

THE SHARP EDGE

Registered Charitable Trust No CC21921

December 2014



Members of the NZ Youth Choir, conductors David Squire and Rowan Johnston, with the Rolling Stones, Mt Smart, 22 November.

LOOKING BACK at 2014

CHOIRS AOTEAROA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROGER LLOYD, REVIEWS THE PAST YEAR.

Following the New Zealand Youth Choir's tour to the USA and Canada at the end of 2013, there was the possibility that whatever followed would be a bit of an anti-climax. Luckily, the New Zealand Festival in Wellington was next on the calendar and this feast of artistic activity never fails to raise expectations and energy levels. The North American tour marked the end of the current NZ Youth Choir's three-year cycle and auditions had been held the previous September for the 2014-2016 choir – this resulted in one third of the choir being new members. In parallel with this, Voices NZ Chamber Choir's current and prospective members auditioned at centres around the country. So, both choirs started afresh in 2014.

Choirs Aotearoa's two choirs' contribution to this year's NZ Festival was a joint recital, and the premiere of a commission. Earthquake strengthening had robbed the Festival of two of the city's favourite choral venues, Wellington Town Hall and St Mary of the Angels Church. As a result, the NZ Youth Choir and Voices NZ Chamber Choir found themselves in the unusual setting of the Wesley Church in Taranaki Street for their joint concert. It proved to be a fairly dry acoustic and the combined choir of 66 singers and their conductors, Karen Grylls

and David Squire, in the confined space had to choreograph carefully their stage moves between each piece. Nevertheless, the concert, 'Sounds and Sweet Airs', settings of William Shakespeare's texts for a celebration of the Bard's 250th anniversary, was warmly received.

A premier of a major work is always exciting and a large audience gathered in the Cathedral of St Paul to hear Voices NZ Chamber Choir, the NZ String Quartet played Beethoven's *Molto Adagio* Op. 132 before the premier of 'Requiem for the Fallen' by Ross Harris and Vincent O'Sullivan. NZ Listener reviewer, Elizabeth Kerr, wrote of this joint Choirs Aotearoa/NZ String Quartet Trust commission: "Impeccable performances by choir and string quartet captured the anguished pain and beauty of the work. Operatic tenor Richard Greager as an old soldier personalised the story, producing real chills as he met his old "cobber" in the Memento Mori." Members of the audience were very moved by this poignant work, the first of many events to commemorate World War I.

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'Requiem for the Fallen' Voices NZ, NZ String Quartet and Karen Grylls, Dunedin, October

In June, Voices NZ Chamber Choir gave a performance of the Durufle and Fauré Requiems in the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul as part of the Cathedral's 50th Birthday Celebrations. The Durufle was accompanied by the Cathedral's Director of Music and Organist, Michael Stewart and, for the Fauré, a 24-member Voices choir was joined by an ensemble from Orchestra Wellington. The large audience was enthralled by the performance of these popular works and John Button wrote in *The Dominion Post*, "... the prolonged applause matched the quality of what this fine choir delivered for Karen Grylls".

A second performance of 'Requiem for the Fallen' was given in October at the Dunedin Town Hall as part of Arts Festival Dunedin. For Elizabeth Bouman, *Otago Daily Times*: "This was indeed a never-to-be-forgotten experience for all who attended."

The NZ Youth Choir's second major commitment this year was its week-long residency in Dunedin.

Rehearsing in the Burns Hall at First Church, they shared the accommodation with boxing matches and a mah-jong tournament, activities not readily associated with choral music! The day spent at Otago Boys High School was a happy occasion and included a workshop with the choirs of Otago Boys and Girls High Schools and performances at both the Junior and Senior assemblies. The OBHS and OGHS choir, 'Barock', was joint winner of the Auahi Kore Performance Award at the NZ Choral Federation's Big Sing Finale and David Squire, conductor of other joint winner, Voicemale, presented the trophy.

The week concluded with a performance in Dunedin's St Paul's Cathedral on the Friday and, following a coach trip up State Highway 1, the concert was repeated in the new Christchurch Transitional ('Cardboard') Cathedral on the Saturday. This was the NZ Youth Choir's debut in this venue. Assisting David Squire in this week of training and performance were Vocal Consultant, Dr Morag

Achison and Accompanist, Dean Sky-Lucas.

