

Choir brings a little joy to the world



Llewellyn choir members preparing to celebrate. Photo: Helen Musa

*Music / “Christmas with Llewellyn Choir”. At Griffith Neighbourhood Hall, December 16. Reviewed by **HELEN MUSA**.*

THIS cleverly designed Christmas concert was aimed at one thing above all – pleasure for both chorus and audience.

Held in the friendly confines of the Griffith Neighbourhood Hall, intimacy was the keynote, with no microphones to amplify the spoken voices and gentle accompaniment by Anthony Smith, occasionally mimicking the organ and often pausing to allow the choir to sing a cappella.

Conductor Rowan Harvey-Martin took the choir through its paces in a gentle, delicate manner and perhaps apart from the community singing section, there was no “belting”.

While she was putting the choristers through their paces, Harvey-Martin paused for moment to state the obvious – they’d all had a jolly good time preparing for this mixture of traditional carols, and seasonal songs, interspersed with short readings, appropriate to the season.

Those readings included a quirky piece of advice given by the artist Henri Matisse to “find the artichokes” in life, a poignant reading from Behrouz Boochani’s “No Friend but the Mountains,” and a bit of Dickens.

The most effective of these was the intermixing of some Christmas verses by Henry Lawson into the performance of famous Aussie Christmas carols by William G. James (think “The Three Drovers”) and John Antill, of “Corroboree” fame, several of whose family members were in the audience.

We had already been treated early into the concert with the medieval “In Dulci Jubilo”, albeit in Johann Sebastian Bach’s setting, but we finished with Ray Charles’ quirky take on “Jingle Bells”, accompanied by real bells. This, we learnt from the excellent program, had been composed by confederate soldier James Lord Pierpont, easily, the most famous thing he did in his whole life.

The clever part of the concert was that it involved parallels and pairings throughout, so that as well as a choral fantasy composed by Gustav Holst, we heard a choral fantasia by Ralph Vaughan Williams later, in which the rich voice of baritone Rohan Thatcher mingled with beautiful vocalising by the entire choir.

As well, there were two equally beautiful versions, respectively, by Samuel Barber and Morton Lauridsen of “Sure On This Shining Night” to words by James Agee.

After the sleigh bells had subsided, it was time for the audience to sing.

Here Harvey-Martin pulled all the stops out and had us singing “Silent Night”, “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”, “Away in a Manger” and, accompanied by the birds singing through the open back doors of the Griffith Neighbourhood Hall, “Joy to the World.”