

VANCOUVER WELSH MEN'S CHOIR

A History

The foundations of the VWMC were laid in December 1979 when three men in the Welsh Society of Vancouver (one of whom is still singing with the choir) decided to form a male voice choir on the west coast. Following many phone calls, eighteen choristers met in the Cambrian Hall (home of Vancouver's Welsh Society) a month later, under the musical direction of Denis Whyte, a choral conductor with the Vancouver School Board. In January 1980, the choir made its debut at the 1980 Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu in Vancouver and later that year performed with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

In June 1983 we were invited to perform "O Canada" with the Vancouver Symphony at the opening of BC Place Stadium. 1984 saw our first performance of a Christmas concert, beginning a tradition that has now grown from one to five performances at locations throughout the Lower Mainland. In 1986 we returned to BC Place Stadium as part of the 6,000-voice choir conducted by Bruce Pullen at the opening of the Expo '86 World's Fair. The most memorable of many performances during the Fair was at the flag-raising ceremony on British Day when, together with the Froncysyllte MVC from North Wales, we sang for visiting Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Robin Thomas, UBC graduate and consummate showman, took over as music director in 1987. While we had previously made day-trips to perform in Victoria, the year witnessed our first overnight trip to sing in the Interior. This first trip to Kamloops was the forerunner of dozens of concerts which have seen us sing in cities and towns over the length and breadth of much of British Columbia, from Prince George to White Rock, and from Nelson to Port Alberni, plus several of the Gulf Islands.

Our first overseas tour, to New Zealand and Australia, highlighted 1988, when we accepted an invitation to sing at Expo '88 in Brisbane, Australia. The Christmas season that year featured the first of what turned out to be a series of performances at the municipally-organized First Night concerts on New Year's Eve.

For a Welsh Men's Choir, a cherished goal is to sing in the land that nurtured and inspired our choir's founders. That finally occurred in 1991 on our second overseas trip, to England and Wales.

While we travelled to the Seattle area to sing on several occasions during our first decade, the first major excursion to the USA occurred 1993 when we made a one-week tour to Southern California.

In 1995, it was Europe once again. The choir represented Canada at ceremonies to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, visiting Holland and Germany.

1998 saw our first visit to Alberta, in a spring tour with concerts in Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge and with the Festival Chorus in Calgary. The opening of our fall season that year saw Music Director Robin Thomas succeeded by internationally-recognized choral director and clinician John Trepp. John's first task was to encourage us to memorize the entire concert program for the 1000-voice London Welsh Millennium Concert of Male Choirs scheduled for October 2000 in London's 5,000-seat Royal Albert Hall.

In 2003, we were one of the two performing groups invited by the Russian Ministry of Culture to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. Petersburg. That trip ended with a sold out concert in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory.

John Trepp relinquished his position as Music Director in May 2004 and his place was taken by the Assistant Music Director, Jonathan Quick. Jonathan is well-known

locally both for his music arranging talents and as a founding member of Vancouver's acclaimed a capella group, musica intima. He brings to the choir a new musical vision which is a melding of his exposure to many facets of the music scene in Vancouver, as well as skills as a recording engineer and producer.

Jonathan led the choir on its next major tour, to Boston and the Maritime provinces in 2006. The choir performed before full houses in Boston, Halifax, Miramichi, and Charlottetown. At a concert in Sydney River, Cape Breton, we shared the stage with the famed "Men of the Deeps."

June 2009 will find us in Europe once again, where the choir will perform in Berlin, Dresden, Salzburg, Vienna and Prague.

Currently with over 100 members, the Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir performs a varied repertoire of both sacred and secular music, ranging from traditional Welsh hymns, to spirituals, to opera choruses and Broadway show tunes. We have produced eight CDs over the years, featuring both live concerts and studio recordings.