

Church Music Australia

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Communities

In my early 20s I began work as a classroom music teacher in a state high school. It soon dawned on me that music teachers were a lonely bunch. I don't mean this in a personal sense, but in a professional one. There were over a dozen English teachers in the school, and they chatted in the staff room before school and at lunchtime over issues concerning the teaching of English. I suspect they may have learned more about teaching English from each other than they ever learnt at a teacher training institution. They were part of a community of English teachers. But there were only two very inexperienced music teachers, and we spent mornings before school and lunchtimes taking choral and instrumental ensembles. We talked very little about what we were doing because we didn't have the time, and we certainly didn't talk with music teachers from other schools.

Church musicians are a lot like that. We organists rarely hear other organists play services because we are playing our own at the same time. We choristers rarely hear other choirs in other churches because we are singing in our own church at the same time. We live and work with our focus directed largely on the work in our local church. In many ways that's a good thing – church music does require focus and discipline and careful attention at a local level, but it does mean that we are often unaware of the larger picture.

On Easter Day I have sometimes noted to my choristers that we are part of a "wave". As we robe in Brisbane in preparation for Easter Services we are doing what choirs to the east of us in the Pacific have done a few hours before. The wave of Easter Alleluias crosses the time zones of New Zealand, Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the American continent before finally ending in Hawaii. Thinking this way helps to make our perspective both local and global.

Being a member of a community is both therapeutic and empowering. It is therapeutic because sometimes things don't go well for us in our local music making. Being part of a larger community reminds us that others have some of the same problems, and also reminds us that the world is larger than our own issues. It is empowering because groups, teams, corporations, clubs – in other words communities are always more powerful than a lonely individual.

That's one reason why membership of RSCM is so important. By becoming a member we recognize ourselves as members of a larger community of church musicians which is both Australia wide and worldwide.

So far I have been talking somewhat generally. Let me conclude by making some practical statements concerning the way is that church music leaders can build communities using RSCM resources. Some of these ideas refer to what can be done at state level and others at the local level. Many of them are obvious, self evident, and almost trivial. However, I think change is often effected not by earth shattering incredibly creative ideas, but simply by "doing the obvious".

Make sure that Church Music Australia (CMA) is available as an insert in your state newsletter, (or if not all of it, at least some of it). Make sure your state RSCM newsletter, CMA, and Church Music Quarterly (CMQ) are available to your choristers, organists, and other church musicians. In my choir room, we have a table which functions as a "hand out" table and I put these there.

But having these on the table doesn't make a bit of difference to my choristers unless I take a further step. I refer to these publications and little bits of information, news items, or trivia within them as much as possible in conversation, during announcements in choir rehearsal, and as we are rehearsing music. If I want my choristers to read these publications, I need to constantly reinforce the idea. I sometimes photocopy interesting paragraphs or articles and put them on the notice board. With the youngsters in the choir, I may even have little competitions to see which chorister can find a certain bit of information first.

I sometimes highlight or circle items of interest in my own personal copies of these publications. It is then easy to flip through them quickly to remind oneself of things that I've read.

And finally, since I have noted the importance of reading these, here are some bits of information I have gained from recent RSCM publications:

- There are 8,559 members of RSCM worldwide. Australia is third in this list behind Great Britain and Northern Ireland (6,532) and the United States (611). Australia has 574. (CMQ June 2008);
- Deirdre Russell from Western Australia received a Special Service Award for her many years work in RSCM and wider church music and music education at the recent NZ Summer School (CMA March and picture in CMQ June);
- Michelle de Courcy and Gemma Dashwood received awards for having completed the requirements for the Silver award in the Voice for Life program recently (CMA March);
- Lindsay Gray – new Director of RSCM is a leg spin bowler and golfer (CMQ June).

Have you “started talking?” If you don’t know what I mean, then go back to the March edition of CMA.

Ralph Morton

President RSCM Australia



Discover The Pipe Organ Day.

There's still a lot of interest shown in organ playing in Western Australia, as we found last month when former Chairman of Western Australia Branch – and one of the instigators of our unique Choristers' Camp – Dudley Bastian, organised a very busy "hands-on" workshop starting at his own home pipe organ on a Saturday morning. The day was titled "Discover the Pipe Organ", and RSCM and the Organ Society of WA co-sponsored this day, continuing a tradition Dudley and his late wife Beverley instigated in 1991. This year he attracted 14 students.

Dudley has been a member of RSCM since 1967 and is a Life Member of RSCM in the United Kingdom.

