

Newsclaf

Upcoming events

Church Music in a COVID age: if, when and how?

This webinar will be held in the next two weeks with a panel of international and local experts. We will be asking key questions about church music in the current time, to give us hope for the future and practical assistance for the present.

Watch for further details by email and on our RSCM Australia webpage and RSCM NSW Facebook page.

The following activities in our last edition have regrettably been cancelled/postponed due to COVID-19

RSCM NSW Famous Annual Midwinter Dinner on Friday, 12 June - cancelled.

Queensland inSpires - which was to have been held in Brisbane in early July - postponed to 2021.

Prom Praise - we were hoping to repeat the sellout event we held last year at *Sydney inSpires* but regrettably we have cancelled this idea for this year.

Junior Schools' Choral Festival which was to have been held on Tuesday 20 October at St Andrew's Cathedral - cancelled.



From the Editor

Hasn't this turned into a strange and unusual year? With our churches closed, our choirs muted and most of the events we advertised in our last edition cancelled or postponed, one wonders what there could be to put in this issue of Newsclaf. It's a far cry from this time last year when we were gearing up for the mega festival of church music that was *Sydney inSpires*. And yet churches have been finding creative ways to praise God and keep connected. You will find a roundup of these activities from various parishes and choirs in this issue.

Our last face to face Branch activity was on 14 March when we held our workshop, "Unlock Your Voice", with Michael Fulcher and Penelope Mills presenting, followed by our AGM. Reports of the workshop from two of our attendees follow. We thank retiring committee members Warren Trevelyan-Jones and Rachelle Elliott for their wonderful service and welcome Justin Sweeting (see his bio in this issue).

We hoped to be able to say something about how/when it will be safe to get back to singing to the Lord together but instead we will be inviting you to a webinar in the near future with a panel of experts to discuss this topic (see notice at left).

We look forward to meeting up safely "on the other side" of this pandemic. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue. Don't miss the fascinating review of "150 Psalms" at the Adelaide Festival.

Pamela Summers

Pamela Summers is a NSW Branch committee member and a chorister at St Swithun's Anglican Church Pymble

Clothed in prayer and decorated with song

If you are missing the services of Evensong or Vespers, these beautiful sentiments of Katherine Dienes-Williams will resonate with you.

The rhythm, structure and sound of our Choral Evensong has currently fallen silent. Yet the walls of our Cathedral continue to echo and hum with the notes of countless services, individuals' voices blending together, soaring upwards, amongst and between our arches, into the space where they rest in the air, circulate, live and resonate. The building is not silent. We have decorated it with song, clothed it in prayer and melody and blessed it. Its heart beats on. It is warm and glowing.

Before the closure of our Cathedral, I stood in our empty building and reflected what this means. I remembered walking out of what I was fairly sure would be our last Choral Evensong for a while, one of our beautiful men's voices' services. It was peaceful, idyllic and prayerful. Our community gathered in both prayer and humility, offering what we could to God. As I walked out, I took note yet again of the words I have encountered now thousands of times here, words sculpted above the south transept doorway – 'Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord' – those striking words from Psalm 150. These words gave me great comfort as they always have done – to give of myself in prayer and praise and to inspire others to do the same.

This beautiful structure of simple prayer we call Choral Evensong is such a multi-faceted thing but it is always there for us. Strip away the layers – and there are many – children arriving from school whom you have rehearsed, needing refreshment, robing, choir men and women arriving from all points by all means of transport, delays, lateness, illness, safeguarding, missing music, people absent, hustle, bustle, rehearsal, line up – and finally the moment comes when as one, we move in procession into the space and offer ourselves. We 'let everything that hath breath praise the Lord'. It is achingly beautiful. A moment in time, held in time, held now inside our closed buildings, whose doors will open yet again and the internal song will once again be revealed to the world as it heals, overcomes and is filled with love and hope for the future.

Katherine Dienes-Williams

Katherine Dienes, MA, BMus, FRCO, Hon. ARSCM, Hon. GCM is Organist and Master of the Choristers at Guildford Cathedral



We look forward to that day, hopefully in the near future, when our doors will open again. As the St James King Street Evensong booklet says, attending Evensong is like “dropping in on a conversation already in progress – a conversation between God and his pilgrim people which began long before we were born, and will go on long after we are dead.”

Reports

RSCM Unlock Your Voice Workshop St Philip's Anglican Church, York & Jamison Streets Sydney - Saturday 14 March 2020

On a cold, inclement morning in March, I accompanied my father and a small number of others up Church Hill to the oldest Anglican church parish in Australia: St Philip's Church in Sydney.

Our first RSCM **Unlock Your Voice** workshop was led by Michael Fulcher, Director of Music at Christ Church South Yarra. Breathing: control of breath and techniques for good choral breathing was the focus.

There was so much to learn; and learn we all did! This was not a static session. Rather, all in attendance were invited to be active participants in the many and varied physical exercises and activities, which Michael led us through. With some nimble and others less nimble, Michael compassionately and thoughtfully adapted his exercises to the abilities and limitations of each and all. I had not previously considered much of what we were taught; however, it has been helpful since - in understanding how I should regard my breathing, especially as a chorister.



After lunch, attendees - RSCM members and visitors - returned to St Philip's Church to be captivated by the enchanting Penelope Mills. Scales and arpeggios (while not forgetting our newly acquired choral breathing techniques) were a focus of this session. We even had the opportunity to sing as a newly formed choir, with Michael Fulcher accompanying us on the pianoforte and contributing furthermore with various vocal pedagogical insights.

