



Sydney Male Choir

Newsletter Winter 2010



Editorial

Peter Marshall, Editor

My apologies for the long gap between the last issue and this one. Events have conspired against me and this has led to the unfortunate delay.

However here it is and we have reason to celebrate the arrival of our new Musical Director. We are, of course very sad that Alan Thrift, after 20 sterling years at the podium, has announced his retirement but we are very pleased that Houston Dunleavy is the new incumbent. He was thrown in at the deep end when called upon, at short notice, to step into the Maestro's shoes when Alan was taken ill and could not officiate at the Town Hall Concert in September.

A short biography of Houston is on this page.



Ulster-born **Houston Dunleavy** is Senior Lecturer in Composition in the School of Music and Drama at the University of Wollongong. Since 1985, he has pursued an international career as a composer and conductor. His teachers have included Peter Tahourdin, Barry Conyngham, Donald Erb, David Felder and Charles Wuorinen.

Houston was Guest Artist at The American University in Washington D.C., and has been Visiting Composer at James Madison University, The Cleveland Institute of Music, Ball State University, the University of Florida, Georgia State University, The University of Delaware and The University of Southern Florida in the U.S.A. He has conducted, and had performances of his music, in Australia, the USA, the UK, France, China, Ireland and Puerto Rico. He has been a participant at the 'June in Buffalo Festivals', The North American New Music Festival and at the 1995 Hoy Composers Course, where he was invited by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies to write for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra String Quartet.

Major performances of his music have been given by international concert artists including Beverley Rinaldi, soprano, Alan Baer (principal tuba of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra), Kevin Orr, David Goldblatt, Stephen Manes and Duncan Gifford, pianists, Adam Meyer, trombone, Susan Collins, violin, Harold Levin, viola, The Stables Flute Ensemble, The Manes Duo, Peter Sheridan, flutist, and Sydney-based ensemble Charisma.

Starting as a freelance music theatre conductor in Melbourne in the 1980's he went on to direct some 40 operas and musicals before traveling to study in the USA in 1988. Here he conducted in Cleveland, Buffalo and Washington DC with the University Circle Chorale, The North American New Music Festival, The World Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Niagara County All-Schools chorus, the June in Buffalo Festival, The Fires of Tonawanda, Bethesda Youth Music Theatre and Potomac Community Theatre and was Guest Artist - Conductor of Opera and Music Theatre at The American University in Washington DC. Back in Australia since 1995, he has conducted mostly choral and new music, and, from 2000 to 2007, he was Musical Director and Conductor of the Illawarra Choral Society in Wollongong. Since leaving the ICS, he has conducted the world premiere of Jeff Galea's opera "Wounding Song" and is helping prepare Galea's newest opera "The Pea Pickers" for its premiere.

In 2010 and 2011 Houston has a busy schedule of performing and composing, and he is delighted to be the new Musical Director of the Sydney Male Choir.

Choir activities since May 2010

As usual we have had a very busy time since the last Newsletter, starting in May with one of our regular visits to the Little Sister of the Poor at Randwick. As usual it was a moving experience to see the loving attention given by the Sisters to those in their care.

In June John Angel had arranged for a concert at the John Paul Village, Heathcote where we were made very welcome and informed that they had been trying for years to get us to perform there! It's nice to be wanted and I'm sure we will be back.

Don Rose is a cricket fanatic and his association with the Auburn Cricket Club has led us to performing to help cash for their fund raising efforts. This is the second time we have appeared at Dooleys Club, Lidcombe. Here you see Alan conducting his boys. The word had obviously been put around and we enjoyed a much larger audience this year.



Winston is the Sergeant Major on Parade



The choir has a long relationship with the Orange Male Voice Choir and to mark the retirement of the Musical Directors of both choirs it was decided to hold a joint concert in Orange. The Sydney Male Choir sang at St Barnabas Anglican Church, where the officiating minister remarked on the inspirational effect of 'My Lord what a morning'. The City joins the Country concert was held in Orange Civic Centre before a large enthusiastic audience

and as you can see that shy, retiring character Winston Eldridge wowed it to them.

