

# TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



## TOUR OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

2009

By Dean Powell, Publicity Officer  
& Honorary Archivist

## **Tour of Australia & New Zealand**

### **Thursday May 21<sup>st</sup> / Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup>**

This was it, the long-awaited fourth tour of Australia and first tour of New Zealand. The tour, organised once again by Andrew Kay and his company HVK Productions and costing over £1million to launch, was run with the precision of a Swiss Watch as each chorister kept rigidly to a tight schedule of times, dress and locations. Together the Choir worked tirelessly to ensure this tour, hailed as the “125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour” was an outstanding success.

With an air of immense excitement, choristers boarded one of the two Edwards Coaches that departed Treherbert at 3.45am, heading south to Cardiff before meeting at the BBC Studios in Llandaff by 4.30am. Following a brief stop in Leigh Delamere Service Station for a tea break, the Choir headed to London Heathrow Airport, arriving at Terminal Three by 9am. A guide was awaiting their arrival and ensured a quick passage for choristers (who were all dressed in the new bright red tour jackets) to check through their luggage and proceeded to the main departure lounge for the usual pre-tour exercise – a pint or two in the nearest pub.

It was well known that the famous “Clec Committee” had been formed once more by Daryl along with Gareth (Chairman) and Stuart to collect the details of idiotic errors made by fellow choristers during the tour! With notepad and pen in hand, it was time for the Chief Cleccer (Daryl) to collect the “Billabong Awards” of the tour.

As always, Roger “Rocky” Watkins provided the early-morning entertainment with his inability to find a) a boarding pass; b) a passport on arrival at the Departure Gate. Len Gale duplicated his behaviour in Singapore, so nothing new there and it was obvious Alan Bowen was in for an interesting time as his roommate! Other choristers had some memorable moments in the airport when they socialised with pop singer Craig David who was boarding the same plane.

On reaching Gate 5 at 11.55am, the Choir boarded the gigantic Singapore Airlines A380, named the Star Alliance (SQ0317). This two-deck state-of-the-art craft – the largest in the world - had some 480 passengers on board for the seemingly endless journey towards the Antipodes. Choristers finally departed at 12.25pm and within a short period were settled into their surroundings for the 12-hour journey of 6,761 miles.

This was an incredible craft and the flight was calm and hugely enjoyable from the outset. That is, until choristers were informed by the chief steward, “Gentleman, you have drunk us all dry. There is no more alcohol to be found on board.” In such frantic situations there is only one solution – to settle down for a few hours sleep while watching one of the many movies on offer.

At 12midnight (UK time) the Choir reached Changi Airport in Singapore. Chorister Selwyn Jones (1B) was rushed to a medical bay after being taken ill on the journey, but recovered sufficiently for the second leg of the trip. Many settled into a lounge area to relax for an hour before boarding the second Singapore Airlines craft (SQ223) for the four-and-a-half hour flight to Perth in Western Australia.

Once again the choristers were grouped together in a cabin towards the rear of the craft and with plenty of empty seats were able to stretch out and sleep for most of the journey. They travelled 2,432 miles south to Australia, flying above Indonesia and Jakarta.

The landing at Perth was anything but calm and all the choristers needed was the theme tune of the *Dambusters* to come over the in-flight entertainment system for that extra piece of realism. It was indeed a hair-raiser, particularly since a storm had hit Perth at about the same time. In fact they were experiencing the first rainfall in six months. It must have something to do with the fact that the Welsh had arrived!

The memorable arrival at the capital of the Western Australia – and the most isolated city in the world as the nearest other metropolitan area is Adelaide over 1,300 miles away - didn't end there however. Many were met by tour organiser Pia di Paulo, tour manager Sue Gannon and production manager David Lang at the airport. However, on arrival at the large 60-seater coach (Roberts Coaches, driven by Murray James) the alarm bells started to go off in the airport due to a bomb scare and the entire building was evacuated. Some of the choristers were taken to another safety spot and had to travel to the hotel alone because they were separated from the main body of the Choir.

Daryl didn't help matters either by admitting in a health check at the airport that he was suffering from a cough and sore throat. As a likely candidate for the new Swine Flu pandemic, he was ushered away for a medical check to determine if he was fit to enter the country! Things did go from bad to worse when John Jones opened his case to find he'd left his suit behind; while Daryl discovered he'd also left his trousers and shoes in Treorchy!

It was only a short 25-minute drive to the centre of this beautiful city of Perth where they reached the Seasons of Perth Hotel at 37 Pier Street. Choristers partnered with their friends and checked into their rooms to enjoy a couple of hours rest. By 7.30pm many settled into the hotel bar for the evening to enjoy the first of many social events together. As the Victoria Bitter, Pure Blond and Carlton Kings beer flowed, the choristers certainly began to soak up the welcoming atmosphere from the many Australian guests.

When last orders were called it was time to re-camp around half a mile away in the very lively Half a Sixpence pub. With a live band and a packed crowd, it proved a memorable first-night of the tour – even if someone was trying to steal the red touring jackets!

### **Saturday May 23<sup>rd</sup>**

At 7am Alwyn Lewis, Dean Powell, Keith Owens and Gareth Evans were met in the by publicist Lynne Burford. She took the four over to the ABC Studios in downtown Perth to be met by broadcast journalist James Lush who was presenting his Saturday morning show. The four were lined up behind a set of microphones to perform *Calon Lan* before Dean undertook a lengthy interview and we concluded the show with a rendition of *We'll Keep A Welcome*. So successful was the visit that the telephones began ringing non-stop during our performance as people requested information on

how to buy tickets for one of the concerts. It helped sell a further 128 tickets in an hour!

During the day choristers wandered through the beautiful city streets of Perth. Some paid a visit to the Perth Concert Hall for a photograph or two outside the venue and then down to the harbour and pier on the Swan River for a coffee next to a favourite old haunt, The Lucky Shag Bar.

Others enjoyed all the sights and sounds of the Swan Bell Tower and Barrack Square where many of the locals took interest in the tour jackets and stopped to ask about the visit to Perth. The Choir was all very recognisable given the quantity of pre-publicity of their visit and the fact they remain decked out in such bright colours!

At 4.15pm choristers left the hotel on board the Roberts Coaches and headed for the beautiful resort of Mandurah 47 miles away. As the usual announcement were made, Daryl took the microphone and for the first time the daily “Bing Bong” Awards for stupidity (renamed “Billabong Awards” in Australia) were announced in honour of the high standard of basic “Twpness” in the TMC!:

Mention in Dispatches:

Daryl Stacey	Said his voice wasn't so good and wanted a travel zone. He meant Vocal Zone.
Rennie Phillips	The great explorer couldn't wait to get to Australia to see the water going down the plug hole in the opposite direction
Dennis Lethbridge	Phoned Wyn Davies at 6.30am in Leigh Delamere to tell him where he was. He rang the wrong number, got through to a total stranger and said “Hello Darling, how are you?”
Alwyn Lewis	Thought he was in a really long queue for the bar in the airport. In fact he was waiting outside Starbucks which was two shops away
Ivor Williams	The only chorister to have a seat in the upper deck of the plane and explained it was “a better view up there.”
Terry George	At Singapore he kept trying to pick up a coin in the arrivals lounge and realised it was the stud holding the carpet down
John Bowen	Tried to suck his gin and tonic through the stirrer
Arthur Miles	Said he was taking his sweets around the bus for the boys. We were on a plane at the time
Len Gale	At the airport he said “There's only 20 of us here. Maybe the other ones caught an earlier flight.” Twp. They'd just boarded earlier than him.
Daryl Stacey	Couldn't hear the film through the earphones on the plane. Probably because he was plugged into Dean's handset instead
Gareth Evans	The ace detective explained that in the Bell Tower in Perth there were.... wait for it....bells.
Dean Powell	Couldn't get over the amount of union jacks hanging in Perth. They were of course the top left hand corner of the Australian flag
Daryl Stacey	Left his trousers and his shoes in Treorchy

Gareth Lawrence	Went out cycling with Adrian Owen and Dai Evans and despite being a young, fit man asked them slow down on the hills because he couldn't keep up
David Thomas	While practicing on the piano (in outstanding fashion!), the boys passed by and threw coins at him. "I take requests", he replied.
Iona Jones	Thought we had a week off in the middle of the tour. Forgot we were going to New Zealand
Len Gale	Looked at his watch and thought it was 9am. In fact he had turned the watch forward correctly, but it was upside down when he looked at it and it was really 3am.
Dennis Lethbridge	Directed Jan and Iona to the river, but sent them up hill in the wrong direction
Gareth Evans	Must remember to switch on the iron before using it.
Alan Bowen	Requested Carer's Allowance for looking after Len
Bronze	John Jones for leaving his suit in Treorchy
Silver	Len Gale for general twpness on tour
Gold	Anonymous Chorister for drinking with a lady who had her own transport.

On arrival at the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre the choristers undertook a lengthy rehearsal on stage prior to the commencement of the evening concert at 8pm. All 765 tickets for the performance had sold out weeks ago and it was a pleasure to return to such a beautiful area and outstanding auditorium.

As always rehearsals were difficult as choristers tried to overcome jet lag and general throat problems. The evening performance was a total success and left many of the choristers and audience moved to tears. The sheer scale of excitement for each item performed was testimony to the incredible success of the evening.

