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**David Cusworth** | The West Australian

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 [David Cusworth](#)



 Mirabilis Collective's Julia, Lucinda and Stephanie Nicholls, with MLC's Pamela Grubb, lead school choirs in *What Happens When a Woman for Her Sound, Her Story*, at Wesley Church. Credit: Tallulah Chong

# Mirabilis extol Her Sound, Her Story with MLC, St Hilda's and St Mary's schools at Wesley Church for IWD

Mirabilis Collective nailed their feminist colours to the mast for an International Women's Day concert, Her Sound, Her Story, at Wesley Church in the CBD on Sunday.

The intergenerational ensemble of female musicians cast the net wide to embrace choirs from Methodist Ladies College and St Hilda's and St Mary's Anglican schools in a vibrant celebration of girl power for the ages.

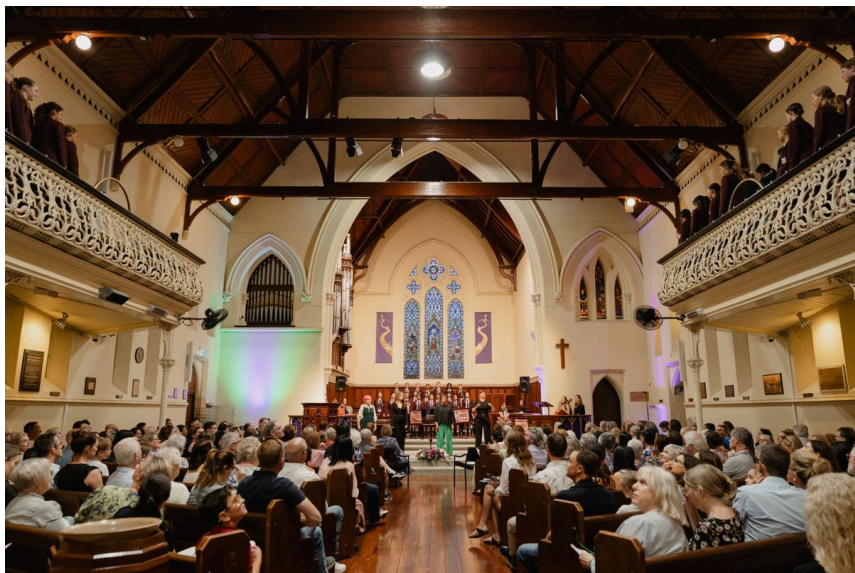
Suffragette hues of purple and green, projected on to the white walls of the church, reflected the seasonal colour for Lent on the altar and pulpit; a cause for reflection and awareness on both counts.

Silvery piano high in the register (Stephanie Nicholls) settled the mood with Shimmer, by Heather Schmidt, as faith mentor Karla Wittkuhn softly intoned an acknowledgment of country and a paean to women of the future, in a narration written by Elena Wittkuhn.

Soaring soprano Lucinda Nicholls staked her own claim to the heights with Missy Higgins' Steer, arranged by her sister, violinist and vocalist Julia; a playful delivery amplified by flute (Emily Clements), violin, cello (Elena Wittkuhn) and piano, anchoring the program in the here and now of women's cultural achievements.

District Court Chief Judge Julie Wager spoke of the history of International Women's Day, with its 20th century socialist roots a powerful reminder of "the oppression and resilience of women through history".

Insistent tolling on the piano (Mia Brine) introduced Taylor Swift's Begin Again, with oboe (Stephanie Nicholls), flute then violin taking up the theme over sustaining cello harmonies, with Julia Nicholls leading her own arrangement down to a whimsical cadence.



Mirabilis Collective's Julia, Lucinda and Stephanie Nicholls, with MLC's Pamela Grubb, lead school choirs in *What Happens When a Woman for Her Sound, Her Story*, at Welsey Church.

An unchanged ensemble floated dreamy tones across the high-vaulted ceilings to lead in Lucinda Nicholls singing Noongar language for Gina Williams' *Kalyakoorl (Forever)*; the lilting soprano catching the folkloric ambience of Williams' composition over richly layered instrumentation in Julia Nicholls' setting.

Massed choirs then rose around the sanctuary and high galleries, directed by St Hilda's Andrea Black, for Sally Whitwell's *I Hold You* (arr. Stephanie Nicholls); a soft cushion of choral sound with flute shadowing the affirmation of sisterhood in song.

St Mary's principal Judith Tudball spoke of *The Power of Women's Voices in Music*, citing as exemplars Barbara Strozzi, a bestselling composer of the Baroque era, and Clara Schumann, a composer and inspiration to others in the Romantic age.

Strozzi's *Che si puo fare* (What can be done) again summoned the versatility of Lucinda Nicholls' voice in the crystalline timbre of the Baroque, echoing down centuries with flute and violin highlights, her diction clear and seemingly effortless.

Schumann's *Ich stand in dunkeln Traumen* (I stood in dark dreams) paired Stephanie Nicholls' limpid piano with Elena Wittkuhn's mellow cello musings in authentic 19th century style. Wittkuhn found colour and expression to suit the mood, emotive without cloying and sensitive to the last dying note.

MLC student Madeleine Kreft voiced *I Am A Woman* (Kat Burns) with hope and inspiration; a still small voice amid women's turbulent history.

That summoned rhythmic pizzicato underpinned by piano for another version of Lucinda Nicholls for Madi Colville-Walker's *Yinyarr Mulana Winyarr* (Free Spirit Woman) in Julia Nicholls' setting; a quietly passionate ballad voice to fit a yearning lyric full of promise as the ensemble warmed to its lighter-than-air treatment.

Dropping back several generations, Joni Mitchell's *Little Green* (arr. Julia Nicholls) evoked the stirrings of contemporary conscience in a mother-and-daughter, piano-soprano combination of Stephanie and Lucinda Nicholls, fading out in warmly sympathetic accompaniment.



School choirs sing *What Happens When a Woman for Her Sound, Her Story*, at Welsey Church.

Close in time but geographically distant, Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* (arr. Julia Nicholls) opened in oboe and flute taking up the iconic strains, with Lucinda Nicholls doing all possible to mimic the original angelic delivery, vulnerable yet bright, agile and striking in equal measure, over bell-like piano and robust cello.

*The Power of Women's Voices Across Generations*, spoken by St Hilda's alumna Jessica-Monique Bojanjac, famed a collective chant by all generations present of Alex Olsavsky's *What Happens When a Woman*.

Rhythmic pulses echoed from the galleries to the sanctuary under the direction of MLC's Pamela Grubb; a cappella power giving physical and spiritual expression to protest.

Mirabilis artistic director Stephanie Nicholls took the microphone to recite *Honouring Voices, Celebrating Strength*, an introduction to the finale, the world premiere of Julia Nicholls' *Accelerate*.

Massed choirs and musicians combined under St Mary's Naomi McKenzie in a rousing, rumbustious introduction to Lucinda Nicholls' pop persona; urging and cajoling one and all to bring on the bright tomorrow of women's empowerment. In the Nicholls family dynamic, reflected through Mirabilis Collective to the schools engaged in this special event, that hope lives large.

Mirabilis Collective's 2025 season, *Unveiled*, continues with *Finding Connie*, on May 4, 5pm, at UWA's Callaway Auditorium.