



Brisbane Concert Choir

DEBRA SHEARER-DIRIÉ MUSICAL DIRECTOR

at St Andrew's

Member Handbook



Brisbane Concert Choir at St Andrew's



The Brisbane Concert Choir *at St Andrew's* is an auditioned, adult, mixed voice community choir of up to 70 members drawn from all walks of life, based in Brisbane, Australia. Formed in 1996 by Dr Guy Jansen as an initiative of St Andrew's Uniting Church's Arts Outreach, it was directed by Christopher Kiver until July 2002, and thereafter came under the direction of Graeme Morton, until the end of 2003. Following an extensive search for a new Musical Director, Debra Shearer-Dirié was appointed to the position in May 2005.

The choir has established an excellent reputation for its performances of diverse repertoire ranging from a cappella pieces to full symphonic works. Performances have included appearances with The Queensland Orchestra, Queensland Pops Orchestra and in prestigious festivals such as Brisbane Cathedrals Week and the 4MBS Festival of Classics.

The choir embarked on a highly-successful ten-day tour of the North Island of New Zealand in 1999 and in June 2002, following the release of its first CD, *Journey*, the choir toured to north Queensland. The choir has recorded performances for broadcast on ABC-TV and 4MBS Classic-FM. In 2008 the choir released another CD, *Radiance*, and went on its first European tour to Prague, Salzburg and Vienna.

Most recently, the choir toured to Italy in September 2011, where it was exceedingly well received. The choir has also produced its third CD which features music for the Christmas festive season: *Rejoice!*

Musical Director — Dr Debra Shearer-Dirié

Originally from Perth, Dr Debra Shearer-Dirié maintains an active career as a choral conductor, music educator, clinician and scholar. She holds a Master of Music Education degree and Doctor of Music degree in Choral Conducting from Indiana University. During her time there she directed the Indiana University Children's and Youth Choir, was assistant director to maestro Paul Hillier with the Pro Arte Singers, and Director of the International Vocal Ensemble at





Indiana University for two years. From 2000 to 2001, she conducted the Northwest Girlchoir in Seattle, a 400-voice organization of young women who perform frequently with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

Debra has received numerous invitations to present at national conferences both abroad and in Australia, including the National Conference of the American Choral Director's Association in New York in 2003, and has been invited to present at each Australian National Choral Association (ANCA) Choralfest since she has returned to Australia in 2003.

Upon arriving in Brisbane mid 2003, she conducted the Queensland Young Conservatorium Chamber Choir through diverse repertoire which led to an invitation to perform at the ANCA conference in 2004. In 2005, she was appointed Musical Director of Brisbane Concert Choir, and in 2009 she founded Fusion, a semi-professional adult a capella ensemble. She continually searches for opportunities to collaborate with other musical groups, composers, dancers, visual artists and cultural groups. Debra's most recent vocal ensemble is Vintage Voices, a programme for older people in the community to join in song.

Debra currently serves as editor of the ANCA journal Sing Out, and on the National Council for ANCA. She is in demand as an adjudicator, clinician and conductor for festivals and eisteddfods throughout Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Accompanist — John Woods



John was born in Stirling, Scotland and studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow, and the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester. Prior to joining the staff of the Queensland Conservatorium he worked for the RNCM, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and Granada Television. He has accompanied singers and instrumentalists throughout

the UK, Europe and Australia, on the concert platform and in radio and television broadcasts, and has also accompanied the master classes of several distinguished musicians including Dame Joan Sutherland, Dame Janet Baker and Dame Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.



General information

Aims

The Brisbane Concert Choir at St Andrew's aims to:

- provide a forum for singing together, and preparing for, and participating in choral performance
- promote, encourage and support choral activity in the general community as an important aspect of the community's culture and cultural heritage
- promote and encourage interest in, and the study and development of, choral music and performance
- provide opportunities for social interaction among the choir's members.

Performances

The core of the choir's activities is the three major concerts it holds in a year, generally on a weekend in late April/May, late August/September and early December. At least one concert is *a cappella*. Concerts are usually held in St Andrew's Uniting Church, on the corner of Creek and Ann Streets, in the Brisbane CBD.

In addition, the Musical Director seeks opportunities for the choir to be involved in other events (for example, Cathedrals' Week) or with other choirs (such as choirs visiting from overseas). In recognition of the support provided to the choir by St Andrew's Uniting Church, the choir may collaborate with the Church or Church choir for particular events or sing at a service during the year.

The choir also uses its choral talents to generate revenue for the choir to minimise the membership fees and to support specific projects such as CD production or choir tours. This has included an annual 'from scratch' performance (the general public pays to join the choir on a Saturday afternoon and early evening to rehearse and perform a well known work) and "café" style events (where we provide food and music to a theme). We also undertake paid engagements (such as weddings and carolling in one or two shopping centres in Brisbane's suburbs in December).

