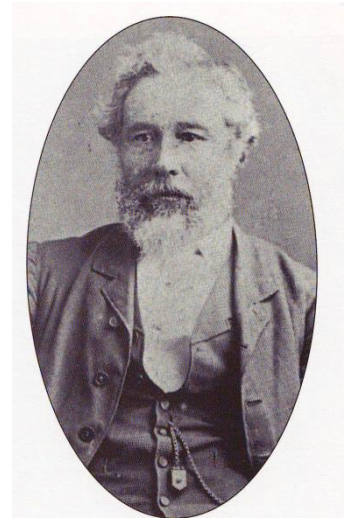


# A Rich Musical History

## Music from the Earliest Days

The Immaculate Conception Church has a rich history in music, from the very beginning. At the first Mass in 1869 at the opening of the church, it is reported that Mozart's No. 2 Mass was sung by the choir. A beautiful organ, manufactured by George Fincham of Richmond, was opened in 1879, at the back of the church.

At the 1879 opening, High Mass was celebrated, where Mr M. O'Gorman, brought out all the fine qualities of the new organ while the choir sang Mozart's 12<sup>th</sup> with the Credo from Haydn's 3<sup>rd</sup>. The organ was altered, enlarged and improved in 1892 and again in 1902. A series of competent conductors directed the professional choir employed by the parish, including Miss Trowbridge who used to stamp her feet to keep time for the singers, effective for the choir but rather frightening for the mass goers in the pews under the loft. In 1895, Charles Levy accepted the position as honorary conductor, a position he held until 1915.



George Fincham



Organ and Choir Loft at the back of the Church

This report in 1899 shows what an effective conductor Mr Levy was. 'On Friday night the 'Stabat Mater' was given as a sacred concert in the Church of the Immaculate Conception 'the church was crowded with persons of all denominations, eager to hear the glorious music gloriously rendered. This church has one of the best choirs in Victoria, and curiously enough the honorary conductor, Mr Charles Levy, is a Jew whose passion for music has caused him to devote a great deal of time to bringing the Hawthorn choir to its present high position.'

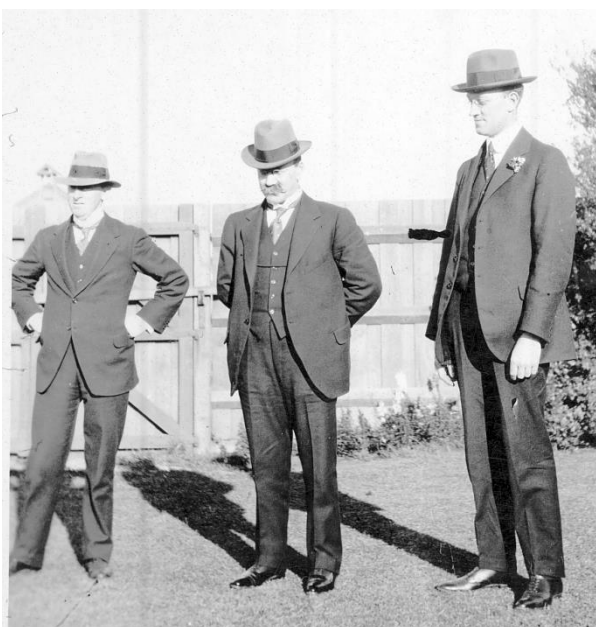
Among the early organists, apart from Mr O'Gorman, one of the most famous was Miss Frances Commons, a well-known teacher from St. Joseph's school who first played the big pipe organ while still a teenager and was said to be "a child full of music, who all her life could make organs and pianos speak."

Other organists included Miss Griffiths, Miss B. McGivern, Mr K.

