



Sotto Voce

Murray Conservatorium Choir

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Manual Labor

Much of the choral oeuvre—whether accompanied by piano, orchestra or simply a capella—enjoys a prominent place in today's concert halls. Works for choir and organ, however, have largely either drifted into obscurity or been relegated to a position of strict religious service. The Murray Conservatorium Choir's May Concerts, jokingly coined "Manual Labor" (referring to both the keyboards of the organ and the choir's efforts!), aspire to challenge that status quo.

In the first half, explore gems of the repertoire immediately antecedent to the development what is today known as the symphonic organ. Wesley's *Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace*, Brahms' *Geistliches Lied*, and Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine* exemplify the tender writing for choir and organ prevalent in this era. Transcendent, but quietly so.

After the interval, we pull out all the stops (literally!) for Vierne's sonorous *Messe Solennelle*. Inspired by the rise of a truly symphonic instrument, Vierne samples the full gamut of sonic possibilities found in this new, grand organ.

Bookended by Widor's famed *Toccata* and a surprise audience favourite, these concerts are surely not to be missed! The Murray Con Choir—together with organist, James Flores, and conductor, Jeff Mosher—looks forward to welcoming you to what promises to be a glorious celebration of works for choir and organ!

Jeff Mosher

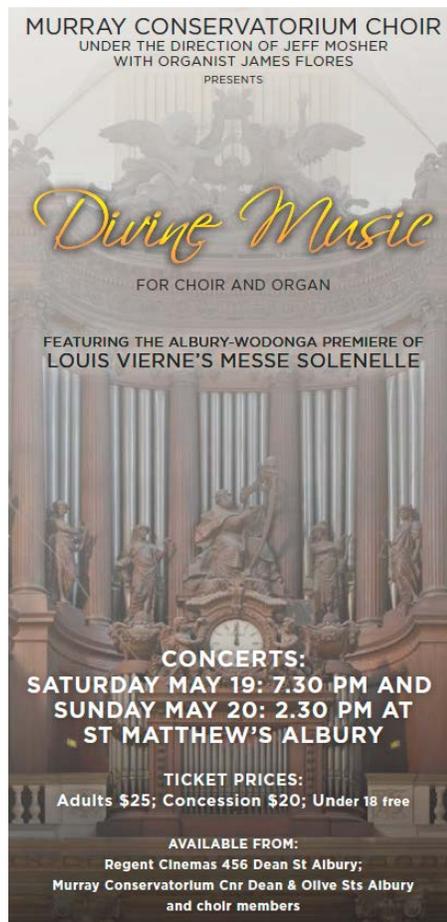
THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL 2019 – advance notice

Planning is already underway for the biennial Three Choirs Festival 2019. It will be held on Saturday 14 September and Sunday 15 September, 2019 - put the dates in your diary. The Three Choirs Festival is a collaboration between the Murray Conservatorium Choir, Beechworth Singers and Vocal Dimension, Wangaratta. Performances are held in Albury and Wangaratta.

In 2019, the three choirs will combine to perform Handel's much loved "Messiah". This will be the first local performance of the full "Messiah" in some years, and will be an exciting opportunity for singers and local audiences.

Details are still being worked out, and we will be making announcements as organisation proceeds. In the meantime - note the dates for your 2019 diary!

Michele Roberts



Inside this issue:

Bonsai Under Lights 2018

Musical directors and their legacy

Cantique de Jean Racine

Two English composers

Louis Vierne, his *Messe Solennelle* and Cavaille-Coll and Albury

Sotto Voce objectives

Special Points of Interest

Bonsai under lights reflection.

Organs throughout time.

Jeff Mosher interview.

BONSAI UNDER LIGHTS 2018

A great night was had by all on 13 April when John and Marie Van Lint hosted the fourth Bonsai Under lights exhibition for the choir.

John's amazing collection of Bonsai, some over 50 years old, looked wonderful under an array of twinkling and coloured lights, and Marie's watercolours

added to pleasure of the evening.

We were very fortunate that the weather held off for us, so the choir was able to entertain the 60 or so guests in the Van Lint's garden, singing a medley of songs by Stephen Sondheim. Solos by our young scholars, James and Emily

Strachan completed the enjoyment.

All proceeds from the night will go towards the choir's scholarship funds for young singers. Many thanks to John and Marie for hosting the night, and to all who attended and contributed to its success.

