

# New choir delivers powerfully in refurbished setting

## MUSIC

### AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER CHOIR

Central Hall, Australian Catholic University, November 22  
www.auschoir.org  
Clive O'Connell Reviewer

APPROPRIATELY enough on St Cecilia's Day, a new choir presented its inaugural Melbourne concert at the refurbished Brunswick Street Central Hall, a light-filled transformation from its former gloomy state although details in the decor look irredeemably trite. Not so the Australian Chamber Choir, directed by Douglas Lawrence, which sang a searching program with a pleasing degree of success.

For an inauguration, this recital has enjoyed plenty of preparation. Lawrence and his singers recently undertook a 20-concert tour of Denmark, Germany and Poland during which they honed their skills and parts of Thursday night's program, so that what we heard was a finished product rather than first strivings after a very long out-of-town tryout.

Some of the singers have worked under Lawrence over many years; soprano Deborah Kayser, alto Elizabeth Anderson, tenor Vaughan McAlley and basses Thomas Drent and Grantley McDonald are familiar faces from the Ormond College Choir

— one of that institution's more enduring treasures under Lawrence's guardianship — the Scots Church Choir, and other ensembles in Melbourne.

With only 18 singers, the ACC invites comparisons with John O'Donnell's Ensemble Gombert, which retains an edge in scholarship and purity of upper-level product.

On a first hearing, the ACC's prime strength lies in its vitality and Lawrence's shaping of this night's mainly Renaissance/Baroque works into dynamic and vivid experiences, rather than emphasising formal contour and elegance of articulation.

Undermining that compari-

son, however, the final pages of the ACC's vital reading of Bach's *Singet dem Herrn* come immediately to mind: choral work of the top rank, as lucidly articulated as you could desire, the bustling interweaving of eight lines com-

**◀ The evening's major work, *Missa Pape Marcelli*, displayed the choir's fluency and suave textural colouring ▶**

ing across in this revealing acoustic with impressive purpose and intonational fidelity.

Similarly, the Jakob Handl motet *Pater Noster* made a posi-

tive impact through the whole choir's direct affirmation, and an even more head-on attack informed the taxing *Jubilate Deo* by Giovanni Gabrieli.

The evening's major work, Palestrina's *Missa Pape Marcelli*, displayed the choir's fluency and suave textural colouring, Lawrence alternating the full choir's power with sections that used only one singer per line, the whole effect both intimate and declamatory, particularly in the quiet jubilation that concludes the work's *Credo*.

It was a pity that the performance omitted the first *Agnus Dei* setting, but Lawrence amplified the experience with some rhyth-

mically quirky Frescobaldi interludes.

Brenton Broadstock's *I had a dream*, in memory of Michael Easton, sets out a three-part elegy in haunting consonantal language, rising to an aggressive climax in the work's central questioning stages and achieving a throat-tightening power in its final soft repetitions of the line "I am remembered", here delivered with tactful understatement.

The evening's only miscalculation was an essay at Messiaen's *O sacrum convivium* that sounded muddy because of imprecise chording, the work itself a big ask even for a more experienced body.



## SATURDAY - 1ST DECEMBER 2007

Attend this FREE Seminar! Last chance for 2007 - Book Now! -

