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VIC WELSH CHOIR

Choir Update in the time of Covid

Tony Davies

Under the Covid-19 restrictions, naturally no physical rehearsals or concerts have been possible. Scientific evidence shows that choirs will be among the last activities to resume, due to the risks inherent in the explosive forces behind the droplets expelled during singing. Unfortunately, no firm date for resumption can be given at this time.

Since the shut-down in March, however, choir members have been able to take part in regular video rehearsals, taken by Associate MD Rushan Hewawasam with recorded music, via Vimeo and Zoom.

Additionally, Mornington Peninsula-based chorister John Evans has recorded many of our songs by multilayering all four parts, sung entirely by himself. Fellow choristers are therefore able to practise by themselves by singing along with the MP3 recordings via Dropbox. Musical Director Faleiry Koczkar sends out a weekly email, with a selection of three songs from our repertoire for choristers to sing at home and to keep their voices in tune.

The message also includes updates on choir families' health situations as well as birthday and anniversary greetings which, in turn, generate other emails and phone calls between members. The choir's almoners have also been phoning members on a regular basis in order to make sure that everyone is well. We are happy to report that, to date, nobody in the choir family has tested positive to the virus.

The Bendigo group initiated Thursday night Zoom sessions for their members and these have continued on a weekly basis. Additional sessions, hosted by the President, involving a different mix of half a dozen choristers from all three chapters, also take place twice a week. Whereas it is too difficult to sing together, because of the various time lags, members are able to see and share news with each other and at least partially keep up the camaraderie which is such a strong feature of belonging to our choir. Our Supporters' Group has also started up similar Zoom chat shows.

Choir Update in the time of Covid

continued

The choir's managing Committee and the Concert Planning & Marketing Committee have met regularly over the now ubiquitous Zoom platform. Like being back in school, we have evolved the easily seen etiquette of raising our hands if we want to speak.

All of our many planned concerts for this year - thankfully all after the completed St David's Day concert at the Melbourne Recital Centre and the Gymanfa Ganu - had to be cancelled, with most simply being postponed until 2021. Even the annual Victorian RSL State Remembrance Service, scheduled for 8 November this year, at Springvale War Cemetery and always outdoors, was cancelled by the RSL.

The choir's planned tour to Wales for this June was an early casualty because of restrictions on international travel and lockdowns both here and in the UK. With goodwill from all our Welsh hosts, however, we had an identical tour program lined up for September 2021 but, with no flights to the UK planned, until the end of next year, we have also had to postpone the tour, hopefully into 2022.



Given all the uncertainty and the inability of all concert venues to offer any firm dates for performances, we have, for the first time in the choir's history, reluctantly cancelled our 26 February 2021 booking at MRC for our St David's Day Concert. Under normal circumstances, by now we would have known who our guest artists were, MRC publicity and advertising would have been in full swing and tickets would have been on sale.

This is a great disappointment for all of us as well as for our loyal supporters but we believe it was the most prudent decision to take in these most unprecedented of times. If restrictions lift in time, we may be able to celebrate St David in a more modest fashion and, if that happens, we will let everyone know what may be possible under whatever rules apply at the time.

About a dozen other concerts for next year have already been booked in but, as with all performance events throughout Victoria, they are heavily subject to what will be permissible bearing in mind the health and safety of choristers, music team and patrons.

Needless to say, we are seriously missing the joy of singing together and performing for all our supporters.

We look forward to seeing you all again as soon as humanly practicable.

In the meantime, you can view recent videos of us by clicking here:

[Australian Pride, Welsh Passion](#)

[Battle Hymn of the Republic](#)

*Best wishes, Tony Davies
President*

Our Oldest chorister

Dr Bill Denholm AM (95)



My sister Joan and I were born in country Victoria. My family were pioneers in Ballan, and I started school in Ballan, then went to Warrnambool midway through my second year for the remainder of my primary schooling. In 1937 we moved to Horsham where I did all my secondary schooling, after which I attended Melbourne University where I studied Metallurgical Engineering then spent 3 years in industry, including 1 year at the King Island Scheelite mine and 2 years in the paper industry where I developed an interest in metallic corrosion. At this time, however, I devoted most of my energy to activities of the Youth Hostel Association, with heavy involvement in skiing, bushwalking and surfing, and became president of the YHA.

In 1949 I realised that I'd better think about my career, so I went back to Melbourne Uni to do a Master's degree - and then became a bit of a workaholic. I was fortunate at the end of my master's year to be offered a lectureship in metallurgy in the Department of Chemical Engineering at Adelaide University and spent 14 happy years there, building up a new department, lecturing and doing research in Metallic Corrosion towards a Doctor of Philosophy degree.

I married an Adelaide girl named Pam McLeod in 1964 and we had 2 daughters named Toni and Wendy. We spent a year in 1957-58 based in London on sabbatical leave, where I worked at Imperial College, and for the last six weeks my wife and I drove around Europe on a heavily over-laden motor scooter, visiting metallurgical departments in a number of universities.