Stephanie Gough

Stephanie Gough is Choral Scholar at All Saints' Anglican Church in Hunters Hill, and a music composition student at Loreto Normanhurst.




Unlock Your Voice Workshops
led by Penelope Mills, Tiarne Tranter and Michael Fulcher
Saturday 14 March 2020
St Philip's Anglican Church, York & Jamison Streets, Sydney

10.00 -- 10.30	registration
10.30 -- 12.00	Healthy Voice Production for Contemporary AND Classical Singers workshop led by Michael Fulcher
12.00 -- 1.30	lunch (offsite; own expense)
1.30 -- 3.00	Singing Techniques for Contemporary AND Traditional Worship workshop led by Penelope Mills and Tiarne Tranter
3.00 -- 3.30	afternoon tea
3.30 -- 4.30	RSCM NSW AGM

admission prices: RSCM members: \$40
non-members: \$55
earlybird discount: \$10 (book by 5 March)





For more information and bookings: <https://www.trybooking.com/book/event?eid=5980156>
Credit card bookings: Gerald Hayes on (02) 9150 5219

After the enormous success of his workshop at Sydney in Spireas 2019, noted Melbourne-based conductor Michael Fulcher will be presenting a similar practical workshop. Expect insights into 'Primal Sound' - accent method breathing. Who could forget the extraordinary contributions of Penelope Mills and Tiarne Tranter at in-Spires? Penny enchanted us with her solos in the St Matthew Passion and then wowed us further the next day at Prom Praise, in Handel's glorious 'Let the bright Seraphim' and 'Eternal Source'. Tiarne, lead singer with famous Sydney worship group CityAlight, thrilled us with her effortless vocals in Prom Praise. These artists will run practical sessions covering vocal techniques and health, how to sing contemporary songs, and harmonising without the dots. Our presenters are uniquely qualified to bring out the best in us. Whether we are choristers, band vocalists, soloists or directors there will something for all who wish to use our voices better. The cost of the workshop includes all practical sessions, refreshments and all materials.

Another perspective on the workshop from Peter Gluyas who writes:

It was my pleasure to attend the RSCM workshop 'Unlock your Voice' on Saturday 14th March 2020 at St Philip's Church in Sydney led by Penelope Mills and Michael Fulcher. Tiarne Tranter was scheduled to be a joint leader but was unable to attend at the last moment.

Michael Fulcher is well known as a voice coach and presented a practical workshop on 'Primal Sound – accent method breathing' at *Sydney inSpires* 2019. I attended that workshop which was an impressive overview of the subject matter. The presentation was necessarily brief, limited by the 45 minutes or so at his disposal. Based on this initial introduction, I was delighted to have the opportunity of a day long workshop with Michael and Penelope to 'Unlock your Voice'. I was not disappointed.

Penelope Mills is also well known to those of us who attended *Sydney inSpires* 2019 where she sang Bach's St Matthew Passion and Prom Praise. She has a very impressive biography. She made an excellent contribution to the success of the workshop.

The workshop was in two parts, the morning session being led by Michael and the afternoon session being led by Penelope with Michael assisting. There were approximately 30 attendees.

The morning session focused on sound production. Michael referred to human physiology and spoke of the evolution from apes to man to introduce the subject of primal sounds as a basis for human sound, voice production and breathing techniques required to support that sound.

Michael invited those who could to lie in the supine position; rolling onto our left side, then the right side whilst taking deep breaths and requiring us to recognise our diaphragm movement. We then assumed an 'ape-like' pose with one's head angled outwards towards the ground and then uttered a sustained sound – typically in the middle of the person's range. In this position, we experienced an ease in sound production which was not evident when standing with an erect posture - with its 'shoulders back, chest out, stomach in' stiffness. It was readily agreed that it was not desirable to have a choir of ape-like choristers, but the overall message was one of 'relax, be conscious of your breathing, no body tightness - use a relaxed posture, no facial tightness to correct pitch by 'smiling up a note' ... which is in contrast to the advices from some of the international celebrities attending *Sydney inSpires*. Having listened to both, I prefer Michael's techniques as they work for me.

The morning continued with vocal exercises, including 'sirens' crossing register boundaries; he spoke of breathing techniques, silent breathing and the use of gravity to fill the lungs.

The afternoon session was more of a traditional music making time ably led by Penelope. She led the program and Michael highlighted the singing techniques. It was an enjoyable afternoon of singing.

Clearly, I found the morning session very interesting, practical and informative. If one is serious about the subject matter presented, then maybe the RSCM should give consideration to an extended workshop (maybe a course over days) to present more material and longer periods for practice and exercise.

Peter Gluyas

Peter Gluyas was a treble chorister in his school choir and has continued life as a chorister in community and Church choirs ever since. He found singing a great relaxation from his professional life as an engineer. Now in retirement he sings regularly with the St. Mary's Singers



Introducing our newest Committee Member, Justin Sweeting

Justin started playing piano church music in the St Andrew's Cathedral's contemporary evening service back in 2000 when he was 15 years old. It was by God's good grace that the Cathedral's music director, Ross Cobb, asked him to join the choir. Whilst not immediately taking up the offer, many years later when teaching piano (and puzzled about how to best teach sight singing), Justin decided the time had come. Although Justin attended St Andrew's Cathedral School and heard the choir sing each week, it was only in his mid-20's that he discovered the amazing world of ancient church music; in particular, its lens into history, language, and theology; and its ability to edify one's relationship with God, and to develop friendship with fellow singers.