2 years ago we took part in a concert with National Australia Brass, a band brought together by Professor David King, an eminent and internationally recognised conductor of brass bands in Europe, in Cooranbong. This was a very successful event and it was decided that the inhabitants of metropolitan Sydney deserved a chance to hear and see NAB and the Sydney Male Choir perform together. The venue was the wonderful Pitt Street Uniting Church with its great acoustics and the sound of the magnificent organ, played by David Clark. A near capacity crowd turned up and were blown away by the wonderful sounds made by the two very different groups. Here is Alan with his bouquet of flowers presented to him by David King to recognise his 20 years service to SMC.



The next weekend we travelled to Kincumber to sing at Brentwood Village followed the next weekend with our first appearance at Dee Why RSL. This club has been voted the best in Australia and it is easy to see why. Facilities are excellent and the good turnout enjoyed the wide range of sings that Alan had put together. They were also in for a shock in the second half when the choir appeared in their new red shirts and ties. They thought the red army had arrived.



Kevin Burgh had arranged the next concert at Rockdale Catholic Church where we were treated to music from the Brigidine College String Quartet, four young ladies from Year 9 at the College, playing violins, viola and cello. This concert marked our first public performance of 'Blue Australian Skies' a piece composed for the Sydney Male Choir by Australian composer Stephen Leek to mark the retirement of Alan Thrift. The piece is quite unlike anything else that the choir performs and Alan gave a short insight into the differences of the harmonies compared to our usual repertoire.

The next weekend it was the turn of Newcastle and Singleton to enjoy the choir's singing. On a gloriously sunny Saturday we joined the Newcastle based Waratah Girls Choirs to perform in the magnificent surroundings of Christ Church Cathedral and to enjoy the organ playing of Peter Guy, organist and Master of the Choristers at the Cathedral.

We stayed overnight in Singleton and then sang in the lovely St Stanislaus Chapel at the Sisters of Mercy Convent. What a wonderful place this is with well laid out gardens and so well looked after. The only sad thing is that there are no Sisters there anymore! What a shame. Here are the choir entering this beautiful chapel for another wonderful concert.



A week without a concert and then a drive up to Gosford where we returned to the Central Leagues Club. Last year we had two performances but it was limited to one this year and we were joined by the excellent ladies Sweet Adelines group, Coastal a Cappella. The ladies certainly know how to put over a song and they tried to outdo us in the costume stakes with bright pink outfits in the second half competing with the choir's red shirts. Good job we didn't share the stage! What a clash that would have been!



The end of August saw the choir at the ABC Recording Studios in Ultimo to record a session for a radio broadcast. What hard work that was! Three hours of concentrated singing, repeating songs several times and by the end of it we were all exhausted. How Alan & Eleanor managed to cope is a mystery. They were under such pressure with no time for relaxation. For Ständchen we were joined by the gorgeous Celeste Haworth and she helped to raise the spirits of the guys, including Alan.

Which brings us to the the big event of the year, the 11th Annual City of Sydney Concert, this year returning to our spiritual home, the Sydney Town Hall. Planned as a tribute to Alan Thrift's 20 years service to the Sydney Male Choir the occasion was a little saddened by the news that Alan was ill and confined to hospital. With very little notice our new Musical Director, Houston Dunleavy stepped into the breach and did a magnificent job to get the choir to perform to such a very high standard. The refurbished organ of the Town Hall was a fitting backdrop for the choir and for the Bathurst Panorama Chorus who wowed us all with their dynamic and varied selection of Sweet Adeline's songs.



Peter Kneeshaw joined the Sydney Male Choir for some of the choir's items and, despite the organ not performing as well as it looked, due to technical problems, he added to the splendour of the occasion. A great, enthusiastic audience completed the scene for a truly memorable afternoon of great music. Alan was even able to hear some of it live courtesy of the magic of a mobile phone. I'm sure he was impressed.

