

There's room for a world of backgrounds in companionable inner-city choir

Variety valued in song

Choir | Michael Gleeson

ONE of Melbourne's best-kept musical secrets is home to some of the city's most heart-warming stories.

Melbourne Sings, part of the network of socially inclusive choirs dotted around the greater metropolitan area, rehearses at the Sofitel Hotel on Collins St every Tuesday evening.

The *Leader*, which attended a recent rehearsal, was immediately struck by the extent to which the choir is reflective of the inner-city's multicultural mix.

Members hail from across the globe, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Afghanistan, the Philippines and China.

Abrar Kather, originally from Afghanistan, joined the choir four months ago after friends recommended it to him.

"It's great to be able to sing in public – it's something I always wanted to do," said Mr Kather, also a talented painter.

"In my country, singing was not encouraged. This is a great experience for me and maybe one day I can sing professionally."

Southbank's Elok Nur, from Indonesia, said she was looking for a social outlet on arriving in the country.

"I don't sing very well, but I'm so glad I came down and had the chance to meet all these people," she said.



The Melbourne Sings choir rehearses in the Sofitel Hotel on Collins every week.

"It's one of those things I look forward to every year."

Melbourne Sings' conductor, Shaun Hislip, said he derived enormous pleasure from seeing choir members grow in confidence and express themselves through song.

"It's great just to see them come in every week and be released from everything else they've been through during the week," Mr Hislip said. "Some of the members even come in to practise outside of rehearsal time."

► **Melbourne Sings and six other socially inclusive choirs will perform at With One Voice at the Melbourne Recital Centre this Wednesday, September 8. Tickets from \$30 to \$60. Details: creativityaustralia.org.au**

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● Hairspray tickets

IT'S been a big year for musicals in Melbourne and another worldwide hit is about to wow our city. Feel-good musical *Hairspray* starts at the Princess Theatre next month. Twice the production size of *Jersey Boys*, the musical has won more than 30 major awards. Newcomer Jaz Flowers stars as Tracy Turnblad, who sets out to make it on to TV's most popular dance show in 1960s Baltimore. We have 10 double passes, each valued at \$280, to give away to a preview show at 8pm on September 29. To enter, go to melbourneleader.com.au by 5pm on Wednesday, September 15.

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