

**BRIGHTON SCHOOL
ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA**

CONCERT CHOIR TOUR

CHINA

DECEMBER 2003

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MAJOR CONCERTS

Shanghai Number 1 Primary School: 28th November

This first concert was very important as it gave the choir a chance to consolidate after the long examination break prior to the tour. A showcase government school of 1400 students, this is said to be the best primary school in Shanghai. Although the performance venue was small, limiting our audience to about 80, the remainder of the school viewed the concert via closed circuit television in their classrooms. We were delighted to be met by a reception party that included the school band and students in traditional costume. As well as our program, we jointly sang *Jasmine Flower* and *Tie me kangaroo Down, Sport* with their choir. The school also performed two very entertaining dance and song items for us. The cuteness and enthusiasm of the children delighted us all.

Jingan Plaza, Shanghai: 29th November

This was an outdoor concert in a popular shopping complex in Shanghai. The concert, promoted by the Cultural Council of Shanghai, was watched by about 500 members of the public. Perhaps more might have attended if the weather wasn't bitterly cold – our coldest day thus far. Everything was amplified – even the claves and wobble board. *Surrexit Dominus* was sung well as was *Betelehemu* in which the stage rocked to the dance step giving the seated comperes a moving experience. Given the conditions the choir sang commendably well and was presented with a beautiful crystal violin by the Council. The Director of the council invited us to perform at an international choral festival here in 2004. A trend may be occurring as the concert was preceded with long speeches that included political promotion.

Two concerts down and so far so good. What is becoming clear is the extent to which the Chinese authorities seem to be using the concerts for propaganda purposes. The second concert at Jingan Plaza was preceded by 3 rather long speeches about the government's progress in various enterprises and particularly education. I wasn't sure if the information was for the benefit of us or the audience. The organizers asked me at the last moment to make a thank you speech and I decided to enjoy this unique situation making a diplomatically correct rhetorical thank you speech. Having to pause every other sentence for the translator allowed me to think up a new gracious thank you – in other words I really waffled on and did the big suck up. But given the fact they shouted us a terrific banquet and promoted the concert with a poster as big as the bedroom wall, I guess they deserved it

There is some incredible architecture in Shanghai. The Pearl Orient Tower – said to be the world's 3rd tallest building, is quite surreal and breathtaking. We

took some great photos. It is hard to get used to the pollution, however, and I'm still finding it hard to shake off this cough and ca'nt see it happening till we leave Shanghai. Population 17 million makes the traffic crazy also. But the food has been very good so far. The students are already hanging out for KFC but I've enjoyed excellent Chinese asparagus, seaweed, cherries, spicy pork, fish, and chicken hearts. Surprisingly few noodle dishes and haven't had the big 'woof woof' yet, but I'm sure it will come because there's not many strays hanging around.

There's a good rapport developing between staff and students, the only real complaint being the hectic nature of it all. There has been very little time to ourselves so far but I think some of that is still getting over the long journey with a few decent nights' sleep.

After concerts Friday and Saturday, Sunday was a sight seeing day. Zuozhang village is a bit like Venice with many canals and gondoliers. It's classified as a World Heritage sight, but for me too touristy, so not my favorite day. Still, we finally saw blue sky and could take our jumpers off. The highlight of the day was escaping the tour and having dinner with Rae's friend Beecher who works for an American company there. We went to a beautiful villa-restaurant in the French Quarter and I ordered caeser salad and a steak. Both were excellent and it was a nice retreat from the smog of the city. The main activity of Monday was a concert at a prestigious bilingual school just outside of Shanghai.

Shanghai Gold Apple Bilingual School: 1st December

This new school –3 years old has an enrolment of 3000 students on 3 campuses. The Choir performed a full concert program (90 minutes including a 10-minute interval) at the middle school in a beautiful modern music auditorium that seats 500. Other members of the school witnessed our performance via closed circuit television, as happened in our first concert. Despite some illness creeping into the choir, the standard of the singing was excellent. This concert revealed some excellent ensemble between conductor, accompanist and choir and some performances of songs including *Soldier Boy*, *Surrexit Dominus*, *Java Jive* and *Bill Bailey* were our best yet. The students visited classrooms afterward and were invited to give talks. We were impressed with the size, cleanliness and newness of the school.

