

**Roy Wales DVD Message to the Brisbane Chorale
on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary Celebration 9 November 2008**

[Text transcription by Warren Ham, March 2009]

Hello everybody. Can I say first of all that I am delighted to have this opportunity of congratulating you as you celebrate the Brisbane Chorale's 25th anniversary. I'm sorry this is a recorded message - I would have much preferred of course to have been with you - but that's not been possible, so here I am, 13,000 miles away, in cold and rainy Brighton while you're there in warm and sunny Brisbane ... well, I hope it's warm and sunny! Incidentally, it's my own birthday today, so we both have something to celebrate. Well, I must admit, I'd prefer to be 25 again rather than the other end of the age scale. I do hope that in this recorded message I can convey some of the real joy and pride that I feel at this time when I think of the Chorale's tremendous record of achievement over the last 25 years. Your achievement in contributing to the choral programmes in Brisbane has really been, I think, quite remarkable. And you perform not only, of course, many traditional works and standard repertoire works, but many unusual and less familiar works, including some premières, and I think that's a very significant part of the Chorale's record. And as an example, of course, I remember a year ago coming over to Brisbane and sharing in your performance of 'Catulli Carmina', which was part of the Conservatorium's 50th anniversary celebrations, and I value that opportunity as it gave me another clear glimpse of the choral activities in the Con at the present time. And many of you will know, of course, when I was Director of the Brisbane Chorale I was closely associated with the development of choral programmes.

It's at anniversary times like this that one perhaps can be forgiven for looking back a little, and I'd really like, if you'll forgive me, to refer back to some of the early days of the Brisbane Chorale, including how it came to be formed. A few of you, I'm sure, will remember when I first came to Brisbane in January 1981 I inherited the Conservatorium Chorale, which had been in existence for some years, and some of you were in that choir. It was a student/community choir, but I know, I remember, that Joanne Rynga, Anne Tanner, and Noel and Marge Milliken were members, and I'm sure there are others of you there today that were involved in that early Conservatorium Chorale. Noel has always been a great supporter of the Chorale, and I'm glad to see that he's still singing today. I directed this choir for two years, and at the end of 1982, after a performance of Haydn's 'Creation' at the Con, I proposed to the Conservatorium Council that we try and extend our continuing education programme, and to include a new community-based choir which was capable of performing the major choral works, and this choir was to be known as the Brisbane Chorale. The plan was approved and in 1983, in January and February, I took a number of auditions -- some of you may have been there -- in fact you may even still have the scars of that first Chorale audition -- and we were very fortunate in attracting over a hundred people who joined this new Brisbane Chorale. I also remember clearly our first performance in Mayne Hall. It was Elgar's wonderful 'Dream of Gerontius', a very favourite work of mine, and some of you were probably at that performance and remember the superb contributions of Margaret Russell, the alto soloist, Ronald Dowd, superb Australian tenor, and of course the young Jeffery Black, who'd just left the Conservatorium to join the AO in Sydney.

Perhaps one of the highlights of our early years was the performance of Bernstein's amazing music theatre piece 'Mass', which we performed in the Concert Hall in May 1986. I know some of you there today were involved in that work that, of course, not only involved Chorale members, the Conservatorium Singers as the Street Chorus (acting chorus), the Boys' Choir, which my son Simon was privileged to be in, a group of dancers which Ruth Gabriel choreographed, and there were, I think, three instrumental groups as well as some pre-recorded tapes that had to be incorporated into the performance. Jonathon Welch was a fantastic tenor soloist in the part of the Celebrant, and I'm sure that all those that attended the performance and that were involved were affected in some way by this most unusual and powerful work.

Amazingly enough, only 6 or 7 weeks later we were able to perform the 'Grande Messe des Morts' of Berlioz in the Concert Hall, and that was another unusual work that involved about 16 timpani, I think, that were lined up at the back of the Concert Hall stage, plus there were various brass groups situated around the Concert Hall to create the spatial effects that Berlioz required.

A very special memory for me was the performance of 'Elijah' in the Concert Hall in June 1987. This was my last performance with the Chorale before I returned to live and work in England, and I remember the power and the sound of the Chorale made and the dramatic impetus that you brought into your performance, which was complemented by the beauty of the soloists who on that occasion included Margreta Elkins, Henry Howell, James Christiansen, and a young lady who sang the part of the youth at rather short notice, and that lady was a young Emily Cox. So I think, Emily, I can say that you've come a long way since your youth days of 'Elijah'.

