

## Dunedin Church Choirs

Church Choirs play a significant part in church life by keeping the music to the same theme of that day's service. This helps people connect to what has just been said during the service or is about to be mentioned later.

Knox Church is a Presbyterian church in and its choir began in 1865 and this was 12 years before they moved to the premises they are on now. St Joseph's is a catholic church and its choir began in 1862 and moved to another premises in 1886 when the cathedral opened. St Paul's is an Anglican church and its choir began in 1859. These churches and choirs are important to the history of the European immigrants who settled in Dunedin.

Most choirs sing masses which are composed by composers as in Haydn and Mozart. A mass is a whole series of songs grouped together and sung to the set words of a Catholic communion liturgy. Masses mostly consist of sacred music. St Joseph's would sing whole masses more than the other two choirs since it is catholic. St Paul's and Knox only sings parts such as Sanctus and Angus Dei.

St Joseph's and St Paul's both started off with males and females singing together and both churches got rid of the females, not believing that females should be able to sing, the females were allowed to re-join the choirs a few decades later.

St Paul's and St Joseph's are affiliated with the Royal School of Church Music. The Royal School of Church Music helps churches find music and negotiates around copyright holders and publishers. It provides education for all of its members and it helps publish music composed by members.

In these churches there are pipe organs to accompany the choirs and at special events there could be an orchestra as well as the choir. These special events could be when the choir sings a whole or a part of a mass by a composer, such as Mozart's mass in C minor. Also in Knox bagpipes are played when the choirs is singing something that requires them as in the Highland Cathedral song, which was transcribed by James Wetherald and arranged by Karen Knudson. The bagpipes are often played to welcome in Christmas day.

Some of these churches also sing songs in Maori such as 'Ka Waiata Ki a Maria' composed by Richard Puanaki. Knox choir has recently started to sing African American spirituals such as 'Down in the River to Pray' which was arranged by Marcello Noia.

These churches all sing in four parts, Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. Knox always has its choir singing in these parts. Often Knox has their choir sing unaccompanied by any instruments.

All three churches have sung together before because of their affiliations to the Royal School of Church music. St Paul's and Knox have sung for the programme *Praise Be* on TV1 before which shows episodes on Sunday mornings of church's around New Zealand singing on TV. Sometimes when these recordings of Praise Be happen Knox and St Paul's choir join together to sing. The children's choir at Knox busk every year at Christmas time and then afterwards do a concert at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery for people to listen and get a feel for how the choir sings usually.

The kinds of music these churches perform is a mixture of classical to more upbeat and modern songs. At Knox when introducing new more modern hymns the choir will learn the hymn before the congregation to listen to how it goes before trying to sing it themselves. Such as when Knox was introducing a new hymn book to the congregation called *Hope Is Our Song* which was published by the New Zealand Hymn Book Trust. Some of the songs sung at these churches can be repetitive, half of the choir stands on one side and sings something and the other half responds. Some of the songs can have sudden changes in pitch. Handel's Messiah has some

famous pieces for example the Hallelujah Chorus which changes its pitch quite often, it is sung in all of these churches or at least has been before, particularly around Christmas and Easter.

The opportunities given to people from all of these churches are countless but some people have become good conductors, composers and singers. These churches have and are helping people from all ages. Starting off from a young age has helped quite a few people learn how to sing properly, how to read music and discipline. Discipline has to happen to help make sure that nobody puts off the congregation when they are listening to the minister at the front or back of the church. If you were to listen to the children in both St Paul's and Knox choirs you would hear new young voices yearning to sing properly and some would even be doing solos, this just shows that churches love to teach and give opportunities to whoever walks into the choir.

Knox choir believes that any child should be able to be given a chance to sing. The same is said for the adults but if the choir director, Karen Knudson doesn't think they are up to standard she can ask them to audition. She doesn't exactly believe in doing this because the choir can sing well as a whole group even if they are not good at singing individually.

Knox's choir director Karen Knudson composes new pieces of music as in the Stabat Mater mass. She tried parts of this mass on the Knox choir who sung it for the first time in 2009. She can have great successes when she tries new pieces of music out on the choir, they sound just the way she wanted everyone in the choir to sound. Also there are awards given out in Knox every year to keep the children and everyone else interested in what they are doing. Some of these are a trophy for the chorister who tried the hardest during the year, the memorial butler tray for the most improved chorister, a singing scholarship and an organ scholarship.

It may not seem like it but church choirs have a significant impact on the musical diversity of New Zealand, just by singing they bring the cultures of New Zealand alive. Like its Maori culture by singing songs in Maori or just by singing songs in English shows the history of the settlers that came to New Zealand and made their culture New Zealand's. Singing something from an older culture like Bach's Requiem or Vivaldi's Gloria helps us remember the past. Singing more current songs from New Zealand's culture brings everyone together to celebrate and sing together.

### Bibliography

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