

TREORCHY MALE CHOIR



BRIEF HISTORY 2016

By Dean Powell
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FEBRUARY

Monday February 8th

Rehearsal Room, Treorchy

A BBC film crew visited the rehearsal room this evening as they were making a programme about the history of the hymn tune “Cwm Rhondda” by John Hughes. The crew interviewed chorister and historian Dean Powell before filming the Choir performing the famous Welsh hymn.

MARCH

Saturday March 5th

China Street Chapel, Llanidloes

It was actually five years ago to the very day that the Choir last performed in this venue and once again they were thrilled by the atmosphere and sheer exhilaration of the audience. The Choir itself has indeed changed since the last visit – not only with a new uniform but also a new Musical Director and an ever-changing repertoire of music.

On this occasion the Choir was joined by soprano soloist Jessica Robinson who is a student of Jeff Howard at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. With her wonderful Welsh humour and beautiful voice, she soon won many new admirers in the packed audience.

Organised by the local Rotarians, the concert also featured Helen Roberts as Accompanist with Dean Powell as Compere – addressing the audience from the choir stalls in the gallery high above.

The concert enjoyed many significant highlights, particularly “Can You Hear Me” and “Sospan Fach” while it also marked the Choir’s debut performance of “Plaisir d’Amour”. The thrilling finale and anthem received over 30,000 visits on Facebook alone.

Thursday March 17th

Stanwell Comprehensive School, Penarth

The Choir was delighted to perform in the new auditorium of Stanwell Comprehensive School in Penarth. It was a momentous occasion for the school’s Music Department as they were preparing for a tour of Italy only a few days later. With a student choir and soloists, performing on stage with the Treorchy men, the stage was certainly set for a memorable evening.

Jeffrey Howard, performing his final concert before spending time in Texas where he will work in the university, conducted the evening with Helen Roberts as soloist and Dean Powell as Master of Ceremonies.

Once again the Choir gave an excellent performance which was warmly received by the Penarth audience. Some of the highlights included “Calon Lan” (with audience participation!), “Builth” and “This is the Moment”.

Wednesday March 23rd

Treorchy Comprehensive School

The 10th annual Treorchy Male Choir Junior Musician of the Year Competition saw another impressive line up of more than 20 children take to the stage of the Grand Finals. The remarkable showcase of local talent clearly impressed the adjudicators and a packed hall at the Comprehensive School. Compere for the evening was previous contestant Callum Howells who is already making a name for himself on the musical stage. The winners were Frances Taylor of Parc Primary School (Singer) and Grace Jones of Oakdale Primary School (instrumentalist)

Friday March 25th

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The 51st Annual Good Friday Concert was upon us once again as the Choir joined forces for another memorable evening with the comrades of the Park & Dare Band. On this occasion the Choir was conducted by special guest Ryan Wood, accompanied by Helen Roberts with Dean Powell as MC. The conductor of the band was Andrew Jones.

Another packed auditorium enjoyed the evening which included a number of new items for the home audience. It was also a pleasure to welcome to the stage the winners of the Junior Musician Competition, Frances Taylor and Grace Jones, who performed magnificently.

APRIL

Saturday April 9th

Blake Theatre, Monmouth

The Choir made its first visit to the Blake Theatre with Honorary Member Dr Haydn James at the helm. The concert was held in aid of the National Eisteddfod fund – as the event will take place in Abergavenny this year. A relatively small choir attended the concert with Helen Roberts as accompanist and Gareth Evans as MC.

The Choir shared the stage for the first time with soprano Shoned Llewellyn and harpist Charlotte Poler who gave a memorable performance. The concert did run somewhat later than anticipated, but the audience was clearly thrilled at the range of music and standard of singing by the men of Treorchy.

Thursday April 14th

Albany Road Baptist Church, Cardiff

The Choir made a welcomed return to Albany Road as this is the church where their Musical Director worships. He was home from Texas, USA and ready to take the baton once again for this special event. Helen Roberts performed as accompanist with Gareth Evans as MC. The evening was extra special because of the guest artists, Mountain View High School of Cupertino, California, USA. The Choir actually performed in Cupertino in 1994 at the opening of Highway 85 and in nearby Sunnyvale. The young people of the American choir were absolutely outstanding and gave a truly unforgettable performance.

