

PAPER IX

ST STEPHEN'S CATHEDRAL CHOIR

Michael Lynch (Director of Music) 5-8-97

In the mid-sixties the impact of the Second Vatican Council was felt in church music circles. Many church leaders and congregation members perceived that the demands for full and active participation were to the exclusion of existing church music and especially choral music.

This led to the disbanding of the Cathedral choir and the notion that an occasional choir formed by seminarians would be used in the Cathedral for feasts and special occasions.

The success of this format was obviously limited and it was decided in 1970 to form a choir using boys from St James's College. Father Barry Copley was the director of the choir with Kevin Elford as conductor and Brother Robinson as accompanist. A rehearsal camp was held in March at de la Salle college, Southport.

The choir sang for the first time on Holy Thursday accompanied by Kitty Slack on the organ. They sang from the choir loft. The choir continued to sing every second Sunday. It rehearsed at St James's on Friday afternoons but soon moved to the Cathedral on Saturday mornings with the addition of boys from other schools.

In October 1970, it was decided to expand the choir and add men on the tenor and bass line. Jack Stevens was appointed as organist/choirmaster and the choir rehearsed on the top floor of the old school building that now houses the Cathedral offices. Jack Stevens provided a piano for the rehearsal room.

Because the pipe organ was in bad repair, and in line with post-Vatican II practice, the choir sang from the west transept, accompanied by a Conn electronic organ. The choir sang the congregational hymns and two anthems/motets at the 10.30 Mass. It presented a Festival of Carols on 21 December with the choir of St Patrick's College, Shorncliffe.

The choir attended a week long rehearsal camp in January 1971 at de la Salle college, Southport. A camp was also held in August at Yarraman. The choir continued to develop with the addition of members of the Collegiate Choir which had sung at the 9.00am Mass. It entered the Silkstone Eisteddfod with a first being gained for a rendition of Bach's 'He Shall feed His Flock'. In December the choir sang carols on the Channel 7 Programme, 'Rosemary's Magazine'.

In August 1971 the choir became an affiliate of the Royal School of Church Music which is an international body based in England. This affiliation has continued til the present.

In 1972 the January camp was at Yarraman. During that year the choir was involved in an ABC broadcast on 'Churches of Australia'. This programme went to air on 28 May. During 1973 the camp was at Yeppoon and the Eisteddfod successes continued.

On 12 May Kitty Slack resigned as organist due to ill health. Jack Stevens accepted the official post as organist. The choir sang each Sunday from this period. Major events included the Solemn Installation of Archbishop Rush on 20 May, a televised Mass on 1 September and an Apprentice Week Ecumenical Service on 2 September. The choir sang at two ordinations, one at Caloundra and one at Gordon Park in August. The choir moved rehearsal rooms to the old Cathedral and a concert was staged there in the latter part of the year.

The choir camp was at St Brendan's College, Yeppoon, in 1974. In February flood benefit concerts were held at St Mary's, Ipswich and at the Cathedral. On 6 December a performance of Handel's 'Messiah' was held in conjunction with members of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. This performance was repeated the following year. In 1975 the choir camp remained at Yeppoon but in 1976 changed to Downlands in Toowoomba, returning to Yeppoon in 1977.

Father Pat Fahey took over as director of the choir at the start of 1976 and during Jack Steven's absence on an overseas trip, David Molloy was organist. This was the start of many changes which occurred over the next two years. After Jack Stevens' return there were some differences of opinion between him and Father Fahey which led to Jack's resignation. (Jack retained a love for the choir and in subsequent years he would often come and sing with the choir until ill health restricted his mobility).

During 1978 and 1979 Father Fahey was the choir director with David Molloy as organist. In January 1979 the choir toured New Zealand, staying at Christchurch,

Napier, Wellington and Rotorua. This was more a social tour than a performance tour. In March and April, members of the choir were involved in performances of the opera 'La Boheme' with the Queensland Opera.

In 1980 Father Fahey departed as did David Molloy. Mr John Davidson was appointed in September as organist/choirmaster by Father Frank Moynihan who was the new choir director. Mr Davidson left in December of the same year. The choir commenced 1981 without a choirmaster/organist. Father Des Reid helped out until Easter with Gerry Connolly helping out as organist, and the choir was then suspended temporarily.

In May 1981 Mr Greg Massingham commenced as choirmaster with Mr Michael Lynch as organist. Greg had been cantor with the choir for many years and was now lecturing at the conservatorium of music. Michael had come from Rockhampton where he had been organist at St Joseph's Cathedral and was teaching at St Rita's College, Clayfield.

At this stage the choir sang at the 10.30 Mass every Sunday. In addition to the hymns, the responsorial psalm (Gelineau), Gospel Acclamation; Lord have mercy; Gloria; Holy Holy; Lamb of God and two anthems/motets were sung. The main Mass setting used was the 'Festival Mass' by Roger Heagney.

The boys of the choir were drawn from several Brisbane Colleges and the number of men expanded with the addition of several conservatorium students. In 1982 the choir camp was reduced in length to a long weekend and was held at Kenilworth Homestead. A recording was made of the 'Festival of Carols' in that year. A sacred concert was held in October.

In 1983 the camp was held at Banyo Seminary and was again on the Australia Day weekend. Jack Stevens donated an Allen electronic organ which he had purchased in the United States, to the Cathedral. The Conn organ was moved to the old Cathedral. On 4 December there was an opening concert for the restored pipe organ. The choir sang in the loft for several months after this until liturgical pressure forced it downstairs to the transept.

