditions by travelling to Salzburg for the Cantus Salisburgensis 2014 music festival.

Musicians from around the world come to Salzburg each year to perform massed choral selections under the direction of Salzburg Cathedral's Music Director, János Czifra.

The festival takes place each year in July.

In addition to singing in beautiful and historic venues such as Salzburg Cathedral, Golling Fortress and the Mozarteum, the choir was able to experience the delights of the city featured in the "Sound of Music".

The decision to attend the Cantus Salisburger Music Festival was a brave one for the Choir, since our experience and tradition (as our audiences will know), relates to singing smaller and more varied pieces of music such as hymns, negro spirituals, songs from musical theatre and opera etc., without the use of music scores on stage.

Nonetheless our Music Director felt we had the ability and, with his operatic experience and support, we were able to acquit ourselves well with the three major pieces



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- *Beethoven's Choral Fantasy*, which is really a piano concerto with orchestra where the choir and soloists only sing (in German) for the final four minutes.
- *Handel's Hallelujah Chorus* (in English), which was familiar to some of our Choristers who had been part of the choir at Channel 9's "Carols by Candlelight".
- *Mozart's "Missa Solemnis" K.337* was his last complete mass and is sung in Latin. The complete piece takes more than 20 minutes to perform, however as part of the Mass it is split into sections *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei*.

Our choir performed the Beethoven and Handel pieces in conjunction with the artists from Wesleyan College Macon, St James Episcopal Church Georgia and the National Philharmonic Choir of Washington together with the Varner International Orchestra in the *Mozarteum* (Herbert von Karajan's favourite music venue).

The following morning we embarked on the "Sound of Music Tour" bus to view, from across the man made lake, the Leopoldskron Palace where the "Sound of Music" was filmed, then on to the Gazebo in Hellbrunn and the wedding church in Mondsee – where there was an actual wedding taking place!

Following a beautiful lunch a local guide took us up a mountain path to see the beautiful Golling waterfall before we embarked on the coach for our concert at the *Golling Fortress*.

The concert featured the Wesleyan College girls as well as ourselves. The venue was a little cramped but the small audience thoroughly enjoyed it and called for an encore.

Sunday morning was bright and sunny showing Salzburg at its best.



Rehearsal was at 8:30 a.m. for the choir and orchestra, in the rehearsal room at the Cathedral. We then all trooped up the stairs to the organ loft of the cathedral, way above the congregation. The cathedral was completely full for the 10:00 o'clock *Missa Solemnis*, which went off without a hitch. The cathedral choristers were excellent and we were able to follow them in the trickier passages. It was an exhilarating experience.

Our wives and partners, on the floor of the cathedral, thought the whole choir, soloists and orchestra sounded wonderful. A final look around, then off to the farewell dinner at Salzburg Fortress perched way above the city.



The tour continued to Vienna via the beautiful *Melk Abbey* where the choir again sang in the organ loft to the delight of the tourists in the Abbey. Vienna saw the choir giving an informal concert at St Peter's church, in the centre of the city and performing a cappella on the steps of the famous Schönbrunn Palace.

A quick visit and impromptu performance at an old people's home and it was off to Gumpoldskirchen for the final dinner at a typical Austrian Heurigen, a traditional meal and of course an "afterglow" to end a memorable tour.



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Memorable 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 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 reflected the "hwyl" of the Choir and its appreciation by an ever-increasing audience.

In March 2002 under the direction of Doug Heywood, 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 draw cards with two performances in one day featuring the Choir, the Camerata Orchestra and our guest artist the popular international singer and compère *Aled Jones*. 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".



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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 the 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**, the **Welsh team** adopted the Melbourn Welsh Choir as their local ambassadors. The choir welcomed the team in song, at a function held on the 17th Floor of the **RACV Club**. After a brief performance, the 250-strong team of Welsh 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 choir's 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 entire site, as the harmonies resounded as far away as the quay and the main buildings.



In 2012 the choir took part in the third **Male Choirs of Association Australia Concert** in Dallas Brooks Hall in Melbourne. Under the baton of our patron Alwyn Humphries, and accompanied by the award winning Kew Brass band, choristers from a number of male choirs from around Australia, lifted the roof of the old masonic hall

The **2014 MCAA concert** was held in Canberra when a record number of more than 400 choristers representing 14 male choirs from around Australia and New Zealand filled the Australian Institute of Sport

(AIS) arena with their sounds and harmonies. Under the baton of Dr. Guy Jansen and accompanied by the band of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, the audience of over 1300 were treated to a rare Sunday afternoon musical feast.

Hamer Hall performances

As a result of the choir's performances at the Melbourne Arts Centre over the years, the choir enjoys a biennial invitation to perform a **Morning Melodies** program which requires the choir to give two one hour performances one at 11:00 a.m. and another at 1:00 p.m.

The choir's most recent Hamer Hall appearance was as part of the Morning Melodies program in April 2015. The program performed by the choir was particularly poignant



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since, at the specific request of the Victorian Arts Centre, it featured songs from the war years to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings and Australia's involvement in World War 1 and 2.

The largest audience for Morning Melodies this year enjoyed a very different choir program. It included medleys of songs from our "Till the Boys come home" CD plus two new songs "For the fallen" and "In Flanders fields", both featuring a trumpet accompaniment, which brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience.

In addition, our soloist and one of our "Singer of the Year" competition winners - Lee Abrahmsen - lit up the audience with songs from the war years made famous by Vera Lynn.



Recital Centre Performance

The choir's first appearance at the Melbourne Recital Centre in November 2015 featured **Teddy Tahu Rhodes** as our guest artist. From Teddy's powerful opening "the Song of the golden calf - Le veau d'or" from Gounod's Faust, to the gentle harmonies of the choir's "Danny Boy" there was something for everyone in the performance and the standing ovation at the end of the concert said it all.

The Choir's Recordings (melbournewelshchoir.com.au/our_music)

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 ranged from an old Welsh wooden church in Maldon, to 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 the 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



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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 a 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”, featuring Michelle Cook (soprano), winner of our Singer of the Year competition in 2002, as guest artist, was released in 2004. 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.



“You Raise Me Up” is the first CD produced under Lucas de Jong’s baton. Featuring some of the items we sang in the Albert Hall, as well as operatic choruses and songs from musical theatre, the album reflects the choir’s versatility.



“In the Spirit” features many of the songs featured in the MCAA concert at Dallas Brooks Hall together with some audience favourites like “My father was a miner” and “Shaft of song” which are unique to our choir.

In response to audience demand, the choir has also 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 the Choir’s 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.