In referring to his personal passion for church music, Justin said, "nothing moves me more than singing praises to our wonderful God with fellow Christians. It never ceases to astound me - the sheer breadth and depth of musical and lyrical heritage we have as Christians. It stirs the soul to sing some of the most complex yet sublime music ever written such as a Bach Cantata, or on the other hand, to sing simple plainsong which has been sung by Christians for millennia. When losing my father two years ago to cancer, I found few times as comforting as when meditating and praying at Evensong."

Justin has sung with the St Andrew's Cathedral Choir for eight years and attends Abbotsford Presbyterian Church where he leads the music team. Justin works in finance and during his time at Westpac led the Westpac Christmas Choir.

Justin is married to Joanna. Together they have a two year old son, Alex, and a two week old daughter, Catherine. At the time of writing, Justin has been enjoying listening to Samuel Sebastian Wesley's 'Ascribe Unto the Lord'. He has also been recording iPhone rough and ready YouTube hymns for his church congregation to sing to during this time of COVID-19.



*Above – Singing "When I Survey" for church – Covid19 Style.
Below – Favourite Sir Hubert Parry piece? – Blest Pair of Sirens!*



Welcome to Justin, and many thanks to our retiring committee members, Warren Trevelyan-Jones and Rachelle Elliott, for their wonderful contributions.



What's been happening?

Here's what some of our members have been doing:

Presbyterian Church Services during Covid-19

Heather Moen-Boyd writes -

Since mid to late March, Presbyterian churches have been holding church services through a system called Congregation Connect, using a program devised a couple of years ago by the Presbyterian Inland Mission, enabling remote communities to join in worship via Zoom technology.

The church where I am organist, **Scots Kirk Mosman**, holds its regular 9am Sunday service, but with only 3 people in the building – our minister Rev Brett Graham, his wife Cherine, and myself. Brett leads to worship, I play the hymns and voluntaries, and Cherine, who has a pleasant soprano voice, sings solo in the hymns. The lyrics are on the screen for the congregation to follow from home, and hopefully sing along to! As in regular church services they can invite friends along, by sending them an online link for the live-streamed service.

It feels rather strange to be doing this in a large empty church, but encouraging to know that others are worshipping with us from their homes. We are thankful that modern technology can provide such opportunities. Each week Brett does some tweaking with the camera and mics to try to get the best possible reception. It's not perfect but with everyone else, we are on an interesting learning curve, and the skills learnt are likely to benefit us in future times.

One of the more unusual things for me, is the silence while I play organ preludes for a few minutes before the start of service. There is usually loud chatter. Now I feel I need to prepare my pieces with greater care. The congregation joins one by one but can't chat to each other till after the service!

Around 3 years ago we commenced a service on Saturdays at 4pm, principally with young families in mind. A band leads more contemporary worship. This is now live-streamed via Facebook. For quite a while the congregation has been small. But the first week on Facebook had over 100 people tuning in. God works in mysterious ways!

Heather Moen-Boyd

Newsclaf is advised that **Abbotsford Presbyterian** has been recording services on a Friday for broadcast on YouTube. The contemporary music is produced by laying down keyboard tracks using iPhone, and then emailing them to singers and other band members to record their own parts. A technical person then does the track layering and puts it all together.

Anglican Churches around NSW

St Peter's Cathedral Armidale: the Dean has been recording contemporary services at the cathedral. Some other parishes are holding Sunday meetings via Zoom.

Christ Church Cathedral Newcastle has essentially been closed, but congregations have been meeting for Friday evening prayer via Zoom.

St Andrew's Cathedral Sydney:

professionally pre-recorded services with 6 or 7 people singing. Extracts as well as the full service are uploaded to social media. The services are now apparently the most-viewed Anglican online services in Australia!

They have also been used all over the world including the official Anglican communion livestream and in many church networks in the UK and the USA.



St Saviour's Cathedral Goulburn: the

Director of Music has been working with the Dean and Sub Dean to pre-record services for YouTube with organ and choral music provided by solo singers or a small group of choir members suitably socially distanced.

St Swithun's Pymble: is offering three online services each Sunday - two contemporary services and one traditional service. Prayer meetings are held via Zoom at the end of the contemporary services. For the traditional pre-recorded service, small subsets of choir members have been meeting to record hymns and anthems with organ accompaniment for later broadcast. Judging from their comments, people are watching from all round the world.

St Alban's Epping: does not live-stream but has Zoom church. The sound quality is not ideal but the experience has been enjoyable.

St Matthew's West Pymble offers pre-recorded services with common elements (sermon) but varied music depending on the service style, followed by a Zoom Q&A.

Anglican Parish of Hunters Hill: has been running virtual choir practices using Zoom - not musically satisfying but provides social opportunity for choristers and also a chance to learn new pieces. Services are pre-recorded, with the Rector doing most of the segments, parishioners doing bible readings and prayers and the director of music playing hymns and other pieces on the organ.

St Philip's Caringbah: has had good Zoom attendance; they use master tracks of keyboard/drums/bass on which others record their parts.

St Philip's Eastwood: livestreams morning and evening services, including occasional pre-recorded clips, for example from the Archbishop. Livestreaming is via both Youtube and Facebook, which is handy when one of those platforms is giving problems. They are going to be offering a pre-recorded traditional service also.

St Paul's Burwood has been pre-recording services, for example a eucharist with a solo singer. See an article from St Paul's with more details later in this issue.

Uniting Church in Australia and music during the pandemic

David Powell writes -

My sense is that congregations which highly value interaction, spontaneity and togetherness will insist on a 'real-time' service using a conferencing product like Zoom. If the minister is used to question-and-answer to keep attention during the sermon, and assessing the congregation's reactions, the live session will have appeal.

