

# Melbourne Welsh Male Choir

Newsletter No 90 March 2025



## St David's Day Celebrations

This year's celebration of the birthday of *Dewi Saint* (St David) our Patron Saint of Wales was very different from previous years but equally entertaining.

The choir's concert at the lovely Methodist Ladies College in Kew, preceded the Melbourne Welsh Church' *Gymanfa Ganu*, which took place on the following day.

There were no guest singers from the UK and no guest conductor for the *Gymanfa Ganu*, all due to circumstances beyond the control of the Welsh Church.

Despite this, both the choir's concert and the church's *Gymanfa Ganu* at St Paul's Cathedral were highly successful.

At MLC the choir's traditional risers were abandoned and the choir lined up abreast on the tiered stage. Our traditional T1, T2, B1, B2 physical stage arrangement was also changed with the bass section (the foundation of the choir's sound) located in the centre of the stage with the other sections either side. The idea was that the sound would be more evenly spread over the relatively wide but shallow James Tatoulis Hall.



*The choir singing from the hall's tiered stage*

The reaction from the audience appeared to be positive, so this layout is likely to continue.

The rousing *Sing Rhondda* opened the concert followed by the wonderful hymn *Deus Salutis*.

In a change of pace - *Away from the roll of the sea* was a gentle Canadian song about small boats in the harbour, which the choir has recently added to its repertoire, this was followed by the old favourite *Memory* from the musical *Cats*

Our soloist was the lovely Welsh soprano - **Heulen Cynfal**, who demonstrated her operatic range with a beautiful rendition of the aria *Quando me'n vo* from Puccini's beloved opera *La Bohémé* and followed this up with a song in her native tongue about home - *Cartref*.

The choir returned for their second bracket with the rousing *Bryn Calfaria* followed by the tongue twisting *Rhythm of Life* from the musical *Guys and Dolls*.

We then premiered our latest addition to our repertoire - *Anfonaf Angel*, Robat Arwyn's beautiful composition which has been performed by many famous singers such as Bryn Terfel, and Rhys Meirion and most choirs in Wales and topped the charts some years ago. Based on the enthusiastic response from the audience this is likely to be part of our repertoire for some time.

We finished the first half with the Elvis Presley classic arranged for a male choir by our patron Alwyn Humphreys - *An American Trilogy*.

After the interval, the choir opened with Arwel Hughes *Tydi a Roddaist* with its verses in English and Welsh. This was followed by an old favourite made famous by *the Hollies* - *He Ain't Heavy* and then yet another new song, arranged by our patron Alwyn Humphries - *What would I do without my music*. The bracket concluded with that beautiful song of longing – *Hiraeth*.

Heulen's second bracket demonstrated her versatility and sense of fun with Cole Porter's *Tale of the Oyster* followed by the quiet, evocative ballad beloved of Welsh exiles worldwide - *My little Welsh home*.

The final bracket from the choir included two recent American additions to the choir's repertoire Carly Simon's - *Let the river run* and Simon and Garfunkel's - *Bridge over troubled water*.

The other two songs continued the theme of the Welsh exiles love of their home country with *Take me home* and *We'll keep a welcome*.

The audience applause at the end of the singing of the Welsh national anthem - *Mae hen wlad fy'n hadau* signified a job well done.

## *Gymanfa Ganu*

Less than 24 hours later, many of the choir were once again in their uniform at St Paul's cathedral.

Once again there were major changes caused by the absence of the Welsh Church's overseas invitees but with the music directors of the attending choirs each (with the exception of Mitch Meyer who was absent as the result of his father's death earlier in the week) leading sections of the singing of the community hymns, while the minister of the Welsh Church – **Sion Gough Hughes** - led the *Gymanfa*.

**Heulen Cynfal** stepped into the breach as soloist.

With the service actually being exactly on St David's Day (i.e. 1st March) it opened with a brief flag raising ceremony and the singing of the Welsh and Australian national anthems conducted by **Faleiry Koczka**.

There were individual choir performances from the combined ladies' choirs (Geelong Welsh and the Mornington Peninsular Welsh) under the direction of **Jeanette John** and by the male choirs (Australian Welsh, Melbourne Welsh and Victoria Welsh) under the direction of **Rushan Hewawasam** and the Excelsis choir under the direction of **Tom Buchanan**.

At the end of the *Gymanfa*, as we all trooped out of the cathedral into Melbourne's brilliant sunshine, we reflected on what had been a wonderful weekend of choral music.