Calendar for the rest of 2010

| Date | Venue | Time |
|-----------------|---|--------|
| October | | |
| Saturday 2nd | St Brigid's Catholic Church, Dubbo | 2.30pm |
| Sunday 3rd | Dunedoo Central School | 1.45pm |
| Saturday 9th | MCAA Rehearsal, Killara Uniting Church | 9.30am |
| Sunday 24th | Castle Hill RSL | 2.30pm |
| Saturday 30th | Frank Vickery Village, Sylvania | 2pm |
| November | | |
| Thursday 11th | Remembrance Day Service, Martin Place Cenotaph | 10am |
| Saturday 13th | MCAA Rehearsal, Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney | 9.30am |
| Sunday 14th | Australian Male Choirs Association Combined Concert, Sydney Town Hall | 2pm |

President's Ponderings



Since our last Newsletter...what a time we've had!!

It's been the busiest of times... with many significant concerts, recording sessions for CDs & ABC Classic FM broadcasts & much more over the last few months...a program to test the strongest of us. Throughout all of this, Alan Thrift has been a major inspiration...as we all wilted under the strain Alan has definitely carried us through.

Throughout all the action, our focus continues to be on & around Alan Thrift. As his retirement marched ever closer we were working hard to find a suitable replacement to fill his big shoes, & of course, preparing for his farewell 'Town Hall' concert. Sadly, within reach of the Town Hall concert, Alan found himself in hospital seriously unwell & unable to lead us through his concert...something we & he had been so much anticipating.

In all the distress that surrounded Alan's condition & the big farewell concert...believe it or not, there was a wonderful 'silver lining'...Houston Dunleavy's baptism of fire! As Alan Thrift's recently announced MD replacement he had to step into the Music Director's (MD's) role a little earlier than planned and carried us wonderfully through the concert. Alan Thrift wasn't physically there but he was there in spirit & in our hearts as we performed under Houston's baton.

We are now rapidly establishing a great relationship with Houston as he picks up the MD role. With Houston continuing to develop on the magnificent foundation established over the last 20 years by Alan...we have been pleased to appoint Alan Thrift as Emeritus Director of Music for the Sydney Male Choir so we can sustain a rich relationship developed over so many years.

As this year draws to a close we will be looking even more closely at our future development especially as we plan & prepare for our Centenary Year in 2013...we are excited by what we see ahead & confident that the choir (SMC) will continue to prove a more than worthy contributor to Sydney's & Australia's music scene.

Jim Layton, President

You Raise Me Up!

The Sydney Male Choir spent 2 long sessions in St May's Cathedral, Sydney to record their first themed cd. Alan Thrift had a vision of producing such a cd of spiritual songs and we were able to make this happen in this, his last year with the choir, launching the new cd, entitled '**You Raise Me Up**' at the 11th Annual City of Sydney Concert in the Town Hall in September. The cd contains many of the well know religious and spiritual songs with which SMC have been associated as well as new numbers. Such favourites as 'Shall we gather at the river', 'Morte Christi', 'Calon Lan', 'Deus Salutis' and 'Angels watching over me' are combined with newer pieces such as 'Jesus shall reign', 'Let there be light' and 'Rachie', together with, of course, 'You raise me up' to form an uplifting and inspiring selection. On the recording the choir is joined by Peter Kneeshaw, one of our Vice Patrons, on the Cathedral organ which adds a wonderful depth of tone to the sound.

The cd costs \$20 and contains 18 great songs.

To get your copy visit our cd sales table at any concert or order on our website - www.sydneymalechoir.com.au



Tailpiece

If you like what you see here, please let me know. If you don't like it, also let me know but more importantly let me know what needs to be changed to be better. Let me have any contributions as soon as you can.

Peter Marshall, Editor