

Brisbane Chorale – Our Journey

Our beginning

The Brisbane Chorale was formed in February 1983 under the auspices of the Queensland Conservatorium by its founding director, Dr Roy Wales, then director of the conservatorium. The Brisbane Chorale grew out of an amalgamation and expansion of choral forces that had operated previously at the "Con": a student/community Conservatorium Chorale that had been formed in the early 1970s by Edward Talbot, and a student choir known as the Conservatorium Choir. Operating within the structure of the conservatorium, the Brisbane Chorale became a major choral force in the city.

In 1997 the Brisbane Chorale, while continuing to maintain a close and mutually beneficial affiliation with the conservatorium, registered as an independent incorporated association with its own constitution. Today, Brisbane Chorale Inc. is self-funded and employs its own staff - music director and accompanist.

Our music directors

Brisbane Chorale Inc. has had musical teams of exceptional quality over the years - wonderful accompanists and assistant chorus masters whose musicianship and support has contributed so much to our music-making.

Our founder, Roy Wales, instilled the essence of what choral singing is all about - the joy, the team-work, the absolute thrill of being inspired to give our all. The music directors who followed him have helped us to keep alive that aspiration for choral excellence and enjoyment - all of them musicians of quality, and we pay tribute to them:

- Roy Wales (1983 - 1987)
- James Christiansen (January - December 1988)
- Peter Roennfeldt (January 1989 - August 1991)
- the late John Nickson (August 1991 - April 1996)
- Emily Cox (April 1996 - December 1996)
- Russell Larkin (January 1997 - July 1998)
- Christopher Kiver (January 1999 - June 2002)
- Emily Cox (since 2003).

Our present music director, Emily Cox, was a chorister with us at the beginning. It's a pleasure to work with her now as music director.

Our members

We are a community of singers drawn from all walks of life, with an extensive choral experience. In fact, a survey of choir members undertaken in 2008 found that total years of choir/choral experience in Brisbane Chorale Inc. add up to at least 1,877 years! The survey also found that:

- members of Brisbane Chorale Inc. were born in 21 different countries
- 24 languages are spoken in varying degrees by our members, ranging from Icelandic to Tongan
- occupations range across sales assistant, postal workers, students, ICT personnel, office and business managers, teachers, nurses, artists, architects, engineers, lawyers, scientists, doctors and clergy.

Performances

Brisbane Chorale's repertoire is broad and extensive. Performances include great choral works of the past but also major 20th century works. Highlights of Brisbane Chorale's history have included Australian premières – Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (1986), Eliot Goldenthal's *Fire Water Paper: a Vietnam Oratorio* (1997), Bob Chilcott's *Jubilate* (2001) and Joseph Jongen's *Mass op 130* (2003). There have also been some world premières, the most recent being the 2011 performance of Elena Kats-Chernin's *Symphonia Eluvium*, a reflection on the Queensland floods. Brisbane



Chorale Inc. has commissioned two choral works – *Child Sightings* by Sydney composer Matthew Orlovich (2002), and Philip Bracanin's *Symphony No 2*, premièred with the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra in 1995.

“... last night's world première in Brisbane's Concert Hall of Philip Bracanin's *Symphony No.2* by the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra, Brisbane Chorale, and soprano soloist, Marilyn Richardson was a landmark performance” (B Hebden, *The Sunday Mail*, 17.9.95)

Brisbane Chorale later recorded this work for ABC Classics with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (QSO) conducted by Werner Andreas Albert. Brisbane Chorale has also recorded Mahler's *Symphony No 3* with The Queensland Orchestra, and at the end of 2012 was involved in a recording “*Joy to the World*”, for Move Records, featuring Christmas choral music by Sydney organist and composer Robert Ampt.

A landmark in Brisbane Chorale's history was its presentation on 11 November 2000, with the QSO and Werner Andreas Albert, of Beethoven's magnificent *Missa solemnis* to celebrate the new millennium. There have been some very moving performances, such as Mozart's *Requiem* in the Concert Hall in 1995 given as a tribute to the victims of the Kobe earthquake.

“In Mozart's *Requiem* ... the Brisbane Chorale and Queensland Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra found eloquent expression for the shared sense of loss.” (P Kelly, *The Courier-Mail*, 10.04.1995)

In August 2012, Brisbane Chorale was privileged to be the core choir in the Brisbane Mahler Chorus, which performed Mahler's “*Resurrection*” *Symphony* with the visiting Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra under Australian conductor, Simone Young.