Members are expected to participate in all of these performances and activities as far as possible.



Rehearsal commitments

There are three distinct rehearsal periods which culminate in a concert. However, music may be rehearsed across seasons depending on the commitments for a particular year.

The choir rehearses on Tuesday evenings from 6.15–8.45pm in the hall underneath St Andrew's Uniting Church (entrance is on Creek Street).

In addition, in each concert season, a Saturday or Sunday afternoon rehearsal is also scheduled. There are also dress rehearsals, usually on the Friday evening prior to a Sunday concert. The dates for these are provided well in advance.

A copy of the current rehearsal and performance schedule is provided to all singers by email and is available in hardcopy at rehearsals and electronically on the choir website.

The membership secretary maintains an attendance sheet for rehearsals. The Constitution provides that where a singer has attended less than 75% of the rehearsals relevant to a performance or event, the Musical Director may make an assessment as to whether or not the member may sing in the performance or event. (If the outcome is that the member cannot sing, the member is not entitled to any refund of fees or levies.)

Fees

As a community choir, the choir is self-funded and the members pay membership fees to cover the costs of running the choir — music, Musical Director and accompanist fees, etc. The current fee schedule is on the choir website on the '**For members**' page. There is a reduced fee for students or those not in employment.

Fees can be paid either annually or by concert season (there is a discount for paying annually), by cash, cheque, credit card (incurs a fee) or direct deposit.

Membership

As a community choir, membership is open to any singer who satisfies the audition process.

If you are thinking of joining our choir, you are encouraged to come to a rehearsal (and sing) and take the opportunity of meeting the current choir members and the Musical Director to see if our choir is the right “choral fit” for you.

If you decide you would like to join, an audition





will be organised for (usually) the end of the next rehearsal you attend.

The audition will consist of:

- your own choice of song (this can be as simple as a hymn or short song – no operatic arias expected!)
- vocalizing led by the Musical Director
- an ear test (singing notes in a chord)
- a short sight-singing exercise

You will also be asked to complete an application form with relevant details about yourself and your singing experience.

It should be noted that the choir has a limited number of places and that it is also important to keep a balance between the sections. If that limit has been reached, or you are in a voice group which may already have sufficient singers, you may need to go on a waiting list.

Information for members

Music

The choir has a (voluntary) librarian who provides members with all the music needed at any given time.

Until you have passed an audition you will not be able to take the music home with you. After this you will be able to take the music for the relevant period and will be responsible for it. This enables members to review the music between rehearsals.

You will be asked to mark your score with appropriate notations. This should be done lightly in pencil only, preferably with a soft lead such as a 2B.

Music usually needs to be returned immediately following a performance. The librarian will provide a box for its return and members must ensure that they return their music promptly, particularly when we have it on a hire arrangement. You will need to rub out any pencil notations which have been made. If your music is lost or damaged, you may be required to reimburse the cost to replace it.





Rehearsal apologies

Apologies for rehearsals or concerts should be advised ahead of time by noting on the sign in sheet **and** telling the Musical Director or membership secretary; or by email to choir@brisbanecconcertchoir.com

If a singer finds on the day they are unable to attend a rehearsal or concert (eg illness, unexpected work commitment), they will need to TEXT the choir phone: **0475 262 649.**

Folders

The choir has folders which are used for most performances. These were purchased through a grant from the Queensland Government's Community Benefit Fund. You will be provided with a numbered folder at your first performance with the choir, which only needs to be returned if you leave the choir.

Uniform

The choir has a formal uniform which is worn for all concert performances. The uniform has been kept as simple as possible as members have responsibility for providing their own uniform, except for the women's scarves.

Women:

- Plain black three-quarter sleeve, round/boat/scoop necked top
- Black tailored ('corporate') trousers
- Black closed toe shoes with black socks/stockings
- Red choir scarf (which will be provided at the first concert the singer performs in)

Men:

- Black long-sleeved collared shirt
- Black long trousers
- Black shoes with black socks

If the correct uniform is not worn, the singer may not be able to participate in that performance.

For performances, singers should keep jewellery to a minimum and avoid wearing strong smelling perfumes or after shave.



Tasks

As a community organisation, the choir depends on its members to assist in practical ways in the running of the choir.

For rehearsals, the carpet and chairs need to be set out and those who can arrive before 6.15pm are asked to assist in set up and others to stay behind for a few minutes after a rehearsal to put everything away.

Everyone is expected to actively promote a concert and pre-sell as many tickets as possible to ensure we have a good- sized audience. Leaflets and posters are provided to members for distribution.

Those who are physically able are needed to assist with setting up and dismantling the stage and choir risers.