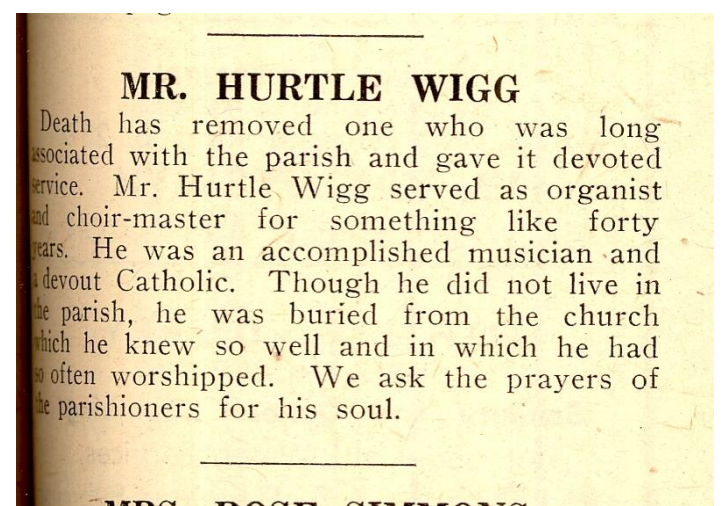
Halliday, Miss Queenie Heron and later Mrs Cecil Jenkinson, who was organist for many years until ill-health forced her retirement in 1950 (Mrs Jenkins was first mentioned presenting an organ solo in the church in 1913).

Mr Hurtle Wigg is central to any discussion of our musical history.

He followed as conductor in the period after Charles Levy and was choir master (and fill-in organist) for something like 40 years, until the early 1950s.



Hurtle Wigg, left, conductor for nearly 40 years





The parish was fortunate to have many expert and dedicated instrumentalists and vocalists who performed at social functions as well as within the liturgies.



*The Parish Orchestra in 1920 (Left)*

*Fr Corish with the Choir in 1923 (Above)*

### **Continuing the Song - 1950s to Today**

Mr W.A. (Bill) Box was appointed organist and musical director in 1952, a position he held until 1988, when he was 84. Mr Box had a rich grounding in church music before leaving England for Australia at age 20 in 1924. He became assistant organist and choirmaster at Christ Church Hampstead at the age of 16. A little later he became organist and choirmaster at St Matthew's Church, Oakley Square, London, at which time he was also assistant conductor of King's College (London University).

The organ was enlarged and rebuilt in 1965, the specifications being drawn up by Messrs George Fincham and Bill Box. Some pipes were obtained from the organ at the Exhibition Buildings, and the console was placed in the Eastern Transept.

Until the 1960s and Vatican Council 2, the choir was separated from the main congregation, originally in the choir loft at the back of the church and then, after 1892, in the new choir loft above the Lady Chapel. This edict from the Council proclaimed: 'The place for the choir and the organist shall be so arranged that it will be clearly evident that the singers and the organist form part of the united community of the faithful; in that way they will more suitably fulfil their liturgical function.' From that time the choir and organist have been based in the front of the eastern transept. The change from Latin to English in the liturgy meant that, also, sung masses and hymns were primarily in English. Following the retirement of Bill Box in 1988, there have been several organists, including Ian Tyler, Paul Taylor, Jenny Baker and, on special occasions, Bernadette Norris.

Damien Nolan joined the choir in 1999. Around 2007, he accepted the role as Director of Music, a position he held until Christmas 2017.



*Bill Box with Fr Brian Murphy SJ, at the organ*



## Involving the Youth – 1970s to Today

**From the 1970s onwards**, music at the Family and Youth orientated Masses (especially the Sunday 9:30am) has been focused on involvement of the congregation whilst still providing prayerful accompaniment to the Liturgy. The parish has been blessed with many excellent and dedicated instrumentalists and vocalists of varying age groups covering a wide range of musical styles.

**As Liz McVeigh recalls:** “During the 70’s, in association with the youth group, and Br Alex McDonald, we had an acoustic guitar group and singers for many years. Following that Fermin and Pat Navascues et al, joined this group and after a while introduced more of a rock band. This group continued for many years.”

“When Fr Richard Shortall became parish priest, he employed a pianist/organist (Paul Taylor) to coordinate and lead the group. This lasted for a year or two from memory and was followed by encouraging some of our talented youth of the time contributing with their instrumental accompaniment.”

**Another parishioner recollects:** “For a number of years Liz McVeigh expertly led the music at 9:30am Mass, and her beautiful singing and music greatly encouraged participation by the congregation and further enriched the liturgy. In the late 1990s Liz and one or two parent assistants organised four “guest appearances” each year at Mass where a group of up to 20 primary and early secondary students provided the instrumental music.