The train journey from Sushi to Qingdao took 17 hours but surprisingly I had my best sleep so far on tour. Ahh the romance of the train journey! I'm finally ridding myself of Bronchitis and feeling great. I entertained myself on the train having three games of chess with the boys and came out with 2 wins and a stalemate, the latter taking about 90 minutes. In this game Brett should have had me but my psychological warfare was too strong!

Arrived in Qingdao about 7.00am and met by another reception party. You have to hand it to the Chinese; they make great hosts and treat you like kings. No wonder Marco Polo hung around.

After breakfast we arrived at Qingdao number 39 middle school, another model Chinese school in time to see the yr 8s and 9s do their morning warm ups (photo attached). Incidentally a middle school in China is like our secondary school. We were taken to a display room with photos and records of achievement of students from this school. English speaking students guided us and gave well-rehearsed speeches about different aspects of school education. The school has a famous history with movie stars and politicians. There was even a photo of Chairman Mao one of their students. The principal described him as a "great leader", but that was in front of the communist party secretary who is keeping an eye on us in Qingdao. I wonder what he really thinks. This woman, the party secretary, looks quite evil like a 'gang of four' member and makes out she can't speak English. But we have been reliably informed that she understands every word we say. I would like to know what happened in the school during the Cultural Revolution, but know it would be inappropriate to ask.

Number 39 Middle School, Qingdao: 4th December

What a joyful concert this was. We performed for one hour in a modest hall seating 200, but with a strong acoustic and a grateful audience, who could ask for anything more!

Coming off an all night train journey from Sushi (where epic chess battles transpired), Qingdao was literally a breath of fresh air from the great southern city of Shanghai. It was refreshing to see a beach again, enjoy the beautiful architectural diversity and accept genuine hospitality. The choir continues on its musical ascent and we enjoyed the banquets of all banquets post concert.

After this concert, we were treated to a sensational banquet. Jeff (choir accompanist) and I sat either side of the Lord Mayor and we must have had at least 20 toasts. They often scull, too. The Mayor is very powerful and wealthy in China, even the school principal kowtows to him. Because of Qingdao's German and Japanese heritage the food was a treat and we followed each toast with a 'prost', 'chin chin', 'campai' or 'bottoms up' which they found amusing. Qingdao beer is good, and there was plenty of it last night

People's Auditorium, Qingdao: 6th December

This concert was a united performance between the two friendship schools – No. 39 Middle School Qingdao and Brighton Secondary School given to an audience of about 2000. The concert, lasting 2 hours was staged in three parts. Part 1 represented traditional Chinese ensemble, part 2 was a 40-minute bracket from us and part 3 represented the future with popular music

from the Qingdao school. It was a fascinating concert, loudly amplified with much hype and long speeches, and very well rehearsed.

Much of the Qingdao contribution involved choreography and dance to pop music. We were impressed with their discipline and uniformity. The overwhelming praise our choir received from high-ranking officials of the city, university, and school was the feeling in our musical interpretation, and the quality of our ensemble work. The concert concluded with another banquet headed by the leader of the communist party, Qingdao. As well as the aforementioned leader and the Brighton staff, the guest table included the Head of the Qingdao University Music department, Director of the Qingdao Opera House and Vice Director of Qingdao Education. These people represent the 7.1 million Qingdaonese. Once again, the food, hospitality and graciousness of our hosts were superb. Tomorrow we train to Beijing.

Huijia Private School, Beijing: 9th December

The Huijia Private School was a convenient venue to perform being only 30km from the Great Wall, the afternoon sightseeing activity and a major highlight of the trip. This high school of 2000 students includes a Chinese Australian college where 140 or so students get to study in Perth for part of their schooling. The performance hall was live in acoustic, making for satisfying performances of the more sonorous pieces and in particular *Surrexit Dominus* within the one-hour program. As always, *Jasmine Flower* was much appreciated by the audience of 400 senior students. Huijia contributed two musical items, both vocalists. One was a traditional Chinese soprano, the other attempted Italian Opera. Lunch at the school was a lowlight, but the evening *Beijing Duck* restored the balance.

