

The Blessing of the Restored Pipe Organ and Refurbished Choir Gallery

1ST MAY, 2022

ST BRIGID'S, MARRICKVILLE

MUSIC AT ST BRIGID'S

There is a strong feeling among many of the church musicians that, just as our ancestors were so generous in the building of our beautiful church, we, as stewards of our inheritance, should find ways to sustain and further develop St Brigid's unique and rich musical heritage. Fine liturgical music has been central to the life of St Brigid's since the mid-1930's when Fr Stanislaus Cross CP was appointed to the parish. Together with a very young Connie Cloran, Fr Stan developed the foundations for the fine liturgical music that continues to this day. In the 1940's and 50's there were a number of choirs – a Boys' Choir, a Men's Choir and, later on, a Combined Men and Women's Choir. Because of the excellence of the acoustics and the high quality of the organ and choirs, regular concerts were held in the church and overseas musicians and organists visited this suburban hub of musical excellence. There were strong connections built with the primary and high schools both of which had renowned heads of music – Sr Gabriel Healy and Brother Florence. Following the recommendations of Vatican 2, Fr Stan ensured that English replaced the Latin texts and enlisted the assistance of Mr Des O'Brien, former Music Master of Christian Brothers' Waverly, and a gifted composer. Des composed Masses in English for the choir and much of his music is still sung today, especially in the seasons of Lent and Easter.

During the late 1960's, 70's and 80's many of the faithful choir members moved away or retired or indeed, passed away. Times were changing. At around this time St Brigid's experienced the arrival of the Tongan and Samoan communities – they were a gift to St Brigid's. They immediately embraced the musical life of the church. They were led by Frank Mafi who took over the conducting role of the choirs as Fr Stan was frail and Des O'Brien had moved to Melbourne.

In the 1990's and 2000 - 2014 all was well with the music. During this time Valerian shared the role as organist with Connie and, under Frank's baton, the Tongan and Samoan Choirs became the backbone to the choral music making in the church.



THE GRANDE PIPE ORGAN AND ITS RESTORATION



Central to the creation of beautiful liturgical music at St Brigid's has been the Grande Pipe Organ. The power and beauty of a pipe organ raises our spirits, lifts our minds and hearts and inspires our lives. The unleashing of the organ's power can move us to tears, console our grief and enhance our joy. It is the "King of Instruments". The Pipe Organ at St Brigid's is now 157 years old. Below is a brief time-line of its history.

1865: The organ was built by the Byrceson Company as a grand residence instrument (possibly for Nathaniel Holmes of The Hall, Primrose Hill, London),

1874: William McQuade purchased it for relocation to Australia at his family residence, 'Bomera', Potts Point, Sydney

1908: It was moved to the adjoining residence, 'Tarana' by William's brother Frederick:

1921: Upon Frederick McQuade's death in 1919, the organ was advertised for sale and subsequently purchased by St Brigid's where it was installed by local organ-builder, Charles Richardson, for the opening of the church in 1921

1956: The Organ was restored by Noad & Sons. This was at the same time as the rose window and tower were added to the church.

2000: Meetings were held to discuss deterioration in sections of the organ.

2009: The instrument suffered severe water damage. Eventually

the pedal section had to be removed.

2010: An Open Meeting was held to discuss options for the Organ. The Meeting endorsed the purchase of a new pipe organ. An Organ Committee was formed to work with the Parish Priest. Overseas experts visited to advise the Parish Priest and Organ Committee. The advice overwhelmingly favoured the purchase of a new Pipe Organ as it was believed that restoration would be almost as costly as a new instrument

2011: A Grande Pipe Organ Appeal was established with a target of \$1m for the cost of a new instrument.

2011-2015: Fund raising efforts took place but we failed to reach even one fifth of the funds needed.

2016-2018: The organ was barely functioning. Ken Martin, organ tuner and long-time friend of the Music Ministry at St Brigid's, tried his best to keep the organ going. Craig Hall donated an electronic pedal section in an attempt to make the instrument playable. Most people in the congregation had no idea how dire the situation was as the magnificent acoustics in the church masked the numerous technical malfunctions.

