

Strategic Plan

2018 - 2019

Chch
City
Choir

“Building a civic choir for the 21st century”

*“In choral singing the whole is greater than the sum of the parts,
and the remainder is magic.”*



Overview

The Christchurch City Choir has a long and proud tradition of delivering both sublime symphonic and charming eclectic concerts to city audiences. To ensure this tradition continues well into the future, we will need to combine the best of the old with something new.

Our modern culture poses challenges for traditional arts organisations. New generations with new habits and new tastes collide with tradition and heritage in unpredictable ways. Christchurch's recent history, shaped by the 2011/2012 earthquakes, has added additional and unique challenges into the mix. Incontrovertibly though, membership and audiences continue to decline.

If we fail to adapt, we will fail to survive. All organisations must innovate. Our challenge is to mix the City Choir's noble history with something new and bold to create a vibrant and relevant choir for the 21st century.

Fortunately, the raw ingredients are already there. Music is alive and well in New Zealand schools. Youth participation and accomplishment is higher than ever. Yet adults suddenly stop singing. If there is to be a growing choral future then we have to help young people to keep on - and older people to rediscover - singing.

What is a 21st century choir?

A 21st century choir needs to:

- Be versatile
 - Capable of singing a wide range of repertoire, encompassing various styles and difficulties of music
 - Capable of singing with diverse backing – orchestral, instrumental, a cappella, bands, backing tracks
 - Capable of performing in a range of venues and situations without loss of distinction
- Sound good
 - Capable of competing with the best of adult amateur choirs around the world in recordings as well as concert performances
- Look good
 - Project a contemporary image of professionalism and awareness of fashion
- Be different
 - In repertoire
 - In presentation
 - In appearance
- Offer a social experience to concert goers; not just a musical experience
- Offer an educative and social experience to choristers; not just a musical experience
- Project personality - not a homogenised corporate image but a collective image based on the individual personalities of the performers
- Be aware that the majority of people today are time poor and that financial circumstances vary considerably
- Be welcoming to all and accepting of diversity

“Building a civic choir for the 21st century”

What is a civic choir?

The Christchurch City Choir needs to:

- Bring credit to the city as well as rehearsing and performing in it
- Maintain a working relationship with the city leaders
- Provide musical leadership in the city
- Promote as well as perform choral music in the city
- Maintain a standing offer with the City Council and/or Office of the Mayor to provide choral performances for civic functions

“Building a civic choir for the 21st century”



Our vision

The only thing non-negotiable is choral excellence. Inspiring audiences and continuing to aspire ourselves to greater musical heights is absolutely necessary - but not quite enough.

If the City Choir's heritage means anything, then it must include the opportunity for members to sing - and for audiences to experience - the largest symphonic works. That means size. Our approach to building numbers must be twofold; to grow the pool of potential singers and to get competent singers to join with us.

Our current "one-size-fits-all" membership and operational structure is not conducive to achieving these goals. Developing singers need support programmes. Accommodating experienced singers requires much more flexibility in how they can commit, rehearse and participate.

Therefore, our point of difference will be our accessibility. We will find innovative ways to reach, inspire, nurture, include and accommodate Christchurch's potential and current singers. A continuum where the experienced help the inexperienced - and we all reach excellence together. Young and old. Novice and accomplished. A true civic choir.

Vision

“Inspiring, and aspiring to, choral excellence in Christchurch”

Mission

“We will combine choral excellence with innovative membership and programmes to create a unique 21st century choir with a special role in the civic and cultural life of Christchurch.”

Stakeholder themes

Audiences

“Performances of distinction”

Members

“Accessible pathways to choral excellence”

Sponsors

“A worthy organisation to be associated with”

Strategic goals

1. Musicianship

“We acknowledge that quality of our product is number one - from which everything else will follow”

- Cultivate a culture of excellence
- Provide pathways for singers of different abilities
- Ensure the best singers will want join our concerts
- Provide support and coaching
- Encourage musical discernment

2. Membership

“Discard convention - we must want to be the centre of gravity for choral singers in Christchurch”

- Build core membership as the heart of the City Choir
- Create a flexible membership structure that caters for a wide variety of skills and circumstances
- Get the best singers in Christchurch to participate - they will raise our game and our reputation
- Work to bridge the chasm between youth and adult choral music - this is our future and the future of the performing arts
- Lower the barriers to attracting and developing good singers

3. Internal relations

“An active, vibrant and engaged membership will drive us forward.”