The Choir gave some very memorable performances, under the direction of Jan Ball and accompanied by Helen Roberts. Soprano soloist Iona Jones, who was accompanied on the piano by David Geoffrey Thomas, was simply superb. Iona gave an exceptionally fine performance, and one of the highlights must surely have been her duet with Ray Daniels from Parry's *Hywel a Blodwen*. From now on she was known affectionately as "Blod".

The audience's responses gave a clear indication of its firm choral favourites, particularly of *With A Voice of Singing*, *Llef*, *Lord's Prayer* and of course the breathtaking *Les Miserables Medley*, complete with a solo performance by Iona Jones and Dean Powell. In the second half the opening operatic numbers of *Soldier's Chorus*, *Pearlfishers* and *Speed Your Journey* set the standard for a quality performance which endured throughout the remainder of the evening. *The Abba Medley* was certainly well received, as was the final section of *Myfanwy*, *You Raise Me Up* and *My Way*.

However, nothing prepared us for the astonishing response to *Men of Harlech* immediately after *Senzenina*, which caused a near standing-ovation before the first bar was completed. The Welsh exiles certainly voiced their deep appreciation of this

iconic battle song. *Nessun Dorma* followed, with the fun of *Delilah* and the nostalgic *We'll Keep A Welcome* to conclude the concert before the anthems of *Advance Australia Fair* and *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* completed an unforgettable debut performance on this tour of Australia and New Zealand. As we walked off stage the chanting of "Oggie! Oggie! Oggie!" was heard from the delighted crowd.

Following the concert the Choir met with many of the audience in the theatre bar and were overwhelmed with the generous plaudits afforded them. Some of the older Welsh exiles admitted to being moved to tears; others felt that this performance far surpassed our concert in Mandurah in 2004 as being "200 percent better". With a deep feeling of satisfaction, of pride in our achievements, and relief that the first concert of the tour had been so well received, the Choir returned to Perth by 12.30am and retired to their beds!

### **Sunday May 24<sup>th</sup>**

It was a day to remember when we not only entertained and musically conquered the audience of Perth Concert Hall once – but twice. It was indeed a phenomenal experience and certainly a highlight of my twenty-year career in choral singing. We could never have imagined the ecstatic response from two huge audiences, the sheer professionalism of the Choir's performance, the show-like atmosphere of the event complete with technical effects, lighting and sound. It was quite simply, superb. Sunday began rather quietly with a 9am breakfast followed by a couple of hours in the hotel. Dressed in our grey trousers, touring shirt and red jackets, we left the Seasons of Perth Hotel at 1pm and walked the short distance to the Perth Concert Hall, stopping outside for the obligatory tour photograph as residents and shoppers stood to admire the sight for themselves.

Once inside the building we marched onto the concert hall stage, aghast at the sheer enormity of the auditorium, towered over by a spectacular organ. The three-tiered auditorium, with a 1,900 seating capacity, appeared overwhelming at first, with choristers questioning their own ability to fill such a space with their vocal talents. A rehearsal took place, sound checks were made, intricate lighting schemes. A mood of nervousness, yet overwhelming determination to succeed, pervaded the ranks of the choir and the moment we stepped on stage for the 3pm matinee performance we were welcomed by an incredible sight and sound of 1,300 people filling the silence with rapturous applause. From that very first note of *With A Voice Of Singing*, the Choir was assured of a performance of note.

From the delicate *Y Darlun* the intensity of the performance reached an early climax in the "amen" section of *Llef*. Two religious items followed in *The Lord's Prayer* and in complete contrast, *Old Time Religion*. For the first time on tour David Geoffrey Thomas performed the breathtaking organ solo of the *Toccata* from Vidor's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony followed sharply by the *Les Miserables* medley. The mood was intense!

With the introduction of so many new lighting techniques, including silhouettes of the Choir and colourful arrangements of spots, the theatre-like quality of this production staggered belief. *Bring Him Home* and *I Dreamed and Dream* was followed by Dean's rendition of *Stars*. With a rousing *Do You Hear The People Sing* to conclude the first half, the audience were left in a state of awe.

The second half opened with another organ solo introduction for Sibelius's *Hymn from Finlandia* with Iona Jones performing the first verse in Welsh followed by the Choir. Ray and I joined forces for the *Pearlfisher's Duet* by Bizet and this section ended beautifully with the *Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves* from Verdi's *Nabucco*.

The *Abba Medley* certainly entertained the audience and we gave them a finale section to remember in *Myfanwy*, *You Raise Me Up* and *My Way*. However, nothing quite prepared us for the phenomenal response we received to *Men of Harlech* following *Senzenina*. A near standing-ovation during a song is not something that happens very often! *Nessun Dorma* and *We'll Keep a Welcome* followed by both national anthems brought the afternoon performance to a close.

We left the stage feeling a deep sense of satisfaction after giving a first-class concert to a first-class audience. However, it also gave us a sense of foreboding as we wondered how on earth we could repeat, let alone improve, on it for the evening performance. A two-hour rest saw many of the choristers venture out for drinks.

At 8pm an even more staggering sight and sound than the one earlier in the day, welcomed us on stage. Over 1,700 people gave us the loudest of applause as we marched on stage and burst into *With A Voice of Singing*. From my very first introduction we knew this was an audience that was out to enjoy itself as the loud cheers of applause and laughter rang in the ears. It was certainly a performance to remember.

Once again the concert followed exactly the same format as the one earlier in the day, with obvious crowd pleases in *Llef*, *Les Miserables Medley*, *Speed Your Journey* and *You Raise Me Up*. Dean also resurrected *Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl*, as well as perform *Stars*, *My Little Welsh Home* and the solo sections in the *Abba Medley* and *The Pearlfishers*.

As previously, the audience were overjoyed with the Choir's magnificent rendition of *Men of Harlech* and the loud applause continued through *My Way*, *Nessun Dorma* and indeed *We'll Keep a Welcome*. Even when Dean stepped forward to announce the anthems, there were still calls for "more!" Much to his surprise one member of the audience ran forward and gave him a large leek, which he ceremoniously waved on stage! We left the stage safe in the knowledge that we had indeed conquered Perth. A great concert hall housed a great Choir for a great audience to enjoy.

### **Monday May 25<sup>th</sup>**

We travelled to Perth International Airport and at 9.30am boarded the Qantas Flight No. QF668 for the 2,114 mile journey to Adelaide in South Australia. The two-and-a-half hour flight allowed many of us time to relax and indeed reflect on such a wonderful start to this tour.

On arrival at Adelaide we were whisked off to the Mercure Grosvenor Hotel on North Terrace in the centre of the city and were soon settled into our rooms. Some managed a few hours sleep before the 6pm call to gather in the hotel bar and greet representatives of the Metropolitan Male Voice Choir of Adelaide whose President exchanged gifts with our Chairman Gareth Evans.

The Choir then began a short pub crawl around the city, starting in the Strathmore Bar where we met with an giant of a Maori called Chris and eventually settled into the perfect surroundings of the Dog and Duck Bar for food and drinks until late into the evening. With no concert to perform this evening, it was an ideal time to relax and enjoy one another's company – but as always, no singing was allowed!

### **Tuesday May 26<sup>th</sup>**

A free day in Adelaide was very welcomed by each and every one of us after a busy start to the tour. We had a breakfast in the Mercure Hotel restaurant before boarding one of the trams which took us the length of the city on the Sir Donald Bradman Drive and through the suburbs to West Beach. Loads of people stopped us in the street as our bright red touring jackets caught their eye – and hopefully helped to sell even more tickets for tonight!

Plenty of shops, a large beach and marina to enjoy as we got together for group photographs, meandered along the busy streets and appreciated our surroundings! Despite the cold weather, it was great to get some fresh air as we walked the seafront and onto the pier.

A visit to a local chocolate shop and café saw the group of us performing *Happy Birthday* for two of the customers named Maria and Melanie, much to the amusement of everyone else enjoying their lunch. So we settled in well to our surroundings for an hour or so before walking around some of the many shops in the area and catching the 1.30pm tram back into the city for a stroll around Rundle Mall and Adelaide Mall.

At 6pm the entire Choir, dressed in the grey trousers and tour shirts with red jackets, carried their dress suits over to the Adelaide Festival Theatre, the venue which they first conquered in 1986 and we returned to again on our month-long tour in 1999. Australia's first multi-purpose arts centre was designed from the inside out by architect John Morphett. Its impressive auditorium with its bright red and natural wood interior provided a memorable location for the evening performance before an audience of 1,400 people.

The evening concert was another great success and although the audience first appeared more subdued than previous evenings, they still nonetheless rewarded us with a rousing standing ovation and calls for two further encores. The actual concert programme remained largely the same as the previous evening, although David Geoffrey Thomas had something of an ordeal performing the large theatre organ which could be found behind the stage! This meant that Jan had a camera pointing on her as she conducted, so David could follow her beat! He also impressed the audience with his performance of the *Tocatta and Fuge in D Flat Minor* by Johann Sebastian Bach.

The Choir gave another very rewarding performance of Welsh, operatic and modern favourites for the large crowd. As always the *Les Miserable* medley went down a total storm and the operatic items – especially *The Pearfishers Duet* – received rapturous applause. The crowd appeared very impressed by the Choir's ability to tackle Abba and once again rose to their feet when *Senzenina* ran into *Men of Harlech* in the final section of songs.



