

# Judicious amplifications

## THE CATHEDRAL SINGERS – 10 YEARS ON

VISITORS TO ST PATRICK'S Cathedral on Sunday evenings may be surprised to find the liturgy supported by a choir of men and women who regularly provide music for the 6.30pm Mass. The reputation of the Cathedral's music has long been dominated by the all-male Cathedral Choir, established in its present form in 1939, which sings regularly at the 11am Mass on Sundays. But there has been music at St Patrick's since 1858, when the first St Patrick's Church was opened at the present site, and the early choirs were unisex. This month marks the 10th anniversary of the Sunday evening Cathedral Singers.

The Singers first sang on Sunday, 12 May, 1996 at the Evening Mass in the Cathedral. They were formed under the direction of Dr Geoffrey Cox, who had then recently been appointed as Assistant Organist/Choirmaster at the Cathedral; and part of his brief was to form a second choir (Dean McCarthy had been overseas to observe what happened in other places, and had come up with the idea). The notion of what a second choir might do, however, was left open. Dr Cox suggested they might sing regularly at the Sunday evening Mass, at least as an experiment. 10 years on, the experiment is still running.

From the start, the Cathedral Singers has been an 'auditioned' choir of men and women. They currently number around 20 singers. Some are students at ACU, and therefore entitled to receive a small scholarship, but most of the members of the Singers are volunteers. They include highly proficient musicians – some of them professional – and some who have been members over all or most of the last ten years. The group is currently supported at the



Dr Geoffrey Cox directs the Cathedral Singers at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne.

PHOTO: RICHARD MASON

organ on Sunday evenings by Mr Paul Taylor, who also works at the Office for Worship within the Archdiocese.

Having two choirs in the Cathedral may seem something of a luxury, especially given that both sing every Sunday, but this is not entirely new, for the Cathedral had a separate 'Vespers Choir' in the early years of the twentieth century. "Now that's an idea!" says Dr Cox, who is keen to explore further the possibility of singing Sunday Vespers. Both the Cathedral Singers and the Cathedral's *Gregorian Schola* have occasionally ventured into singing Vespers in recent years.

The repertoire of the Cathedral Singers, like that of the Cathedral Choir, is aimed at preserving the 'treasure of sacred music,' ranging from Gregorian chant to new music and in keeping with the documents of the Second Vatican Council. "But repertoire should not be imposed on the liturgy as 'musical performance'," emphasises Dr Cox. "It must always serve the liturgy." He hopes that the balance between congregation and choral singing in the Cathedral liturgies, along with the use of cantors, might provide a model in some respects for the music in our parishes. ■

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