

Christ's College Choir – Singapore and New Zealand Tour 2015

The choir's long journey to the Southern hemisphere began at Heathrow airport, where a highly enthusiastic group of 22 met, with 3 to follow the next day. The prospect of flying with Emirates was well met by all, thanks to the large collection of films, games and renaissance music on board the spacious A380 planes (interior plus choir members pictured right) that we were due to fly on. A double bill of two 7-hour flights from London to Dubai to Singapore wasn't enough to dampen anyone's spirits, and with an outstanding lack of technical hitches, we disembarked at Changi airport at 8am local time.



Singing in Mandarin proved a challenge: Above - Teresa Teng; Below - John Ellse conducting 'The Moon Represents my Heart' at the Esplanade Concert Hall

Much of the choir had difficulty calming their excitement and failed to sleep on the plane, so the idea of a concert the same day as our arrival was a tricky one to overcome, but approached with the same steely determination the choir have always had. Thanks to Vincent Lam, a choir alumnus who has helped the choir a great deal, we had organised 3 concerts in Singapore: one at the Tanglin Club; one at Singapore Island Country Club and one at the majestic Esplanade Concert Hall.

After our director of music, Professor David Rowland, had given an expert masterclass with local singers at the Tanglin club, our first concert featured a surprise for the Singapore audience: as an encore the choir sang our Senior Organ Scholar's (John Ellse) arrangements of the popular Mandarin song *The Moon represents my Heart* by Teresa Teng (left). The song was enjoyed thoroughly by both audience and choir, and we used it again in all our Singapore concerts.

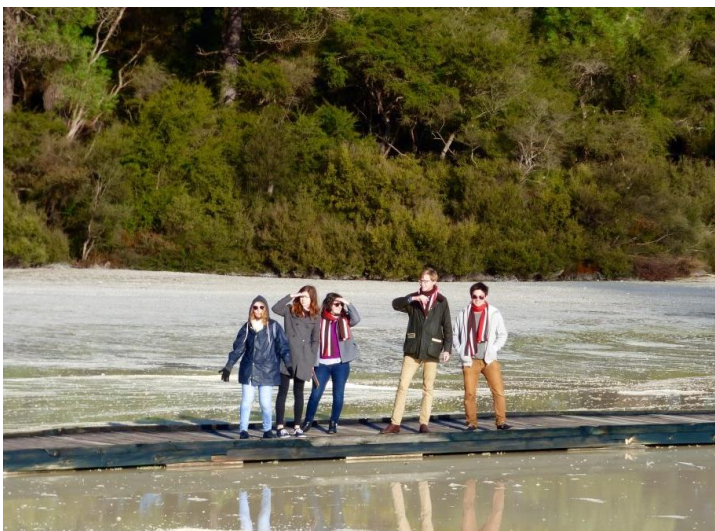
Singing in the gigantic Esplanade theatre was daunting, but provided ample excitement for all. A very carefully crafted acoustic helped the choir to produce some of the best jetlagged singing ever heard over its long history.

Much of the choir's spare time was spent purchasing overpriced cocktails in esteemed Singapore establishments including the Marina Bay Sands skyboat (right) and Raffles' hotel. Beyond that, we explored much of Chinatown, where we were staying at the Beary Best hostel (which was as good as it sounds) and enjoying much of the local cuisine.



A fairly sizeable venue: The Esplanade Concert hall in all its glory

A quick sleep and a few cups of tea later, we boarded our final plane for a while, taking us to our first New Zealand city: Auckland. We had 2 concerts at the Community of St Luke's church, Remuera and St Peter's, Onehunga, both of which gave us very warm welcomes. After sleeping off some residual fatigue, a visit to Devonport on the other side of Auckland harbour was very enjoyable, thanks to all-round views of Auckland city and some highly recommended fish and chips.



Pungent: Some of the more diva-ish members of the choir enjoying the view, despite the eggy aroma



Considerably out of pocket: The Singapore Skyline and members of the choir aboard the Marina Bay Sands boat

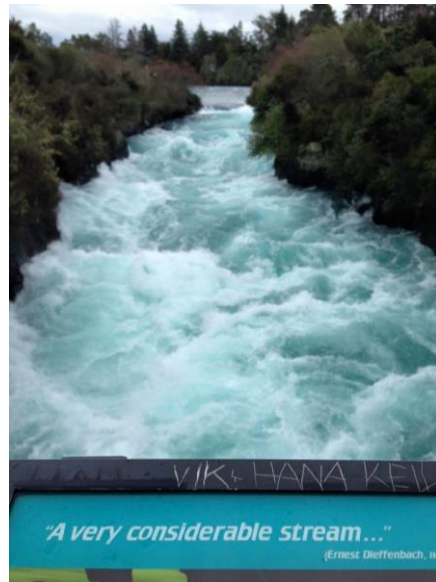
After a jam-packed 3 days and nights, we were due to head off to the next leg of our tour and catch a plane or two to New Zealand. An unexpectedly long flight from Singapore to Brisbane pointed out the flaws in our sense of scale within the Southern hemisphere and the choir were shocked again to find we were being treated to an 8 hour overnight stopover therein.