With the sight of Welsh flags being waved in the crowd, and the sound of their loud applause in the ears, we left the stage quietly confident that we had once more left our mark on Adelaide. Many of us had a quiet drink in the Strathmore Hotel before returning to the Mercure for a relatively early night's sleep in preparation for tomorrow's frantic day.

### Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup>

By the end of the day we all felt totally and utterly exhausted. A mixture of prolonged jet-lag, constant travelling, a demanding rehearsal and an evening concert in a large hall did little to raise the spirits of the touring party. However, despite the shortcomings, the audience at the Llewellyn Hall in Canberra were ecstatic about the entire performance, which was reassuring to say the least.

We left the Mercure Grosvenor in Adelaide at 7am following a very early morning breakfast, and travelled on the Murray Coaches to the International Airport. En route Dean had the pleasurable task of reading an outstanding newspaper review to the Choir from the Perth Courier following our weekend concert there. On reaching the airport we boarded the Qantas craft QF676 headed for Melbourne. On reaching the state of Victoria we spent two hours in the airport's departure lounge and after a gate change, we left Melbourne and boarded the Qantas QF812 for a 291 mile flight to Canberra, the nation's capital.

On reaching the airport Keith, Stuart, Alan and Dean jumped into a taxi and travelled to the ABC 666 Studio in the city for a 4pm radio interview. The live-on-air performance saw us sing *Calon Lan* and *Cwm Rhondda* and Dean had a lengthy radio interview with Louise Maher who presented the drive-time show.

When it was all finished the four took a cab to the Rydges Eagle Hawk Resort on the Federal Highway, an isolated hotel on the edge of "the bush" with a lot of either dead kangaroos lining the side of the highway, or plenty of live ones jumping across your path in the resort itself! On reaching the Llewellyn Hall in the Canberra School of Music we undertook a difficult rehearsal. To be fair, the choristers were exhausted following a busy day of travelling, sections were going flat in some songs and the First Tenor section sounded poor. The rehearsal was a complete disaster and we all felt let down by the situation. A couple of cups of tea and some kangaroo kebabs later in the rehearsal room and we returned to the stage for the evening concert before 900 people.

The audience was very enthusiastic and there was plenty of fun and laughter to be had with them. Admittedly the Choir was tired and although *Myfanwy* was poor, we still gave an admirable performance which the crowd clearly appreciated given the constant calls for encore after the final item was performed.

There were still many highlights, once again the *Les Miserable* Medley, David's performance of the *Toccata* from Vidor's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony on the organ, *The Hymn from Finlandia*, *Pearlfishers* and the *Abba* medley complete with flashing lights giving a disco effect to the songs. We boarded the buses at 11pm and travelled back to the resort for a late night pizza supper and some drinks in the hotel bar, analysing our shortcomings and rearranging the programme with Jan in preparation for tomorrow's

concert in Geelong. Above all it was a night to relax, unwind and try and regain some lost energy for the remainder of the time in Australia.

### **Thursday May 28<sup>th</sup>**

Many of the choristers were out of their beds and in the hotel bar by 4am this morning in time to watch Manchester Utd lose against Barcelona. So much for catching up on our sleep! We had a hearty breakfast and boarded the coaches at 8am heading to Canberra International Airport.

At 10.15am we boarded the Qantas aircraft flight QF763 for the 45-minute flight to Melbourne International Airport. With a quick cup of tea and a chat, we covered the 291 mile journey in no time and were greeted once more by the single Murray Coach (who said the Rodneys and the Deacons can't be friends!) for a trip into the city where we reached our accommodation for the next four days, the Ibis Hotel at Victoria Market..

At 4pm we gathered in the hotel foyer and boarded the coach headed for Geelong around 50 miles away. As we settled onto the freeway, viewing the splendour of the Melbourne skyline, Daryl read the Billabong Awards for the day:

#### Mention in Dispatches:

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| Dean Powell   | For his performance of "I'm nothing special" – he certainly wasn't in rehearsal because he kept getting the song wrong, despite prompts from the conductor and accompanist.  |
| Boyo Watkins  | He's rooming with John Bowen and said, "I'd rather hear you snore than sing."  |
| John Jones    | He approached an Asian woman in the Perth hotel breakfast room and asked if she wanted his room number. She looked puzzled because she was also a guest.   |
| Alan Bowen    | For wearing camouflage shorts in an effort to hide from Len. He also deserves a mention for dressing up like a surfer in Adelaide. He is obviously Ystrad's answer to David Hasselhoff   |
| Rocky Watkins | Picture the scene in Adelaide when a few of them were walking back to the hotel at 2am and saw a gap between two buildings with five policemen mounted on these huge horses. The next morning Jeff Powell said, "Those police were very polite and I can't get over the size of those bikes they had". What was he drinking? |
| Gareth Thomas | On hearing the review of the concert in Perth when she said the "tenors were flat", he thinks it's a misprint and should have read, "tenors were fat."   |
| John Bowen    | His tour t-shirts have spelt Adelaide and Frankston wrong  |
| Iona Jones    | When told the Canberra aircraft pilot was a woman she said, "Good for her, but she'll still never get on the late bus."  |
| Jan Ball      | For the look on her face in Canberra when the organ was playing and David was walking across the stage. The item was pre-recorded!   |
| Dean Powell   | For having more faces than Big Ben. He told the Canberra audience they were wonderful. But for the past week has told everyone else the city is shut.  |

Dennis Lethbridge	Lost his hearing aid in Adelaide, but only just realised
Bob Hopkins	For saying, "All flights should be like this, up and down."
John Radford	Traced his family tree to New Zealand and is originally from the Looney Family. That figures!
Rocky Watkins	In Melbourne he said his room was nice, but the sink was shallow. What is he doing? Washing dishes?
Iona Jones	For promising to get her maracas out tonight on stage
Bronze	John Radford - "I can't wait to get home and get my wife's knickers off. I've had them on for three days now!"
Silver	Dai Williams - Was told to be careful of kangaroo droppings all over the place in Canberra. He said, "Well, they are human after all."
Gold	Selwyn Jones - At the security gate in Canberra, Stuart had to take his shoes off to go through the x-ray machine and Selwyn had to take off his belt. Stuart went through first and as Selwyn followed, he tried to pick up his bag, belt and Stuart's shoes at the same time in a bid to help his fellow chorister. Unfortunately as he's walking along his trousers fell down to his ankles and he couldn't pull them up because his hands were full. The security check-in staff were beside themselves in laughter.

On arrival at the Costa Hall, Geelong, we were all impressed by the vast auditorium before us and spent the next hour or so rehearsing items for the evening concert that began at 8pm. It was obvious from the very first note that the tiredness in the voices experienced in Canberra had dissipated and tonight the Choir most certainly gave a first class performance for a very appreciative audience of around 400 people. The concert was a great success with calls for encores and rapturous applause following each and every item.

Jan introduced a new line-up of material tonight which included *Cwm Rhondda* and was well received by all concerned. Once again some of the highlights included *Les Miserables*, *You Raise Me Up* and *Men of Harlech*. Iona also performed *Y Nefoedd* for the first time on tour that was also appreciated. With a successful concert under our belt and a feeling of deep satisfaction that the Choir was back on top form following a strenuous few days, we relaxed in the theatre bar for an hour to enjoy a few glasses of wine and to meet many of the Welsh exiles in the audience.

### **Friday May 29<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Glorious weather welcomed us on our first full day in Melbourne. It was spectacular, and with plenty of free time on our hands given us an ideal opportunity to make the most of the surroundings. Some groups travelled around the Victoria Market, while others arrived on Swanson Street and reacquainted themselves with all the sights and sounds of this fabulous city. The hustle and bustle of the streets, the quantity of live street theatre and music, all added to the exciting atmosphere of the Australian metropolitan.

We walked through the main shopping centre, passed the National Gallery and St Paul's Cathedral to a favourite landmark, the Flinders Street Station with its yellow

and red brickwork. Then it was a short walk over the Yarra River across the Princess Bridge to the Melbourne Arts Centre where we will be performing on Sunday evening. Some of the group took the opportunity to visit the Crown Casino while others boarded a Melbourne City Cruise motorboat and sailed down the Yarra River to enjoy the many sights on offer.

Travelling under each of the many bridges, we were able to view the Boat Houses, some impressive mansions, the local private school, Botanical Gardens and also the main sports arenas including the National Tennis Centre, Lexus Centre and Cricket Ground. We then circled Herring Island and returned to the city once more.

With heavy freeway traffic in our path, it took over an hour to reach a familiar concert venue for the Treorchy team – Frankston Arts Centre – where we had performed on both the 1999 and 2004 tours. Tonight was an extra special occasion because the director of HVK Productions, Andrew Kay (who is also an Honorary Member of the Choir) was in the audience. So we really wanted everything to go just right. It did!

The Choir is certainly giving its best in concert and the over all performance was superb. At first the audience appeared a little reserved, but they soon warmed to the Treorchy men and particularly to the performance of Iona Jones who once again, was absolutely fantastic. There were very many highlights to the performance which is now a perfect example of good discipline, excellent diction and tone and the over all feel of a complete show with mood lighting and sound technology.

Dean's performance as compere was very well received tonight and the audience soon warmed to the Welsh sense of humour. He also performed *Little Welsh Home* and once again *Stars* received a round of applause before the final song in the medley was performed. Ray sang the solo line in *Winner Takes It All* instead of John Bowen and the introduction of *Cwm Rhondda* into the programme is also pleasing the Welsh crowd.