Since that time I've been able to return to Brisbane on a number of occasions and I've also been invited to conduct the Chorale again on three occasions I believe. The first was in 1989 when I returned to direct the performance of the Brahms 'Requiem', which Peter Roennfeldt prepared so ably and musically. And then in 1995 I returned and directed Philip Bracanic's Second Symphony with the Chorale and the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra as it was then, and the wonderful Marilyn Richardson as the soprano soloist. John Nickson was the Chorale Music Director at the time. And finally the 'Catulli Carmina' performance at the Con last November, when it was a great pleasure to work with you and Emily again, even though rehearsal time, as we know, was quite tight. I must admit that I was not particularly well at that time, after an operation that I'd recently had, and that led to something that happened for the first time in my career, that I actually rushed out of a rehearsal feeling quite ill, and some of you may have noticed that, some of you may not, but I can assure you it was not a reflection on your singing at that time.

Looking at your record of achievement, so many choral works have been given impressive performances by the Chorale during the last quarter of a century. Some of course have been conducted by the Chorale's own Musical Director, and some by guest conductors. But I think it's fair to say that all of them have been supported in rehearsals by some superb accompanists. I can think back to Fay Baker, when I was Director of the Chorale in the early days, right through to the present time with Justine. So my congratulations to all the accompanists for their superb work over the years which has helped the Chorale immensely in rehearsals and concerts and to achieve such a high standard of performance.

I've already mentioned the youth from 'Elijah', but perhaps I could mention once again the contribution that I think Emily Cox has made to the development and the continued success of the Chorale during the last few years. I think it's fair to say that Emily, your dedication and your musicality and choral conducting expertise has done a great deal to develop the Chorale into what it is today. I gather you've had a very successful season, which included a recording with the Queensland Orchestra of Mendelssohn's 'St Paul' -- That must be one of the first times that 'St Paul' has been performed in Brisbane I'm sure -- and I hear that you're making your first Chorale interstate tour next year in May to Adelaide. So for all these things, some coming in the future and for your record of achievement in the past, Emily, a great big thank-you for helping the Chorale to maintain its level of performance and be such a success.

Someone else who I'd like to take the opportunity to thank, who has worked behind the scenes for the Chorale as long as it's been in existence, and that is Anne Tanner. Anne was a founder member, and has been an ever-present support to the Chorale, not only as a singer but as a member of the Committee, and holding the position of Chairman, and I'm sure that she has done so much over this last 25 years to help to keep the Chorale going, sometimes in quite difficult circumstances, but Anne, for all the commitment and dedication and skill that you've brought to your position, thank you very much, and I'm sure the Chorale members echo my sentiments and would like to thank you for your particular contribution.

And then perhaps I could also highlight Peter Roennfeldt's contribution to the Chorale, especially in the early years. He was so helpful in many practical ways, and I found him to be a great colleague and a choral enthusiast as well as helping the Chorale as accompanist, as chorus master and I think even sometimes as a tenor singer. He has continued as you know as QCM Director to support and encourage all the Conservatorium choral programmes and has been a supporter of the Chorale as well. I think members of the Chorale will realise how important it is to have the Director of the QCM on-side, and particularly someone who like Peter is enthusiastic about the place of choral music, not only in music education but also in society at large. So thank you Peter for all that you continue to do for choral music in Brisbane, and all Australia, and particular congratulations for your recent election as President of the Australian National Choral Association.

Finally, to all Chorale members, past and present, can I thank you for your enthusiastic involvement in Chorale activities during the last 25 years. As director, I was always impressed by your commitment, your ready sense of humour, as well as your vocal and musical ability. Certainly the Chorale could not have achieved what it has without all your special efforts and support and musical talent, and I realize how much time that you give to rehearsals and concerts, as well as the financial expense often this entails. So thank you all, members past and present.

I was reminded that my last words to the Brisbane Chorale Committee before I left to return to England in 1987 were "It is my hope that you will go on from strength to strength as a choir in the future". Well, with what you've already achieved during the past 25 years, and with your forthcoming programmes in the future under Emily, including your first interstate tour to Adelaide, I think it's clear that you've already vastly exceeded my hopes and expectations. You clearly continue to enrich the choral life of Brisbane and you increasingly seem to be extending your talents into the wider Australian community. And I think that is a cause for real celebration. Chris, my wife, who was a founding member of the Chorale in 1983, joins me in sending you our really best wishes and congratulations. You've made the Chorale the success story it is. Long may it continue, and here's to a very happy anniversary celebration.