Music can suffer in this context! Zoom is set up for conferencing, and by default applies filters to suppress non-vocal noise and automatic volume control to handle variations in voice levels. Things improve when these settings are altered, but there are still compromises as complex musical signals must be pumped through limited channels in real time.

Churches that place high value on the musical experience are I think more likely to pre-produce. The service will be pre-recorded, or largely so, and uploaded for on-demand viewing, even if perhaps also streamed at the pre-appointed time. Some will then schedule their Zoom for post-service fellowship.

A number of Uniting Churches have celebrated 'home church' situations, with church operating from ministers' and congregation members' studies and lounge rooms. For some, it's a chance to affirm that the church is people, not a building.

Others acknowledge that the sense of a special place is important, and provide in video the church setting and the musical instruments that have been familiar aspects of the Sunday meeting.

How should the hymns be led? Do you believe a voice is necessary to lead a voice? The folk at RSCM Centre would say not, if you take the example of the Hymn for the Day that's been provided during COVID-19 lockdown. An organ should be sufficient – yet I must admit feeling odd singing alone against full organ. So when I was asked to sing as I played (necessitating use of my house instrument), I reluctantly agreed, but knew that was contrary to the good advice of such sages as Robert Boughen. I attempted a part remedy by ensuring my two other family members were singing as well. A body of singers seems the best model to lead a body.

I prefer the idea of mixing various authentic voices of the congregation that have submitted their voice tracks to a commonly presented backing video. It requires layering together by someone with time and skill (although the free tool Audacity means there need be no dollar barrier). I attempted this for a "Happy Birthday" wish, using a Screencastify video of my MuseScore notation in playback, with supplied count-in, in lieu of my deficient conducting skills. (These software tools are also free.) However, I feel a proper conductor with accompanist would be a better model, as nuance in tempo variation can be better effected.

There is nothing especially inauthentic about 'virtual choir': we are accustomed to the artifice of studio techniques to make something different from what might actually have been possible. Songs of Praise had some wonderful fantasies – I recall outdoor sings with splendid resonance!

The Cathedral Singers



The Cathedral Singers are disappointed that we are not able to meet together at present but are continuing to meet weekly by Zoom.

It is a steep learning curve, but it is good to see each other and keep singing. At present we are working on Gibbons' Short Service in the hope that we can sing at a service soon.

We are also enjoying checking out services from other churches online. It is good to see others' experiences.

We wish all choirs and choristers well at this time.

Best wishes

Jan Kneeshaw

For Jim Abraham and TCS

Some Tips and Hints

- CCLI offers a "streaming" licence, which also includes pre-recorded material (during COVID-19)
- optimising Zoom for transmission of music (for example during live services): ensure that "original sound" option is selected. Untick 'auto volume' and 'suppression' for best results.
- for Zoom choir rehearsals: The meeting scheduler (probably the choir director) would send out an invitation email to participate, with a link in the email, and meeting code for the Zoom meeting. [Participants may need to download the Zoom app to their computer or mobile device, and may need to change internet browser to run Zoom. Participants need to have a reasonable quality internet connection to run both sound and video in Zoom]. The Zoom 'breakout room' feature is available for sectional rehearsing (S A T B separate rehearsing).

Now about those suggestions of making a virtual choir video (you know, the ones with all the faces of the performers in a big grid)....



- this article is very helpful in explaining that this is a complex video editing task not accomplished in a hurry, and also discusses some of the multi-track recording products available to do a simple version of this: <https://midnightmusic.com.au/2020/03/dear-music-teachers-please-stop-asking-how-to-create-a-virtual-choir-video/>
- On YouTube, three videos by Guy Bunce talk about how to set up a virtual choir using Zoom and how to use the sound settings for singing. <https://youtu.be/STXzs5qnPwg>

News from St Paul's Anglican Church, Burwood

A short while before his death, Peter McMillan OAM ARSCM attended a Service at St Paul's Burwood where Sheryl Southwood OAM was inducted as the new Director of Music. Having served as our wonderful Director of Music since 2012, Sheryl has decided that it is the right time to step back and retire from this role.

Sheryl, through her devotion and service to the Parish, has maintained the considerable reputation of the choir at St Paul's; a reputation which the esteemed Peter McMillan established over many years.

Sheryl had an extensive and fine teaching career at Trinity Grammar School in Sydney and has an outstanding reputation as a music educator. A strong interest in choral music led to Sheryl's involvement with the Choirs of St James' Church, King Street; Christ Church St Laurence; and St Paul's Burwood. She has conducted the Sydney University Graduate Choir and has been Acting Choirmaster of St James' King Street and the Cathedral Singers. Sheryl has also been the Director of the Mater Chorale. She was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours for Service to music through a range of organisations.

During her time at St Paul's, Sheryl initiated an extensive lunchtime recital programme. Since the church's award-winning refurbishment, it has become a noted venue for fine music recitals by some of Australia's leading performers – both instrumental and vocal (Greta Bradman gave a recital here just a little while ago). These recitals are very well attended with audiences exceeding numbers found in other venues and Sheryl will continue to convene this series. Due to the current restrictions on gatherings, the regular Tuesday Lunchtime recitals have had to be cancelled until further notice, but they will resume once the Federal Government and Health Authorities deem it safe to do so.

At St Paul's recent Parish AGM the Rector, Fr James Collins, read out a moving and heartfelt letter from Sheryl to the Parish. In response he thanked Sheryl and paid tribute to her exceeding hard work, her thorough professionalism, and her reliability as Director of Music. Furthermore, he said that he looked on Sheryl not only as a trusted colleague but as a friend and wished her well, on behalf of the whole Parish for the next phase of her life.

