

THE ARTS

Sacred and spine-chilling

MUSIC
AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER CHOIR
★★★★

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church,
Middle Park, August 22
Clive O'Connell Reviewer

ONLY three years old, the Australian Chamber Choir attracts a large body of enthusiastic followers, larger even than several older Melbourne choral organisations. On Sunday, its 20 members performed a mixed bag to a well-populated church audience, revisiting some works that director Douglas Lawrence has made familiar during his years leading the Ormond College and Scots' Church

choirs, along with some short, new offerings delivered with enthusiasm and a well-buffed vocal patina.

Central to the program was Allegri's *Miserere*, the executants grouped together on the high altar. The reading was fluent and blessed with an excellent soprano who articulated spine-chilling top-Cs with comfortable assurance.

While Byrd's *Ave Verum Corpus* and Handl's poly-linear *Pater Noster* gave evidence of the ACC's solid grounding, an unexpected pleasure came with Philip Nunn's *I Heard the Owl Call my Name*, four reflections on Margaret Craven's spartan and moving novel.

The Australian composer's

score is still powerfully evocative and clear-speaking after two decades and was deftly accomplished by this group.

With a Brahms sacred song and a Rheinberger *Abendlied* to exemplify a stoic German Romantic view of Christianity, Lawrence and his singers finished their formal program with Bach's rollicking motet *Der Geist Hilft*, maintaining an admirable clarity in the opening movement's complex polyphonic matter, and revealing a finely balanced spread of layers in the concluding chorale: Bach vocal interpretation of high quality, with a bouncy energy and unwavering unanimity of pitch.