



NEWSLETTER



APRIL 2023

VOL. 4

VIC WELSH CHOIR

2022 - That Was The Year That Was

Tony Davies

This newsletter is very much a catch-up as the vagaries of programming meant that 2022 got very busy in the latter half of the year and other events took over in early 2023 so this is the first time the editors have drawn breath long enough to put the newsletter together.

The year's rehearsals got off to a flying start with the power team of Rushan and Lorna sprinting up to Ballarat on 17 January and continuing travelling up every week. Lorna's talents set the musical benchmark until the appointment of local accompanist Mary O'Driscoll from early March. Rushan also restarted Bendigo on the 20th with Faleiry bringing Blackburn back onboard on 2 February. As we know, we were extremely fortunate to have Rushan's energy and commitment from then right through the year as he took on more responsibility at all three chapters. This was crucial, particularly as the year progressed and Faleiry had to step back pending the planning of her two serious operations which have proved to be highly successful, much to the relief of the choir family and our supporters everywhere.

Nervousness about attracting enough paying customers to the 13 March St David's Day Concert, led us to postpone it until 29 May. The week before, in the worst timing possible, Covid struck down both Faleiry and Lorna. There was huge disappointment but not disaster as the Alternative A team of Rushan and Mary very competently stepped into the breach. And, in what turned out to be The Year of The Stand-in throughout the world of show business, the concert was a triumph thanks to everybody pitching in and quickly adapting to a rapid change in circumstances. It takes a great choir to pull off a potential calamity like this and everyone should be justifiably proud of themselves.

2022 - That Was The Year That Was

continued

With the exception of this concert – and one at Echuca in March and a couple of workshops – all the other concerts ended up in the tail end of the year so that, in the last four months, we have crammed in 12 gigs of various sorts.

Unfortunately, five of them were funerals which, of course, are not uncommon for a choir with our particular age demographic. Our memorials appear on successive pages.

Concerts were performed in a wide variety of venues in Albury, Yarram, Bairnsdale, Springvale, Wangaratta, Kew and Bendigo. Write-ups of all of these, along with patrons' feedback, can be accessed via Facebook and through our website: vicwelshmenschoir.com.au

We also managed to fit in two CD recording sessions at the ABC's Iwaki Auditorium.



Concerts all around Victoria

VicWelsh is unique in that it not only has a Melbourne base (in Blackburn South) but also a well-established Bendigo branch and a fast-developing Ballarat chapter. As befits our name Victoria Welsh Choir and comprising choristers from all over the state, the venues of our concerts reflect the diverse demographic geography of our membership.

From the north, three members live in Echuca and attend Thursday rehearsals in Bendigo with other long-distance choristers attending from Woodend, Gisborne and Castlemaine.

The geographic diaspora is the greatest for Blackburn with 'road warriors' coming for Wednesday practices from Romsey, Hoppers Crossing, the Mornington Peninsula, Berwick, East Warburton and Yarram.

One Mt Eliza member and another from Portarlington also attend Monday rehearsals at Ballarat.

Here is a selection of photos from our concerts August-November.



St Matthew's Albury, home of the Canadian Létourneau pipe organ. Photo by Graham Jenkin.

Regent Theatre Yarram. Photo by Jonathon Spurling



Concerts all around Victoria



St Mary's Bairnsdale with soloist Roger Bartlett. This photo and the one on the front page by Jill Wheeler.



Tony Hosemans & Geoff Roberts performing The Proposal/The Night Was Alive from the 1997 musical Titanic at Bairnsdale. Photo by Jill Wheeler.



Rushan and choir in action at Wangaratta. Photo by Jill Wheeler.

Original member Reg Hazell retires

The Hazell family (finally) emigrated to Australia in 1970.

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. In October 2022 he celebrated his 93rd birthday.

Andrew Naylor



Certificates of Appreciation awarded at the end of 2022

Rushan Hewawasam_____10 years
 George Kunzelmann_____10 years
 Tony Edmonds_____15 years
 Liz Paton_____20 years
 Graham Hickman_____20 years
 Ed Hughes_____20 years
 Drew Hopkins_____25 years
 Dev Nallathamby_____30 years

Five funerals and no weddings

Moelwyn Hugh Jones

22 August 2022

14 July 1931 – 13 August 2022

Joining the choir in 1991, Moelwyn was the only member who had actually worked as a coal miner. His blackened face adorned the cover of the *Working Man* CD cover and he also performed – along with Faleiry – in a Welsh-speaking role in a film about *Joseph Jenkins the Welsh Swagman*. He wasn't a native Welsh speaker but had perfect pronunciation and an authentic accent to go with it. One of the finest moments of the 1999 tour was the concert we had in his old village – Gilfach Goch – when all his old school friends and fellow miners turned out to welcome the homecoming son. Prior to their first visit to the UK in 2000, Dave and Bev Smith, supporters of the choir, mentioned to Moelwyn that his hometown experience had inspired them to visit his village.