Brisbane Chorale has sung in staged productions (the Queensland Ballet's 1989 season of *Carmina Burana*), film screenings (Sergei Prokofiev's sound-track to the screening of the classic Russian film *Alexander Nevsky* in 1991 and, in 2012, “*Lord of the Rings – Fellowship of the Ring*”, original score performed live with film) and also concert versions of Bernstein's *Candide* (1995), Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1996) and the Australian première of the rock musical *Chess* (1993). Brisbane Chorale has performed regularly in the Queensland Performing Arts Trust's *Spirit of Christmas* concerts. It has also participated in the Queensland Pops Orchestra's *Best of British* concerts where it has been known to really let its hair down: “high kicks, stamping and hip swaying...all part of the Brisbane Chorale's contribution”! (Gillian Wills, *The Courier-Mail*, 2003).

Some other wondrous events have come our way on occasions. A group of us took to the Concert Hall stage in 1987 disguised as the Great Barrier Reef Coral Society to help Gerry Connolly and the QSO under Dobbs Franks in a “*Tour de Farce*”. We've stood, singing mid-field in the Lang Park “*Cauldron*” at a 1996 Rugby International as 42,000 fans roared their welcome to the teams. What an overwhelming experience that was! And in 2002 we had some fun singing along onstage with the renowned rock group *George* and The Queensland Orchestra in the *River symphony* concert in New Farm Park.

Occasional invitations to perform for corporate events have taken us to some interesting locations. Particularly memorable was the gala event to celebrate the 85th birthday of the Brisbane Arcade where we surprised the assembled guests by appearing all around the balcony above to sing and wish this beautiful Arcade a musical “*Happy Birthday*”.

Tours

Taking our performances to centres beyond Brisbane is an important community outreach and also a lot of fun for us. While there are logistical difficulties in transporting a large choir, Brisbane Chorale Inc. has, over the years, sought out performance opportunities in our immediate regional centres (Gold and Sunshine Coasts, Toowoomba, Ipswich). Brisbane Chorale's first interstate tour was to Adelaide in 2009 to perform Verdi's *Requiem* with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, with a reciprocal visit by the Adelaide Chorus to perform that work with us and the QSO. A valuable interstate cultural collaboration!



Brisbane Chorale's first international tour took place in September 2013 with a performance of Elgar's oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* in Auckland, New Zealand in collaboration with Auckland Choral. Some Brisbane Chorale Inc. members had an exciting foretaste of international touring early in 2013, when a contingent travelled to New York to participate at the invitation of Distinguished Concerts International, New York, in a performance of Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* in Carnegie Hall.

Associations with other organisations

We are indebted to the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University for its support over the years and we appreciate the continued close and mutually beneficial affiliation that we have had with the "Con" since becoming an independent incorporated association. One of those benefits is the opportunity Brisbane Chorale Inc. can provide for Conservatorium students to sing with Brisbane Chorale as part of their course and we are delighted to welcome them each year. From time to time we can support Conservatorium events by active participation. For example, in 2007 we helped the "Con" celebrate its 50th anniversary in two events, the first being a performance of Vaughan Williams' stirring and moving *A Sea Symphony*. And in 2013 we joined the Conservatorium in special Anzac Eve and Anzac Day commemorations, celebrating the 100th anniversary of Benjamin Britten's birth with his *War Requiem*.

Over the years we've been privileged to work with Brisbane's major orchestras, choirs and performance organisations and have enjoyed some memorable concert experiences. Some of these have been broadcast on ABC radio and television. Brisbane Chorale Inc. values its association with 4MBS *Classic* FM, Brisbane's fine music FM radio station, which has made a major contribution to the music community through its annual Festival, its recording and broadcast of concerts, and its support of local artists.

It is important for us to give back to the community where we can, in support of charitable causes. Brisbane Chorale lent our voices in 2000 for the Palliative Care Christmas celebration and our 2001 Singathon "Voices for Voices" raised money to help children who can't speak or can't hear. More recently, our very successful Christmas concert in 2010 raised funds for Cancer Council Queensland, as did our 2013 raffle for flood relief.

The years ahead

Choral music is a vital artistic medium that has inspired composers over centuries to write some of their greatest music. Brisbane Chorale Inc. is dedicated to bringing to audiences the joy, the wonder and the beauty of great choral works of composers past and present. We invite music lovers to share that music-making with us as we continue our musical journey.

Anne Tanner
(President 1997 – 2013)