Following the concert we were delighted to find Andrew Kay raving over how much he enjoyed the entire performance. It was just what we needed to hear. Together we enjoyed a pint in the nearby Shakespeare Tavern before boarding the coaches at 11pm and heading back to the Ibis Hotel for a good night's sleep.

### **Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> 2009**

With another free day on our hands, choristers ventured around Melbourne to re-discover this beautiful city. At 5pm it was time to board the coaches again and travel 40 minutes to Monash University. Once again Daryl was off:

#### Mention in Dispatches

Noel the Driver	Said it was only 25km to Frankston when we were going to Geelong
Tom Belmont	When he asked for a cup of tea in the Melbourne hotel restaurant, the staff asked if he wanted English Breakfast. He said no, just a cup of tea
Jeff Powell	Couldn't find the marina in Adelaide and said "It must be down a side street."

Alan Lewis	At Melbourne he had the café bill and it said the group had five lattes and an English breakfast. He couldn't understand it because nobody had food (tea again!)
Keith Owens	Posed as a senior citizen to get a concessionary rate on the boat
Dai Williams	Said he needed a new watch for his battery
Andy Costin	Thought his shirt felt strange. He still had the hanger in it
Boyo Watkins	Asked Rocky whether his daughter liked the concert, but we were still in the Green Room and hadn't gone on stage
Adrian Owen	Said he saw Ivor Lock and Peter Cutter in town. But he's better known as Phillip Tucker!
Alwyn & Keith	Said they would stay on the tram until the next stop, when they realised there was no more track – it was the end of the line
Terry George	Couldn't find his way back to the hotel – which is on Therry Street. Easy name for him to remember!
Rocky Watkins	Couldn't get any lather from the soap, but he was rubbing the plug
Bronze	Terry George - Ordered a coffee in the airport and the waiter asked for his name, "Terry George", he said. "I only need one name," he replied. "Well take your pick", he answered.
Silver	Bob Hopkins - Went up behind a man in the Ibis Hotel (who was wearing a shirt very similar to a chorister), shook him at the shoulders and shouted "Arthur! Arthur!". The bloke was not a member of the Choir!
Gold	Jan Ball - Her podium in Frankston was noisy and she asked the Choir, "Do I have a squeaky box?"

We reached the impressive auditorium at Monash University and had a lengthy rehearsal. Tonight ABC Productions were recording the concert and hope to produce a live CD from the items recorded in a total of three concerts throughout the tour. The stage was littered with microphones and cables that made movement a difficulty, particularly when Jan tripped and almost fell head first into the First Tenor Section.

The concert itself was well received by the 400 members of the audience, although few of us felt totally satisfied by the standard of performance, particularly the First Tenors who went flat more than once during the night. Despite the few shortcomings, the audience appeared thrilled by each and every song, particularly the *Abba Medley* and *Men of Harlech*. We left the concert hall by 11pm, returning to Melbourne in time for many of the choristers to watch the FA Cup in a local sports bar in Victoria Market.

### **Sunday May 31<sup>st</sup> 2009**

Sad news reached us first thing in the morning when we were told that Alan Lewis (1B) had gone home to Wales because his wife suffered an accident and has broken her arm. This means that our touring choir is now down to 48 members, which is indeed a great shame.

A free day welcomed the choristers, with many continuing their adventures through the streets of Melbourne. The bus left the hotel at 5pm for the short drive to the stage door entrance of the Hamer Hall at the Victoria Arts Centre on the banks of the River

Yarra. The Choir first performed there in 1986 and returned once more on our last tour in 2004.

The early arrival allowed Jan the opportunity to rehearse the First Tenor section in isolation because of their tendency to lose pitch during the concert. We rehearsed a number of items where the First Tenors are most prominent and the full Choir was then called to the stage for an hour-long rehearsal session until 7.15pm.

Tonight was always going to be a very important concert. Over 1,000 tickets had been sold and once again ABC recorded the performance for the forthcoming CD to be released in August. At 8pm the concert began and this was the finest performance of the entire tour so far. The First Tenors maintained pitch with some soft, quality singing rather than trying to sing too loudly to make up for the few numbers. The whole balance and blend of voices in all sections was sublime and the audience appeared thrilled by each and every item.

Highlights were *The Pearlfishers*, *Llanfair* and once again the *Abba* medley which surprised and excited the more traditional male voice choir concert goers in the audience. Over all, this was indeed a truly outstanding concert and as we burst into *We'll Keep A Welcome*, it was hard to hold back the tears. One of the more excited members of the audience was the founder of the multi-million-pound business Specsavers.

Afterwards Jan, Iona, Helen, Ray, Dean and David, were ushered to the main foyer where a long table with chairs was placed in a row for them to sign programmes and CD covers. Choristers then enjoyed celebratory drinks at the Sports Bar in Victoria Market before heading off to bed in preparation of another early morning.

### **Monday June 1<sup>st</sup> 2009**

Choristers had a quick breakfast and boarded the coach for a 6.15am departure to Melbourne International Airport. At 9.25am we departed Melbourne for Auckland on the Pacific Blue aircraft (DJ164) for the 3hour 20minute flight covering 1,630 miles. The flight was comfortable, and the views of the New Zealand landscape was absolutely breathtaking. In fact, everything about the journey was near perfect until we reached Auckland airport and as we began to touch down were aware of the fact that the ground has disappeared and we were flying close to the sea! As the land reappeared, cross winds hit us, throwing the plane from side to side, which left us both a bit pale and shaking!

However, there was worst to come for poor Daryl when we went through the security check and it was discovered that he had left a banana in his hand luggage. Due to the strict laws in place in New Zealand, he was fined \$200. Similarly, Gareth Thomas (1T) also suffered the same fate for an apple in his hand luggage as well. Needless to say plenty of "fruity" jokes and songs were performed on the Pavlovich Coach as we made our way into the city of Auckland, the largest in New Zealand. Later that day the choristers all donated enough money to pay off the entire debt for both singers.

This is the furthest many of us had been from home and that was foremost in our minds as we enjoyed the short journey into uncharted territory for both the Choir and for many of us individually. With 1.8million inhabitants, and stretching for miles to

see, Auckland is the largest city in New Zealand and is known as the City of Sails because of hundreds of yachts in the nearby harbour.

Our accommodation for the next few days was the Heritage Hotel on Hobson Street, undoubtedly one of the finest hotels we have ever stayed in. Our two-bedroom apartments, complete with kitchen and bathroom, was absolutely outstanding. Its classic 1940s design made it feel as if we'd walked back in time to a Humphrey Bogart film noir scene. Formerly a department store, it was truly splendid and few of us could believe this would be our home for the duration of our stay in Auckland.

Few places were actually open as this was a Bank Holiday to celebrate the Queen's Birthday. So it was only a matter of time before choristers gathered at the Muddy Farmer Irish bar next door to the hotel. After a few quiet drinks amongst friends, it was time to turn in for the night.

### **Tuesday June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009**

It was an early rise at 7am for breakfast in the Hector Restaurant with its seven-floor atrium, providing incredible surroundings for the guests. Choristers wandered over to the Sky Tower on the corner of Victoria and Federal Street that totally dominates the Auckland skyline. It towers 1076 feet high – making it the tallest free-standing structure in the Southern Hemisphere and the 12<sup>th</sup> tallest member of the World Federation of Great Towers. With a sense of trepidation we stepped out of the fast-moving lift on the Observation Deck to appreciate the breathtaking views of the city and harbour below us.

The funniest moment came when we settled into the café bar for a morning tea and as we looked through the window a rope dropped and a man undertook the Sky Jump, a 192-metre jump from the observation deck which can reach 53mph as you head towards the street below. At a second glance this hovering spectacle turned out to be none other than Jeff Priday! The bravery of the second tenor!

A perfect day actually got even better, because we walked over to Auckland Town Hall on Aotea Square, a venue better known these days as The Edge. The Italian renaissance style building is home to the main council chambers and also the Great Hall, regarded as one of the finest concert halls (acoustically) in the world. It was in such magnificent surroundings that our concert rehearsal took place and the evening performance, before 820 people, began at 7.30pm prompt.

The concert can only be described in superlatives, for it was indeed a triumphant and yet deeply emotional performance. History was made this evening as this was the first concert given by the Treorchy Male Choir in New Zealand and Dean was quick to tell the audience that if it wasn't for their country, then there may never have been a Choir. The reason, quite simply, is that the original group of men who sang *Myfanwy* in the Red Cow in Treorchy in 1883 and won £1 for their efforts, had only gone there to sing a few songs at a farewell part for a fellow collier who was emigrating to New Zealand! This information obviously pleased the audience who were totally enthralled from the opening bars of *With A Voice Of Singing* followed by my usual Welsh introduction followed this time with the Maori word of welcome, "Kiaora!"

We raised the rafters at the Great Hall. The Kiwi audience was superb, rewarding the Choir with an ovation and calls for an encore even before the final song was sung. They cheered at the mere mention of a performance of the *Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves* and the response to *Men of Harlech* was astounding. And there was no sign of a Haka in return!

Many choristers had a lump in the throat from the start of *You Raise Me Up* and by the time the national anthem came, some were shedding tears, as were so many of the audience who felt a hiraeth for Wales. It was also a momentous performance in that the Choir gave their first public rendition of the New Zealand National Anthem, *God Defend New Zealand* in both English and Maori. The audience certainly appreciated it.