Michele Roberts

Picture: Phil W Bel

Musical Directors and their legacy

The Murray Conservatorium Choir has been in existence since 1982 and has been greatly assisted by a succession of Musical Directors of great ability and individuality.

There are still some founding members of the choir still with us. For more recent recruits, however we propose to revisit the previous Musical Directors over coming editions of Sotto Voce to better understand this rich heritage. The first instalment is, however, an insight into our current Musical Director, Jeff Mosher who becomes the youngest ever MD and sadly, possibly with the shortest tenure (unless of course, we kidnap him!) Here are some snippets from an interview with Jeff Mosher...

Q: What was your deciding factor to undertake a music performance degree?

A: I went for a long time between music and medicine, so I was interested in either becoming a doctor or a musician and I ended up ultimately pursuing the medical path first. I went to university and when I got there I started studying Biology. I heard all of these ensembles on the other side of the campus and said "oh I need to be a part of that", and eventually weaseled my way into it and found out that it was right at the time. So I switched from a Biology undergraduate major to a music performance undergraduate major. Those are the two careers that really fascinated me all my life and it's been a long struggle between the two because medicine of course represents security with a job and it's a well-respected path and everyone can support you on that whereas musician is insecurity and society doesn't see that as a great job outcome or as a respected position necessarily. I found out that the way we practice medicine today - in such an industrialized kind of way - I was not really interested in being a part of that; where you are a doctor and you have a set protocol... the government tells you how to practice medicine and you're just the guy who signs the paper. That kind of turned me away from medicine and at the same time I just appreciated music for what it was.

Q: Was there a moment in your childhood that sparked your interest in music?

A: Yes. My grandparents were both very interested in state auctions so they went to one and there was this old Hammond, 1970's electric organ. It was ridiculously heavy so no one wanted to buy it because no one wanted to move it. So they got it for one dollar and brought it home... my parents eventually got me into piano lessons.

Doug Westland and James and Emily Strachan

"I switched from a Biology undergraduate major to a music performance undergraduate major."



CANTIQUE DE JEAN RACINE

This work is one of the most popular in the choral repertoire. It was written by Gabriel Faure (1845-1924), a French composer, organist, pianist, teacher. He was 19 years old, still a student at the School of Classical and Religious Music. The text is a French paraphrase by Jean Racine of a Latin hymn from the breviary for matins.

The English version is as follows:

Word of God, one with the Most High,
In Whom alone we have our hope,
Eternal Day of heaven and earth,
We break the silence of the peaceful night;
Saviour Divine, cast your eyes upon us!

Pour on us the fire of your powerful grace,
That all hell may flee at the sound of your voice;
Banish the slumber of a weary soul,
That brings forgetfulness of your laws!

O Christ, look with favour upon your faithful people
Now gathered here to praise you;
Receive their hymns offered to your immortal glory;
May they go forth filled with your gifts.

Robyn Krowicky



Border organist James Flores and Murray Conservatorium Choir conductor Jeff

Moshier. Picture: JAMES WILTSHIRE

TWO ENGLISH COMPOSERS

Two items in our May concert are by English composers, both flourishing during the Victorian era. Did they ever meet, or have any contact? Let's see.

Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) English organist and composer.

His middle name came from his father's life-long admiration for J.S. Bach.

As a boy he sang in the Chapel Royal, then embarked on a career as a musician, becoming one of England's leading organists and choirmasters.

He composed almost exclusively for the Church of England. "Thou Wilt Keep Him" is one of his better-known

anthems; some of you may also know "Lead me, Lord."

He also wrote the hymn-tune "Aurelia," sung to the words "The church's one foundation."

Wesley was opposed to the equal temperament method of tuning, even after it had been widely adopted across Europe and England.

He helped invent the concave and radiating organ pedal-board. (Check out the shape of the pedals next time you see an organ).

Now for Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918)

English composer, teacher and historian of music.

While at Twyford Preparatory School, his

interest in music was encouraged by three people, one of whom was - yes, you guessed it - S.S.Wesley, from whom he gained an enduring love of the music of J.S. Bach.

Parry hoped to have lessons from Brahms (almost another connection with our program), but Brahms wasn't available. He was eventually taken up by George Grove, becoming a teacher at the Royal College of Music, and later, Director.

"Jerusalem" was composed in 1916, and was immediately taken up by the suffragette movement.

Parry died of influenza 100 years ago, in 1918.