Moelwyn kindly arranged for them to meet with his sister-in-law, who not only turned on a very nice afternoon tea but then had her son give them a personal tour of the village and surrounds.

Very little evidence of the mine workings was still apparent but he was able to paint mental pictures of the past by pointing out what little did remain and by filling in the gaps.

Coincidentally, Dave's email to the President, with this memory, finished with *Nes i ni gyfarfod eto, Moelwyn (Until we meet again)* and the closing music at the end of his service in Berwick was *We'll Meet Again* by Vera Lynn.

He was an important role model in the second tenor section and, besides singing *Working Man* after his well-crafted articulate preamble, he wrang out all the pathos he could by speaking the second verse of *Myfanwy* while the choir hummed and he could also recite from memory some marvellous pieces like *Rhondda Grey*. At the choir's Albury concert on 20 August, the compère mentioned that Moelwyn had recently died at 91 years of age and, in memory of him, his friend Barry McMahon stepped forward to sing his 'signature tune' which was received extremely warmly.

An audience member later commented: *Barry's solo Working Man absolutely beautiful - a very touching tribute indeed.*

Like me, many older members will have very fond memories of this wonderful man.



George Michael Koczkar

16 September 2022

22 November 1931 – 28 August 2022

George had been in care for a couple of years and died when Faleiry was herself in rehab after two successful corrective surgical operations on her back. A large number of choristers attended George's Joyful Gathering at St John's Church, Toorak.

Here are extracts from his son David's eulogy:

"Dad was a remarkable person who had a remarkable life.

Dad was born on 22 November 1931 in the hills above the Danube in Budapest - to Madga and Erno Koczkar. His name at birth was Gyorgy Mihaly - which in 1949 he changed to George Michael - long before Wake me up before you Go Go was a hit.

Whilst he grew up in a middle class Jewish family who ran a small medical supplies company in 1940 Hungary took the side of the Germans and three years later the German Army invaded. The war was raging and Jewish people were being persecuted but the family was lucky in a way as their factory was useful to the Nazis. After 2 years of brutal occupation Soviet forces entered Hungary for the last assault and the war finished before he was 14. The rise of communism saw Dad's prospects for education and freedom greatly diminished and, with some schoolmates, he tried to escape via Czechoslovakia but were all captured. Eventually, he left on a ship from Naples and arrived in Sydney in the spring of 1949. As was normal then, he was given a 2 year refugee visa - and worked in jobs as directed by the government. During those years, he also completed his high school leaving certificate at night and following this he completed his Bachelor of Applied Chemistry which he completed over seven years working during the day and again studying at night.

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In 1963 - After 14 years of study and work – Dad took a break and headed back to Europe for a few months. While he was in London, a family friend introduced him to Faleiry - a 22 yr old Welsh girl who was studying harp at the Royal College of Music. It must have been love at first sight for Dad as he proposed to Mum within a few weeks of dating. Dad returned to Australia, got a job with BP and Mum arrived a few months later on the 20 February 1964. They were married 2 days later, now more than 58 years ago. He was famous for relating stories from classical times and quoting Latin, for acquiring facts, remembering songs and making sure everybody was well-fed.

Dad worked for BP for the next 25 years, working his way up the ranks and then retired from the oil industry in 1994. He met many of his life-long friends during his time at BP. He then threw his energies into giving back to his community - volunteering for the Wesley mission, Anglicare, The Smith family and became a life member of Rotary. He was also a huge support to Mum with the Victoria Welsh Choir for his last 20 odd years. He became an active member of that community which he loved.

His brave decisions and his hard work gave us our opportunities. It provided us education, freedom and the ability to make an impact.

The wonderful thing about all the messages we received was the similarity in the words that were used to described Dad. He was a gentleman, he was intelligent, he was joyful, he was loving, he was a great friend - my Dad.”

From the choir came eulogies from President Tony Davies, from Accompanist and friend Lorna Ogilvie and from Janet Parsons, the choir’s Assistant Treasurer - and wearer of many hats - who worked closely with George and who spoke about George’s administrative skills, his cleverness at enlisting people to do jobs, his quirky sense of humour and his competitiveness, whether it was selling programs or raffle tickets. Echoing what everyone who had ever met George, Janet concluded, “George was truly one of life’s gentlemen. We will remember him with affection, as the tall impressive man we first met. It was a great privilege for Gordon and me to call him our friend.”