We left the stage assured we had indeed made our mark on Auckland and following some autograph requests in the foyer (from none other than former All Blacks player Sid Going) it was time to return to Hobson Street for a party at the Muddy Farmer Irish Bar next to the hotel. A fun-loving Jan lifted the “no-singing” ban and we performed our usual repertoire to the many guests, including members of the Auckland Welsh Society who were present. Iona, Sue, David, DGT and the crew really enjoyed the atmosphere of the evening as the beer flowed and the songs were performed until 4am!

### **Wednesday June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009**

After only a few short hours of sleep, it was time to pack our cases and enjoy some breakfast – in the company of the current All Blacks Team and none other than former Welsh coach Graham Henry! What a send off as we bid a very fond farewell to Auckland and began a wonderful journey through the north island of New Zealand to the nation’s capital of Wellington.

This 11-hour journey of 647 miles (the equivalent of Cardiff to Edinburgh) took us through the most breathtaking of landscapes as the two coaches wound their way along the main Freeway 1 (which only had a single lane either side!) through the Franklin District, Huntly, Hamilton and eventually to the beautiful little village of Tirau where we stopped for a short coffee break and a wander through the public information centre and shops.

It was with much hilarity that Tony Davies had his prized teddy bear returned to him following a foiled kidnapping and ransom campaign. His little mascot was kidnapped a few days ago and he began receiving ransom notes! It was eventually returned to him in a Kentucky Fried Chicken box from the bus driver!

At one point Jan and Iona accompanied us on the “late bus” and played excerpts from the recording of the Monash Concert. The funniest moment came when Iona looked into her handbag and found the TV remote control from the Heritage Hotel!

At Huka Falls we stopped to see the sheer volume of tumultuous waters that cascade under one of several bridges spanning the river Waikato that drains Lake Taupo which we visited soon after. The deep blue waters of New Zealand’s largest fresh-water lake were surrounded by tall snow-capped mountains, providing a viewpoint unlike any other. Again we had time to explore our surroundings, have food and take



photographs of the scenery. The area, known as the “central plateau” of the north island is dominated by the snow-covered volcanic mountains of Mount Ruapehu, Ngahauruhoe and Tongariro which are all part of Tongariro National Park.

Our journey continued towards the mountain ranges, where steam was actually rising from one of the volcanically active mountains. We stopped to take photographs of the scenery, much of which was used to great effect in the epic Lord of the Rings film trilogy. As we covered more miles and the journey continued, we became engrossed in the stories, history and information supplied to us by our driver Mark. A brief stop in Huntersville, then the coaches were on their way for the final leg of the journey towards Palmeston North and finally to the capital city of Wellington.

We were booked into the West Plaza Hotel on Wakefield Street, another lovely overnight accommodation. Once we were settled it was time to explore and visit the Welsh Dragon – the only Welsh pub in the Southern Hemisphere. Not a single inch of wall or ceiling can be seen as Welsh memorabilia and flags cover every space! A few drinks later and we visited Kitty O’Shea’s Irish bar before an early night to bed beckoned for one and all.

#### **Thursday June 4<sup>th</sup> 2009**

A free day was something each and every one of us needed, and we certainly made the most of our time by exploring Wellington’s many impressive sights. An early morning rise saw the usual group of us enjoy a full breakfast and at 11am our driver, Mark, offered to take a bus load of us on a tour of Wellington. For the next two hours we were witness to some terrific scenery, beginning with a Choir photograph outside the main Parliament and Governmental building – the latter is built in the shape of a beehive.

From there it was to the top of Mount Victoria, whose summit is about 700ft above sea level, giving a panoramic view of Wellington, surrounding hills and looking out into the Cook Strait. It was an ideal opportunity for us to take plenty of photographs of the many different images before us, from the bustling city to the deep blue and tranquil bay, littered with white sail boats.

During our visit Jan had a photograph next to a cannon. Not content with just standing next to it, she proceeded to climb up it, earning the nickname of “Cannon and Ball”!

We returned to the city from there, admiring the hustle and bustle of the nation’s capital, which although is much smaller than Auckland, has many landmark features to appreciate. For the remainder of the day some of the choristers settled into the Molly Malone’s Irish Bar to watch a rugby game while others explored Cuba Street and all the shops and eateries. We returned to the West Plaza Hotel from there and decided to spend the next few hours in the luxurious Blend Bar next door. About 20 of the choristers had already settled into their surroundings and as the red wine flowed, the afternoon turned into a great evening for us all! Plenty of laughter and good fun between us.

#### **Friday June 5<sup>th</sup> 2009**

It was a very early morning start for the Choir as we had breakfast by 6am and dressed in our dinner suits boarded the coaches for the New Zealand Television

Studios about 20 minutes outside of the city in Lambton Quay. We were welcomed into the Green Room area for hot drinks before making our way into Studio One to film two songs for the Good Morning New Zealand television breakfast programme. With a few brief rehearsals, the Choir recorded *Llef* and *You Raise Me Up* and within half an hour it was all completed.

Jan and Dean were ushered into the make-up department for a bit of polishing, and then it was back into the studio to film a chat with presenter Simon Grey. He was incredibly enthusiastic about the Choir's visit to New Zealand and Jan and Dean made a pretty good double act sat on the couch and jabbering away to their heart's content about the Choir's tour of the Southern Hemisphere. He was also just as thrilled and the interview went very well, so much so that the Choir stood outside the studio and watched the proceedings on the TV screens dotted throughout the building. As Jan and Dean walked into the car park they were greeted with rapturous applause from the men!

So it was back to the hotel for a cup of tea and then back to bed for a couple of hours in an effort to make up for the late night and early morning! During the day many choristers visited very impressive Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Telling the complete history of this magnificent country, its indigenous people and the arrival of Captain Cook and the subsequent settlers, it was a sight not to be missed. We were able to explore the natural history of the country by observing the skeleton of a blue whale and a preserved giant squid. It also allowed us the opportunity to appreciate the Maori culture and its people, by seeing a plethora of artefacts and treasures.

Returning to the hotel by walking the harbour and crossing the City to Sea bridge, it was time to prepare for the evening ahead. We boarded the coaches at 5pm and headed to the St James Theatre in the heart of Wellington. This Edwardian theatre built in 1912 and once the largest vaudeville and picture theatre in the country provided a first class venue for evening's performance before a sell-out audience of 950 people. Inside, the auditorium was hugely ornamental, featuring elaborate cherubs, plaster curlicues and painted and gilded lyres, horns, harps, dancing cupids and masks representing Comedy, Drama and Opera. With a rehearsal completed, the choristers waited back stage for the arrival of the crowds and at 7.30pm the evening performance began.

Our second concert in New Zealand was another outstanding success. The audience once again proved to be quite remarkable and by the roar of the applause and the stamping of feet following the performances, it was obvious they were having a great time. For some items, the applause actually took place at both the start and the end of the piece that was astonishing. Again our predominately Kiwi and Welsh audience provided us with the stimulus to give the very best of performances and with so many highlights, it was difficult to imagine how the next section of music could possibly compete with the last.

It was also noticeable how much the audience appreciated our knowing the New Zealand national anthem in Maori and it was with loud ringing in the ears that we finally left the stage to a standing ovation

## **Saturday June 6<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Another early morning start today as we left Wellington by 7am and travelled to the local Interislander Ferry Terminal at Port Nicholson to board the Kaitaki Ferry bound for the south island. The three-and-a-half-hour cruise took us through some of the country's most breathtaking scenery as we travelled sixty-one miles to the harbour town of Picton. During the lengthy cruise many of us stood up on deck or in one of the luxurious lounges with panoramic views along what is known as the Cook Strait. This stretch of water can often be subject to strong winds, but fortunately for us we had a very calm and enjoyable crossing.

Our journey to the south island took us through the most gorgeous fordes as we entered Tory Channel at West Head and followed it all the way along past the many bays, including Blackwood, Kumutoto, Walkawa and Whatomango until we reached Shakespeare Bay and Picton Harbour. This has indeed been another highlight of the tour as the opportunity to view so many breathtaking sights cannot be missed.

On arrival at Picton we boarded the coaches and continued to head south, once again mesmerised by the snow-covered mountains, the deep blue and turquoise sea and the many natural beauties of this country. Our enthusiasm was further helped when Jan and Iona produced three bottles of red wine out of their handbags and rucksack. With Stuart as barman, something of a red-wine drinking frenzy as the coach trundled along on its way

Daryl then picked up the microphone and announced the latest round of Billabong Awards:

### Mentions in Dispatches

Iona Jones	For preparing to step onto the stage at the Arts Centre to sing the finale of Do You Hear The People Sing only to find that the door was locked. In blind panic she shouted a couple of choice words until a stage hand opened it for her
Daryl Stacey	Introduced Dean to the founder of Specsavers in Melbourne as "Dean Phillips".
Iona Jones	For opening her hand bag and finding the remote control in it from the previous hotel
Alwyn Lewis	Ironed two shirts, couldn't remember why he'd done them both and put one in his case. Then realised he'd packed Dean's shirt instead
Jan Ball	When she was asked whether we could have a drink in the day as there was no concert that night she replied, "Yes, pull the bus over to the nearest pub." What a woman!
Dai Evans	When talking of the French air crash he said, "They always find the red box."
Gareth Evans	While looking at Wellington Airport he said, "We had a dodgy landing there." We actually landed in Auckland
Arthur Miles	In a restaurant he was asked, "how was your fish?" The reply was, "A bit small, but at least they look like fish."