Western Academy of Beijing (WAB) 11th December

This day marked the beginning of our 3rd week in China. It was to be a busy day with four concerts given at two schools. Another early wake up call and the fatigue showed on the way to WAB on the bus with many students sleeping. The first concert at this school, a prominent international school of age 10 years (47 nationalities among the students) began soon after 9.00am and to be fair, showed the effects of our fatigue. Nevertheless, as has always been the case on this tour, the students did their best and are learning to perform in a variety of situations, arenas and mental states. Most of the group has suffered some form of sickness at some stage on tour, and at this point in time, a few members were unable to sing at all, some others barely able to contribute.

The second concert at this school was given to a primary school audience. They loved it! They cheered and clapped and responded to questions from the compere. This lifted the choir and hence the performance was a very

successful one. Both concerts lasted about 40 minutes and were given to an audience of perhaps 250 students and staff. It was good to catch up with ex patriot S.A music teacher Peter Habib of *Generations in Jazz* fame, and the fact that all students spoke English provided the opportunity to rest our bilingual accompanist from compere duties, with the conductor taking over.

International School of Beijing 11th December

According to sources, in the international school business, ISB is about as good a school as it gets. The facilities are outstanding with marble reception halls decorated with modern art, quality furnishings and pertinent to our performance – a very professional performance auditorium. It was possible to believe that US \$40 million has been spent on the new school infrastructure.

As with WAB, we gave two performances of short duration to a younger than usual audience. Both concerts were an outstanding success, particularly the second. Credit to the excellent audiences who really knew how to enjoy a good concert and inspire the performers! *Soldier Boy* and *Go Down Moses* were sung the best on tour so far, as was *Betelehemu* but I fear some audience participation may prevent us gaining a recording.

It is pleasing that most songs are really hitting their straps. The fact that many students have a different favourite song is also a healthy sign regarding the success of this repertoire. More South Australian connections were found at this school, with Jenny Mast (teacher) being an old scholar of Brighton. The Director of performing Arts at the school, Caroline Pommeroy is also an ex patriot S.A music teacher, choral conductor and old scholar at another public SIMC school. Ms Pommeroy paid tribute to the choir, and I quote: "I have seen many choirs perform here and at other international schools from Asia, Europe and America. This choir is the best. I am astounded at the quality of your choir."

St. Francis of Assisi Cathedral, Xian, 14th December

The Choir sang 8 pieces at midday mass celebrated by Bishop Anthony Li Du-An and Father Stephen, both Diocesan priests. On the mass calendar, this was the 3rd Sunday of Advent, a joyous occasion. Whilst we sang at the processional, responsorial psalm, offertory, peace offering, communion and recessional, the local choir of 48 nuns and seminarians sang the parts of the mass proper. Jessica Fleming read a translation of the 1st reading and the congregation included an Irish priest who enjoyed the *Irish Blessing*, and a Nigerian student who enjoyed the carol from his homeland, *Betelehemu*.

This catholic congregation was very appreciative of our contribution. The Church was targeted remorsefully during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76,

and this particular church was turned into a warehouse for candy. Church property was confiscated and the priests were imprisoned during that period. Now, the Xian province of about 20 million has 230 000 Catholics and about 240 priests. Vocations are healthy and the largest order of nuns in China resides here.

It was an honour to contribute at this service. The priests cannot speak freely against government policy and we sensed their appreciation for our presence. Father Stephen introduced the choir as 'world famous', and the choir sang like they believed it. The very full congregation was stunned at the quality of our music and to quote our Xian tour guide (English name Andy), "I have never heard such magnificence from voices".