Robyn Krowicky

Louis Vierne, his Messe Solennelle and Cavaille-Coll and Albury

Louis Vierne is probably not a name familiar to the general music community but is, however, a towering figure in French late Romantic Organ literature. His Messe Solennelle of 1899 that will comprise the major work in our May concert was composed immediately prior to his appointment as principal organist at Notre Dame at age 30. Prior to that, he had been assisting Charles-Marie Widor at the church of Saint-Sulpice also in Paris.

The Messe Solennelle was presented for the first time at Saint-Sulpice with Charles-Marie Widor playing the main organ.

At each of these posts, Vierne had at his fingertips, organs built by the great French organ Builder, Aristide Cavaille-Coll.

French organs were notable for their reeds, and the highly stylized French music of the 17th and 18th centuries calls for their frequent use.

Because of the increasing interest in orchestral and operatic music, the organ fell out of favour during the 18th century, and by 1800 it survived only as an ecclesiastical drudge. From the middle of the 19th century, however, a revival took place under the leadership of two great builders, Aristide Caillaé-Coll of France and Henry ("Father") Willis of England. In Britain during the first half of the 19th century, the introduction of pedals made it possible for the first time to play the organ music of J.S. Bach and his German contemporaries and predecessors. While retaining respectable vestiges of the classical chorus, Caillaé-Coll and Willis developed the solo stops, especially reeds, and Willis, in particular, provided new aids to registration. In Canada, Joseph Casavant built his first organ in Quebec province in 1837. Two of his sons visited France in 1878-79 and brought back to North America the Caillaé-Coll tradition.

This leads us directly to St Matthew's Letourneau organ around which our May presentation is focussed. Orgues Letourneau is based in St-Hyacinthe, Quebec and has clear links to the French Cavaille-Coll organ-building heritage.

The story of Orgues Letourneau begins in February 1965 when Fernand Létourneau accepted a position as an apprentice voicer at Casavant Frères. After progressing through a number of positions, Mr. Létourneau was appointed Casavant's head voicer and tonal finisher in 1974. Four years later, Mr. Létourneau applied for and received a grant from the Canadian Council of the Arts to study historic pipe organs in Europe where he examined instruments built by Arp Schnitger, Gottfried Silbermann, and François-Henri Clicquot among others.

The relationship between the musical work, the choir, the acoustic setting, and the accompanying instruments is the chemistry that makes a live musical performance so unique and really incapable of being equalled by recordings.

At St Matthew's, we will be able to present the Messe Solennelle in a broad resonant acoustic supported by an organ with a lineage that reflects the quality and voice of the Cavaille-Coll instrument that is so important to Vierne's musical concept.

The program will also include the more widely known Widor Toccata

Here's a little taste!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQaXh28tzyo>

Doug Westland

The Murray Conservatorium Choir plans to be nationally recognised as a strong regional choir with a focus on both the performance and development of singers, based on a broad and challenging repertoire, which includes original Australian compositions, consistent high performance standards, and regular engagement with other choirs and musicians.



St Matthew's Organ Albury

Sotto Voce Objectives

Sotto Voce has been an important part of Murray Con Choir life for many years providing a connection between current choir members outside the Monday night setting...

Now that we are all connected through the internet, your editorial committee believes that Sotto Voce could be a valuable means of connecting with our wider musical community developing further the understanding and awareness of Choral music making in the region. The Beechworth Singers, The Conservatorium Voice Consort, Wangaratta Vocal Dimensions all share similar purpose and potential audiences.

The primary focus is the work of our choir and the general promotion of Choral Music.

Building the Circulation

Our intention is to produce a monthly edition that backgrounds current activity, schedules forthcoming events, and stimulates interest in choral music.

The initial circulation is intended to be the members of Murray Conservatorium Choir, but we would like to extend that to anyone interested. We would like to extend the circulation to

- Past members
- Sponsors
- Members of the other Regional Choirs
- Interested audience members.

Our intention is to ask current members who receive Sotto Voce to forward it on to anyone that may be interested and invite them to contact Michele Roberts asking to be included on the mailing list. The mailing list will be "blind copied" so that individual email addresses are not shared. It will take some time to build the list but we believe that this is a powerful and efficient means of promoting choral activity in our region.

Doug Westland

Murray Conservatorium Choir



Bonsai Under Lights 2018 Picture: Phil W Bel



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