Alan Bowen	When talking of a young lady who introduced herself to the Choir in Wellington, he said, "If she brings her great grandmother tonight we can palm her off with Len."
Gareth Evans	"Did you see that film starring Betty Muddler?"
Iona Jones	When Dean tipped some ripped up pieces of tissue into a bowl in the pub in Wellington, he convinced Iona and John Fletcher it was a Japanese delicacy. They believed him and started to munch their way through it.
Dean Powell	Introduced Iona as his wife and Jan as the mother-in-law to a woman in Wellington
Roger Watkins	Said they "Sailed up the Yassa River in Melbourne and were doing 20 miles to the galleon."
Dennis Lethbridge	Went up to his room to get his hearing aid, but he was already wearing it
Daryl Stacey	While on the Kaitaki ship Dean did a "Titanic" impersonation. Daryl said he looked just like Leonardo Da Vinci.
Bronze	Sue Gannon - Phoned the hotel in Wellington to apologise for Iona's remote control incident. But she phoned a hotel we hadn't actually stayed at
Silver	Jan Ball - Whilst trying on different people's glasses she said, "Oh, these are perfect!". They were hers.
Gold	John Jones - While on the ship the captain announced there were "Whales on the starboard bow." John thought he meant all the Welsh should get off on that side of the ship and proceeded to wake some of the boys up to tell them

Feeling slight lightheaded, we followed the magnificent coastal road for the four-hour journey south through the island and stopped to take pictures of the seals playing on the rocks and in the small salt-water ponds. We had a delicious lunch at The Craypot Restaurant in Kaikoura and then concluded our long day's journey by reaching the city of Christchurch at 7pm. Our accommodation for the next few days is the Copthorne Hotel and we were soon settled into our surroundings, spending the evening visiting Baileys Irish Bar and The Holy Grail Sports Bar in the centre of the city.

### **Sunday June 7<sup>th</sup> 2009**

With a hearty breakfast inside us we went for a stroll through the streets of Christchurch where as always we received the warmest of welcomes from the local people who recognised us not only by our bright red jackets, but the many posters, TV adverts and radio promotions throughout the city announcing our arrival. Roger "Rocky" Watkins has already used six hours worth of video camera tape just interviewing random people on street corners!

The concert was held in the Christchurch Town Hall, a modern spectacle with its deep red seats, huge balconies, organ and majestic acoustics. The 2pm concert was indeed another outstanding success and the audience was one of the best yet as it responded so well to every song, joke and snippet of information. The greater majority of the 860 members of the audience were sat on the balcony, with some spaces in the actual

stalls. However, the auditorium felt over-full as the sound of cheering and loud applause deafened us on stage at times.

This was of course the last performance in New Zealand and this ecstatic audience applauded introductions of songs even before they began and it was unimaginable that we wouldn't perform the usual encores for them! The sound of clapping was overpowered by the loud stamping of feet at the finale which comes as music to the ears of the performer!

Tonight Ray Daniels performed *Music of the Night* as a solo piece for the first time and with an organ available in the auditorium David Geoffrey Thomas was able to entertain us in his usual first-class manner. All told, this was again a simply marvellous performance. It was also a pleasure to learn that in the audience was former All Blacks player Dennis Young.

Immediately following the concert Gareth Evans called all the choristers into the dressing room and gave them the very sad news of the death of Bob Griffiths. He read a eulogy Dean prepared, which explained Bob's role in the Choir. He was the epitome of a first-class chorister who was close to celebrating his 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the ranks. Only a few weeks ago I ensured that it was passed in the committee room that he should be made a Vice President at the Annual Concert later this year. It was explained how he was a Life Member, former Stage Marshall and held the position of Chairman for three terms, more than any other individual.

It was indeed a deeply emotional moment. Gareth broke down at one point in the reading, which was followed by a minute's silence and then the performance of *Arglwydd Mae Yn Nosi*. With a dark cloud enveloping us one and all, we left the auditorium with our heads held low, sharing memories of our own special times in the company of Bob Griffiths.

On returning to the hotel, we settled in the bar before going to Bailey's Irish Restaurant for dinner and an early night.

### **Monday June 8<sup>th</sup> 2009**

An early morning call is never welcomed. But to have it at 3am was simply cruel! With our luggage packed and ready to go, we left Christchurch armed with our breakfast in a box, a miserable bus driver and no heating on board! What a farewell! At 4.30am we arrived at Christchurch International Airport and settled into the departure lounge for a snooze before boarding the New Zealand Airways (NZ781) at 7am for the three-hour flight to Sydney, Australia.

On board, the captain of the craft had great delight in announcing to the passengers: "Should our entertainment system fail today, then I'm sure the members of the Welsh Treorchy Male Choir will entertain you!"

The 1,319 mile journey was a bit of a bumpy flight at times, but by 10am we touched down in New South Wales. With a two-hour time difference it was early morning when we boarded the Murray's coach into the city and reached the Travelodge on York Street within 40 minutes.

Just a few streets away and the magical sight awaited us. As we turned the corner at Darling Harbour there was the magnificent sight of the Sydney Opera House, dominating the landscape. We walked the harbour, taking pictures of this wonderful scene before us. The harbour was bustling with cruise liners, tug boats, ferries and yachts. People were busying themselves around the streets. Entertainers including Aborigine bands, rock guitarists and a youth choir performed along the harbour side. Tourists could be seen walking over the arch of the awe-inspiring Sydney Harbour Bridge while shoppers and business people had lunch on the waterside. This place is truly idyllic.

For the next few hours we just wandered aimlessly across the harbour front until we reached the steps of the Opera House. Back at the hotel, we boarded the buses by 4.45pm to head for Sutherland, an affluent area between Botany Bay and Port Hacking some 50 minutes from the city. The venue for the evening concert was the Sutherland Entertainment Centre where we last performed in 1999. The auditorium was packed with 950 tickets sold and it had all the makings of a very enjoyable concert ahead.

Although there were occasions when Jan was not happy with the intonation, the audience themselves had a first-class evening's entertainment. Clearly they were overjoyed with the performance as displayed by their rapturous applause and standing ovation as the finale approached. The concert repertoire remained the same as the previous evening, with the Welsh hymns and *Men of Harlech* receiving loud cheers from the crowd. Once again *Les Miserables*, *Pearlfishers*, *You Raise Me Up*, *Nessun Dorma* and the *Abba Medley* was a total triumph.

We returned to the hotel by midnight and the 23-hour day was over.

### **Tuesday June 9<sup>th</sup> 2009**

A leisurely breakfast and a quiet start to the day was just what we all needed after such a busy schedule yesterday. The majority walked to Sydney Harbour and boarded the Manly Ferry for another impressive cruise. Taking in views of the Harbour Bridge (which chorister Jeff "stuntman" Priday was walking over today!) and the Opera House, we explored the harbour waters, which were just a bit stormy at times, before reaching the lovely town of Manly some forty minutes away. It was there that we visited the beach and settled down to a beautiful steak dinner lunch in the Ivanhoe Restaurant, including ice cream to savour while walking back to the ferry terminal!

Returning to the city, we made our way back to the hotel on York Street to prepare our suits for the evening performance. In no time at all we had returned to the coach and at 5.45pm departed for Castle Hills around 45 minutes out of the city. Crossing the Harbour Bridge, we looked down on the Opera House and it was difficult not to feel "butterflies" in the stomach at the thought of performing there tomorrow night.

Tonight's concert was held in the Hills Centre, Castle Hills, where we last performed in 2004. Again a packed audience of very enthusiastic Choir fans greeted us on stage and it was a delight to meet our Honorary Member James Kelso (organiser of the 1986 Tour) who had come along to see us perform once more. The Choir's performance was excellent in places again this evening, although once or twice the intonation was a little bit suspect from the First Tenor and First Bass sections.

However over all it was another grand concert to be proud of and the audience were obviously ecstatic throughout the entire evening. The impressive sale of CDs was also testimony to a good job well done!

### **Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> 2009**

The day began with breakfast in the hotel restaurant and at 9.30am Gareth, Keith, Alwyn and Dean jumped into a taxi and travelled to the ABC Studios on Harris Street for an early morning interview. They were asked to perform *Calon Lan* and *Cwm Rhondda* and Dean was interviewed by presenter Deborah Cameron, one of Australia's leading journalists. This particular programme was actually one million people! The entire experience went well and everyone seemed delighted with the broadcast.

Tonight was another glorious chapter in the history of the Treorchy Male Choir and an unforgettable moment in the lives of every singer on stage. Tonight we returned to the magnificent Sydney Opera House and took this iconic concert hall by storm. Words will fail to describe the incredibly emotional performance, the ecstatic response to each item by the audience and the deep feeling of pride, satisfaction and distinction to stand on that great stage. It was always going to be the highlight of the tour and without doubt the choristers gave of their best.