Chamber choir performances made up the remainder of the Youth Choir's year: in March, a Wellington-members choir, supplemented by a few out-of-towners, was delighted to perform in the St James Theatre for the 20th Birthday Dinner of Principal Sponsor, Infratil. Many in the group also presented a concert in the Classical Expressions series in Expressions Arts and Entertainment Centre in Upper Hutt in October. The programme comprised 2014 repertoire with several solo items from members of the choir and a virtuoso piano contribution from Isaac Stone. Another Wellington gig was to entertain guests at the Wellington Airport Community Awards at the Marae in Te Papa in November.

A spectacular event was in store for the Auckland members of the NZ Youth Choir in November with the invitation to appear on stage with the Rolling Stones at their Mt Smart concert. The long-time favourite, "You can't always get what you want", was an encore and the choir's involvement had to be kept strictly secret. When the concert was postponed from its original date in April, the singers had to hold their tongues for another seven months until the night of the concert, 22 November! As choir member Natasha Wilson said on the 'Breakfast' TV interview "... we were bursting by the concert." Appearing in front of 37,000 Stones fans was an extraordinary and exciting experience for these young singers, and they were cheered and applauded.

Voices NZ Chamber Choir was also moving in unfamiliar circles when its new CD 'Voice of the Soul' was nominated in the Best Classical CD category in the Vodafone NZ Music Awards. In amongst the stars of the Rock and Pop scene, it was heartening that this "journey of traditions" as Karen Grylls describes it, was acknowledged by the NZ recording industry. We offer our congratulations to our colleague, composer Jack



NZ Youth Choir workshop with Otago Boys and Girls High Schools, Dunedin, September.

Body, as winner of this award.

Also in November, Voices NZ and Karen Grylls set off on a week-long visit to Australia. This was only the second time that the choir had crossed the Tasman, the first being with the NZSO for the 2000 Sydney Olympics Arts Festival. This time, Voices gave a recital in the Eugene Goossens Hall at the ABC Centre in Sydney which was broadcast live across Australia on the Classic FM network, with a simultaneous relay via satellite on Radio New Zealand Concert – an estimated Australasian audience of over 100,000 listeners. The programme entitled '... of the Virgin and the Bard', featured songs dedicated to the Virgin Mary and settings of Shakespeare's poems.

The choir then moved on to Melbourne where they performed a lunchtime concert in St Paul's Cathedral. A schools workshop and conductors' workshop were followed by an evening concert in St Paul's with Polyphonic Voices, a Melbourne-based chamber choir under the direction of Michael Fulcher. For the performance entitled 'Magnifica', the two choirs provided individual contributions to the first half of the programme and, after the interval, came together to sing Bach's 'Magnificat in E-flat'. The concert was recorded by the ABC for broadcast on Christmas Day and will be heard on Radio NZ Concert in the future. This was a fitting climax to Voices NZ's Australian tour.

Looking back is a useful management tool for assessing our organisations progress over a year and how the challenges presented to our two vocal ensembles were met. We have every reason to be proud of our singers and music staff for their outstanding achievements in 2014. This exercise also gives the added pleasure of reliving favourite moments from a year of many diverse and wonderful experiences. I hope the readers of this review can share some of those treasured memories.



Voices NZ, Karen Grylls & Dean Sky-Lucas, ABC Sydney, November

INFRATIL EXTENDS SPONSORSHIP



Trustee David Caygill and Infratil's Tim Brown at NZ Youth Choir's Parliament concert in 2012.

LAST MONTH INFRATIL DECIDED TO EXTEND ITS SPONSORSHIP OF THE NEW ZEALAND YOUTH CHOIR BY A FURTHER TWO YEARS TO 2017.

Infratil became the NZ Youth Choir's Principal Sponsor in 2012 providing a minimum of \$100,000 per year. The initial period of sponsorship due to end in mid-2015 has been extended by two years.

Trust Chair, Trevor Kempton, said, "We are very pleased that Infratil has decided to extend support for the NZ Youth Choir as its involvement has made a significant difference to the work of our national choir. In the last two and half years we have been able to broaden the choir's activities in New Zealand and undertake a significant tour of the USA and Canada last year with a choir of 60 singers. The continuation of our partnership with Infratil allows us to plan ahead with confidence and start working toward the NZ Youth Choir's tour to Europe in 2016."