Treorchy Choir once again gave of their best with a pleasant programme which delighted the packed audience. At one stage Helen conducted “Builth” and “Llef” as it

allowed Jeff to accompany the Choir on the church organ. Another rousing applause at the finale of their performance which displayed the sheer enjoyment of the audience.

Wednesday April 20th

Red Cow, Treorchy

In 2009 the Choir was presented with a Blue Plaque to be placed on the Red Cow Hotel in Treorchy where the original choir first performed in 1883. Sadly the former public house fell into disuse and was eventually demolished to make way for a new accommodation block, built in the same style as the original building. Therefore members of the Choir were invited by RCT Homes to perform several items outside the building with the re-presentation of the Blue Plaque which will be placed back on the front of the former landmark.

MAY

Saturday May 7th

Playhouse Theatre, Weston Super Mare

Following a three-year break, the Choir returned to the Playhouse Theatre in the seaside town of Weston super Mare to perform to a near-packed audience. Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts led the Choir with Dean Powell as MC and Clydach-born Sophie Gregory as soloist. The concert was a great success and provided another memorable visit to the holiday resort.

The Choir gave a wide repertoire of music ranging from “You Make Me Feel So Young” and “Calon Lan” to “Myfanwy” and “Nat King Cole Medley” which delighted the crowd.

Friday May 20th

Maesteg Town Hall

The Choir was honoured to open the Maesteg Festival with a performance in Maesteg Town Hall. The festival is organised by guest conductor Ryan Wood who formerly invited the Treorchy men to perform at this hometown venue. For the first time the Choir shared the stage with soprano Sally Kingsbury and with a packed audience to entertain, the concert was a great success.

Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts led the Choir with Dean Powell as MC and the evening was well received by all who attended. Many of the Welsh numbers received the loudest of applause, particularly “Calon Lan” and “Sospan Fach” while “Nat King Cole Medley” and “You Raise Me Up” clearly thrilled the audience. With a finale of “You’ll Never Walk Alone”, the Choir was assured of another excellent performance.

Saturday May 21st

St Mary & St Chad, Brewood

The Choir made its first visit to St Mary & St Chad parish church in Brewood, Staffordshire at the invitation of Jean Wright and the Welsh Society. The concert featured Britain’s Got Talent hopeful Jean Martin along with seasoned raconteur Mel Thomas as MC. Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts made up the rest of the music team which presented an excellent concert.

The evening proved a successful one with a packed audience thrilled at the standard of the performance. There were number of particular favourites and the Choir left the stage assured they had given of their best on their debut performance.

JUNE

Saturday June 4th

St George's Hall, Bristol

There are few auditoriums as acoustically impressive as St George's Hall in the heart of Bristol. Once again the venue did not disappoint as the Choir took to the stage for another excellent performance. On this occasion Ryan Wood acted as guest conductor, with Helen Roberts as accompanist. The soloist for the evening was Honorary Lady Member Ros Evans and Dean Powell fulfilled the role of MC.

Despite a small number of choristers on stage, the performance was of the highest standard. The audience appeared overjoyed at the concert and the rousing applause and stamping of feet illustrated their true appreciation. The Choir gave excellent performances of items such as "Builth", "Roses of Picardy" and "Can You Hear Me", while Ros totally enchanted all those present with her beautiful voice and glowing personality. Another memorable visit to Bristol

Monday June 13th

Rehearsal Room, Treorchy

BBC Wales television crew visited the rehearsal room this evening to film the Choir performing the Welsh National Anthem. The performance appeared on television during the Euro 2016 Football Championship where Wales made incredible strides as a first-class side.

