

## **Sights, smells, sounds ... Well, mostly sounds.**

### **Gondwana National Choral School, My home away from home. By Lachlan Donlevy Y12**

Every year for the past 3 years I look forward to the second week in January as I embark on a musical adventure like no other. National Choral School or NCS is a two week long choral program at the UNSW campus, run by Gondwana National choirs, who also run my year round group, Sydney Children's Choir. During the 2 weeks that this "camp" runs we quite literally eat sleep and breathe music. Many of my closest friends come from all over Australia, including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Cairns, Yeppoon, Toowoomba, Hobart, Perth and Canberra. It's here that my choir nerd family creates truly magical sounds that inspire and resonate (literally) with us all.

This year I managed to be placed in Latitude 34, a group of year 10-12 students who are on the verge of a professional adult choral sound. Our amazing conductors, Elizabeth Scott and Rowan Johnston helped guide us through the vast assortment of repertoire which truly developed our individual sound and our sound as a whole. We were fortunate enough to perform "The Foundling" a piece based on the classic Grimm Fairy Tale which was composed by our accompanist Luke Byrne. The chance to work with this composer and seek advice and help from the most accurate source was the main reason it was our favourite piece to perform. Even though Luke was there to help, this was not the premiere of this work. Our choir was able to perform in two brand new premiered works, one of which was written entirely during the first week!

One of the best parts of Choral School is that it is not only for young singers, but there are two additional 'courses' run during the two week program. These are the Conductor's School and the Composer School. The piece "Love's Coming" was composed by composer school student Jeremy Richmond during the first week. This sweetly romantic, yet epic piece was dedicated to his grandfather who unfortunately passed away while he was composing the piece. This made it a truly inspirational and memorable piece to perform. The second piece was written for all 6 choirs at NCS by world class composer Paul Jarman. Jarman, as we call him, wrote a massed piece called "One Pure Voice" which was performed in two concerts by all 400+ choristers (us) in two concerts. The piece talks about how "we will sing you home to where you belong." This message was to Lyn Williams OAM, the founder of Gondwana Choirs. In addition we were able to work with internationally renowned conductor Simon Halsey who conducted two of our pieces. He was lots of fun!

An idea that was initiated two years ago was to have "electives" also known as Special Performance Projects or SPP. SPP's were sessions that happen for an hour of a half once a day instead of a normal rehearsal where we chose an activity that ranged from Music media to Taiko drumming to Music Therapy. I chose to do Music Therapy as I am considering all my career options and wanted to find out more. It ended up being a fantastic choice. Our sessions were led by Bonnie Nilsson, a professional music therapist and her husband Paul Jarman. We learnt one of the pieces that they wrote together and later on were taught the 'Key sign' sign language for the piece by a local signing choir. We performed this piece in the Starlight room in Sydney Children's Hospital during the second week. We also had the opportunity to host many guest speakers who have all taken different approaches to music therapy. We had one therapist who worked at a group home for people with intellectual disabilities. She brought three women with her and they performed songs that she helped them write. This was inspirational as these women find it difficult to communicate because of their disability, but through performing music they can express how they feel and communicate so much more than they can through a conversation. We also had a visually impaired singer come and perform and talk about how her music has helped her live with her impairment. The chance to

explore all these different therapy methods really pushed me to think about studying Music Therapy after school.

The end of the two weeks is usually a sad occasion as we must say goodbye to all our friends until next year, but this year is different. On the last morning we were a little sad, but mostly filled with excitement. 2019 is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gondwana choirs, so to celebrate, we are hosting a World Choral Festival. This July, 12 professional children's choirs will come from all over the globe to perform in the Sydney Opera House and various other venues in Sydney. Latitude 34 was lucky enough to be picked as one of those choirs to join the festival.

Singing is my escape from the busyness of life because it transports me to another place, and NCS is no exception. It is a place where every year I make more friends and form more connections. Each year our friendship group grows even bigger to the point where I have friends in every major city in Australia just through choir. It is an experience that reminds me of why I love music and reassures me of its importance and place in my life.

This is a link to a video the Music media kids made about our Music Therapy SPP where I am interviewed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdBimLCef6Q&t=2s>

In addition, this is the live stream of the closing concert. I have marked the points where I am performing below:

Lat 34: 1:20:07 – 1:36:45

Combined Finale: 2:08:15 – 2:15:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nAmLSDJPvQ>

## Photos



The finale performance of One Pure Voice by Paul Jarman



Latitude 34 performing in the closing concert



My Music Therapy group, with leader Bonnie Nilsson.





Music Therapy and Gondwana in the community groups at the Starlight Room.



Latitude 34 rehearsals



Lat 34 performing in the opening concert



My friendship group AKA my Gondi Family.