*The interior of St Pauls*

## Background to one of the choir's favourite songs – Hiraeth

One of the hymns which was performed at the St David's Day concert was the beautiful arrangement by our patron Alwyn Humphries of *Hiraeth*.

*Hiraeth* is a Welsh word that has no direct English translation. The University of Wales, Lampeter, likens it to a homesickness tinged with grief and sadness over the lost or departed, especially in the context of Wales and Welsh culture. It is a mixture of longing, yearning, nostalgia, wistfulness or an earnest desire for the Wales of the past.

The Cornish and Breton equivalents are *hireth* and *hiraethz*. It is associated with the Amharic-Ethiopian concept of *tizita*, the German concept of *Sehnsucht*, the Galician-Portuguese *saudade* or the Romanian *dor*. A similar Scottish Gaelic term, *cianalas*, also refers to a type of longing or homesickness, often used in relation to the Outer Hebrides

### Etymology

Derived from *hir* 'long' and *-aeth* (a nominal suffix creating an abstract noun from an adjective), the word is literally equivalent to English 'longing'. A less likely, but possible, etymology is *hir* 'long' + *aeth* 'pain, grief, sorrow, longing'. In the earliest citations in early Welsh poetry it implies the grief or longing after the loss or death of someone.

### Culture

Nineteenth-century attempts to spread the English language through its exclusive use in schools at the expense of the Welsh language, following the 1847 Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales (commonly known as the "Treachery of the Blue Books" in Wales), led to an increase in *hiraeth*.

Between 1870 and 1914, approximately 40% of Welsh emigrants returned to Wales, a much higher percentage than the rest of Britain, and it has been claimed that this was due to *hiraeth*.

The words of the hymn and its English translation are given below:

### *Hiraeth*

Dwedwch fawrion o wybodaeth  
O babeth y gwnaethpwyd hiraeth  
a pha ddefnydd a roed ynddo  
Na ddar fyddo wrth ei wisgo  
Ooo

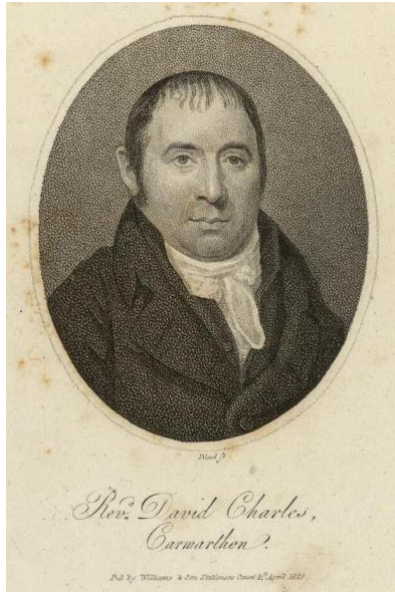
Say, great men of knowledge  
From what is hiraeth made  
And what material was put in it  
That will not fade by wearing it.

Derfydd aur a derfydd arian  
Derfydd melfed derfydd sidan  
Derfydd pob dilledyn helaeth  
Eto er hyn ni dderfydd hiraeth  
Ooo

Gold will fade and silver will fade,  
Velvet will fade, silk will fade,  
Every abundant garment will fade,  
Yet despite this, hiraeth will not fade

Hiraeth mawr a hiraeth creulon  
Hiraeth sydd yn tori nghalon  
Pan fwy dryma'r nos yn cysgu  
Fe ddaw hiraeth ac a'm deffry  
Ooo

Great hiraeth and cruel hiraeth,  
Hiraeth breaks my heart.  
When I sleep heavily at night  
Hiraeth comes and wakes me.



The hymn was composed by David Charles (11 October 1762 – 2 September 1834) who was a prolific Welsh hymn-writer.

David Charles was born at Llanfihangel Abercywyn, near St Clears in Carmarthenshire, the son of Rees and Jael Charles, and the younger brother of the Methodist leader Thomas Charles, later of Bala.

He was apprenticed to a flax-dresser and rope-maker at Carmarthen and afterwards spent three years at Bristol.

He returned to Carmarthen when he married Sarah, the daughter of Samuel Levi Phillips, a Haverfordwest banker, and set himself up as a tradesman. Long connected with the Calvinistic Methodists, he joined the congregation at Water Street Chapel and became an elder.

Charles began to preach at the age of forty-six and was one of the first lay preachers ordained ministers in South Wales in 1811.

He helped to establish the "Home Mission" but was forced to retire in 1828 after suffering a stroke.

He died on 2 September 1834 and was buried at Llangunnor.