At the start of the sponsorship Marko Bogoevski, Infratil CEO said "We are delighted to be able to help. Infratil is owned by 31,000 New Zealanders and its success is based on being a welcome member of its communities. Singing in a choir is New Zealand's most popular form of participatory music, thousands of people sing with school, church and social choirs and other groups. As with so many endeavours, participation works best when there is also excellence, both as a goal and to ensure there are skilled teachers and leaders. By providing sponsorship of Choirs Aotearoa we hope we can assist with the development of excellence for the good of both those singing now and in years to come."

Meet our sponsors

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Donations

Donations are vital in maintaining support for the New Zealand Youth Choir and Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir. They also assist in funding expenses relating to both choirs' rehearsal, performance and educational activities throughout New Zealand. For further information go to www.choirsnz.co.nz/donate and complete the donation form, or see below left.

DONATIONS FORM

By donating money to Travel Donations you are making a practical contribution to performances or rehearsals through the travel costs. Supporting Donations underpin the structure supporting the NZ Youth Choir and Voices NZ Chamber Choir.

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AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

In March 2015 the Auckland Arts Festival will host the first north of the North Island performance of 'Requiem for the Fallen'. Commissioned by the Choirs Aotearoa NZ and New Zealand String Quartet Trusts with financial support from Creative New Zealand, this work by Ross Harris and Poet Laureate, Vincent O'Sullivan, was premiered in Wellington at the NZ Festival last February and repeated at Arts Festival Dunedin in October. It is a powerful and moving 35 minute dramatic work that pays homage to the many who surrendered their lives for our country particularly in the 1914-1918 Great War.

The work is uniquely Kiwi with taonga pūoro performer and composer, Horomona Horo, providing a spiritual context for Harris' music, O'Sullivan's poems and the Latin text. The critical acclaim has been unanimous and audience reaction overwhelming. This is a "must go" event in the Festival calendar. For further details go to www.aucklandfestival.co.nz/events/requiem-for-the-fallen-at-great-hall/

'Ata Reira', a choral celebration of light, is a joint Voices NZ & NZ Youth Choir recital, with their respective Music Directors, Karen Grylls and David Squire, together with organist James Tibbles and Euphony from Kristin School joining forces to perform Bob Chilcott's 'Canticles of Light'. This three-movement work comprises of two evening hymns and a song for the morning. Other music includes settings by Whitacre, Tallis and Lauridsen, and a choral setting of Elgar's Nimrod with the text 'lux aeterna'. Choirs Aotearoa will present a newly commissioned work in te reo Maori by Tuirira Wehi. For further information go to www.aucklandfestival.co.nz/events/ata-reira-at-great-hall/

A fledgling National Choir of New Zealand performed Tippett's 'A Child of Our Time' with the NZSO under the direction of the English choral specialist, Sir David Willcocks in 1980. In 2012 NZ Youth Choir joined the NZSO National Youth Orchestra for a performance of the work in Christchurch following a joint residential course. The five spirituals embedded in the work, arranged for a cappella choir by the composer, have become something of a party piece for NZYC and they make a regular appearances in concert programmes.

On Saturday, 21 March the NZ Youth Choir will be joined by a large Voices NZ Chamber Choir and additional singers for a performance of this great anti-war oratorio with the Auckland Philharmonia directed by Eckehard Stier in Auckland Town Hall. For more information go to www.aucklandfestival.co.nz/events/a-child-of-our-time-at-great-hall/



THANK YOU

Maintaining two national choirs requires huge generosity from a number of organisations and people.

Our main financial supporters, Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Community Trust, joined in 2012 by the NZ Youth Choir's Principal Sponsor, Infratil Limited, provide the essential environment for our choirs to flourish. Our trio of NZYC Section Sponsors and the many private donors add to the fabric of our organisation and make things possible. Choirs Aotearoa NZ Trustees not only contribute time in their governance role but readily provide the administration with expert advice across a range of issues. The artistic staff lead the way on our choral mission with enthusiasm and passion and the dedication of the members of the New Zealand Youth Choir and Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir make these aspirations a reality. Last, but certainly not least, are the members of the New Zealand public who treasure choral music and support our performances. See you all in 2015!