Xian Hi-Tech International School, 15th December

This school is the first state-owned international school in northwest China and opened in September of this year. The 90-minute concert consisted of 14 items from Brighton and 5 from the Xian School. The large, modern and somewhat sterile auditorium was acoustically good for choral music, but was amplified to a loud and unnecessary degree. The choir performed very well under difficult conditions to a young and noisy audience of about 500. Once again, different performance conditions were encountered, adding to the valuable performance experience the students are gaining. This proved to be a useful dress rehearsal for the major concert in Shanghai tomorrow night.

Conservatorium of Music, Shanghai University, 16th December

The 13th and final concert was an outstanding success and a fitting way to end the tour. It was a long day, beginning with a 5.30am wake-up call, a flight from Xian to Shanghai and a 'claytons' sound-check which wasted 2 hours mid afternoon when we needed to be resting. On top of this we were late for the performance, getting stuck in a traffic jam (a 20-minute journey mid afternoon took 80 minutes!). Warm-ups occurred on the bus.

The students were magnificent. In sporting vernacular, they dug deep. Sickness took toll on two students who had to leave the stage, but they were well covered due to the 100% commitment given by others. The concert, once again slickly organised by the King's College team, went for two hours in which we presented 18 items, and a guest "Peace" choir from Shanghai contributed two. The auditorium capacity of 775 was nearly filled, and diplomats from the Australian and New Zealand consulate as well as the Chinese government were in attendance. Prolonged applause and many words of praise as well as the usual photographic marathon concluded the evening.

OTHER IMPROMPTU PERFORMANCES

Wednesday 26 th November	Adelaide Airport for the Premier
Monday 1 st December	Dia Jasmine Restaurant, Shanghai
Wednesday 17 th December	Singapore Airlines flight for cabin crew

Conclusion

On all fronts this was a very successful tour. Musically, I could not have wished for more from this choir. In every concert there were highlights and moments of precision, force and beauty. The choir performed indoor and out, with and without amplification, and on occasions in extreme temperature conditions. The length of concert ranged from 35-120 minutes and patience and tolerance were often called upon. Whilst the choir made noticeable improvement as the tour progressed, the consistency and quality through the 13 concerts was outstanding.

The students are worthy of the highest praise for their behaviour and demeanor on this tour. They were polite and courteous, patient and generous. They accepted cultural difference with maturity and interest. We were very proud of the way they represented themselves, their school and their country.

Student and staff relations could not have been better. We worked together, ate together and laughed together. For the staff it was a wonderful opportunity to get to know the students better in a non classroom environment. Also, the students enjoyed the company of the staff and were outspoken in their appreciation to all four of us for our different roles in contributing to this tour.

Michael Griffin
Conductor
Brighton School Concert Choir
19TH December, 2003

Repertoire and audience notes:

1. Ave Maria

This is a Renaissance setting of the prayer to the Virgin Mary by the Belgian composer Jacob Arcadelt. The piece is sung in Latin.

2. Cantate Domino

A Renaissance motet, that is a hymn of praise to the glories of creation by the German 16th century composer Hans Leo Hassler. The motet is sung in Latin.

3. God be in my head

A prayer that the presence of God will be in all aspects of our life, even at death. The anthem was written by an English composer Martin Neale in 1999.

4. The Lamb

This setting of the English poet, William Blake's famous poem is by the contemporary English composer John Tavener. It was composed in 1976.

5. Surrexit Dominus

This work is by the contemporary Australian composer, Nigel Butterley. It was written in 1976 and celebrates the victory of good over evil. The piece is sung in both English and Latin.

6. Ubi Caritas

The Latin motet by the 20th century French composer Maurice Durufle is sung in Latin. It is a moving hymn of praise to the love of the Almighty One.

7. Hymn to Joy

The famous melody from Beethoven's 9th Symphony is set to words, which proclaim the brotherhood of all nations. We sing this piece in English.

8. Go Down Moses

This spiritual originally sung by negro slaves from Africa is a cry for freedom from all oppression. This is still relevant in today's society.

9. Every Time I Feel the Spirit

An African negro spiritual that pays homage to the great forces outside our daily life. It was arranged by an English composer.

10. Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child

An African negro spiritual that speaks of man's loneliness and asks for help. A person often feels like an orphan in this world.

11. Singabahambayo

A traditional African song which speaks to all of us who are far from our homeland. We use bongo drums to accompany this song.

12. Betlehemu

This is a song from Nigeria in Africa. The words celebrate birth and a new beginning of life. The song will be sung in the Nigerian language.

13. Ngana

Ngana is by the contemporary Australian composer Stephen Leek. It is based on indigenous Australian words for "shark", "fish", "welcoming" and "blue waters". It is really a sound piece representing our beautiful seas and wildlife.

14. Simple Gifts

Our Australian composer Stephen Leek has arranged this traditional melody. The words, sung in English, reflect upon the value of simplicity in our lives.

15. Sneezles

This piece of musical humour is based on the English poem about a naughty little child who liked to pretend. The music was written by an Australian composer. The little child has a cold and sneezes a lot.

16. Waltzing Matilda

Australia's most famous song is "Waltzing Matilda". The poem is about a lonely stockman (or swagman) looking after his sheep in our outback. He was in trouble with the law, and died a lonely death. The arrangement of this song emphasizes his mysterious life.

17. Song of Australia

This is a patriotic song written by a poet and composer from our region in South Australia in the late 19th century depicting the beauty of our country.

18. Advance Australia Fair

This is Australia's National Song.

19. Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport

The Australian entertainer, Rolf Harris, has written many humorous songs about our country. This one, probably his best known, has a catchy tune. We don't have kangaroos in our cities, though!

20. Tuxedo Junction

The famous setting by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra is arranged for a choir. The setting includes an extra piano part and solo clarinet.

21. Bill Bailey

The famous traditional melody of this piece has a lively setting. The words emphasize the values of our home. One of the students is a 'star' in this performance.

22. Java Jive

This was a song made popular by the group called "Manhattan Transfer". It is about popular drinks - coffee and tea.

23. Sentimental Journey

A popular song that talks about our home. If we are far away we think of our home and our homeland.

24. Soldier Boy

This song was written by the English composer, John Rutter. It is about the tragedy of war. A soldier goes to war but does not return, even after 7 years.

25. Irish Blessing

Though the words may be Irish, this song speaks of love for all people and the hope that we will meet again.

26. Jasmin Flower

We sing this traditional Chinese melody in Chinese and we hope that you accept this as our gesture of thanks and appreciation.

Hon MIKE RANN MP (Premier South Australia)

26/11/2003

AWARD-WINNING BRIGHTON CHOIR LEAVES FOR CHINA News Release

The award-winning Brighton Secondary School choir leaves for China today after its original trip in April this year was cancelled amid the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Premier Mike Rann and Education Minister Trish White joined the students and their families at Adelaide Airport, wishing them well on their journey. Each student received a special South Australian badge to take with them.

A State Government guarantee that the trip would go ahead when the SARS risk had passed has enabled the choir to resume its long-planned tour of China.

Premier Rann says the 47-member concert choir will be outstanding ambassadors for the young people of South Australia.

"This trip comes on the back of Brighton Secondary School's success in Sydney in August where their choirs blitzed the Australasian Choral Championship, becoming the most successful school at the competition.

"The students have an impressive schedule of performances across four cities, including singing at the 700-seat Shanghai Conservatoire of Music on 16 December.

"The concert, to be recorded and broadcast on radio, will entertain a number of Chinese education authorities and corporate leaders.

"A separate concert with students from Qindao No 39 Middle School is expected to attract a crowd of 3,000 students and civic at the busy Jing'an Plaza.

"There will also be concerts at international schools in Beijing and X'ian along with a performance at a major church service in X'ian."

Education Minister Trish White, who first met choir members at Adelaide Airport in April to pledge that she would ensure their return, says the government has stayed true to its word.

"Their initial tears of disappointment turned to joy when I told them the trip would resume later in the year and I am pleased that the support of this government has been able to deliver that for them."

A CD will be produced of the students' overseas performances. They are due to return to Adelaide on December 18.