



## Harley Mead

In November 2010, I was told by friends at Toowoomba Grammar School that a world-class musician was being employed at TGS, starting the following year as a Year 7 teacher. Coincidentally enough, or perhaps lucky enough for us. The Glennie School had a position vacant for a secondary choral conductor. After tracking down Harley's contact information, an email conversation, a phone call and meeting later, he was appointed as our new Choral Conductor for 3 hours per week, this being on top of his full time position at TGS. Meeting Harley for the first time was like a breath of fresh air, and it brought with it an excitement for the possibilities of what he could do for the girls at Glennie.

By the end of 2011, Harley had firmly entrenched himself into the hearts of all the girls and staff at Glennie with his enthusiasm and love of music making. He extended this circle even wider with the start of a Glennie community vocal ensemble which was made up of parents and friends. In 2012, a choral conductor position became available with the Glennie Junior Years and so without hesitation Harley agreed to this additional conductorship – now doing 4.5 hours per week at the School. Numbers in the choirs grew and the peals of laughter from the rehearsal rooms echoed down the corridor. Harley challenged the girls like never before and always commanded their best work. Little did they know at the time, but many of life's lessons were taught in between the wave of his hands. During this time Harley wrote many compositions for the girls at the School – treasured at the time, but perhaps even more so now. His many hats that he wore were always done so with his trademark infectious effervescence.

In 2012 Toowoomba Grammar and The Glennie School combined for a tour to five countries in Europe, with a Choir, Orchestra and Big Band. Harley and colleague Neil Roche-Kelly shared the conductorship of the choir. Performances included "The Dom Cathedral" in Salzburg, The Chateaux de Chillon in Switzerland, Bratislava International Music Festival and St Michael's church in Hungary. The biggest highlight was the beautiful echoes and the pure choral sound created in the Cathedral in Salzburg. This was the most awe-inspiring, transcendently spiritual choral performance that I had ever witnessed. Music is a powerful medium; Harley explored this with exceeding insight and perhaps in his hands, the music became even more prevailing.

On questioning one day as to why Harley was teaching some Pop Music repertoire which was quite unlike him as far as choral repertoire goes, his reply was: "Well, teenagers can have some junk food occasionally!" Harley was always interested in the person as a whole, he cared about other's feelings and dreams, he empowered everyone around him to be great human beings, and most of all, instilled such a love of his craft that inspired everyone to do greater things than they thought possible.

In 2012, he was appointed as Director of Performance at TGS and so his responsibilities became greater where he could no longer continue at Glennie with the choirs after the end of 2012. Sadly, we said Goodbye to our much loved choral conductor; however, Harley was always close by and ready to assist in any way at any time. This "goodbye" was short lived as 6 months later, after the experience of the combined choir in Europe the year prior, the students requested that both

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schools combine to create a SATB auditioned choir under Harley's tutelage. "Xpression" was born in Term 3 and has since become one of Toowoomba's best young vocal ensembles. Harley's pursuit of excellence and desire to always show musicians at their best resulted in breathtaking performances on every stage. He would never allow a concert to end with speaking – it was always music that had the last word.

At the beginning of 2014 Harley decided to take the reins of our combined Glennie / Grammar Orchestra. He was a tough task-master, but the sense of accomplishment that the students had when they had mastered a particularly difficult piece of music was priceless to witness. He always found ways to challenge the students to be even better versions of themselves. Harley did not just challenge the students, his conversations and interactions with staff encouraged us all to reflect on the "boundaries" and seek alternate approaches which has seen, and will continue to see, a questioning of the "norm".

There is no doubt that Harley was a genius of his craft; however, what was most profound about Harley was his ability to teach, to share this craft and in doing so, fuel the desire for someone else to make it their life-long passion: now, that is a true gift and perhaps the greatest gift of all.

Harley's flame shone brightly. His gift of music and light will forever live on in the hearts of all Glennie staff and students.

Sharon Gilbert

HOD – The Arts

On behalf of The Glennie School

Toowoomba



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