The Rector went on to announce that David Russell, who has been serving as our Acting Director of Music since the beginning of the year, had accepted the appointment as our new Director of Music and wished David every blessing as he takes on this very important role. David has been a member of the St Paul's congregation and choir for the past 18 months, is a previous Deputy Chair and Secretary of RSCM NSW and is currently the Artistic Director of CAPTIVATE, the Creative and Performing Arts program for Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta. He previously sang with the Choir of Christ Church St Laurence where he was also the Honorary Assistant Conductor.

As the Choir of St Paul's embarks on a new era it will also be moving into the "Upper Room" in the Parish Hall. This has recently been fitted out as the new choir room and music library and the choristers are looking forward to having their own dedicated space in which to rehearse. The Choir can't wait to get back into regular singing (and into its new choir room) once things return to 'normal'. Unfortunately, owing to the Corona virus situation, the choir is currently forced to be 'in absentia', like almost every other choir.

Since COVID-19 restrictions have closed churches, St Paul's has been rapidly adapting the way we can hold services. On Sunday 22 March we held our regular 8:00am (sung) and 9:30am (choral) services

outside the West Door (see photo) and the worship was conducted in accordance with the spacing regulations.

The following week, 29 March, when only 10 people were permitted to attend at any one time, half-hour slots were allocated from 8:00am until 10:30am. Due to the restricted numbers we were unable to continue to hold a full choral service.



Since the further restriction to 2 people at a gathering, we have begun to embrace more technology and record some services for viewing at home via YouTube. David Russell has been the cantor, Michael Deasey the organist and Fr James and our Lay Minister, Rosemary King, are the only others present. These videos can be viewed on the St Paul's YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH7lnJgP6hGQ_sQGohJLr6A

Singing with the Choir of St Paul's is a wonderful opportunity to perform beautiful choral repertoire in a rich liturgical context. If you are interested in finding out more about the choir, please contact David Russell via email music@stpaulsburwood.org.au or phone the Parish Office on 9747 4327.

More information about the choir and St Paul's can be found on our website: <http://www.stpaulsburwood.org.au> and anyone is welcome to join the Parish Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/7441384898/>

Margaret Whittaker

Still thinking about Sydney inSpires? For recordings and photos of Sydney inSpires events, go to:

www.sydneyinspires.com

Interested in undertaking a Bronze Voice for Life Singing Award?

RSCM Centre (UK) has training materials on its Showbie site with worksheets and video and audio resources to support singers preparing for the exam. Sample sight-reading and aural tests are included and resources to build confidence for the spoken parts of the exam.

For more information about using Showbie, and how to access the new resources, please visit: <https://www.rscm.org.uk/start-learning/voice-for-life-and-singing-awards/showbie-training-materials/>

Denominational Reports

Uniting Church in Australia

While Easter is a universal celebration, there was a time when most from the antecedent denominations of the Uniting Church knew little of Lent. However, church union meant not only compromise on long-held local practices, but also an openness to those of others. Today, probably the majority of Uniting Church congregations hear readings from the Revised



Common Lectionary that are shared in large part with many other western denominations. All seasons of the liturgical calendar are observed, and there is a better welcome, too, to forms of experience apart from language.

Luckily for church musicians and those who respond to sound, music has generally fared reasonably well among the arts for churches that get described with adjectives like ‘reformed’ or ‘evangelical’. Historically, where visual symbols might have been labelled idolatrous, or dance banned for sensuality, song at least has always been legitimate, even in those corners where it was limited to psalm singing without the benefit of instruments. Now we allow all the senses to respond to God’s world. Taste the pancakes on Shrove Tuesday; feel the ashes at a sober service the next day. See the colours change from Lent to Passion to Easter.

We may deny ourselves excess during Lent, but riches of other kinds can be experienced. For a number of years, Rev Rod Pattenden had an art exhibition in church space that invited, from serious artists, new interpretations of the Stations of the Cross.

Rev Beverly Matthews invited a similar project this year in our local parish at Burwood-Croydon. However, this time, the contributions were welcomed from the members of the related congregations. People had been given the list of events on Christ’s journey to the Cross, and could choose which to interpret. Most contributions were expected to be visual works, but the idea of music was included among the suggestions. Beverly, who has been studying visual art academically, is also very fond of song. It makes sense to employ each sense.

The intention had been to exhibit these works in the church space during Holy Week. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that this could not happen. Instead, a Facebook photo gallery was set up, so that each work could be seen at leisure from people’s homes. This had the added benefit of inviting interaction through the comments and reactions that Facebook invites. If a musical interpretation had also been offered, it would in fact have been realised more easily in such an online environment than in the church-turned-art gallery that had been planned.

More broadly, we can see the repositioning of music as a member of the arts, rather than an entity on its own. In South Australia, there is a Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts, whose program and publications reflect this wider breadth. Before the virus precautions, at <https://www.cmla.org.au/>, you could see that alongside events like “New music showcase (20 new songs for 2020)” there were painting workshops (for example, “soft and oil pastel workshop for adults”. And, again, a focus on local praxis – getting involved; doing it yourself (or yourselves): a writing/storytelling workshop, a songwriting workshop, and a session on ‘music without musicians’.

It makes sense that music should take its place alongside other art forms, as sound, light, smell, taste and touch all work together in our experience. Today’s technologies can allow more of us to both create and curate – mixing together sources from various places. For worship, an understanding of liturgy should, of course, inform the artistic urge.

While the high scepticism of our reforming forebears can thankfully be relaxed, the danger of idolising our work remains. True for one mode or many, creator or collator: to God alone be the glory.