After Fr Richard Shortall arrived in 1991, the Christmas Eve Family Mass and nativity re-enactment was expanded to include about 70 children, a tiny baby and 10-15 young musicians. A Trumpet solo or duo heralded the commencement of Mass, angels and shepherds led ‘Away in the Manger’ and ‘Gloria’ and young musicians augmented the liturgy’s music.”

Nowadays, each of the St Joseph’s school Class Masses held at ICC 9:30am Mass has children from that class sing an opening song. Of course every week we experience inspirational music led by Georgina, Krishna and the wonderful choir.

*Choir at Christmas Eve Family Mass, 2017*



*“Opening Song” at St Joseph’s School Class Mass, 2017*

## Damien Nolan reflects on the role of music in the parish over past decades:

*'If music be the food of love, play on' (William Shakespeare - Twelfth Night.)*

As Christians, we find ourselves on the great journey from God to God - finding God in all things, which takes us to the most unexpected places where we experience God's love, be it in consolation and desolation.

The hymn "**How can I keep from Singing**" contains this simple text –

*The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,*

*A fountain ever springing;*

*All things are mine since I am his—*

*How can I keep from singing?*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm*

*While to that rock I'm clinging;*

*Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,*

*How can I keep from singing?*

At Hawthorn we have been fortunate over many decades to have experienced both music and music makers who have allowed us to experience God through the musical prayers we sing each week.

The variety of musical prayer grew exponentially in the aftermath of Vatican 2 as we learned to express our inner desires more freely. Young parents in the 70's and 80's brought their children to 9:30 Masses and found new experiences of God's love assisted by the new writers putting biblical texts to music which enabled us an easier pathway to finding God. Led by the St Louis Jesuits, Carey Landry and many contemporary composers this new breed created engaging and prayerful music which offered a new insight and personal image of a creator God who never stops loving us. It opened new doors to a personal experience of conversational love between singer and creator - all pleasing to God!

The music was collected in the blue American hymnal Glory and Praise. Truly music for the masses. We saw the pews filled with people searching for something more on a Sunday. As more composers came on board the music collections were expanded with the addition of many new Australian and international composers contained in the hymnal **As One Voice**.

Meanwhile our more traditional 11:00 am Mass goers experienced the music from the new Australian hymnal Catholic Worship Book which resided in the pews containing both classic and new composition from renowned international musicians such as Australian Jesuit Christopher Willcock, French Jesuit Joseph Gelineau, Kathleen Boschetti MSC along with whose psalms and Masses we regularly sing – Be Not Afraid, Taste and See.

Music at 9:30 and 11:00 was certainly different which reflects where our faith journeys are taking us. However these converge around the events of Holy Week when we gather as one parish.

There are so many people who contributed to the quality of our worship and journey in this parish. Our many skilled musicians – organists, pianists, strings, brass and wind. And our cantors and singers who have lead us and encouraged us all to sing to the God who loves us.

Bill Box as organist and musical leader was extraordinary in overseeing 11:00am Mass and our major feasts (from 1952 to 1988). There was a serious 11am choir which practised regularly whose members have mostly moved on to God.

We have been fortunate to have some superb musicians at 9:30 Jane Matheson, Jess Young and Georgie Docherty.

However for me there is one person that stands out for her extraordinary service – Shirley Wright a choir member for 50+years who regularly sang the psalm at 11:00 until she was 88. She brought a great sense of God's love for us all as she stepped up to the lectern each Sunday but also specially during the Easter Triduum.

In 2017, the highly credentialed Fiona Dyball took over as Music Consultant for the parish and conductor of the 11am Choir. Fiona provides details of the many who currently contribute to our music today, including keyboardists, Angela Pezzano and Maureen Mahon, excellent cantors at various masses, including Jessica Young, Benjamin Colley, and at the Saturday evening Mass, Stephanie Dignis, while we are also fortunate to have the services of Krishna Martin, another accomplished pianist. Special mention must be made of Jane Matheson Jane Matheson began playing at IC when she was still a student at Loreto Mandeville Hall in the early 2000's. She has been playing at the parish ever since, playing for Masses and other liturgies and events across the schedule, but especially at the 11am Mass. Playing both piano and organ, Jane's services are in demand locally, nationally and internationally.

*'If music be the food of love, play on!'*



*Shirley Wright, over 50 years in the choir, with Donna Bosnjak*