The choir usually provides post-concert refreshments for the audience, soloists, orchestra and choir. Everyone is expected to “bring a plate” and assistance is needed with the setting up, serving and clearing away.

The “tea break”

About half way through each rehearsal there is a “tea-break” for about 15 minutes. Tea, coffee and biscuits are available for a gold coin donation. This is a great chance to get to know other choir members — particularly those from other voice sections.

There is a duty roster for assisting in setting/clearing up and serving the tea and coffee to share this task around the choir. Singers are asked to volunteer for this. Generally a ‘duty period’ is about 6 weeks. Feel free to bring something home-baked to share – it’s always appreciated!

Communication

The vast majority of information is provided through email due to its ease for mass communication and the time of voluntary committee members being limited.

Members are asked to check their emails regularly. If you do not have email, you should find an “email buddy” who will commit to passing this information on to you.



We also use the time at the beginning of the tea break to update or provide information to the choir. Rehearsal and concert schedules and other notices will often also be available (in hard copy) at rehearsal.

Information can also be found on the choir website on the **For Members** page

Transport and parking

Due to our City location parking can be difficult. Ann and Creek Streets are clearways until 7.00pm.

You may find on-street parking on Wickham Terrace which has parking meters and some streets around the Astor Terrace area are free after 6pm. It's first in best dressed — and a good incentive to be at rehearsal early!

There are moderately priced public car parks close by such as the Wickham Terrace multi-storey (\$5) immediately above Central Station and under the Novotel Hotel in Astor Terrace.

For those coming by train, the Central Railway Station is only a short walk.

Security

The church and hall are accessible to the general public. Members of the public will occasionally come and sit in the hall or church when we are rehearsing. Unfortunately there have been incidents when items have gone missing.

Neither the choir nor church's insurance covers loss of personal possessions and therefore you will need to take responsibility for them.

During performances, we are usually able to put valuables and bags in a locked room. However, the safest way is to bring a bare minimum of valuables with you and to keep them with you as much as possible.

Insurance

As a result of the choir being a member of the Australian National Choral Association, the choir and its members have the benefit of personal injury insurance cover at rehearsals and performances and for travel to and from these events. The terms of the policy are available on request.



Management and administration

The choir is an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981* (Qld) and is therefore managed and run through a committee which is elected every year at the choir's annual general meeting (AGM).

The committee consists of the following honorary positions: a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and up to five general members. The Musical Director is also a full member of the committee. The committee meets as needed but at least once per concert season. Summaries of the meetings are made available to choir members as appropriate.

Administrative roles can be undertaken by non-committee members, which has included the librarian, membership secretary, performance folder custodian, uniform coordinator, and tea roster coordinator. Anyone who is willing to take on a role should let a committee member know – “many hands make light work”!

The choir's AGM takes place in the second concert season of the year. Notice of the meeting and call for nominations for the committee or items for discussion are made to choir members at least two weeks in advance. The meeting is held on a rehearsal night with the rehearsal being shortened to allow for this.

A copy of the constitution and a list of the current committee members can be found on the choir website.

Expectations

Each financial member has the **right** to:

- participate fully in the choir's activities, including to:
 - sing in performances subject to satisfactory rehearsal attendance
 - contribute their ideas in relation to repertoire and any other issues which would assist in the smooth running of the choir or the enjoyment of its members
 - speak at and vote in all general meetings of the choir, including the election of the members of the management committee
 - attend any social events organised for members
- receive proper notice of all meetings and events in a timely manner
- be treated respectfully by other members of the choir.

Each financial member has the **responsibility** to:

- actively participate in the choir, including the tasks associated with rehearsals and events noted in this handbook



- ensure that they have a copy of the rehearsal and concert schedule and check for emails from the choir
- attend as far as possible, the rehearsals and events as detailed on the schedule, and in particular to:
 - attend a minimum of 75% of rehearsals, or otherwise demonstrate their competence to the satisfaction of the Musical Director, to be able to participate in a performance
 - sign the attendance record sheet at each rehearsal
 - register an apology when not able to attend as described above
 - be punctual at rehearsals and events
- undertake personal review of the music between rehearsals
- take good care of the music and return it in the same condition it was received
- wear the uniform stipulated at each performance
- to treat other members of the choir with respect.

Choir contact details

Phone: **0475 262 649**

Email: **choir@brisbanconcertchoir.com**

NB: because the committee is a voluntary group, the email is not monitored all day. The committee will aim to respond to an email within 48 hours but it should not be relied upon for urgent communication.

If you want to contact the Musical Director or a specific committee member put “For (name as appropriate)” in the subject heading of an email or leave a message on the phone and the information will be passed to the relevant person who will get back to you.

Web: **www.brisbanconcertchoir.com**

See ‘For Members’ page.

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