

Austinato



The Vocal Consort, The Australian Boys Choir and the Training Choirs of the Australian Boys Choral Institute in rehearsal for *Songs for the Open Road* at The Edge, Federation Square, March 2023

From the Chair



Professor Stephen Duffy
Chair, Australian Boys Choral
Institute Board

'Every day is a renewal, every morning the daily miracle. This joy you feel is life.'

Gertrude Stein

Renewal

While the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering social and financial effects have not yet ebbed, the Australian Boys Choir is back in full swing with an outstanding year of concerts planned. The first performance of the 2023 concert season, *Songs for the Open Road*, headlined by The Vocal Consort, with guest appearances by the Australian Boys Choir and the ABCI Training Groups was a great success. The fabulous Edge theatre at Federation Square was a magnificent venue. Owing to our recent and ongoing collaboration with the Australian Digital Concert Hall and excellent ticket sales, the concert was watched and listened to by over 600 people, which is a great achievement for our first concert of the year. Our Artistic Director, Mr Nicholas Dinopoulos led the performance with aplomb, as always. Many of the boys are unaccustomed to professional performance as the Choir renews, but all the performers were in wonderful voice, a credit to our talented and dedicated music staff who have kept our boys and young men in concert readiness throughout the last few challenging years.

The Australian Boys Choral Institute is the governing body responsible for the Australian Boys Choir. The ABCI Board meets monthly to help guide the careful development of the organisation. This includes considering opportunities and issues related to strategic governance, operational oversight, managing budgets, financial sustainability, setting policies, setting goals, measuring progress and celebrating achievements. The ABCI Board currently has six dedicated and caring volunteer Directors, who invest their time and abilities ensuring that the ABC thrives for another 84 years

and beyond. We are blessed to have a group of outstanding individuals representing a cross-section of excellent skills on the ABCI Board.

Most of our ABCI Directors stay in their position for years... indeed, some in the past for decades! This is wonderful for the continuity of the Choir, by helping preserve our corporate knowledge. However, from time to time it is prudent to refresh the Board with new members who bring fresh ideas and renewed energy to the task at hand. We are very fortunate indeed to have recruited a new ABCI Director recently, who I am sure will bring new energy and perspectives to the ABCI Board. You may recall that Mr Tim Matthews Staindl penned a fundraising letter you would have received in December 2022. Those with longer memories and associations with the Choir will know that Tim previously served as Head Chorister of the Australian Boys Choir. That is quite an honour as there have only been five Head Choristers in the ABC's 84-year history. The rank of Head Chorister recognises boys who have shown exemplary leadership, and it is a rarely conferred honour. Tim went on to complete a music degree, sing in The Vocal Consort, and was a music tutor at the ABCI. Following that, Tim studied law and is now a practising barrister. Thus, he brings much knowledge about the ABCI and many capabilities to complement the 'skills matrix' of the ABCI Board. To our knowledge Tim may be the first person to work his way from the rank of Probationer all the way through to a Board Member of the ABCI. I welcome him on your behalf, and I look forward to working with him and the other ABCI Directors.

ABCI Concert Season 2023

- *Songs of the Sea*: The Vocal Consort and The Australian Boys Choir / Saturday 20th May, Christ Church Cathedral Ballarat / Sunday 21st May, Hawthorn Arts Centre and the Australian Digital Concert Hall
- *Brothers, Sing On!*: Training Choirs of the Australian Boys Choral Institute / Sunday 18th June, Auburn Uniting Church Hawthorn
- *Sing Joyfully*: The Australian Boys Choir and The Vocal Consort / Saturday 19th August, Sacred Heart Cathedral Bendigo / Sunday 20th August, St Patrick's Cathedral East Melbourne and the Australian Digital Concert Hall
- *Sing of Christmas*: Sunday 10th December, Melbourne Recital Centre and the Australian Digital Concert Hall

Full concert details and booking information at www.australianboyschoir.com.au/concerts.



West Gate Bridge

A Choir Goes West

The ABCI's non-auditioned Early Learners program launched in the Choir's 80th anniversary year and has since seen steady growth. The start of 2023 has been particularly significant, marking the start of a modest expansion into the western suburbs of Melbourne with our Early Learners classes now being offered in Truganina, as well as Hawthorn.

These classes, for both boys and girls aged four to seven years, focus on learning through exploration and play. Our singers learn music-specific skills, such as keeping time, matching pitch, and melody recognition, and on top of this, pick up countless other transferable skills. They expand their memory capabilities with remembered songs; develop fine motor skills through playing different instruments each week; improve their language and subsequent reading competence; and build confidence in connecting with their peers through singing together.

