



(Photo: Distinguished Concerts International New York)

# BENDIGO YOUTH CHOIR

## BRINGS THE HOUSE DOWN AT CARNEGIE HALL

The Bendigo Youth Choir flew to New York to take up the once-in-a-lifetime offer to perform at Carnegie Hall, thanks to practical and financial support from the Rotary Club of Bendigo, Vic.

**THE** choir's journey began when a talent scout from Distinguished Concerts International New York stumbled on a YouTube clip of the choir singing a work created specifically for them by a young Australian composer. Titled *The Enchanted Hour*, the song incorporates harmonic overtone singing, also known as throat singing, in which two notes are sung at the same time. The choir, founded by Rotarian Valerie Broad OAM, has practised this unusual and ancient art since 1999.

Impressed, the scout contacted the choir to ask if they would like to perform at Carnegie Hall. The invitation was so extraordinary, at first it was believed to be a hoax.

Once it was realised the request was genuine, an enormous fundraising campaign began. The small country choir is entirely voluntary, not-for-profit, and all associated donate their expertise to ensure as many children as possible can afford to be members. The travel and accommodation costs of travelling to New York would have

been a huge impost on the household budgets of participants, meaning they would have been unable to accept the invitation without significant support. Fortunately, the Rotary Club of Bendigo and Bendigo Youth Choir were able to raise \$52,000 towards the trip, including a Rotary Foundation grant.

Fifteen choristers travelled to New York – for many, their first overseas trip – to join other youngsters from Colombo, Venezuela, Indonesia and the United States to be prepared for the premiere performance of *La Avispa Brava* (The Angry Wasp), a 25-minute work written by internationally renowned composer Alberto Grau to celebrate his 80th birthday. Challengingly, lyrics were in South American Spanish, which the children had to perfect in only four days of rehearsals.

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“Our children worked very hard and we were proud of their efforts,” said Valerie, who accompanied the children. “They were wonderful ambassadors for Australia, Bendigo, the choir and their families – and they grew as we watched.”

The performance, conducted by Alberto Grau’s wife Maria Guinand, was electric, vibrant and joyous. Dressed in wasp costumes, with bobbing antennae and quivering wings, the children sang while at the same time performing synchronised eurhythmic choreography involving body percussion.

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Afterwards, choristers, organisers and special guests were treated to a magnificent banquet, where they were entertained by an impromptu performance from the Indonesian Choir. The group then spent two days seeing the sights of New York, including a visit to Tim Minchin’s latest musical and the 9/11 Memorial.

The opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall is a career highlight, even for adult performers; undertaking such a performance so early in their

career can only enhance the long-term professional and personal opportunities of the choristers, many of whom are now considering careers in the arts. The development of the children musically, as well as socially, was enormous. Many met peers from other countries for the first time, and many are still engaging with their newfound friends.

“These young people have had such a significant, life-changing experience that it can only have lifetime benefits,” Valerie said. •



(Photo: David Field/Shooter Photos Bendigo)

## BENDIGO YOUTH CHOIR – THE SEQUEL

Upon their return to Australia, the choir plunged immediately into learning a new work, composed by Rotary Club of Melbourne member Dr David Kram, entitled *Peace – a Cantata for John Monash*.

The choir premiered the work in Melbourne’s Hamer Hall in September last year, with another group of young singers, an adult SATB choir and four soloists. Following the performance, David invited the choir to travel to France to join a 100-voice local children’s choir to sing an abbreviated version of the work (translated into French) at Villers-Bretonneux, where Sir John Monash led his troops.

A total of 15 young singers will be taking the trip, only a couple of whom were on the New York trip, giving an exciting opportunity to a new crop of young people. The choir is scheduled to fly out of Australia on September 25 – with another huge fundraising campaign now underway to cover expenses. Many of the children could not otherwise dream of travelling overseas. Their excitement is palpable.