

## Sistine Choir in Albury

*Joe Wooding & Greg Ryan*

As early as the fifth and sixth centuries there are records of singers being part of the papal entourage. "A capella" style of singing literally refers to the Sistine Chapel (the "capella"), and to the unaccompanied style in which the Sistine Choir has been singing ever since it was installed in the world famous "Capella Sistina" in the 15th century.

Proclaimed as the 'Pride of Italy and the Envy of the World' by King Edward VII, this famous group performed at the Theatre Royal in Kiewa Street on Tuesday, May 2, 1922.

The *Albury Banner* reported that "This body is not only the oldest and most famous choir in Christendom, but one which has for centuries maintained an unwavering standard of excellence." The audience of around 1200 was as large as the town had ever seen, with takings exceeding £500. The *Banner* concluded its review stating that "it was a glorious concert."



The choir at Christian Brothers' Monastery, 481 Smollett Street

A standing ovation lasting several minutes was accorded the choir at the conclusion of the concert.

Earlier that day, many of the boys spent the morning with students at the Christian Brothers College, but found the oval Australian Rules football very different from the round ball they were more familiar with. The afternoon saw the choir attend a civic reception at the Town Hall hosted by Mayor Alf Waugh.

Under the baton of Monsignor Antonia Rella, the 65 voice choir first performed in Australia at the Melbourne Town Hall on April 15, commencing an extraordinarily busy three month tour.

In all, 62 performances were staged, 46 of them in Sydney or Melbourne. Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth also marvelled at their talents. Albury, Wagga, Goulburn and Toowoomba were regional centres to host the choir. All reported hundreds had to be turned away!

Mostly aged between 10 and 14 years of age, the choir thrilled Australian audiences like no-one who preceded them.

Monsignor Rella expressed disappointment at not being able to meet Australian diva Nellie Melba, who was holidaying in North Queensland.