Back in Adelaide I completed my PhD and became Reader in Charge of the Metallurgy Dept at the SA Institute of Technology and, although I enjoyed teaching and running the department, I had become more interested in pure research and couldn't refuse an offer to join CSIRO in Melbourne. We moved to Melbourne in 1964 and bought a beautiful big Federation house in Camberwell which unfortunately had been used as a boarding house for many years and was in a shocking state of disrepair. It took me 10 years of hard labour to restore it to its former glory and we thoroughly enjoyed living there for nearly 30 years before moving to my current dwelling. During this time my late wife was a keen potter and she built up a successful pottery school in our house in Kintore St. I had fun building pottery kilns and pottery wheels for her and helping with the chemistry of glazes and firing ceramics.

At CSIRO I thoroughly enjoyed my research work as a Section Leader and was fortunate to be eventually promoted to Chief Research Scientist and to lead a very highly skilled group that developed the Sirosmelt system for non-ferrous smelting that's now used in many smelters around the world. I was awarded a medal named The Sir Ian McLennan Achievement for Industry Award and became a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) as a result of this work.

Our Oldest chorister

Dr Bill Denholm AM (95) *continued*

For relaxation we enjoyed camping and for several years we sailed a 21-foot trailer-sailer around lakes all over Australia. Unfortunately, a few years after our daughters left home my wife became unwell and, as it wasn't possible to safely sail single-handed, we sold the boat.

Regrettably my wife died in 1998 after which I was rather despondent for some time, but eventually occupied my time for many months preparing for a very successful family reunion at Ballan in 1999. This was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of my great-grandparents in Victoria from Scotland in May 1849 and their move to Ballan soon after, where they established a small farm. They subsequently had 10 children whose descendants were invited to the reunion, and 180 of them attended.

The Denholm family lived on the farm at Ballan for three generations and my father was born there in 1900. My mother was born in 1902 in Ballarat into a family that had also lived there for three generations after emigrating from Sheffield.

In 2001 I went by chance to the Victoria Welsh Choir's 21st Birthday Celebration at the Robert Blackwood Hall, and was so impressed by the choir that I immediately set about joining it, and that has taken up most of my spare time ever since. Apart from attending rehearsals and many performances around Victoria I spend most of my time developing computerised training aids, preparing scores for display on tablets at rehearsals and maintaining the sound system for the choir. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in the choir with a wonderful group of people, and I'm convinced it has extended my life by several years!

Our Youngest Chorister

Rushan Hewawasam



Rushan Hewawasam (35) was born and bred in Sri Lanka and migrated to Australia in 2005. While he has no formal musical training, he has been heavily involved in music from a young age and is an accomplished singer, pianist and choral conductor. He studied at Wesley College, Colombo where he started singing at age 9, conducted the school choir from age 15 culminating fronting a 500-voice choir for the College's 2000-year jubilee. In 2002, he represented Sri Lanka at the Asia Pacific Chorus Conference in Manila.

Rushan joined Victoria Welsh Choir in 2012 as a second tenor and has been very involved as a choral member, frequently performing as a soloist and arranging music for the choir, the last of which was performed at the Melbourne Recital Centre celebrating St David's Day. He was appointed Associate Musical Director in 2019. In addition, he also conducts ConChord, another Melbourne-based community choir.

Professionally, Rushan is an accountant and currently CEO for a medical education and GP practice group. He is also a member of the Victorian Government's Pandemic Committee.

Reg Hazell's memory of joining the choir 40 years ago



Our longest serving chorister Reg Hazell was born on 15 October 1929 in Cardiff and had one brother and one sister. Reg's father worked at the Llanbradach Colliery as a winding engine driver, raising and lowering the shaft cage/lift. Reg was educated at Coedyerain School but left school by the age of fourteen to work at the mine with his father. He became responsible for a small winding engine dragging loaded coal skips to the cage which his father would then hoist to the top of the shaft. At night school he began to study mining subjects including mine safety and the Davey Lamp.

However, within the year Reg left the mining industry and joined the Great Western Railway (in 1948 subsumed into British Railways) as a Wagon Number Taker boy starting at Llanbradach Colliery – there were no computers in those days. He was promoted to Porter/Shunter at nearby Ystradmynach and then further promoted to become Head Shunter and later a Goods Guard at Aber Junction. In this role he worked his way up to become a 'top link' Goods Guard based at Radyr Junction and was frequently rostered on passenger work at weekends as far east as Bristol. He was in line for the position of Yard Foreman at Radyr but in those days he knew that this would only materialize through 'dead man's shoes'! Reg had earlier avoided national service because the railways were a reserved occupation. Reg and Joyce had been married at St Catherine's Church in Caerphilly on the 26th of February 1955.

Reg had been with the railways (now BR) for 23 years but was frustrated by the very slow rate of promotions and his disappointment that diesels were now taking over from steam and so he and Joyce looked further afield for new opportunities including the option of making a new start in Australia. The Hazell family finally emigrated to Australia in 1970 where Reg initially gained employment in a factory making and printing cardboard boxes and paper bags. He continued working as a machine setter and operator at various locations for the rest of his working life.