Our next stop was Rotorua – a 'geothermal wonderland' of a destination. After a concert at a very friendly St Luke's church and a Eucharist the next morning, our much anticipated day off featured a trip to Waitapu geothermal park which was well furnished with an array of sulphurous craters, crevices and lakes. We even found a spot to have a swim in a hot lake.

Taupo was next on the itinerary, featuring another large volcanic lake, though much older and thus less smelly. A quick survey of the lake (which was incidentally the same size as Singapore) was followed by our best-attended concert in New Zealand, at St Andrew's church. After a delicious selection of food post-concert, we said a sad farewell to Dave, who had led us well in all his musical integrity but unfortunately had to fly home.

The next day, many hosts were kind enough to drive choir members to Huka falls (right) on the Waikato river connecting lakes Rotorua and Taupo. We then sped to the bus stop to move ourselves on to Napier, the next town on the list.



Understatement: The choir now consider themselves officianados after last year's Niagara falls visit



Napier, having been hit by a big earthquake in the '30s was an intriguing location, with art deco buildings lining the streets. Our venue, St John's Cathedral, left, was no exception. Our first concert without Dave was very successful thanks to the efforts of our 3 organ scholars John, Joe and Sid, providing excellent musical direction and some amusing mid-concert rhetoric on the subject of early 20th Century British composers.

Wellington was our next stop, where we had concerts at St George's, Seatoun and the Sacred Heart Cathedral. We managed to squeeze in a visit to the parliament building (right) and Te Papa museum, with some choir members going the extra mile and hiking up Mount Victoria. We also got to see some of the more 'trendy' parts of the town, including Cuba street which featured a lot of coffee shops. All this was achieved against the onslaught of typically savage coastal winds and cold rain upon our heads.



Statesmanlike: Enjoying the parliament building on a rainy day in Wellington



Ahoy: The sun came out for our first day on the South Island

Having exhausted the North Island, we took a ferry journey across to the South Island, which proved choppy, and widespread queasiness ensued. Once the waves had subsided and the sun emerged, we got our first glimpses of the pitoresque landscape.

The coach took us to Nelson, where we sang in Holy Trinity Church, Richmond and Old St John's. Nelson was host to the annual choir football match, pitting cantoris and decani against each other in a fiercely fought battle for eternal glory.

With 3 previous dec victories in a row, can were the underdogs but were nonetheless determined. The initial combat happened between organ scholars John and Sid, scoring a continuous stream of increasingly effortless goals. However, encouragement from Rebecca; a re-ordered defensive formation and new presence in goal from one Rosalind Russell saw the goals close up and the competition put in the hands of the disorganised masses.



A brick wall in defence: Ros uses her height in goal



Astonished: Team dec's reaction to my own headed goal

The play was described by many as 'energetic', with support on the side from gaffer and professional chain smoker Joseph Ashmore. In the end the enthusiasm shone through and a record breaking 9-9 draw was a fair result for all, with play terminated due to an injured John Ellse, whose damaged calf raised questions as to who would ring forth the 32 foot Bombarde on the pedals (my best organ jargon). Some effort from yours truly led to my appointment as man of the match, though in truth, to quote the British sould

band Hot Chocolate, "Everyone's a winner".

Our penultimate destination, Kaikoura, was a stunning location, with mountains crashing dramatically into the Pacific ocean in the background. Our concert venue was the homely St Paul's church on the hill, where the local audience amassed to see the choir sing a very loud 'Silver Swan'.

The next day was a day off, a rare occasion these days and one well deserved. Some members of choir splashed out and went whale watching off the East coast of the South island, providing spectacular sights of sperm and humpback whales. Others trekked round the Kaikoura peninsula, seeing a colony of seals who were out in the radiant sunshine. A very relaxing day was spent with ideal weather, and we even got to feel like celebrities, with some of the 3,000 locals identifying us by sight.



Pitoresque: Even these three couldn't spoil the view



Team: Christ's College Chapel Choir

The next day took us to Christchurch, which included a performance in the iconic Cardboard Cathedral (left). The evidence of the 2011 earthquake was still present, but the optimism of our hosts showed us that it was a city which is well on the mend. We browsed through the city before our final concert at Knox Church, during which Parry's *I was glad* gave us a chance for some subtle forte-vs-fortissimo contrast which the choir has become famous for.

The 30 hour journey home through Christchurch, Sydney, Bangkok, Dubai and London may have been a long one, but it was certainly worth it for the enjoyment we all had. The choir would like to thank Vincent Lam for all his help; to all the churches who kindly took us in and those who hosted members of the choir. Special thanks also goes to Mr Stephen Revell (m. 1975), Mr Finian Tan (m. 1986), Mr George Yeo (m. 1973 and Honorary Fellow) and Mrs Jennifer Yeo, and Dr Adrian Yeo (Honorary Fellow) who kindly sponsored our concerts in Singapore. We all look forward to another international tour in 2016!

Max McGinley