Since the launch of Early Learners in 2019, numerous boys have gone on to successfully audition for the ABCI's training program. For aspiring singers, beginning their musical journey at the Early Learners level has practical benefits, as families of these boys attest:

'Our son had a fantastic time attending weekly Early Learners classes both online during the lockdown and face-to-face after the restrictions. The fun, non-judgemental and supportive approach to group singing has given him invaluable confidence and skills to transition smoothly into the Probation training where he felt a sense of belonging.'

Staff see the benefits of gentle encouragement and modelled behaviour. Students who come to their first few Early Learners classes nervous and shy, flourish into young singers who volunteer to sing independently with the support of the group. There are several songs that allow us to track the progress of a child, especially with echo singing. There is much joy in observing this development and providing the opportunity for continual growth and extension; from singing a song in a group, to singing individually, through to taking over the role of the teacher and creating the echo for other students to mimic.

Early Learners teacher, Rachael Joyce says, 'Working at this foundation level with the next generation of musicians is inspiring

'Our son participated in the Early Learner classes back in 2020, he was fortunate to have done a few in person classes making what was to become a mostly online program at the time somewhat easier than it would have been otherwise. To be able to sing with other boys helped to galvanise his continued interest in singing, and the professionalism of all the teacher's made learning enjoyable and progress steady. There is a lot for our boys to learn in the Choir; however, the first step is the most important as with any journey. I would encourage all parents to consider giving their son an opportunity to be a singer in the ABC made most easily possible through enrolment in the Early Learners classes.'

and humbling for me. Just this week, one Early Learner asked at the end of class "Why are we already finished?". I used my preferred adage in response to this, "time flies when you're having fun", which, though perhaps clichéd, still rings true. I love spending my Monday and Wednesday afternoons learning and exploring with these young singers, and I find that they teach me just as much as I teach them.'

NEWSFLASH

In addition to our western suburbs Early Learners classes, we are currently seeking expressions of interest from families in the western suburbs with a son or grandson between the ages of 7–9. With sufficient numbers, we hope to be able to audition and offer places to join the first level of the formal Australian Boys Choir training program in Truganina on Monday afternoons from Term 3. Please visit www.australianboyschoir.com.au/our-programs for more information.

A Season of Song in Full Swing

After a magnificent opening gala in March, this year's ABCI concert season is now in full swing. With twists, turns and special guest artists around every corner, it's been a swashbuckling start to the year and the Institute's next public outing, titled *Songs of the Sea*, promises to enchant with two May performances in both Ballarat and Melbourne.

Again pursuing a themed series of programs in 2023, Artistic Director Nick Dinopoulos has promised 'more singers and more songs', with most events this year offering elements of massed singing and some stunning additions to the Choir's repertoire.

Also on show are some outstanding guest artists, including some of the Institute's most accomplished alumni.

Chief among them is Raphael Wong, fresh from his Sydney Opera House debut last year as Phantom in Opera Australia's *Phantom of the Opera*. Audiences will be delighted that he is set to feature prominently in these two ABCI concerts coming up in May.

The start of Raph's musical journey will sound familiar. Joining the Australian Boys Choir as a Probationer in 1997 before becoming a member of the Performing Choir in 2000, his voice ultimately changed in 2003. Moving to The Junior Consort (now known as The Kelly Gang) was the obvious next step, but Raph would also go on to become a key member of The Vocal Consort from 2006 to 2012, as well as serving on the Institute staff.

What has followed is more unusual: an enviable career in Opera and Musical Theatre, with notable engagements right around Australia. Being able to welcome Raph back to perform this season is an enormous boon for the ABCI.

On developing into an opera singer over time, Raph is of the view that 'opera is a slightly different beast to choral singing but much of it is very similar - if anything it's like choral singing but everything is dialled up a fair few notches!'

Songs of the Sea will showcase Raph performing alongside members of The Vocal Consort and firm ABCI favourite, international pianist Andrea Katz, in Charles Villiers Stanford's magnetic *Songs of the Sea* for baritone soloist and male chorus.

Anticipation is certainly growing for this performance. Senior Singer Matty is excited to be 'singing songs we have rehearsed as a group, and exploring the different venues we perform in. I look forward to the thrill of singing in different places.' The Melbourne performance will also be broadcast via Australian Digital Concert Hall for those unable to attend in person.

Vocal Consort bass, Cameron, is sure there will be 'something for everyone and anyone could enjoy the high level of skill and talent that will be on show from both choirs. The program will bring together music with a common theme but a range of different sounds and atmospheres, but most importantly lots of gloriously low bass notes.'

Apart from exhilarating choral colours, two-thirds of the scheduled pieces are by Australian composers as varied as Peter Sculthorpe, Lyn Williams and Matthew Orlovich, furthering the brief of the ABCI to uphold this country's best and brightest across successive artistic generations.

On that topic, Raph notes, 'So much of my life has been influenced by being a member of the Australian Boys Choir community. I'm glad I made the choice to join.'