John Michael Hales

30 September 2022

24 February 1933 – 21 September 2022

We had 18 at John Hales' service on Friday with Roger Bartlett fittingly wearing John's old green jacket. Special mention should be made of Ken McMullan who came down from Echuca to pay his respects as John had been particularly supportive of Ken in his early days as a first tenor in Blackburn. The Hales family were extremely pleased to see and hear us and the whole service went very well. Ex-chorister - and John's performance buddy - Geoff Serpell kept his distance but gave an excellent eulogy. We wished Geoff the very best as he went into hospital for an operation on the following Monday. Special thanks to Lorna who played throughout the entire service from when the congregation was filing in, accompanying all hymns and our performances, right through to the conclusion. And, when the photo montage was being shown, we were delighted with her witty medley of tunes from some of the shows in which John had performed.

Afterwards we received this letter from John's daughter, Janet Bane.

I have had a little time to process all that has happened in the last week and it is with a certain sense of pride that I write to you to thank you for your participation in dad's memorial service last Friday. I think we gave him a great send-off. When I heard the choir warming up in the church, I must confess that it brought a tear to my eye. Not just because of the music, but because I really felt dad was with us in spirit and would have loved to hear the choir sing one last time. He really loved singing, especially with his mate Geoff Serpell, performing their favourite "silly songs" together. Geoff's eulogy was a wonderful testament to his life in music, which started at a very early age.

continued

The choir, under Rushan's steady hand, sang beautifully. I have been to funerals where the singing has been fairly mediocre, but it was wonderful to hear such a rich sound which resounded right around the church.

And now we come to Miss Ogilvie, aka The Divine Miss O. Dad had such a high regard for Lorna's talents, not just as an accompanist, but as a very accomplished musician in her own right. Several people came up to me after the service and said how much they had enjoyed hearing her play. Lorna's choice of songs which played during the "life in pictures" was just perfect. We had the Gendarmes duet, I still suits me, My Funny Valentine and If I ruled the World, all woven into a wonderful musical kaleidoscope. I know Dad appreciated everything she does for the choir, but on a personal level, she was a good friend as well. Together with Geoff and Jan and Ailsa, they had many long lunches together, usually at the Highett RSL. As Dad said, "Lorna is the key to our success-she analyses the music, arranges it, and inspires our songs. Geoff and I have loved our rehearsals with Lorna and all our time spent with her." So, thank you Lorna, for your invaluable contribution to Dad's memorial service.

Once again, thanks for a great send-off, I'm sure dad would have enjoyed it!

Gwyneth Marilyn Gooley

1 October 2022

3 August 1938 – 8 September 2022

In one of those odd coincidences, the day after John Hales' service, we were engaged by the Gooley family to sing at their Welsh mother's service at the Malvern Presbyterian Church where John had first started worshipping. Universally known as Marilyn, this Welsh immigrant nurse had first met Dr Peter Gooley in a Queensland hospital before moving to Melbourne. The blended Welsh-Chinese-Australian family loved our singing with *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* having a particular emotional effect on them.

We were therefore delighted and a little surprised to see Peter and his son Michael at our next choir rehearsal in Blackburn, to immerse themselves a little more in Marilyn's beloved traditional repertoire of Welsh hymns.

And we were even more pleased that this power of song has seen Michael regularly coming back as he is now a committed probationer in the First Tenor section who has just successfully passed his second voice test. We're sure that Marilyn would be very happy about that.



15 December 2022

Graeme Sanderson

18 September 1942 – 9 December 2022

As Graeme belonged to both VicWelsh and Victoria Chorale, both choirs gathered at 10 am at Ormond Anglican Church on the day to rehearse their separate musical contributions, both singing two favourite songs which Graeme himself had chosen and left as written requests.

The first eulogy was given by an old Camberwell High school chum Barry Barton who had travelled down from Wodonga especially. He remembered Graeme's early passions for music and rowing, which continued throughout his life, prior to his slightly later passion for Jan who would become his wife for over fifty very happy years.

Sons Cameron and James next spoke fulsomely about their wonderful memories with their very hands-on father who always told them they were the best at everything they did.

In my eulogy I covered Graeme's years with VicWelsh since 2000 – this has been widely circulated but it finishes with the epitome of the man: *He showed remarkable stoicism every time he went under the knife. I speak on behalf of all his friends in the choir when I say that we all admired and respected him hugely. He showed us what a brave man looks like.*

There followed a photo montage, compiled by Felix Sanderson, which amply showed Graeme's wide interests – including sailing, travelling, trains – all to the jaunty *Coat of Many Colors* by Dolly Parton, again showing Graeme's love of many different musical genres.