David Powell *is a member of the Uniting Church in Australia Church Music Committee and UCA Representative on the RSCM Branch Committee since 2011*





Catholic Church in Australia

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, Catholic choirs, cantors and even organists have been largely silenced, and in the absence of assurance as to when it might be safe to resume rehearsing and singing in services, this remains the case at the time of writing.

Much has been written about the various studies which recognise that singing may create a potentially higher risk of spreading the virus than simply speaking, due to the production and dispersal of droplets and aerosols. As the function of music in the Post Vatican II Catholic liturgy has primarily been focused on congregational participation, parish music-making has been almost universally stopped during the lockdown period, and parishes which have streamed the Mass have not generally had their live musicians active in the streaming process. Several have relied on pre-recorded content during this time, encouraged by the promotion of streaming/podcast liturgical music licences from One License which have greatly assisted with copyright compliance. Cathedrals such as St Mary's in Sydney and St Patrick's in Parramatta have been able to sustain regular, streamed choral services with reduced forces, and some other churches have also been able to stream services with cantors or smaller entities of their parish choirs. I have "attended" many livestreamed and pre-recorded Masses over the pandemic time, and regret that in the majority there was no singing or music.

Since the recent resumption of Mass for small numbers, there has still been no general encouragement of a return to music in the liturgy, due principally to the advice from epidemiologists and medical practitioners that we should be extremely cautious in returning to singing together, even in a spatially distanced capacity.

There are church musicians feeling forgotten, as many parishes now continue live with a simple, spoken expression of the Mass, without an attempt to include music at all. Archbishop Anthony Fisher has been clear in his recent Pastoral Letter (his sixth since the pandemic began): "Because of possible risk of aerosol transmission, congregational singing is prohibited at this time (this is ironic given how hard it is to get some Catholics to sing in public!); a cantor or small choir should provide the music if any (or a recording where this is not possible); any singer(s) should be positioned at least three metres away from the congregation and each other."

[NB All brackets in this quote are the Archbishop's.]

Now is really the time to remember the first point about internal participation raised in the Vatican II document *Musicam Sacram* (1967), placed before the frequently quoted second one about external participation:

This participation

(a) Should be above all internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace,

(b) Must be, on the other hand, external also, that is, such as to show the internal participation by gestures and bodily attitudes, by the acclamations, responses and singing.

The faithful should also be taught to unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.

Therefore, rather than list what measures our Parishes have been able to provide musically during this period, such as those provided earlier in this Newsclaf, I include here excerpts from two recently published articles from the Australian Pastoral Musicians' Network reflecting on the online Mass experience (from the APMN June newsletter):

From Mass Interruption – A Parish Perspective by Fr Wayne Bendotti (self-described 'pastor of a small country parish with limited pastoral resources and personnel')

...As many of my more tech-savvy brother priests quickly embraced live-streaming of weekend and weekday Masses from their parish websites and via platforms such as YouTube and Facebook Live, I was initially unsure how to respond. ...

In the end – partly due to lack of time – I chose simplicity. Using a room at my parish school (for the strongest wi-fi signal), I set up one end of a long table as the "altar" and placed my webcam laptop at the other end. I celebrated the whole Mass seated at the "altar" end, with a divider-screen draped with liturgical coloured cloth as a backdrop behind me ...

As the Mass was being celebrated, I began to see a steady stream of brief comments scrolling on the screen. While the screen was too far away for me to easily read, I could just make out that some people were using their keyboards to "respond" to the parts of the Mass in real time. Thus, despite being on my own, I had a profound feeling of being "gathered together" in this experience with my fellow worshippers.

Later that day, I took some time to read all the replies. In addition to the liturgical responses, there were prayers of intercession, greetings of peace and words of thanks, not only from my local parishioners, but also from past parishioners in other towns and friends from across Australia and even overseas! From within the disruption of COVID-19, the Holy Spirit had remarkably gathered and called together a broad and diverse community into one Body, one People of God ... through the marvels of technology. Remarkably, by the end of the week of that first online Mass, it had more than one thousand views – more than ten times my regular weekend congregation!

... Much has been written and said about online Liturgy being no substitute for actual gatherings, and there is obvious validity to these claims. Yet despite their obvious limitations, the profound sense of gathering and unity that arose from these "virtual assemblies" brought about by the disruption of COVID-19 has been for me, something very "real" indeed.

... The Sunday Mass is still live-streamed, for the benefit of those unable to attend, those in places where Masses have not yet re-commenced ... and the many so-called "disconnected Catholics" who have become regular participants.

From Forward, never backward – further reflection on the current restrictions being lifted by Sr Louise Gannon

...As we move forward with the new directives, more attuned to what manifests the true nature of Church, liturgy and eucharist – a nature found in Christ whose commandment is love and whose kingdom is concerned with the common good including a preferential option for 'the poor' – let us be the people who ...

- are good citizens continuing to do what needs to be done for the good of the whole community.
- rejoice that now there can be more present at funerals and weddings.
- are patient that public mass remains unavailable.