2019: The inevitable decision was made to get rid of our beloved organ. Reluctantly we researched electronic substitutes that would fit our limited budget. Then the question arose - How would we get rid of it? How much would that cost us? Who would buy it?

WE WERE BLESSED: THE FIRST MIRACLE

Early in 2019 we visited a number of churches as well as the Cathedral, looking at, listening to and playing various Electronic Organs. After much discussion we decided on one particular model. Four days before signing the contract for this electronic instrument the Committee met with a visiting organist who was interested in purchasing our Old Pipe Organ for a private school in the south of the state. We discussed the costs involved in dismantling, transporting the organ and then reinstating it into its new home - all this expense for an instrument that was barely functional. Our visitor asked, "Why don't you have it repaired"? We explained that the cost was beyond our means. He then gave us the name of Pitchford & Garside Organ Builders, a company he had worked with previously. There and then, in the gallery, we spoke to Darrell Pitchford who promised to assess our Pipe Organ and provide us with a report. Within a week and in collaboration with his colleague, Matt Richards, Darrell produced a very thorough report. According to their careful calculations the restoration would be **WITHIN OUR BUDGET!** As they say, "The rest is history".



Organ builders Darrell Pitchford and Matt Richards

THE RESTORATION



During COVID 19, Darrell and Matt enjoyed uninterrupted use of the church to work on the organ. They started the project in June 2019 and completed it in August 2020. Many sections of the old organ had to be replaced but, after careful reconstruction and a good cleaning, most of the pipes could be reused.

This was great news as the pipes are so well suited to the outstanding acoustics of St Brigid's. Restored, the sound is even more brilliant. Darrell and Matt loved working on this project and were very appreciative of the welcoming

environment of St Brigid's. The restored instrument is a testament to the skill, care and heart they put into this wonderful restoration project.

At the completion of the work, the President of the Sydney Organ Society was invited to inspect and play the instrument. He declared it to now be one of the top six Pipe Organs in Sydney and worth in the region of one million dollars.



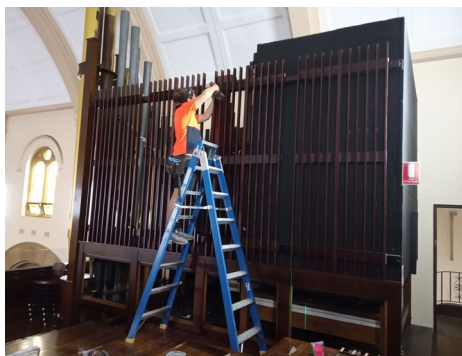
THE BLESSINGS CONTINUE: MORE MIRACLES

THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE CONNIE CLORAN CHOIR GALLERY

Once the restoration of the organ began, other hurdles kept falling. The Choir Gallery had not been refurbished for over 70 years and was dusty, grubby and unappealing. Michael Daher, a parishioner on the Maintenance Committee, came to our rescue and supplied his tradesmen to polish the floors and attend to the many carpentry needs in the gallery. The generosity of parishioners kept flowing when Sue and Glorio Di Gianni offered to make beautiful timber screens to encase the workings of

the organ. The results are stunning. The gallery has never looked so good! Terry Turner oversaw all of this work and he stands in awe of the skill

and generosity of these friends of St Brigid's who worked tirelessly and contributed so generously to the Organ/Gallery Project.



FRIENDS AND PARISHIONERS OF ST BRIGID'S

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the generosity and kindness of the hundreds of parishioners and friends of St Brigid's who contributed financially and in numerous other ways to ensure the continuity of fine music in liturgical celebrations in our parish. We are proud to say that all of the funding for the Project has come from generous donations over the years making any parish money unnecessary.

MOVING ON...

It is hoped that the restored organ and refurbished gallery will sustain and further develop the unique and rich musical traditions of St Brigid's which contribute so much to its liturgical and spiritual heartbeat.

The Organ Committee: Valerian Rego, Terry Turner, Mary Cloran and Terry Blanchard (RIP)

