A SHORT HISTORY OF WITS CHOIR

Wits Choir is now in its 54th year of existence!

It was originally called The Witwatersrand University Choir and was founded by students from two diverse student bodies. The first was The University Choral Society and they decided to use the profits from their 1961 production of Oklahoma to buy choral music and start a choir. On the other hand, at the same time, a group of students on the Students’ Engineering Council also decided to form a choir. Towards the end of that year the two groups combined and the Wits Choir was formed.

Wits Choir is unlike any choir you have ever experienced: it is vibrant, young, and colourful!  Membership is open to all, resulting in a fully representative choir drawn from diverse national and international cultures.

The Wits Choir motto is *‘Excellence through diversity’* and this manifests itself in everything the Choir does, be it repertoire, membership of the choir, performances. An example of this diversity is the fact that Wits Choir must be the only choir in the world who has sung for over 20 Heads of State both in Africa and abroad, and ………….. also at the opening of a sewage plant in Mpumalanga!

During the last 21 years of the newly-constituted Wits Choir there have been many highlights. To mention a few:

* The Choir had the honour to sing at 3 occasions for **Nelson Mandela** and what a gracious and generous audience member he was. They also had the honour of singing at his Memorial Service at Wits University. The message of Ubuntu that he lived by, is one that Wits Choir strives to emulate.
* The extensive **outreach programme** for the advancement of choral music and conducting through mini-tours to amongst others the Cape Platteland, Mpumalanga, and Northern KwaZulu-Natal has afforded the Wits Choir the opportunity to work with local choirs and conductors furthering music education and forming meaningful partnerships.  The Choir also regularly holds choir festivals and workshops involving singers and conductors from church, school and community choirs.
* The Wits Choir has often had the privilege to perform on **television**, with the last one being on Morning Live on SABC 2 to celebrate Freedom Day which is commemorated on April 27th.
* The Wits Choir has spread the magic of South African music and culture through **tours** to Namibia (1998 and 2015), Kenya (2001), Argentina (2003), the Czech Republic (2006), the Seychelles (2009) and in 2011 to the USA and Canada. They performed on the Fringe of the 2008 and 2010 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.
* A new Wits Choir – the Young Wits Choir was established in 2013 and it is an extension of Wits Choir with its focus being on music education and skills training, and its motto *Yearning, Willing and Committed* makes it a worthy younger sibling!

The Wits Choirs bring the music of South Africa and of our continent to audiences everywhere. It is our undertaking to show the beauty, intricacies, diversity and complexity of the music in our world.

Issued by Dalene Hoogenhout, Trainer and Conductor of Wits Choir

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