

Mr Bennett (Ben) William Macpherson OAM

The title of Honorary Fellow of the University was conferred upon Bennett William Macpherson OAM at the Faculty of Medicine and Sydney Conservatorium of Music graduation ceremonies held at 4.00pm on 1 May 2009.



The Chair of the Academic Board Professor Bruce Sutton conferring the title upon Mr Macpherson, *photo, copyright Memento Photography.*

Citation

Professor Sutton, I have the honour to present Bennett William Macpherson for the conferring of the title of Honorary Fellow of the University.

For 23 years, until May 2006, Ben Macpherson was Musical Director of the Sydney University Musical Society, Australia's oldest and largest secular and undergraduate choir. In this role, and as chorumaster and conductor for a variety of other ensembles, Ben made sustained and significant contributions to music in Australia. In particular, he assisted the development of young artists and arts administrators through university choirs and Intervarsity Choral Festivals and, more generally, contributed to fostering a love of music among young people. In recognition of his exceptional services to music, he received a Medal in the Order of Australia (General Division) in 2002.

Ben Macpherson holds a Bachelor of Economics from the University of Western Australia, and became involved in the University choral scene during his undergraduate years. He was a student member of the Perth Undergraduate Choral Society between 1972 and 1978, serving as its President and, later, its Assistant Conductor. At this time he also began his association with the Intervarsity Choral Festival movement. These are unique in the world, annually bringing together members of the nation's university choirs to rehearse and perform large concerts, and to socialise.

Ben sang at six festivals and was subsequently chorumaster or conductor at eleven more festivals across the country. In this capacity he prepared and directed programmes ranging from world premières to major choral masterworks – both unaccompanied works, and those performed with the state Symphony Orchestras. Ben's well-respected musical leadership within the Intervarsity movement has been a major ingredient in its vitality and ongoing success.

SUMS has always been active in the musical life of both the University and the city. As its Musical Director, Ben fostered collaboration with other choral and orchestral ensembles, including most of Sydney's major youth orchestras. He encouraged the commissioning of new works, the tackling of adventurous repertoire and the performance of Australian and world premières. He also maintained and enhanced such SUMS traditions as the Annual Festival of Lessons and Carols, affectionately known as Carolfest. Under his leadership, the reputation of the choir was such that it was invited by the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs to

participate in the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games, for which Ben was a chorusmaster.

Ben Macpherson's musical skills are also in demand with other professional ensembles. In 1989, he conducted the combined choirs for the 'Sound Cloud' presentation, a Bicentennial gift to Australia from Japan. He has previously also acted as chorusmaster for the ABC's Epson Master Series and prepared the World Festival Choir for performances with Pavarotti in 1993. Ben is himself also a singer of note: a past member of the Sydney Chamber Choir (based at the University), he has sung with the Australian Opera Chorus and is now part of Cantillation, which records regularly for the ABC and performs with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Ben Macpherson is a passionate musician and a brilliant choral conductor, as countless singers around the nation will attest. He possesses a unique combination of innate musicality, prodigious knowledge, skilful communication and interpretive flair and has an exceptional ability to draw out the best in any choral ensemble. Many credit Ben with introducing them to the lifelong joys of choral singing and encouraging them to improve their skills as choristers and musicians, or as arts administrators. SUMS prospered under his guidance, and continues today as a vital musical force and a fine ambassador for the University. Ben's ability to inspire is perhaps best expressed in his own words of farewell to SUMS in 2006:

"A choir can involve themselves in the expression, through the most personal instrument of all, of the greatest thoughts of the greatest minds of humankind. The output is arguably the most complete expression of humanity that exists, covering the spiritual, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual, subconscious, conscious, rational, irrational, and indeed, in a very significant way, even the physical, attributes of human existence. An appreciation of these types of outpourings is vital to the health of a society that wishes to call itself civilised. It's called "culture". Maybe we have played a small part in the creation of culture within our community. If not, we've at least been having a great time."

Professor Sutton, I am pleased to present to you, for the conferring of the title of Honorary Fellow of the University, choral director and musical educator, Bennett William Macpherson.