- Build a skills-based board
- Foster an engaged volunteer and member-run organisation
- Financial prudence
- Develop clear lines of communication between groups and use them

4. External relations

“How the choir looks to the city matters to us”

- Learn to view our musical performance and general communication through the lens of our audience; not our own
- Building a socially and culturally relevant choir worth sponsoring
- Maintain excellent relationships with our sponsors
- Seek collaborations and build bridges to others in the arts
- Innovative engagement with other Christchurch organisations to advance choral music and bring in members

Our repertoire

We first performed Handel's Messiah in 1864 and it has remained a constant in our programming since. Variety concerts, however, were the main format of presentation in our nineteenth century programmes. Bits of pieces characterised much of the concert giving. Paradoxically, as resources expanded in the twentieth century, we were able to narrow our focus onto large cantatas, oratorios and requiems such as Mendelssohn's Elijah, requiems by Brahms, Verdi and Mozart, Elgar's Dream of Gerontius, Benjamin Britten's War Requiem and Walton's Belshazzar's Feast. By 1970, and at peak membership numbers of our parent choirs, we had established a reputation based on our mastery of this principally religion-inspired repertoire. Both the Christchurch Harmonic Society and The Royal Christchurch Musical Society were frequently invited to perform with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and enjoyed successful trips abroad.

Tastes changed quickly in the 1970s and 1980s as the amplified age upturned concepts of concert-giving. Classical musicians in general and choral societies in particular were slow to adapt. In Christchurch's case, audience and membership numbers dwindled and an amalgamation of the two choral societies became

necessary. Concerts of popular music became more frequent and lighter classics such as the Last Night of the Proms became fixtures on the annual calendar. A closer bond was forged with the Christchurch Orchestra, but with the rising costs of orchestral and soloist hire, the choir had become increasingly dependant on initiatives from the orchestra to perform with orchestral accompaniment.

In the 21st century it has become clear that the pre-1940s repertoire that had piqued and sustained the interest of a large general audience has, for now at least, lost the power to do so. For our choir to recover and regain the interest of a general audience and wider membership, we need to broaden the focus of our repertoire to the point where the nineteenth and early twentieth century masterpieces become part of, rather than the majority of, our annual presentations. We need to re-present our established repertoire in fresh packaging as well as find new material. In both instances, in order to retain the respect of audiences, we need to find ways to do this without compromising standards of artistry and artistic integrity.

A brief history

The Christchurch City Choir can trace its lineage to Monday 2nd July 1860 when the Christchurch St Cecilia Harmonic Society gave its first concert to a sold-out audience of four hundred at the then Christchurch Town Hall. The concert was a mix of instrumental, small orchestral, vocal and choral music. On 18 December 1860, at the nearby Market Hall, a group of nine men known as the Canterbury Vocal Union gave its first concert. This was with a focus on the voice – solo singing, ensemble singing and ‘readings from favourite authors’. For subsequent concerts it became known as the Canterbury Musical Union.

Within a year the two groups attempted amalgamation, initially under the proposed name of The Canterbury Harmonic Society, before settling upon the name The Christchurch Musical Society and first performing as such in April 1862. Membership numbers grew rapidly and the choir applied for, and was granted, the right to use the title ‘Royal’. This was conferred at the society’s Diamond Jubilee in 1920 and so became The Royal Christchurch Musical Society.

Shortly afterwards a second large choir (of 140 performing members in its first year) was established. This initiative grew from successful oratorio performances by the combined choirs of various Baptist and Methodist churches under the baton of Victor C Peters, and became known as the Christchurch Harmonic Society. Peters remained at the helm until 1959. He was succeeded by William Hawkey (1960-76), followed by Dobbs Franks (1977-78) and then David Childs (1979-90). Along with the Royal Christchurch Musical Society, conducted by Robert Field Dodgson from 1949 to 1990, these two choral societies of well over 200 members each (300 at their peak) consolidated Christchurch’s reputation throughout the British Commonwealth as a musical city with a special excellence in large choir performance.

In 1991 the Christchurch Harmonic Society and the Royal Christchurch Musical Society merged to become the Christchurch City Choir under the musical directorship of English-born Brian Law, who emigrated from Canada to take up the position.

In 2014 Andrew Withington succeeded Brian Law, followed by the appointment, in 2016, of the choir’s current musical director, John Linker.



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