Thursday June 16th

Coopers Field, Cardiff

A group of 20 choristers joined by Jeff Howard ventured to Coopers Field at the rear of Cardiff Castle to appear live on BBC Radio Wales. The programme was hosted by Wynne Evans in the "fanzone" of the Euro 2016 football arena. The Choir made seven live radio and television broadcasts within the hour! These included performances of "Calon Lan", "Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau", "Men of Harlech" and "We'll Keep a Welcome".

They also joined singer Jay Jones with his rendition of "Can't Take My Eyes off You". Filled with plenty of humour, the entire experience was a very enjoyable one – and certainly gave the Choir a great deal of "on air" coverage!

Saturday June 18th

Longmeadow Club, Whitchurch

The Choir's first visit to Whitchurch in Hampshire was a very enjoyable one as they made their debut in the Longmeadow Club. Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts led the Choir with Selwyn Jones as MC and soloist Georgia Williams. The Treorchy team certainly provided a first-class concert which was well received by the impressed crowd of admirers.

Given the level of messages of support and appreciation, it was clear that the Choir had provided a concert of the highest possible standard. Highlights included “What Would I Do Without My Music”, “Nat King Cole” and “Builth” to name a few. The Choir literally pulled out all the stops and the sound of rapturous applause as they departed from the stage left them in no doubt of the success of the evening.

Saturday June 25th

Rhondda Heritage Park

A group of choristers were invited to join a number of musical organisations at a special event in Rhondda Heritage Park Museum, Trehafod. The occasion was to unveil a Blue Plaque to celebrated socialists and unionists A J Cook. Choristers sang a selection of items with several other groups, led by the Lewis Merthyr Band.

Thursday June 30th

Savoy Theatre, Tonyrefail

The Choir made its first visit to the Savoy Theatre, a former cinema which was recently re-opened as a community theatre. This small, intimate building provided a perfect setting for the Choir who were joined on stage by the talented youngsters of Cwmlai Primary School.

The concert was a fundraising effort for the Choir, arranged by Secretary Selwyn Jones and featured the musical team of Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts with Dean Powell as Master of Ceremonies. With 60 choristers on the rather cramped stage and a packed auditorium, the concert was a great success.

The Choir performed a selection of its present repertoire which received a great deal of enthusiastic applause. It was also a pleasure to welcome the children of Cwmlai to perform with them.

JULY

Saturday July 2nd

Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun

Treorchy Choir joined forces with one of the world’s leading brass bands today to record a selection of festive favourites for a Christmas CD. The band in question? The Cory Band of course, long-standing musical comrades of the Treorchy men for well over a century.

The Choir was invited to perform just four Christmas carols for the half-day recording session with the band in the Rhydywaun School near Aberdare. Unfortunately only a small amount of choristers undertook this engagement, but the standard of the performance was deemed of the highest order.

Tuesday July 19th

Soar Centre, Merthyr Tydfil

When Welsh singing star Iris Williams was invited to return home to appear on the final episode of a series with tenor Rhys Meirion, she insisted Treorchy Male Choir joined her for the production. As an Honorary Lady Member of the Choir, Iris was keen to work with choristers again for a broadcast featuring her first hit “Amazing Grace” in Welsh (Pererin Wyf).

It was the hottest day of the year when choristers travelled to the Soar Centre for the two-hour recording and filming session with Iris Williams, Rhys Meirion and the Cardiff-based choir CF1. Unfortunately the filming actually took twice as long with the Choir performing in the sweltering heat until almost 11pm!

The recording of the piece was completed first and the filming continued with all involved until late in the evening. Iris and Rhys spent time chatting to the choristers and in this happy atmosphere the filming went ahead with various “takes” and “camera angles” to suit the director.

Saturday July 23rd

St Mary's Church, Bibury

The Choir was delighted to make a return visit to one of the most beautiful villages in England with a performance in St Mary's Church, Bibury. The setting couldn't have been more perfect with the beautiful river running through the village, the bright summer sunshine, exquisite cottages and colourful flowerbeds at every corner. The church had a chocolate-box cover quality about it, with perfectly kept lawns where villagers sipped glasses of wine before the concert.

