The distinct choirs of the Brisbane, Melbourne and Ballarat campuses give lively expression to just one of the riches of Catholic culture fostered at ACU National.

Art, music, liturgy, literature and history are equally valued, in keeping with Vice-Chancellor Professor Greg Craven’s comments in his 2008 inaugural address at St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney.

“As very significant repositories of the material and intellectual goods of the Church, there is a strong obligation amongst Catholic universities to foster the richness of Catholic culture,” Professor Craven said. “A Catholic university should be a showcase of the cultural quality of the Church itself within the community concerned.”

The Melbourne Campus’s choir is made up mainly of music students and membership is by audition; in Brisbane, interest is the criterion for joining; while members of the Ballarat choir often provide their own instrumental accompaniment.

“If a thing’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well,” Melbourne choir conductor Andrew Wailes said. “Students at a good university like ACU National should be setting an example, going out into the wider musical world and showing other people how choral music and community music making can be done.”

Earlier this year, the choir joined Melbourne University Choir and the touring Hong Kong Baptist University Choir in a concert of Western and Chinese sacred choral masterpieces, at the beautifully refurbished Concert Hall of ACU National in Fitzroy, performing Mozart’s Regina Caeli and a setting of All People that on Earth Do Dwell in Mandarin.

The choir’s expanding repertoire encompasses everything from the plainchants of medieval Christendom to comedian Tim Minchin’s whimsical ode to recycling, Plastic Bags, telecast for the Melbourne International Comedy Festival Gala.

It has performed Eastern liturgies, including Slavonic Vespers and other sacred Russian music at the Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral for the Chernobyl Commemoration Activities in Australia; taken part in many services at Melbourne’s St Patrick’s Cathedral, including an International Liturgical Conference, where they gave the world premiere of Anastasis by Australian composer Christopher Willcock; been featured on the ABC’s Rising Stars program; and sung a full choral mass for the Archbishop of Westminster at the ACU National Melbourne Campus chapel.
The Brisbane Campus choir, pictured above, has a community focus. Directed by Dr Ralph Morton of the Catholic Cathedral of St Stephen in Brisbane and senior lecturer in music Judy Fromyhr, it is made up of staff, students and alumni of the University, with a third of its members coming from the local community.

The choir gives special services, end-of-semester concerts and performances with invited choirs, such as Kids to Kids Youth Choir, the University of Queensland and Queensland Conservatorium choirs and international choirs such as Klarup Girls’ Choir which recently visited from Denmark.

Its greatly loved service of Christmas Lessons and Carols at St Stephen’s Cathedral and participation in the Cathedrals Festival with both Catholic and Anglican cathedrals are highlights of Brisbane musical life.

The Brisbane choir is also a major participant in the annual Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) Spiritfest, a Queensland choir festival of all RSCM school and church choirs in the state.

Its repertoire includes the canon of classical sacred music; Gregorian chants; great Latin, Italian and German masses; English anthems and oratorios; responsorial psalms and other liturgical music. The work of local composers is also sung, as in a recent concert for the opening of Catholic Education Week, where the choir joined with many schools in the area, from well-known Nudgee College to small parish primary schools, and sang both Vivaldi’s Gloria and an anthem by local composer Jane Massingham.

“Our brief is to be part of the community and also to provide cultural and spiritual activities for the whole campus,” Ms Fromyhr said. “The Brisbane campus is a strong curator of the Catholic cultural heritage. Arts students may choose majors in music, drama or visual arts.” An Evening with the Arts annually celebrates all three fields together.

The Ballarat Campus choir, in existence since before the formation of the University, includes students, staff and community members, and performs at liturgical and other events on campus, as well as in local schools and community centres.

“We are fortunate to also be able to call on talented musicians, some of whom are graduates or former members of staff, to play for our major events,” said ACU National Arts and Sciences Assistant Head of School (Victoria) Roger Hillman, who won an Excellence in Teaching Award this year for his outstanding contribution to students and the music curriculum.

This year, members of the choir provided accompaniment on xylophones, metallophones and percussion at the Graduation Mass at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Ballarat.

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