

A melange of interesting notes and the promise of things to come

Wine is drinkable sunlight. It's the most glorious summer's day imaginable, captured in a bottle. Wine can be a melody in a cut-glass goblet, but it can also be a cacophony in a dirty tumbler, or a rainy autumn night, or a funeral march that scorches your tongue.

- Walter Moers, Der Schreckenmeister

How to succeed in the choir business



The choir has three great concerts planned for 2015 - plus a community performance as part of the University's 50 Year celebrations.

More details in the next *Cacophony* - what is important now is what we're doing and when we're doing it.

What we're doing has taken a lot of discussion. We have many different criteria to satisfy, often contradictory.

We need to think about what our choristers want to sing, and what our audience wants to hear. Already we have four possibly incompatible

camps - those who want to sing/hear the traditional choral favourites versus those who want to be a little bit more adventurous in what they sing/hear.

Musical Directors usually want to challenge the choir to aim higher, to express a potential that they may see but some may doubt. At the same time that challenge must be achievable.

The committee will be concerned with the finances, of course, and a balance can be difficult but must be reached to ensure the very survival of the choir. Performances that draw a large audience may still run at a financial loss if they require large resources - a full orchestra for example.

Then there's the question of who we work with - do we go it alone or will we be part of a joint venture?

We have a duty to the University, which supports us by providing the facilities we use - the Great Hall and other venues - plus the patronage of the Chancellor and the support of the staff. We are one of the extension activities of the University, and it is important that we contribute to the culture of the Hunter Region.

In 2011 Opera Australia's Artistic Director Lyndon Terracini made an important if controversial speech in which he dealt with the problems of pleasing people.

"Our programming is popular but without being populist... we will need to balance our performance styles very cleverly so that we continue to satisfy our existing audience but at the same time play in a style that connects to the new audiences that are so important to our future..."

Whether we like it or not, we are in the entertainment business and if our audiences are not interested in buying tickets... and we don't secure sponsors... then we are out of business."

Many join the choir for the joy of singing. They say they don't care whether there's an audience or not, but I think everyone enjoys the acknowledgement of an appreciative audience. I'm also a realist. We can only get to experience this joy thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and the support of our audiences.

You, our sponsors and our audience, are our life blood.

In the next issue we will announce the content of the four performances we have planned for 2015. In the meantime, I thought I would share some good reasons for joining us on our musical journey, by supporting our concerts, and even joining the choir.

What's in it for you?



To begin with, music is better than medicine. According to Limelight magazine "We've long been told of the benefits of listening to music whilst pregnant, of how music enhances a child's learning, how music can help in our studies and work, but when it comes to addressing our health, a whole range of latest studies are telling us that the positive effects of music could outweigh those of medication."

Music, we are reliably informed, reduces stress, eases pain, improves immune function, helps memory and increases the enjoyment of exercise.



Scientists have observed that reading ability scales with socioeconomic status. Scientific American suggests that music classes help close this gap. Their studies even found that "four or more years of musical training in childhood was linked to faster neural responses to speech, even for the older adults who had not picked up an instrument for more than 40 years."

It gets even better!



Studies at Tokyo's Teikyo University found that mice who were given a heart transplant and were made to listen to opera (La Traviata) survived for 27 days, as opposed to only 11 days for those unfortunate rodents forced to listen to Enya.

There's more!



Music has been proven to be as good as sex! A recent study found that the enjoyment we get from listening to music releases dopamine, which in turn causes changes to heart rate, breathing and body temperature. Remember?

This could be a help in marketing our concerts. In a recent article Sam Gillies asks "Is sex appeal the key to a classical comeback?" (Warning: This link contains material that may offend some viewers. On the other hand, lovers of Dvorak may discover a whole new world of entertainment.)

This year's program has something for everybody. So please - put these dates in your diary:

Sunday 17 May
Sunday 14 June
Sunday 2 August
Sunday 6 December

More details - and an exciting announcement - in the next issue of *Cacophony*.

Cacophony is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com
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