

# St Dympna's Primary Aspley, Qld

*"With Singing Hearts"*



I remember the first time I sang at St Peter Chanel in Regents Park in Sydney. Having taught for about eleven years I had never heard anything quite like it. There was a quality that was simply no accident. In the years since I've come across it a few times in a handful of schools. These are schools where singing is a deep part of the fabric of school life and culture and has been for many years. In the case of St Peter Chanel, the Josephites had carried the singing tradition but the first lay principal, Jeanne Pestana, ensured that staff members were selected to carry on that particular part of the Josephite charism.

Another school where such a tradition was evident was St Dympna's in Aspley. The APRE at St Dympna's is Catherine McKechnie, who not only loves music but has a terrific voice. In fact for many years she has sung on Michael Mangan's albums, and worked with Michael at the All Saints' Parish in Albany Creek. After meeting Catherine and the principal I set up in the hall and waited for the arrival of the choir.

Just before the bell, the principal came into the hall and explained that there was a special visitor in the school, either a senator or member of the royal family from the Philippines, who would like to hear some singing. He hated to put me on the spot but could we have something ready in ten minutes! I said we'd give it our best shot.

In a ten-minute workshop with this choir of about 50 students we managed to arrange "These Hands", a song they were only just familiar with, into a three part harmony with actions/dance throughout. Just as we finished in walked the guest who was, to put it bluntly, "blown away". So was I. I've sung "These Hands" in many places with many people, but as a choral performance this was one of the very best.

Such a performance is no testament to me, but great testament to those who have built the tradition. To Catherine and her constant work over many years; to Mary Hehir, the music teacher, whose talent is well-known throughout the Brisbane Archdiocese and beyond (and who also sings on Michael's albums); to Michael Mangan, who spent a few years at St Dympna's, teaching and developing music; and to those who went before them and shared their talents.

"They say when you pray you sing twice", said St Augustine. Well here is a school that prays twice and prays well.