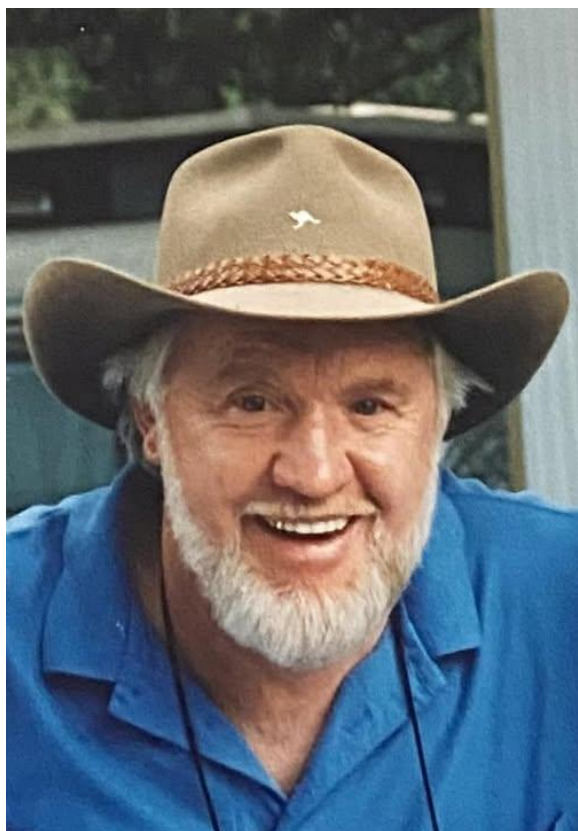
There is a memorial to Charles, by Daniel Mainwaring, at Water Street Chapel.

Besides *Hiraeth*, his best-known hymns include *O fryniau Caersalem ceir gweled* (From the Hills of Jerusalem are seen).



## Vale – Teifion Sault (1937-2025)

The choir was saddened to hear of the death, from prostate cancer, of one of our old choristers and a real character within the choir – Teifion Sault.



Born in the Rhondda Valley, Teifion was a strident and fiercely loyal member and supporter of the Melbourne Welsh Choir.



*Teifion with Bob Millist and Brian Heywood at an afterglow at the London Welsh Club following a concert rehearsal*

He was part of the choir which visited South Africa in 1997 for the international festival held in Roodepoort outside Johannesburg. Teifion spontaneously sang acapella “*My little Welsh Home*” in the 5000-seat tent as part of an “afterglow” session following the completion

of the official competition.

Teifion and his wife Gayle were part of the choir’s overseas tours to Atlanta (Georgia, USA) Canada and England and Wales including the *1000 Voices* concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Short in stature and sporting white hair and a beard he was affectionately known within the choir as “our little Welsh gnome”

Such was his love for the choir that Teifion, a woodworking craftsman, single handedly modified the stage of the Mechanics Institute Hall, at Toongabbie, to enable the choir to perform there.

In his later years he made his skills available to the community by giving woodworking master classes for young and old at the local men’s shed.

Several members of the current choir as well as retired members John Mole, Malcolm White, John Hay and former Music Director - Lucas de Jong attended his funeral in Toongabbie, where we sang two of his favourite songs - *Gwahoddiad* and *Calon Lan* to help send his spirit home.

Rest in peace Teifion you will be missed.



*Teifion on the steps of the Toongabbie Hall he modified for the choir concert*

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

While the choir maintains its ability to regularly put between 40 and 50 choristers onstage, we are keen to increase those numbers and hence are embarking on a recruitment drive.

Would you like to be singing in a four-part harmony ensemble, everything from full throated anthems to gentle love songs?

If so, then whether you've been involved in music all your life, possibly sing in another choir, enjoy Karaoke or only sing in the shower, just come along to our temporary (but excellent) rehearsal facility at **Wantirna College Performing Arts Theatre, 90 Harold St. Wantirna, VIC 3152** 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 about 25 % 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 our permanent home - Maroondah Federation Estate, which is currently being refurbished, 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 a respected conductor of several 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.

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.melbournwelshchoir.com.au](http://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.

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**

### **The Creation of Wales**

When God was crafting Wales, he adorned it with sheep and cows for food and clothing. He gifted it with coal to keep its people warm. He bestowed rolling hills, enchanting valleys, and majestic mountains that reached the heavens.

Upon completing his work, God gently kissed the highest mountain, creating the very first Welshman. The Welshman, filled with awe, questioned, "My Lord, why have you blessed me with all these remarkable treasures?"

God chuckled and replied, "My child, wait till you meet the neighbours!"

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## **CHOIR DIRECTORY**

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