Towering over Sydney Harbour, the Sydney Opera House was a majestic sight for the choristers as we lined up on its steps for a series of photographic opportunities. Despite the cold and windy weather, the shots were perfect and one by one we were led inside the building for security checks and passes before settling into the comfortable surroundings of the Green Room. Enjoying sumptuous meals, the choristers found time to relax, although it was obvious that tensions were high and a sense of nervousness pervaded through the ranks. It was hardly surprising either, as this was going to be a highlight for not only many a choral career, but an entire lifetime and we all wanted to give the best performance possible. That was the clear message from Jan beforehand who reminded us all that we would always regret not giving our very best tonight. We didn't disappoint her.

The lengthy rehearsal introduced the choristers to the mighty interior of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. With its light red interior, towering organ and impressive ceiling and stage, the Concert Hall is absolutely breathtaking. Choristers took photographs of one another and their surroundings before Jan took to the podium and prepared them for the evening ahead, like a general leading an army into battle. Of the musical kind at least.

The concert began at 8pm prompt and from the very first moment we walked on stage, we felt confident that this would indeed be a night unlike any other. A thousand ardent Treorchy Male Choir fans were awaiting our arrival, with one couple flying all the way from Massachussettes, USA just to see the concert. Now that's what you call absolutely dedication! The Choir gave a first-class performance from beginning to end, without a single flaw to the evening. Jan was a total inspiration, Helen performed brilliantly, David gave a resounding performance on the organ while Iona won the hearts of everyone in the hall with her beautiful voice. This was quite a team.

It would be impossible to highlight the items that were performed best, or the ones that created the greatest response, for all of them were outstanding. The entire concert was recorded once again by ABC Productions for the Live in Australia CD. The opening section of *With A Voice of Singing*, *Y Darlun*, *Lord's Prayer* and *Llef* gave a beautiful variety of rousing and delicate songs, showing the versatility of the Choir. Iona followed with her *Maids of Cadizz* and Dean explained to the audience that should she lose her castanets on tour then false teeth from the Bottom Bass section would be made available!

Our operatic section of *Speed Your Journey* and Ray and Dean performing the Duet from *The Pearlfishers* was well received even before they were sang as the audience applauded wildly at what was to come! Then David began his majestic performance of the *Toccata* from Symphony No. 5 by Vidor on the organ before we finished the first half of the concert once again with the *Les Miserables Medley*.

The second half opened with the *Hymn from Finlandia*, featuring Iona and David. This was followed by *Cwm Rhondda*, known as the second national anthem of Wales and certainly an item to rouse the senses of the very many Welsh people in the audience.

Iona followed with *Waltz Of My Heart* and Ray performed *Music of the Night* before the Choir moved on to the *Abba Medley*, again raising the bar still further of the musical variety, discipline and over all standard of the evening. Once again Iona and Ray sang the *Hywel a Blodwen* duet from there and Dean stepped forward to sing *My Little Welsh Home*, which was a difficult item to perform as many choristers were becoming very emotional by this stage of the show.

Soon enough the final section of items was to come with *You Raise Me Up*, *Senzenina* and then *Men of Harlech*. The applause following this item was absolutely unbelievable! The audience went crazy with stamping of feet, cheering and clapping from all corners of the Concert Hall. They even began calling for encores before we sang our last item on the programme, which of course was the old showstopper, *My Way!* This created another magical response while *Nessun Dorma* really raised the roof of the Sydney Opera House, where it has been performed by the great opera tenors of all-time from Domingo to Pavarotti.

When Dean introduced *We'll Keep A Welcome*, the audience again yelled and applauded and we moved on to the National Anthem with a standing ovation and the loudest cheering of all as each and every choristers stepped off stage. Overcome with emotions, they were hugs, pats on the back and reassuring words from everyone who stood on that stage that night. It was hard not to become deeply affected by the entire experience and many of us were unable to talk as we relived the moments time and time again in our minds. It was indeed a night to remember.

In celebration of the concert, we moved onto the Opera Bar for drinks with the audience and fellow choristers. We were together for the rest of the evening as we enjoyed the celebratory drinks and shared memories of the performance together. We moved on to the bar of the Grosvenor Hotel to continue the party atmosphere before finally returning to York Street for a very late night indeed! A night to remember.



### **Thursday June 11<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Following the euphoria of last night's events, it was hard to focus the mind this morning as we gathered for breakfast after only a few short hours sleep. The adrenaline rush we all experienced from the Opera House concert remained with us for the rest of the day as we boarded the coaches at 9am and began the three-hour journey to the former mining town of Newcastle. The long drive was interrupted by a short stop in a service station (which claimed to have "Five Star Toilets") and then it was on to Newcastle, arriving in the Travelodge on King Street by 1pm.

Once we were settled in our rooms, choristers found the nearest Rugby League Club and settled down to a cup of tea. We've remained faithful to the plea not to drink during the day at least! Back at our hotel we spent the afternoon relaxing before reaching the Civic Theatre in the heart of the town for a 5.30pm rehearsal. The Choir has performed in this venue in each of its four tours of Australia and the gorgeous gold and reds of the Edwardian balcony and boxes made the setting all the more comfortable.

The audience however was something else. Whether it was because of the fact that we were set back from the crowd, or because they are a sophisticated and reserved crowd nobody knows, but they were very quiet! Despite this minor setback, the Choir still gave a very impressive performance and sold out all of our CDs! Admittedly we were all suffering from a little exhaustion today which was hardly surprising, but still the concert went very well and the performances of *Abba*, *Cwm Rhondda* and *Men of Harlech* were particular favourites.

Dean resurrected *Unwaith Eto'n Nghymru Annwyl*, while Iona performed my favourite aria, *O Mio Babino Caro* and *We'll Gather Lilacs* for the first time on this tour. We were all very pleased and satisfied by the performance and the crowd, although quiet, still left the theatre full of deep appreciation and praise. An early night beckoned!

### **Friday June 12<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Another of those cruel early mornings greeted us today as we packed our belongings and boarded the coaches for a 5.30am start. Armed with our breakfast boxes we headed back to Sydney; a three hour journey mostly spent catching up with sleep or enjoying our last few sights of New South Wales. On entering the city we caught a glimpse of the Harbour Bridge for a final time before reaching Sydney International Airport. We boarded the Qantas aircraft (QF516) for a 1hr 30minute flight to Brisbane. The smooth crossing saw us touch down in the Queensland capital by 11.30am to be greeted by the objectionable John "the driver" and start a three-hour journey through the beautiful sunny weather to the town of Toowoomba.

En route Captain Billabong (Daryl) took hold of the microphone and announced the latest awards:

#### **Mentions in Dispatches**

John Radford                      Wanted to know how to use the lights in his hotel room. Gatch (CID) Evans walked in, flicked the switch, walked out.

Ray Daniels	In the harbour in Auckland said “There’s a boat from Canada and there’s loads from New Zealand. It must be an international race.”
Selwyn Jones	Complained he was eating so much he couldn’t get his trousers on. They weren’t his trousers
Dennis Lethbridge	Couldn’t contact his daughter on the hotel phone. Stuart offered to ring her on the mobile and asked Dennis her house number. “Number 13,” he answered
John Radford	Said if he’d know how easy it was to come through customs he would have “brought an orange through!”
Tony Davies	Couldn’t get any volume on the earphones in the plane. They were plugged into the other person’s arm-rest
Len Gale	Said his voice has gone hoarse through miming
Dean Powell	For being chased through Toowoomba by a mad woman called Christine who wanted “to kiss the comedian”.
Joe Harris	Saw Ernald sitting behind a palm tree in the hotel restaurant and sad, “You look like a Japanese sniper.” The Japanese couple on the next table were not too impressed
Alan Bowen	Said he was glad to have Room 101 in the hotel so he could get rid of Len at last!
Iona Jones	For her outstanding presentation of Ivor Novello shows i.e. “Great shows like Perchance to Dream....and other shows like it.” Oh, a mind block!
Iona Jones	Again for the Ivor Novello presentations, “He was the Ivor Novello of his day..” instead of him being the Andrew Lloyd-Webber of his day!
Jan Ball	In Toowoomba she thought the music was familiar on the piano, but couldn’t remember the words. They were Happy Birthday
Jan Ball	Asked Gatch to “have a go at Iona from behind”. She meant a massage

#### Bronze, Silver & Gold

Joint winners – Jan Ball and Iona Jones for all of the above!

Many of us have very fond recollections of this beautiful little town of Toowoomba which we last visited in 2004, with its large sports fields, main shopping street and colonial style buildings.

We were booked into the five-star Burke and Wills Hotel on Ruthven Street and soon settled into our rooms before embarking on the usual stroll through the main street. A short walk through the shops on this glorious sunny day (and they call it mid winter!) before returning to the hotel and relaxing for an hour in time for the 6pm rehearsal at the Empire Theatre which was in walking distance of the accommodation.

The Empire is a truly magical theatre, with its beautiful balconies, boxes, red velvet curtains and ornate stage. Despite the obvious tiredness from a day of travelling we survived rehearsals relatively intact and the evening concert before an audience of 900 people was certainly well received. Clearly they were a more responsive audience

than in Newcastle and we performed to the best of our abilities – much to their obvious satisfaction and generosity in applause.

The concerts have become incredibly slick and show-like during the past three weeks and lovely little moments are reappearing time and again during the performances, whether they be Iona's inability to remember more than one name of an Ivor Novello show, to Dean's decision to change the amount of curtain calls Tosca had after jumping on her trampoline (Iona and Jan take bets side of stage!). Then of course there's the moment Dean steps forward for the opening bars of *Thank You For The Music* when I begin with "I'm nothing special, I think I'm a bit of a bore", with the Choir (and Iona!) yawning and agreeing from behind him.