'The skills I learnt are still skills I regularly utilise to this day, not just as a musician, but as a teacher and even the odd life skill, too. I have many longstanding friendships with other alumni, and am very thankful for the performing opportunities and community experiences I had during my time there.'

It's yet another example of music shared in community bringing people together to create unforgettable experiences and magical memories.

Members of
The Australian
Boys Choir in
rehearsal,
March 2023
(Photo: Chris
Powney)





Songs of the Sea

Saturday 20th May 2023 | 3:00pm

Christ Church Cathedral, Ballarat

and

Sunday 21st May 2023 | 3:00pm

Hawthorn Arts Centre, Hawthorn

and the Australian Digital Concert Hall

Bookings: www.australianboyschoir.com.au/concerts

The Australian Boys Choir | The Vocal Consort

Raphael Wong, baritone | Andrea Katz, piano

Nicholas Dinopoulos, conductor

Above: Raphael Wong
(Photo: Lewis Francis)

Right: Nicholas Dinopoulos
(Photo: Chris Powney)

Below: Andrea Katz
(Photo: Robert Catto)



Meet the Newest ABCI Leaders

Over the years, the Australian Boys Choral Institute has always sought to give its members something to aspire to. From the Institute's exceptional music education to the opportunities provided to perform and travel, the Australian Boys Choir sees young singers supported to develop their skills and maturity over time.

The training program is set up in such a way as to enable each boy to progress through the training levels of the Australian Boys Choir at their own rate, gaining not only musical knowledge, but also growing in confidence and personal independence. From Probationer to Tyro, Junior Singer to Senior Singer, the training continues to the highest level of Chorister. Two further special ranks acknowledge outstanding effort by Choristers: that of Choir Leader and the rarely awarded Head Chorister badge, presented in exceptional circumstances.

Pleasingly, two new Choir Leaders were installed in April: George Stirling and Tom Padula.

George reflects, 'When Mr D sat Tom and I down and told us he wanted to install us as Leaders, I was surprised; I had never thought of myself as a Leader and I had always looked up to other ABC Leaders in the choir such as Josh Vass, Cameron Gilchrist and Jimmy Hilton - Leaders who really had been outstanding in every way. I thought about Mr D's proposal for a second and realised the baton was now being passed to me.'

Leaders distinguish themselves across the board, thoroughly embodying the ethos of the ABCI as an organisation and working to uphold its values.

Tom says, 'I am thrilled and honoured to become a Choir Leader. I feel extremely proud of myself for achieving this and am very happy to share the position with George.'

Both George and Tom joined the Choir at the same time, in 2016, and both noticed an immediate sense of community and inclusivity within the Choir.

Tom says, 'It was instantly a welcoming environment and I felt like I fitted in. Not only has Choir dramatically improved my musical skills, it has also developed my social and leadership skills. I have had lots of opportunities to increase my confidence and I have been able to practise being a leader, which has helped with my leadership outside of Choir.'

George, too, says the Choir has helped him to become a more confident person, 'Choir has been hugely beneficial. I can't quite imagine my life without it.'

George goes on to say, 'My favourite thing about being a Choir Leader is the opportunity to inspire younger boys. Everyone has had someone who inspired them to continue with the Choir. For me, that was Josh Vass. Every time, I saw Josh, whether I was a Tyro, a Junior, or a Squad member, he would meet my timid glance with a welcoming smile. He sang beautifully and he always knew the answers to Mr D's curlier musical questions.'

George and Tom now take the baton, to inspire other young boys to reach their potential.

Tom says, 'My favourite thing about being a Choir Leader is my ability to help and support my fellow choir mates.'

The training the Australian Boys Choir provides truly goes beyond the musical. The ABCI is empowering the next generation of young men to put their best foot forward, not only as members of the Choir, but ultimately as active contributors and leaders regardless of their chosen future field.

George says, 'The training we boys have received has been unsurpassed — it really is world class.'

With his choral training, George has enjoyed the opportunity to perform with Opera Australia, as well featuring on the ABC's 7:30 program.

'I saw Raphael Wong in Phantom of the Opera recently,' says George, 'and it was pretty astonishing to see somebody who had trained as we have with the Choir, up there on the stage of the State Theatre with Opera Australia. For me, it is amazing to be part of something that has been training boys for so long.'

This path from the youngest training groups through to Chorister and beyond, remains a proud distinguishing feature of the Australian Boys Choral Institute to this day.



Left: George Stirling and Tom Padula
(Photo: Chris Powney)

Far left: Cameron Gilchrist and Joshua Vass



Summer School Round-Up

They say a change is as good as a holiday, which might explain why some choir parents give up a week (or a few days) of their summer holidays to volunteer as Carers for the ABCI's annual Summer School camp.