A packed audience filled the church for a very enjoyable and thrilling performance by the Choir. Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts led their musical troops with Jessica Robinson as soprano soloist and Dean Powell as MC. There were many highlights to the evening, including “Roses of Picardy”, “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “What Would I Do Without My Music”.

Following the finale of “You'll Never Walk Alone”, the Choir performed “Myfanwy” as an encore. Choristers retired to the Catherine Wheel pub where glasses were raised in memory of Bob Turner and David Stanton. A delicious buffet followed with plenty of informal singing until midnight.

SEPTEMBER

Saturday September 10th

Sir Thomas Picton School, Haverfordwest

Due to popular demand, the Choir made a welcomed return to Sir Thomas Picton School in Haverfordwest for its first concert of the new season. Organised by Haverfordwest Rotary Club, the fundraising concert for the Stroke Club also featured the Goodwick Brass Band who were the 2015 Great British National Brass Band Champions.

It was a pleasure to make a return visit to this venue because of the warmth of applause for the audience and welcome from the band members. The concert was another success with Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts at the helm and Gareth Evans performing the duties of MC for the evening.

Saturday September 17th

Cheltenham Town Hall

The Choir made a triumphant return to one of its favourite venues this evening with a performance in the beautiful surroundings of Cheltenham Town Hall. Organised by Honorary Member David Green, the proceeds from the evening went towards the

Cheltenham Lions Club. Conducted by Jeff Howard and accompanied by Helen Roberts, the MC duties were undertaken by Dean Powell. The soloist for the evening was soprano Gail Pearson.

One of the largest audiences packed the town hall auditorium for this first-class performance of song. The Choir absolutely excelled itself again with a repertoire of male choir classics and modern arrangements which brought the audience to its feet. With the sound of thunderous applause and calls for encores, the concert was a total success.

Sunday September 25th

Tabernacl Chapel, Morriston

The Choir was invited to participate in a Songs of Praise television recording with Cor Meibion Dunvant and Pendyrus Male Choir in the Tabernacl Chapel, As always this was a lengthy affair of more than eight hours when the Choir recorded a selection of new music including a hymn to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan Disaster. Although problems arose with the recording, the programme was eventually completed by late evening.

Monday September 26th

Rehearsal Room, Treorchy

The Choir participated in a Youtube film to mark the launch of a new book dedicated to characters from the Rhondda. Written by Sion Tomos Owen, the son of First Tenor Adrian Owen, the Choir sang "Thank You" to the "amen" section of "Gwahoddiad". This helped promote the book online and social media.

OCTOBER

Saturday October 8th

Queen's College, Taunton

The Choir made its first visit to the Queen's College, Taunton under unique circumstances. Due to the unavailability of Jeff Howard, the Choir was honoured to welcome Honorary Member Ros Evans as their guest conductor for the evening. Under her direction the Choir gave a faultless performance and were grateful for her sheer professionalism and leadership following just one rehearsal.

The soloist this evening was Iona Jones and Dean Powell undertook the duties of MC. The Concert was held in aid of the Taunton Music Festival and a full auditorium welcomed the Choir on stage. With another excellent performance they enjoyed thunderous applause and calls for encores.

Monday October 24th

Royal Mint Experience

The mark the official opening of the Royal Mint Experience tourist attraction, a group of thirty choristers performed in the foyer for the distinguished guests of politicians and celebrities. Jeff Howard played the keyboard and conducted the two performances during the morning event which received warm messages of gratitude from all who attended.

Saturday October 29th

Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama

The Choir was delighted to accept the invitation from their Rhondda comrades, the world-famous Cory Band, to perform in this celebration concert. The Cory Band had recently swept the boards at four national and European championships and were holding a series of concerts across Wales to mark the occasion.

Choristers were delighted to return to the College for this impressive concert before a packed audience. They were conducted this evening by Dr Alwyn Humphreys, who led the musical troops with his typical sheer professionalism and suave delivery. The Choir gave another first-class performance of solo and combined items with the band which resulted in a standing ovation.