With Lorna on the electronic piano and conducted by Faleiry, we performed Graeme's chosen pieces *Gwahoddiad* (Invitation) and finished off with the optimistic *Calon Lân* (A Pure Heart).

Two lodge members then farewelled their brother mason with a formal commemoration. The Reverend offered up his closing words and prayers before Graeme was borne out by his family to the very appropriate words and feelings of *Sailing* by Rod Stewart.

Tony Davies

Early start to 2023

As our annual St David's Day concert had to be brought forward by a week to 19 February (because the Welsh Church's Cymanfa Ganu was announced for 26 February), all three choir chapters had to start back early in the week beginning 16 January. Again, Rushan took on the bulk of the travelling with Monday nights in Ballarat and Thursday nights in Bendigo as well as joining Faleiry, now fully upright, in Blackburn on a Wednesday night.

In preparation for the big concert, there was a combined Ballarat/Bendigo rehearsal in Castlemaine and a whole-choir workshop in East Melbourne with, for the first time, six instrumentalists.

The big concert at Melbourne Recital Centre did indeed turn into the biggest we had ever scheduled with two conductors, two accompanists, two trumpeters, a drummer, a double bassist, a flautist and a violinist plus the Celtic trio Bhán Tré. Many loyal patrons had come to see Faleiry again after such a long lay-off and the whole concert was therefore even more emotional than usual, with a very special moment when Rushan sang the Eisteddfod welcome back song Unwaith Eto'n yn Nghymru Annwyl (Once Again in Dear Wales) with Faleiry on harp. A standing ovation by choir and audience said it all.

With Faleiry's obvious return to concert fitness came a very kind invitation from the Welsh Church to join the other two local Welsh choir conductors Jeanette John and Tom Buchanan at the 26 February Gymanfa Ganu held at St Michael's Church in the city. As her part of the proceedings, Faleiry was delighted to conduct the three Welsh male choirs – Australian, Melbourne and Victoria – in Gwahoddiad (Invitation) and Rachie.



Early start to 2023

continued

A few days after St David's Day, the choir was hired for a local fund-raiser in Lancefield which featured a local entertainer David Allan and the choir's chaplain the Rev. Tom Morgan who, at 94 years of age, drives down to Blackburn rehearsals on a weekly basis from Romsey. With the retirement of Reg Hazell and Bill Denholm we have just two nonagenarians – Tom and Victor Gago who will be 93 on the same day (May 17) as Bill will be 98. To honour him, the choir will be singing at his party in his nursing home on May 20 (which just happens to be the President's 81st birthday but he is a mere stripling in this company!) As a testament to the many benefits of singing in a choir, VicWelsh has many active members in their 70s and 80s with Tim Todhunter ready to join the 90s cohort right at the beginning of May.

As audiences are emerging from the post-Covid torpor, the choir's diary of engagements is filling up. We were very pleased to be asked to be the first act in the hall at the Seafarers' Mission at the inaugural Melbourne Celtic Festival on St Patrick's Day. With plenty of audience participation and abundant craic, we got the whole event off to a great start.



Welsh Rugby Union bans 'problematic' Tom Jones classic 'Delilah' ahead of Six Nations

A popular song by Tom Jones that has been a regular feature at Welsh sporting events will not be performed at the **Six Nations tournament** amid allegations of sexism, bullying and racism at the Welsh Rugby Union.

"Delilah," which was first released in 1968, contains lyrics that are "problematic and upsetting to some supporters," read a statement issued on behalf of the WRU. The song is about a jealous lover seeing a woman, Delilah, with another man. One line reads: "I crossed the street to her house and she opened the door; she stood there laughing, I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more."

It will not be sung by a male voice choir before Wales' match against Ireland in the Six Nations on Sunday (AEDT) or at future games.

Extracted from www.nine.com.au

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





Order the latest CD Songs from the Heart

All our CDs are priced at \$25.00 plus \$3.00 postage and packing charges (inc. GST) within Australia and \$9.00 overseas.

To see our other CDs and/or to order any, go to our website www.vicwelshmenschoir.com.au or contact Mrs Chris Ash:

Email: purdown@bigpond.net.au or
Phone: 0408 525 946

Listening to Victoria Welsh Choir on Eastern FM (98.1)

Despite a brief hiatus at the height of the various Covid lockdowns, VicWelsh Choir has resumed presenting our monthly slot in Lyn Woods' Lunch Spot Programme on the second Tuesday of the month between 11.30am and 12 noon.

Tune in to hear the latest choir news as Andrew Naylor highlights one of the choir CDs from our collection.

Acknowledgements

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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