The fourteen eager folk listened to an experienced organist Alison Robins, playing in different styles on the organ that Dudley installed himself in a music room that could have been purpose built. Placed in the living room void of his two-level home, the pipes soar to the ceiling. Then the fourteen, in groups already planned by Dudley, travelled in pooled cars to adjacent suburbs to three more organs, made available by the churches for the day, with three other tutors, Margaret de San Manuel, Moya Sherlock and Milton Smith.

We all met at St John's Lutheran Church in Aberdeen St, Perth, for a BYO lunch and coffee provided - sustenance very necessary at such a time. The group then divided again to meet with another tutor at another venue. They discovered that 1:1 is just a part of learnin; listening to their

peers play their own selections was very educational too.

Just one church had double-booked, and it was to enable some Visual Arts students from Curtin Uni to set up a mock wedding in the real church, complete with costumes, sound, lighting and of course hi-tech camera equipment. However, this did not interfere with our work. It gave our budding organists a taste of what organ practice could entail.

The churches who kindly allowed all this to happen were St John's Lutheran, Perth Baptist in the city, and St Patrick's Anglican in Mt Lawley. Dudley's own organ was also in Mt Lawley and so very little travelling was necessary.

Players ranged from a 13 year-old girl to an 85 year-old girl, and from a good spread of suburbs including York, 100km from Perth. All agreed that it was a great learning experience, and really appreciated the help given by the four tutors. Dudley was thanked profusely for his initiative setting up this very informative day. We are planning to run it again (with Dudley's expertise) in 2010.

We hope that giving these students a taste of playing the "King of Instruments" will encourage them to find a teacher to continue from Dudley's initial introduction, and one day we may have a new crop of organists in our churches.

Deirdre Russell,

Chair, Western Australia Branch



News from ACT Branch

The Branch held a hymn singing and organ interlude afternoon on 18 May which proved very encouraging. The gathering was held utilising the fine resources of the historic Anglican Church of St. John the Baptist at Reid, which originated well before Canberra was conceived.

Since then, the Branch has launched a composition competition whereby competitors are asked to prepare an anthem setting to the words of Psalm 150. It is anticipated that the winning entries will be performed at a celebration on 17 August at the historic All Saints' Anglican Church Ainslie. This church is currently celebrating 50 years in the present building, which was originally a Necropolis Receiving House at Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney, built in 1868. In 1958, the fabric was moved stone by stone to Ainslie, and re-erected,

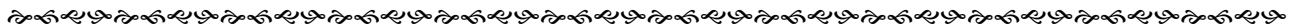
constituting a fine edifice to meet the needs of a growing suburb. A twin building still exists adjacent to Sydney Central Station.

But so much history. On 22 June, the Branch will augment the choir of the North Belconnen Uniting Church to celebrate the church's acquisition of a pipe organ. Christian fellowships in newly developing suburbs of Canberra usually commence meeting in school halls, often without any permanent musical instrument. Resources to acquire a building are progressively amassed, but acquisition of a substantial musical instrument usually comes much later. In North Belconnen's case, the pipe organ has been rescued from the former Methodist Church in Singleton NSW, which had closed. This instrument, built by C. W. Leggo in 1920, has been refurbished by members of the congregation with the assistance of organ builder, Roger Jones and is very prominent in the worship space of the building. It is also expected to be a valuable social acquisition as there are few pipe organs in that part of the city.

In September we will be back into history with a visit to the Ross Memorial Uniting Church in nearby Murrumburrah-Harden. This church boasts a fine organ built in 1917 by J.E. Dodd of Adelaide. After a musical program, some fine country hospitality is expected.

Bill Fraser

Chair ACT Branch



A Tale of Two Towns

Two small but significant towns lie within only a few kilometres of each other in the French province of Burgundy. One is the town of Cluny, home of the Cluniac reform in liturgy around the turn of the First Millennium. This emphasised the cultivation of the personal spiritual life and the splendour and solemnity of worship. The magnificent Abbey of Cluny was 614 ft long (about 200 m.), the largest church in Christendom, and at times the Abbot of Cluny was said to be more powerful than the Pope himself. (Unfortunately this significant and beautiful building was demolished for building materials in the French Revolution; only a couple of arches and one tower still remain.)

Just down the road is the village of Taizé, which has also had a considerable influence on worship and liturgy in our own time. The Taizé community was founded in 1940, when Roger Schutz-Marsauche acquired a house to shelter Jews and other refugees during the Nazi occupation. After the war he obtained permission to welcome German prisoners-of-war from a nearby camp, thus establishing Taizé's thoroughly international character.

The first brothers were all from Protestant backgrounds, but since 1969 they have been joined by Roman Catholics. Worship in the Church of the Reconciliation in Taizé is characterised by songs and silent meditation, mostly in flickering candlelight. The songs usually involve a short melody to a brief text, often in multi-language versions, repeated at considerable length.