Tonight's concert did indeed have a very special moment at the start of the second half. For the past few weeks we had planned to make it something of an occasion because although she had tried her best to keep it quiet, many of us knew that this was Jan's birthday. So the second half of the concert commenced as usual and just as she waved her hand at Helen to play the opening bars of *Cwm Rhondda* something totally different came from the piano. Later Jan herself admitted that she knew the piece of music from somewhere, but couldn't remember the words. That is, until we began to sing "Happy Birthday" and with rapturous applause Gareth Evans walked on stage holding a cake with lit candles. Jan's face was an absolute picture and it made for a lovely moment in the Choir's tour down under.

The remainder of the concert was just as fun-filled and exciting for choristers and audience alike. Once again we gave a first-class performance and despite the passing of time and the many concerts already given, the Choir remains on top form, much to the delight of the audience who rewarded us once again with enthusiastic applause and constant demands for an encore! It was a joy to be back in this auditorium once again and we celebrated another successful evening with a few birthday drinks for Jan in the hotel bar until the early hours.

### **Saturday June 13<sup>th</sup> 2009**

It was indeed a day to remember and none of us could have imagined just how significant today's performances would be. The day began quite ordinarily with breakfast in the hotel and then it was time to board the coach heading back to the city of Brisbane. Jan had successfully cut her cake (although many of us thought this had been carried out with an axe given the shape of the squares!) and we all enjoyed a slice. The hour-long journey was over in no time and we reached the Riverside Hotel in Brisbane by 11am to settle into our rooms and prepare for the two concerts of the day.

Given the immense popularity of the evening concert, it was decided to hold a matinee performance also, with some of the proceeds coming to the Choir funds. Andrew Kay had also flown into town to attend the evening performance and make a sizeable donation of around \$2,000 to the bar bill at the end-of-tour party! The choristers certainly made the most of it!

The morning was spent in leisurely fashion before rehearsals were called at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) on the River Brisbane. The scene could not have been more perfect for such a major auditorium, which was undoubtedly one

of the best concert halls acoustically in the entire country. Massive investment has also more recently been made to the building, which improved the acoustics still further, so much so that the performance by the Choir and soloists alike was of the highest order of the entire tour. Just when you think things can't get any better, they did.

Sound checks, lighting checks, microphone checks and all the usual David Lange arrangements were completed in time for our afternoon rehearsal. Time to change into the dinner suits and then it was out on stage for the 3pm matinee performance. Around 400 people awaited our arrival, and although this was far less than the capacity audience of the evening, their enthusiasm was equally as thrilling for all concerned.

With such a perfect sound system the concert hall was filled with some magical sounds in the afternoon show and the audience were clearly overjoyed by the performance as they called for several encores during the latter part of the programme. David Geoffrey Thomas (introduced as "Organ Morgan"!) gave a majestic performance once more of Vidor's *Toccata* and the *Les Miserables* medley had one of the best applause of the entire concert. Similarly, *Men of Harlech* and *We'll Keep a Welcome* were greeted with thunderous applause and we left the stage assured we had done our very best.

For the next two hours we relaxed in the Green Room, enjoyed a full meal and basically recharged the batteries before the 8pm curtain call for the evening performance.

It would be hard to describe the evening concert except in superlatives. It would also be impossible to make such statements as to whether it was once of the finest concert performances ever given by the Choir in its long and illustrious history. But for those 49 men who stood on stage that night, in the glare of the spotlights, with 2,000 adoring fans hanging onto their every note, it was readily agreed that this was probably the best concert any of us had ever performed.

From the first very note, the standard of the performance was just faultless. Jan Ball led her troops with an inspiring confidence that encouraged us to the very best. Helen was superb as accompanist, while David's performance of the Vidor's *Toccata* resulted in a near standing ovation. As always Iona's sweet performance, particularly of *O Mio Babino Caro* broke the hearts of one and all. As for the Choir itself? From the delicate pianissimos to the rousing fortes, the blend of voices created one of the most majestic sounds.

Then there was the audience. And what an audience it was. A mass of red, with waving flags and Welsh dragons all around, the crowd brought many of us to tears with the thunderous applause for each and every song. From a personal point of view, I've never compered a concert quite like this before. They were the most responsive to every single word uttered and I was pretty much overwhelmed by their enthusiasm and infectious laughter from the very start.

It would be impossible to name every song that created this electrifying reaction, suffice to say that they all did in one way or another. But to name the handful that had

the biggest response of all, then it would be easily done – as always, *Pearlfishers*, *Llef*, *Les Miserables*, *Cwm Rhonda*, *Finlandia*, *Abba*, *Men of Harlech* and *My Way*. When we sang *Nessun Dorma* we received a standing ovation from the entire concert hall audience. It really day take our breath away.

*We'll Keep A Welcome* again brought the audience to its feet and with *Advance Australia Fair* and *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* to come, we left the stage with the sound of applause, stamping of feet and cheers ringing in our ears.

Walking into the Green Room was a deeply emotional experience. Choristers stared at one another through teary eyes, united in the common knowledge that this had indeed been exceptional. It was a feeling of exhilaration, yet none of us could cheer. It was also a deeply humbling experience and one of satisfaction that we had given our best in the name of our Choir. At the end of the day, that's all that could be expected of us.

The end-of-tour party was held in The Fox Hotel close to the QPAC building. Andrew Kay ensured plenty of alcohol was made available as we crowded into the sports bar. Drinks flowed, songs were sung and three local lads soon became part of the Treorchy family when we presented them with tour shirts that we all signed!

Chairman Gareth Evans also gave gifts of the Choir plaque to Honorary Member Andrew Kay, Sue Gannon and David Lange (renamed "Dai The Sound"! ). Andrew moved us greatly when he said that we now had a "great relationship" and he would certainly tour us again in the future. He said the Choir meant a great deal to him as his father attended our concert in 2004 and died shortly afterwards. It was the last concert he ever went to.

The atmosphere was terrific as we all celebrated what had been a pinnacle moment in a truly awesome concert tour. Plenty of fun and laughter was had as the evening turned into early morning and we gradually returned to our hotel for a few hours sleep before the final day of the tour.

### **Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Bleary eyed we gathered for a 10am breakfast and checked out of our rooms. Our luggage was stored in the main boardroom of the hotel and we had the next three hours free to explore Brisbane. It was a real delight to re-acquaint ourselves with this beautiful city. Many walked to the main Parliament Buildings, down to the Victoria Bridge and took pictures of QPAC on the other side of the Brisbane River. We also returned to the famous river-side lagoon to watch the locals splash about in the deep blue waters and spent time exploring the bustling market place and restaurant bar area nearby. It was unfortunate that we didn't have more time to spend in Brisbane, but our 1.30pm bus ride called and it was time to head for the Gold Coast.

The hour-long journey saw us return to some more familiar sights across Surfer's Paradise as we reached the Gold Coast Arts Centre. Another first-class venue awaited us and although our rehearsal was indeed poor, it was Jan who inspired us once again. "We must go out with a bang on this tour", she demanded. We didn't let her down either.

After a brief lunch in the Arts Centre Café, it was time to march on stage for the 20<sup>th</sup> and final concert of the tour of Australia and New Zealand. Any thoughts of us feeling the effects of a lengthy, demanding tour, were soon dispelled because with the sound of the first rousing applause, choristers dragged the last ounce of energy to give a first-class concert performance.

Once again this was a great concert audience. We were a smaller choir today as Arthur Miles had become ill overnight and was unable to stage. Paramedics were called and he was deemed fit enough to return home with us on the evening flight that came as a great relief.

The Choir once again left the stage to the sound of roaring cheers from the 800 in the audience and individuals felt satisfied another excellent concert had been performed. It had been something of a rollercoaster ride of emotions because although many of us were looking forward to finally returning home, we also felt a deep sadness that such an outstanding experience of touring both countries had now come to an end.

Boarding the coaches, we travelled in relative silence to Brisbane International Airport where we bid our fond farewell to two outstanding people and new-found friends in Sue Gannon and David Lange whose professionalism had made our jobs so much easier. We sat in departure lounge for a few hours before boarding the Singapore Aircraft to Singapore, around 4,500 miles away. It was a bumpy ride in places and we were relieved for a three-hour rest in the airport bar (supping the occasional Singapore Sling!) before the next leg of the journey. The 13-hour flight of 7,000 miles was once again plagued with the occasional turbulence, but plenty of wine and a couple of sleeping tablets, helped make the experience more enjoyable. We touched down in London Heathrow by 3.30pm (UK) and boarded the two Edwards Coaches for the return journey to Wales.

Looking back, this was indeed a happy and hugely successful tour. Despite the tiring journeys, the internal flights and the many concerts within such a short period, there is no doubt that every one of us had the experience of a lifetime. There are too many highlights to mention, but understandably they all relate to individual concerts that stick out above the rest – the first night in Perth, the concerts in Adelaide and Melbourne, our first ever performance in New Zealand when we took Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington by storm. Then of course the return to the Sydney Opera House for a first-class night of hwyl and the epitome of the tour came at Brisbane's QPAC. We had indeed done our very best to ensure the traditions of the Choir had been upheld and this tour was undoubtedly a lasting tribute to a distinguished 125-year history of which collectively we remain so justifiably proud.