After attending Summer School at Lake Dewar Lodge, you return home from the experience a changed person - and I don't mean from eating dessert daily, or the world-famous Lake Dewar scones, or Mr Christie's birthday cake – the 10,000-plus steps you cover each day as a Carer balances out these excesses.

Why do I volunteer? Because I'm hooked on the experience. I've been hooked since the first singalong at the first Weekend Workshop I attended.

It was out of a sense of curiosity that I first put up my hand to volunteer as a Carer. What do they do at Lake Dewar that results in my son coming home with impeccable manners? How is it possible that he has won a Tidy Room award? What do they feed him that he has grown two centimetres in a week? And will he ever stop singing?

First, I helped care for the Junior Singers at a Weekend Workshop. The two days passed in a sleep-deprived flash, but I experienced a taster of what Choir is about and why it is so good for our sons, got to know some boys, parents and teaching staff, and exchanged cooking and home domestic tasks for a couple of days in the bush. But it was the singalongs I loved most. Listening with awe as boys as young as seven learnt a new song and could sing it in harmony with their senior counterparts in the space of half an hour.

I spent three days at my first Summer School, and I will never forget them. I made friends with other parents, planned and problem-solved as part of a dedicated and committed team, shared many laughs, handed out stickers to boys doing well, comforted and encouraged those who needed support, got plenty of encouragement and support myself from the experienced Carers, learnt new skills, was well fed, and had front-row seats to top-notch performances.

This year, at my second Summer School, I met some of our newer Tyros and saw how boys I have cared for previously have grown into new roles. Some are now in the Kelly Gang or Cambiata; some have just made it to Chorister, and, incredibly, two of them are now tutors. I was reunited with past Carers and met some fantastic new parents who I now count as friends. And, of course, there was the singing.

As I now adjust to being back in the real world, away from the daily rhythms and melodies of Summer School, I am reflecting on what it means to be a Carer. To me, it means being fully part of a community that is constantly evolving, each of us contributing our unique gifts, all dedicated to the growth and flourishing of our children. We are the village raising the child. In our ordinary lives of busy-ness, work, school, domestic activities, paying bills, shopping and socialising, this is a rare and joyous thing to experience.

Jo Bowers



Top: Caring Team volunteers (Jo Bowers standing, centre)

Above: Cuddly toy competition

Left: Summer Music School 2023

ABCI Mid-Year Giving Appeal

The years I spent as a volunteer with the ABCI are amongst my most memorable. Seeing the boys under my care, happy and well was rewarding enough. To hear them sing with such enjoyment and skill was an enormous privilege.

One moment I clearly remember was driving my son and two of his friends to rehearsal. They were sitting in the back seat. Their lively chatter suddenly turned into enthusiastic, tuneful part singing. They were Tyros and I'd never heard my son sing that way before. I was amazed.

I consider myself to be so fortunate, to have been able to not only care for the boys of the ABCI, but to hear them rehearse and perform at weekend workshops, summer camps, concerts and overseas trips. During these times, I've observed these young boys become increasingly independent, learning to share, care and support their fellow singers. I've watched them mature into confident and proud young men, able to perform with poise, skill and obvious enjoyment.

During the *AmericaFest* tours I attended, the choristers

were given many standing ovations and described as among the best boy choirs in the world. Such praise and skill could not be achieved without the excellent tuition, passion and patience of the music staff. It could not be achieved without the volunteers and parent support.



Catherine Hallam

However, behind the scenes, the financial support of members and their friends is vital. A donation, no matter how small, goes a long way to maintaining this wonderful organisation. Please consider whether this is something possible for you to do at the end of this financial year.

I wish you all health, happiness and continued enjoyment of this precious ABCI.

Catherine Hallam
ABCI Honorary Life Member



The Australian Boys Choir

Auditions

Boys aged 7 to 9 can apply today.
All levels of singing experience welcome.
Based in Melbourne.

Call 9818 4818 for more information.
australianboyschoir.com.au/join

excellence is a musical head start

Tyro singer Herbie, aged 8.
Recital Centre 2019.
Photo by Jane Kupsch.

Donate online today

www.givenow.com.au/australianboyschoir



The Australian Boys Choral Institute/The Australian Boys Choir Fund is an endorsed Deductible Gift Recipient. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Contributors: Sarah Bird, Jo Bowers, Nick Dinopoulos, Stephen Duffy, Julia Gilchrist, Rachael Joyce, Liz Lindner, Kishani Navaratne, Coral Vass.

If you would like to receive *Austinato* by email, please contact the Choir Office.

The Australian Boys Choir

3C Hepburn Street, Hawthorn VIC 3122
PO Box 3117, Auburn VIC 3123
03 9818 4818
admin@australianboyschoir.com.au