NOVEMBER

Thursday November 3rd

Park & Dare Theatre, Treorchy

The 70th Anniversary Concert of the Treorchy Male Choir was one of the most outstanding performances it has ever given in its hometown. A sold-out audience welcomed them onto the stage to rapturous applause as MC Dean Powell announced “Happy 70th Birthday, the Treorchy Male Choir!”. With the curtains raised the Choir burst into “Men of Harlech” under the direction of Jeff Howard and accompanied by Helen Roberts. It set the standard for a mighty performance before the most grateful of audiences.

Tonight’s concert will live long in the memory. The Choir gave faultless performances of their mixed repertoire of firm choral favourites and new classics tunes. From “Cwm Rhondda” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” to “What Would I Do Without My Music” and “You Raise Me Up.”

The Choir also took the opportunity to honour two prominent individuals. Chairman David Bebb presented the title of Vice President to baritone William “Boyo” Watkins to mark his 60th anniversary. The Choir rose to its feet to honour their fellow chorister. President Brian Bates was the recipient of the Choir’s new President’s Medal. Made in the Royal Mint, the silver medal will be handed down to consecutive Choir Presidents and Brian – the third President since 1946 – was honoured to be its first wearer.

Dean Powell, acting as MC also gave the audience a series of specific dates in the history of the Choir which helped to reflect their incredible success story over the last 70 years.

Tonight the Choir was delighted and honoured to welcome as their special guest, the international Welsh operatic baritone Jason Howard. Now residing in Canada, Jason made a special journey to Treorchy to celebrate this special occasion and gave a performance that none of us would ever forget. The power and control of his glorious voice raised the spirits with such a wide and wonderful repertoire of opera, Welsh and Rogers & Hammerstein classics. Such was his success that he performed four encore numbers, including a wonderful comic duet with Jeff Howard of “The Gendarmie Duet”.

The concert concluded with a combined performance between the Choir and Jason of “Impossible Dream”, specially arranged for the evening by our Musical Director. The overwhelming applause and standing ovation left the Choir assured that they have given one of their best performance in Treorchy.

Friday November 11th

St Cadoc’s Church, Caerleon

For the first time the Choir visited this beautiful church in the historic Roman town of Caerleon. Jeff Howard and Helen Roberts performed along with soprano soloist Iona Jones and MC Dean Powell. It was also a pleasure to welcome Barbara Hughes into the audience as she is the great niece of “Cwm Rhondda” composer John Hughes.

Despite a slightly shaky start due to the positioning of the piano far from the musical director, the Choir gave another excellent performance for the sold-out audience. The concert was held as part of the Caerleon Festival and welcomed visitors from far and wide.

With another varied repertoire to suit all tastes and a dramatic finale of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” with Iona, the audience gave two standing ovations and calls for encores galore!

Sunday November 13th

Blaenrhondda & Treherbert Cenotaphs

Members of the Choir performed in the British Legion Commemoration Services at both the Blaenrhondda and Treherbert War Memorials.

Sunday November 13th

Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff

In celebration of the Black Stars Screen Festival, Chapter Arts Centre was showing a remastered version of the Paul Robeson film “Proud Valley”. Owing to the Choir’s connection to the late American singer and activist, they were invited to this premiere event and historian Dean Powell was interviewed for a documentary. The Choir sang “Men of Harlech” in the foyer, followed by “Gwahoddiad” and “Calon Lan” on stage before the showing of the film.

DECEMBER

Saturday December 10th

High Street, Treorchy

Members of the Choir performed in a gazebo on High Street, Treorchy as part of the entertainment for the annual Christmas parade.

Saturday December 17th

Royal Mint Experience

Choristers performed a selection of carols at a Christmas event held in the Royal Mint Experience. Jeff Howard accompanied and conducted the group of 23 choristers for this festive occasion

Monday December 18th

Ty Hafan, Sully

Once again a group of choristers performed a selection of songs and carols at the Ty Hafan Candlelit Memorial Service.