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Voices NZ Chamber Choir, New Zealand String Quartet & Karen Grylls, 'Requiem for the Fallen' NZ Festival, February 2014. Photo: Chris Watson

NZ Youth Choir and Voices NZ Chamber Choir at the NZ Festival

The New Zealand Youth Choir and Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir made a welcome return to the New Zealand Festival in 2014. Chief Executive of Choirs Aotearoa NZ Trust, Roger Lloyd, looks back at these performances and what the reviewers had to say about them.

Sounds and Sweet Airs

The joint concert by NZ Youth Choir and Voices NZ Chamber Choir conducted by their respective Music Directors, Karen Grylls and David Squire, presented settings of Shakespearian text by a variety of choral composers – Jakko Mäntyjärvi, Richard Rodney Bennett, John Tavener, Matthew Harris, Andrew Carter, David Willcocks, our own David Hamilton and last, but not least, Ralph Vaughan Williams. Starting with Vaughan Williams, born in the latter part of the 19th century through to the three composers who are still with us, the programme covered a wide range of styles with music inspired by the English bard's lyrics.

From the 38 plays of William Shakespeare, nine provided the words for this performance – *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, *As you like it*, and *A Winter's Tale*. Some texts will have been more familiar than others – 'Come away Death', 'Double, double, toil and trouble', 'Full Fathom Five', 'It was a lover and his lass' and 'O Mistress mine' to mention a few.

These settings were a great vehicle for our two national choirs, who performed their own sets of works individually and joined forces to open and close the programme. John Button commented in the *Dominion Post*, "... this concert was a timely reminder of the quality of choral singing we have in this country." In the online publication *Middle C*, Rosemary Collier summed up the concert: "The entire performance was characterised by captivating finesse, and did honour to Shakespeare. Bravo!"

PS The NZ Youth Choir stayed together in the capital for a couple of days after this concert to give performances to schools in Masterton and Wellington before dispersing to their homes around the country.

Requiem for the Fallen – *World Premiere*

The major music premiere of the NZ Festival was *Requiem for the Fallen*, a joint commission by Choirs Aotearoa NZ Trust and the New Zealand String Quartet Trust with funding provided by Creative New Zealand. The Requiem is a setting by Ross Harris of poems by Vincent O'Sullivan mingled with the Requiem Mass in Latin. It brought together Voices NZ Chamber Choir, the NZ String Quartet, solo tenor Richard Greager under the baton of Karen Grylls with sounds of taonga pūoro (Maori traditional instruments) composed and performed by Horomona Horo.

The work, semi-staged on a platform in the middle of Wellington Cathedral of St Paul, was directed by Jonathan Alver with lighting design by Paul O'Brien. Audience members sat either side of the platform creating a 'music in the round' effect. Reviewers were in accord with their praise for the new work and its presentation. Elizabeth Kerr in the *NZ Listener* said, "... the artists have combined traditional Latin texts, O'Sullivan's economical lyricism, string quartet, chamber choir and solo voice in a spacious work of shattering power." Lindis Taylor in his *Middle C* review thought the work "... captured the essence of one of the most profound experiences in the history of this country".

The Requiem was preceded by Voices NZ singing Purcell's *Hear my prayers*, O Lord, Messiaen's *O Sacrum Convivium*, and Schnittke's *Drei Geistliche Gesänge* and the NZ String Quartet contributing the 'Molto Adagio' (*Heiliger Dankgesang* – Song of Thanksgiving) movement from Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor Op. 132. John Button wrote in the *Dominion Post*, "Both Voices NZ and the NZ String Quartet gave us performances of breathtaking quality."

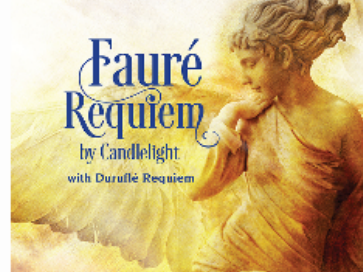
William Dart in his NZ Herald review stated that "Horo's exquisitely gauged improvisations ranged from a crystalline koauau introduction to a war-like pukaea in the Dies Irae, that evoked the horrors of hell itself, in tandem with Harris himself on thunderous bass drum". He went on to say: "Voices NZ and Grylls are a potent team and there was pride of ownership in their handling of Harris' immaculately crafted score. The arching phrases of *In Paradisum* seemed to leap to heaven itself..."

Concluding his review John Button commented, "An unforgettable occasion that I hope people outside Wellington get a chance to experience." Be assured, the joint commissioners of *Requiem for the Fallen* are working towards this.

Fauré and Duruflé

On Saturday, 7 June at 7.30pm in Wellington Cathedral of St Paul, Voices NZ Chamber Choir, Orchestra Wellington, organist Michael Stewart with conductor Karen Grylls will present the Requiems of French composers Fauré and Duruflé.

Gabriel Fauré's most popular work is his Requiem completed in 1890. It is one of the great Requiems of the 19th century but unlike those of Verdi and Brahms, which sound as though they were composed with either the opera house or the concert hall in mind, Fauré's work was written for a liturgical setting and the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul is a perfect venue for this glorious work.



Born in Normandy, Maurice Duruflé studied in Paris and became one of the city's most distinguished organists. His Requiem of 1947, based on themes from Gregorian chants, is the perfect companion for the Fauré Requiem. At this concert Kīwi soloists, Jayne Tankersley and Bianca Andrew, will be joined by Australian Opera's principal baritone Christopher Hillier who will be making his New Zealand debut.

Tickets \$35 Adult, \$20 Student/child are available from Ticketek
Tel: 0800 TICKETEK (842 538) www.ticketek.co.nz
Door sales will be CASH ONLY.

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