Reg Hazell's memory of joining the choir 40 years ago

continued

The Hazells have two daughters Lynette and Denise, six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. Their older daughter Lynette initially had lessons but the music teacher quickly noted that Lynette had inherited an ability to sing and further singing lessons would be a waste.

Ten years after arriving in Australia Reg and Joyce attended a Cymanfa Ganu Hymn Festival at the Welsh Church. There the late Don Gibson invited him to join VicWelsh and when, with Joyce's encouragement, this invitation was renewed by phone, Reg attended his first Wednesday rehearsal, then held at the Bayswater Uniting Church in September 1980 (the choir having only started rehearsals in February 1980) and the rest, as they say, is history. Joyce has accompanied Reg right through his 40 years and is therefore the choir's oldest-serving member of the Supporters' Group.

In the choir Reg initially sang as a first tenor but then changed to a second tenor. However, when Faleiry heard him participating in an after-concert sing song, she tapped him on the shoulder and told him that from now on he was to sing as a first tenor. He recently celebrated his 91st birthday.

Andrew Naylor

Hire the choir

The great majority of Victoria Welsh Choir's concerts are performed for charitable and other organisations in Melbourne and beyond who find us the perfect solution to their fundraising needs, offering a complete, self-contained package, attractive to potential audiences, which we deliver with professionalism, polish and poise. One Melbourne hirer wrote that we were, "a well-oiled machine."

We are also often engaged for private functions such as weddings and birthday parties, and also for funerals, subject to availability. For client and audience feedback see under past performances on our website.

We provide everything needed for a satisfying and enjoyable concert experience, including:

- Conductor, accompanist and compère
- Microphones and loudspeakers
- Tiered platforms for the choir to stand and/or sit on
- Electronic keyboard for venues without a piano
- Payment of performing rights
- Assistance and advice regarding marketing, including preparation of media releases and posters/flyers.

Working with you, we are totally flexible, according to the venue and your requirements.

Contact us via the website or phone Garry Salisbury, Marketing Manager on 0428 265 656 or email:garrysalis@bigpond.com



VicWelsh Rehearsals – when we can get back to having them

Uniquely, for a Melbourne-based choir, we actually have three chapters – at Blackburn, Bendigo and Ballarat.

Melbourne Branch

Rehearsals are held at St Edward's Anglican Church, Edinburgh Road, Blackburn South on Mondays and Wednesdays (except in summer and winter breaks) from 7.30 to 9.30 pm.

Rehearsals are usually preceded on Mondays by a Welsh pronunciation class, starting from 6.45, and on Wednesdays by a rehearsal for our soloists from 6.30. Many choristers participate on both days, others on only one. Visitors are always welcome. Contact David Black on 0413 077 573.

Bendigo Branch

Bendigo rehearsals will normally be held at St Luke's Church Hall, 490 Napier St, White Hills on Thursdays, except during the summer and winter breaks. Welsh lessons from 6.15pm, choir from 6.30pm, finish 9pm.

Prospective new choristers and other visitors are most welcome - confirm the date with the Bendigo Branch administrative leader, Keva Lloyd (tel: 5448 3839, e-mail keva7@bigpond.com).

Ballarat Branch

The Ballarat branch is recruiting. If you enjoy singing, or you think that you might, come along to a rehearsal. These are mostly held at the Neil Street Uniting Church, Neil Street, Ballarat at 7pm on Thursdays, but once a month may be on a Wednesday and/or a Saturday. For details, and for dates of summer/winter breaks, phone John White on 0402 808 299.



Becoming a chorister

There is no "buzz" quite like lapping up the applause of an ecstatic audience at the end of a well-executed concert. Join the best club a man can belong to - a male choir. Develop your musical skills, exercise your lungs and your brain, expand your social life, and see Victoria and the world. How? Join Victoria Welsh Choir! We make Welshmen out of singers, and singers out of both Welshmen and Aussies! Can't read music? No worries, our computerised recordings enable you to learn your part by ear and pick up the rest as you go along. Don't speak Welsh? No worries, it's a very phonetic language, and we provide pronunciation aids and tuition. Initial learning of our parts (and last-minute revision!) can be done at home, using specially prepared recordings in which each part is audibly highlighted, and which can be played on a computer or hand-held device. This enables us to use precious time on rehearsal nights to focus on putting the four parts together with the right balance and adding the final polish.



Listening to Victoria Welsh Choir on Eastern FM (98.1)

Until the Covid lockdown VicWelsh enjoyed a monthly thirty-minute slot on Radio Eastern FM in Lyn Woods' Lunch Spot Programme on a Tuesday between 11.30 - 12.00 pm. During the lockdown Eastern FM was restricted to telephone only interviews but, happily, normal service has now resumed. Tune in to hear the latest choir news whilst Committee member Andrew Naylor highlights one of the choir CDs.

Acknowledgements

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www.thenewcompany.com.au

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Mailing List

If you need to amend your email address, please send it to
jonamell@melbpc.org.au

You can follow us on Facebook and on our website:
vicwelshmenschoir.com.au

The choir is proudly supported by the Murrumbeena Community Bank Branch of Bendigo Bank



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