- appreciate that to have any liturgy – especially mass – that is by invitation only and where all are not welcome, is in contradiction to the nature of Church, liturgy and eucharist.
- understand that while Churches can be open, the restrictions placed on that opening might yet make it impossible.
- keep strengthening our domestic church with prayer and liturgy and ongoing participation in God's mission.
- dwell more and more in the Word of God and become living Words of God in our neighbourhoods and society.
- ponder the mystery of the incarnation and allow it to shape us and our response to our current circumstances. God does not engage with us remotely. God came to be with us and remains with us always – within us, around us, beyond us.
- develop our awareness of parts of our country and the world where people have little access to the celebration of mass – sometimes as little as once a year. Is there some response we can make in this space?
- claim more deeply our baptismal identity as sharing in the priestly, prophetic and shepherding ministry of Christ, and as the foundation for ALL ministry.
- participate in and encourage Christ centered leadership: that invites us forward not backward; that leads rather than responds to 'opinion polls' and the loudest voice.
- are grateful and count the blessing of simple things.
- allow our experience of isolation and lockdown to open our eyes to the many ways our world, our society and our Church isolates and locks down individuals and groups. So converted may we stand up and speak out against such behaviours. And may I be more aware of the many ways I isolate and lockdown others.
- love as God loves us and follow the Spirit of Truth who is with us and in us.

What would you add to the list ...?

The challenge of the impact of COVID-19 has hopefully brought this home to us with its enforced lengthy absence of music, and perhaps now we value music all the more due to that absence.

Josie Ryan

Josie Ryan is the Catholic Church representative on the RSCM NSW Committee and is a committee member of the Australian Pastoral Musicians Network

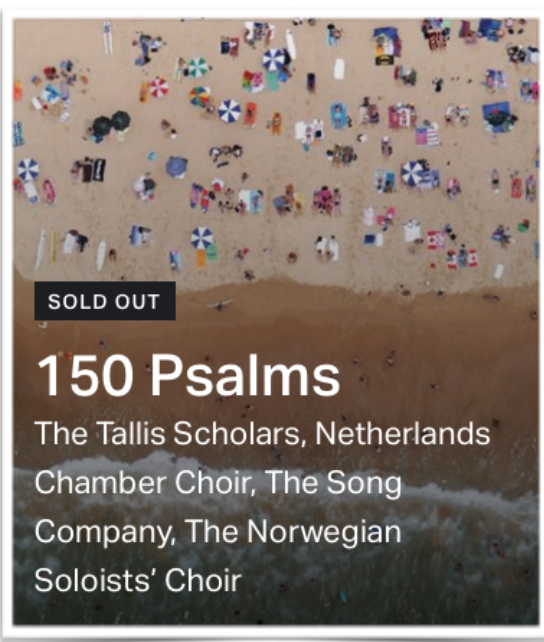


WEBINAR Church Music in a COVID age: if, when and how?

Hope for the future and practical assistance for the present

Don't miss our webinar which will be held in the next two weeks asking key questions about church music in the current time with a panel of international and local experts.

Watch for further details by email and on our RSCM Australia webpage and RSCM NSW Facebook page.



Review

150 Psalms

12 concerts at the Adelaide Festival
March 2020

I wouldn't be surprised if some nerd had calculated that the Psalms have inspired more composers to do their thing than any other similar book of lyrics. Indeed Tido Visser (Managing Director of Netherlands Chamber Choir and creator of 150 Psalms) asserts that "more

than half of the choral repertoire is based on psalm texts. Virtually every composer from the past 1,000 years has set a psalm text to music."

So it's not surprising that the range of musical styles is enormous: this was evident in the astonishing series of 12 concerts over four days that presented music by 150 composers based on all 150 psalms. Each concert had a theme: A mirror for today's society, Trust, Safety, Justice, Abandonment, Gratitude, Powerlessness, Suffering, Leadership, Path of life, Power and Oppression, and Celebration of life.

I attended the last four of the 12 concerts, which meant that I heard each of the four choirs. How gratifying that all these concerts were sold out. Who would have thought?

Leadership *The Song Company at Pilgrim Uniting Church*

Highlights were White's Ps 20 and Scarabelli's Ps 98 from the 16th century, and MacMillan's Ps 96 and Knight's Ps 21 from the 20th century. But all of these would have been enhanced by a more generous acoustic. I estimate the church's reverberation time to be about half a second. Another second would make all the difference!

Path of life *The Norwegian Soloists Choir at St Francis Xavier's Cathedral*

Is it true that Scandinavians sing English beautifully? Yes: their enunciation is splendid. This choir's tonal quality, control and variety was more refined than the Song Company's local enthusiasm, and the Norwegians were assisted by a more reverberant acoustic.

The four psalms they presented first were all outstanding: Valen's Ps 121 (written in 1909), Pärt's Ps 122 (written in 2002), Palestrina's Ps 123, and Maxwell Davies' setting of Ps 124 (arranged by their conductor Grete Pedersen, who conducted this anthem from the middle of the cathedral while the choristers were scattered all around it). This proved to be a pindroppy concert (as in "you could have heard a pin drop"). The close, dissonant harmonies of Lidholm's setting of Ps 130 ask the choir to sing to the extremities of their range, and the choir did that apparently effortlessly. The choristers were also amazing in their fine calibration of intensities. Rehnquist's Ps 134 provided an exquisite ending to a memorable concert – alone sufficient to make the trip to Adelaide worthwhile.

Power and Oppression *The Tallis Scholars at Pilgrim Uniting Church*

I was keen to hear what The Tallis Scholars could do in the dry acoustic of Pilgrim Uniting Church only 24 hours after The Song Company's concert. It was thrilling to hear the Scholars' overtones ringing – the building seemed more reverberant than the day before: proof that a choir can seemingly improve the acoustic by inspired vocal production and projection.

Highlights were Gabrieli's Ps 7, Arnoni's Ps 26 and Bryars' Ps 141, which all featured exquisite pianissimo passages and endings. Pindroppy again. Bryars' recent setting sounded ancient in textures, harmonies, harmonic progressions and rhythms. (Paradoxically, some psalm settings from the 16th or 17th centuries sounded modern 20th century.)

This concert concluded with van Dijk's setting of Ps 109: its opening is dramatic, and the choir produced another glorious pianissimo chord at the end. Bravo!