The unique quality of Taizé-style worship lies in its adaptability to the most diverse occasions. The songs may be sung extremely simply, or, with quite an opposite effect, performed with a small (or even large!) instrumental and vocal ensemble. Calmer melodies accompanied by the soft tones of the flute or oboe alternate with the bright joy of horns, trombones, trumpets and organ, fit to fill the largest cathedral. Whatever arrangement is chosen, it must always be remembered that the music of Taizé was not written for concert performance but rather for the purpose of common prayer and for worship services in which everyone simply sings along.

Laurie Wigney

Uniting Church rep on the NSW Branch
Committee



Very Small Choirs

In the last issue I raised the issue of very small choirs and how they can survive in churches. I am sure this a very general problem. The recent publication of Flexible Anthems by Oxford University Press is one publication I have found that solves at least some of the associated problems of a small choir. Of course there are other sources. What for example do you do when your only tenor, (who does excellent work when present), gets the dreaded winter round of cold/flu late on a Saturday afternoon; and this the day before you were organised to present the four part motet you had planned and rehearsed. I find sometimes I need to prepare two works, one acting as a backup for just such situations. Of course, this is not an every week occurrence, but it does happen enough to be an issue.

Given that your loyal but very few choristers are secure on their own part, there are many possibilities from (say) a duet for two equal voices (Panis Angelicus of Cesar Franck comes to mind), to simple plainsong in unison.

I will be interested to know of any reader's comments.

Ray Booth Chair South Australia Branch

Reaching Out

RSCM Queensland recently ran a choral workshop on the Gold Coast. What was unusual about this was that almost all the participants (and there were 60 of them) were not members of RSCM, and many had not heard of the organisation. How were we able to achieve this?

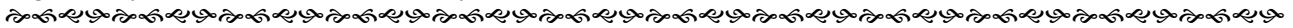
Firstly we wrote a publicity document as an example of how such a workshop might be run. It was based on our annual sacred choral festival in Brisbane, but with a greater emphasis on using the music as a means of learning vocal technique than actually performing a festival at the end. It had all the arrangements that a chorister would need to know concerning the workshop – date, time, venue, directions to the venue, the music to be worked on, information about rehearsals before the workshop to learn the music, information on the presenter, information about catering and the lunch, the cost per participant, and so on.

We then sent the publicity sheet to an interested conductor on the coast (she is not a member of RSCM) and said in effect, “this is how we would organise it. We will supply a conductor and accompanist. Now you use this as a template, change what you need to change to suit conditions on the coast, and send the information out to your contacts”. We gave her 14 pieces of music in a range of styles and levels of difficulty and from

these she chose the music to be worked on. She re-jigged the arrangements to suit Gold Coast conditions. She then sent this information to her contacts.

This seems to me an interesting model for gaining interest, support, goodwill and perhaps new members for RSCM. When RSCM organises an event, we generally publicise it to our members and circle of friends. But it's difficult to get beyond that group. When you ask someone else (and not necessarily a member of RSCM) to organise the event but using your template, he or she immediately taps into a different network of contacts and friends that we didn't know about. When you are working in an area that you don't know (in our case away from Brisbane) you certainly need the local knowledge and contacts of a local person. The second advantage of this model is that we arranged one festival (the Brisbane one) but arranged it with the possibility of alternative music and alternative emphases. We have now used that model (with local variation) in three places in the last few weeks (Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Toowoomba) and hope to use it several times more in other places in Queensland this year.

Ralph Morton Chair Queensland Branch



The Getting of Wisdom

The speaker at the recent World Day of Prayer in my district was Edith Bain, a Baptist pastor's wife, newly arrived in the area, whose family was recently working “up north” in Western Australia. She talked about the decisions her family had to make, firstly to work “up” there, and then to return south.

As the topic for the Day was “Wisdom”, she stated that we all wanted it. “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, making you feel stupid, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

Can we be sure we are making a wise decision even when we have asked God for wisdom?

We use what God has given us – brains, the wisdom of those who know us and love us, professional advisers in matters financial, health and life choices. But often we are still left with doubt and uncertainty. Was this particular choice wise, even after all the research we did?

We need wisdom to think right, speak right and act right.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, to depart from evil is understanding. Our speaker referred to Abraham Lincoln who had no great education, brought up in a log cabin in primitive conditions yet rose to be a highly respect leader of integrity. He said: “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of those about me seemed insufficient for the day.”

So it's not about trying to acquire or grasp an abstract quality called wisdom. It's about keeping company with, relating to a friend, a powerful all-wise caring friend, Jesus, “who will instruct us and guide us in the way we should go”.

Deirdre Russell

Chair, Western Australia Branch