In 1984 the choir camp was again at Banyo. A major event was Father Moynihan's Jubilee on 28 June. Brisbane composer, Stephen Cronin was appointed assistant choirmaster. The choir had no camp in 1985 due to a booking error. After Easter, Greg Massingham resigned due to pressure of work at the Queensland Conservatorium. Michael Lynch took over as choirmaster, Earle Denning became the choir organist. Father Michael McKeaten was appointed choir chaplain.

In January 1986 the choir camp was held at Banyo with the choir leaving the camp to sing at the Australia Day service. In June it was asked by the Liturgical Commission to make a teaching tape of music for the Papal Mass which included a psalm by Gregory Massingham and a Mass setting by Stephen Cronin. In September the choir was invited to sing at the Toowoomba Cathedral to demonstrate this music. On 25 November it formed the nucleus of a massed choir to sing at QEII Stadium for the Papal Mass.

The choir camp remained at Banyo from 1897 to 1990. The main event of 1987 was a concert with the Laiton Brass on 25 October. In October of 1988, due to the renovations of the Cathedral, the Mass centre was in the bottom level of the car park. The choir rehearsed on the upper level of the car park and the offices were in the Bank of Queensland building. In September 1988 Michael Lynch was appointed to the full time position of Director of Music.

The Christmas Carols service was held at St Patrick's, the Valley and the Midnight Mass for Christmas at Festival Hall.

In 1989 a second all female choir, the Amabilis Chorale was formed as well as a vocal quartette, Quattro Voci. Father Jim Cosgrove replaced Father McKeaten as chaplain. The Easter ceremonies were held at St Patrick's. It is unfortunate that during the renovations the pipe organ was removed and sold to the Queensland Youth Orchestra. The choir loft was also removed. On 4 December the choirs combined for the Rededication Ceremony which was the start of a week of liturgical and musical events. The choir sang from behind the sanctuary. This was found not to work acoustically and it moved back to the transept in September of 1991. New robes were provided.

The choir gave its first performance of 'The Crucifixion' by John Stainer in March of 1990 with soloists Adrian McEniery (Tenor) and Richard Sims (Bass). In December it was invited to sing carols in the Botanic Gardens.

In January 1991 the venue for the camp was changed to St Leo's College at the University of Queensland. The camp has continued at this venue to the present day. The RSCM 'Sing Aloud' choral training programme was introduced in 1991. In April the choir performed 'The Crucifixion' again with soloists Sean Brown (Bass) and Adrian McEniery (Tenor).

Father Clem Hodge was appointed Administrator in July 1991 and has remained in that position till the present day. [He was replaced in 1998 Ed.] The boys were involved in the New York Early Music Society's production of 'Daniel and the Lions' as part of the Brisbane Biennial.

In 1992 the year started with the Liturgical Reception of Archbishop John Bathersby on 30 January. This event involved the combined choirs and brass. In July the choirs combined again with the Concert Society Orchestra for a Sacred Concert. A live cassette recording was produced. The choir performed in carols at South Bank during December.

In 1993 Father Ken Howell was appointed chaplain. Ken was one of the original choristers from 1970. During that year, Adrian McEniery was appointed to the new position of assistant choirmaster. The Easter ceremonies were enhanced by the performance of the Allegrì Miserere on Good Friday during the Veneration of the Cross.

The choir was invited to attend the Liturgical Conference 'New Song in an Ancient Land' in Melbourne in April. The highlight was the singing of the Palestrina 'Missa Aeterna Christe Numera' at the 11 am Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral. For its conference performances the choir sang only music by Australian composers. A recording of Christmas carols 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo' was made in November. The choir repeated its carols service at Burleigh Heads.

In 1994 the choir combined with the Brisbane Concert Society Orchestra in September for a performance of the Bach Cantata, 'Praise Our God'. A compact disc of the same title was produced from the live recording. Soloists were Leanne Kenneally (Soprano), Ron Morris (Counter Tenor), Paul McMahan (Tenor) and Daniel Morrow (Bass).

In early 1994 Adrian McEniery left to take up a position in the Victorian State Opera. He was replaced by Paul McMahan, a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music. In 1995 Father Anthony Randazzo was appointed chaplain. Anthony had sung with the choir during part of his time as a seminarian. The highlight of that year was the formation of the Cathedral Orchestra, consisting of strings, woodwind, brass and percussion. The choirs and orchestra combined for the annual concert in September which was sponsored by the Brisbane Biennial and featured the 'Missa Brevis in G' by Mozart. About 400 attended. The choir presented a Christmas carols service with the orchestra which drew an almost full Cathedral.

In September 1996 the choir concert was sponsored by the Festival of Brisbane and featured 'Genius One', a composition by Michael Lynch based on a set of paintings of the creation by Philip Pike. This work combined the Cathedral choirs and orchestra with soloists Leanne Kenneally and Paul McMahan. The other work on the programme was the 'Mass in C' by Beethoven with the additional soloists

Leo Warnock (Bass) and Anne Fulton (Alto). The performance was attended by over 400 people and received critical acclaim. A recording was made of 'Genesis One'. Paul McMahon left at the end of 1996 to join a vocal ensemble in Sydney.

The year 1997 has a main focus the joining with St John's Cathedral for Cathedral's Week. There will be a week of cultural activities in the last week of August.

In this brief analysis I have not made mention of the regular activities of the choir - 10am Mass each Sunday, Easter ceremonies, Christmas Midnight Mass and the three rehearsals per week. The choir has an ever expanding repertoire and the Cathedral is fortunate to have three choral groups and an orchestra on a regular basis.

In the compilation of this history, I am indebted to:

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