Celebration of Life *Netherlands Chamber Choir at Adelaide Town Hall*

After a marvellously provocative introductory speech by Kerry O'Brien, the Netherlands Chamber Choir started their concert studiously with a couple of serious academic settings, before rendering Cozzolani's amazing setting of Ps 110, written 300 years before its time. Continuous changes in rhythms and tempi made this sound like an early 20th century work. Then we heard a sublime setting of Ps 136 by Costantini for the ladies' voices only. Nees' setting of Ps 87 is energetic and his word-painting is exquisite, but I suspect this is a very difficult anthem to learn.

This concert included some settings that left me cold. For example, Gallus' Ps 150 and Giovanelli's Ps 149 did not capture the joy and exuberance of the texts. But it all came good at the end, with Gretchaninov's Ps 135 – the choir's *pppp* on the final chord was astonishing – and Poulenc's Ps 81.

Overall

Very few of the psalms were presented as our choir at St Swithun's is accustomed to singing them at Evensong. Rather they were anthems (or occasionally cantatas) based on excerpts from the text, with some repetition. Most were written in the 16th and 17th centuries, but it was gratifying to hear some very recent compositions too, including 14 commissioned for the Festival:

Composed in the 15 th century	4	2%
16 th century	41	28%
17 th century	29	19%
18 th century	13	9%
19 th century	13	9%
20 th century	26	17%
21 st century	16	11%
Plus chants etc of unknown vintage	8	5%
	150	100%

Noting the distinct paucity of Anglican chants by the usual suspects – Longhurst, Hopkins, Nares, Barnby, Battishill, Harrison, Ousley and Crotch – we might regret their omission. But a happier view is to rejoice in the incredible wealth and variety of musical approaches to the singing of the Psalms.

The topicality of the Psalms

Their relevance to 21st century life was evident in the photo exhibition at Adelaide Festival Centre. The program reveals this exhibition was “curated”, which begs the question: what is the difference between a curator and a curate?

Mostly portraits of public figures (from The Australian’s photo archives), each photo was linked to a verse or two from Psalms. The photos portrayed the same themes as in the book of Psalms – war, corruption, incompetent leaders, catastrophes, unfairness, grief, disappointment, tyranny, fear, greed – that continue to fill the newspapers today.

Summary

This was a thrilling, ambitious concept that attracted huge crowds to hear sublime music written for thought-provoking words, and performed by astonishingly wonderful choirs.

Peter Hamilton

Peter Hamilton (who used an electric scooter to hurtle along Adelaide’s footpaths at 14 kph) is the Principal Organist at St Swithun’s Anglican Church, Pymble.



of USA and Canada

is excited to announce that their **2020 Annual Conference from 12 July to 16 July** will be an all-digital conference, providing a great opportunity to participate in an exciting and high quality program without the costs of travel, room and meals.

The program will include morning prayer, plenary addresses, featured sessions, sectionals, evening hymn events and more.

For complete conference information, visit the website at www.thehymnsociety.org/event.



Media Release

'New Choral Composition Prize accepting entries'

Bel a cappella's inaugural Prize takes Australian music travelling

It feels more than slightly unusual to be writing about Sydney chamber choir Bel a cappella's planned tour to Northern Europe and the Baltic when we remain inside the protection of our own homes until these disconcerting times pass, but it's a year out, and the choir are excited. Excited both because this, their third international tour since 2015, will be a highlight of their 2021 calendar, marking Music Director Anthony Pasquill's 10 year anniversary with the choir, and because last week they launched an initiative linked to the tour that promises to showcase new Australian music to the world.



The Bel a cappella Choral Composition Prize will award 3 Australian composers \$1500 each for original a cappella choral works for up to 8 voice parts.

Each of the 3 winning works will have its world premiere in one of the cities in the 2021 tour (to be chosen by the awarded composer), including St Petersburg, Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallin and Riga. Their Australian premiere will be at the next concert Bel performs upon their return to Australia.

Pasquill believes that Australian choral music certainly has the capacity to match the depth and breadth of that being composed and performed in the traditional choral music countries of northern Europe and this Prize will give him and Bel a cappella the opportunity to demonstrate that.

The Prize money was raised through the very generous donations of supporters of the choir, via an Australian Cultural Fund campaign earlier this year. This fund, managed by Creative Partnerships Australia, was established by the Australian Government in 2003 to encourage donations to the arts. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible, and donors get the chance to make a real difference to the work of Australian artists.

Choir president Bruce Watson says, "When we launched our fundraising we were excited about creating an opportunity to bring new Australian choral music to the world. Now we also know we'll be supporting some local composers through this terrible time when so much work for musicians has vanished."

Bel a cappella believes their Choral Composition Prize will make a big difference to composers in this difficult time for the Arts across the globe, providing both a sense of creative purpose and significant prize money to the three awarded composers.

Bel a cappella Choral Composition Prize

ELIGIBILITY: The Prize is open to any individual who is a permanent resident of Australia or Australian citizen. There is no age limit.

PRIZE PERIOD OPENS: April 1, 2020

PRIZE PERIOD CLOSES: June 30, 2020

A panel of jurors will review entries and award the 3 Prizes on July 31, 2020



Make culture happen

This project was made possible with the support of the Australian Cultural Fund

Information/ Web: <https://belacappella.org.au/composition-prize>

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RSCM Choristers' Prayer

*Bless, O Lord, us Thy servants,
who minister in Thy temple.
Grant that what we sing with our lips,
we may believe in our hearts,
and what we believe in our hearts,
we may show forth in our lives.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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