

THE SHARP EDGE

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2016 European Landmark Tour

CHOIRS AOTEAROA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROGER LLOYD PREVIEWS THE NEW ZEALAND YOUTH CHOIR'S 2016 EUROPEAN LANDMARK TOUR.

International touring started very early in the history of the New Zealand Youth Choir. Such trips were a rarity and, following the founding of the Choir by Guy Jansen in 1979, its 1982 tour to Europe was considered quite an adventure. The next overseas expedition was six years later with a NZYC chamber choir of 40 members under Music Director Prof. Peter Godfrey. This two-month long tour included the Choir's first visit to the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen.

After the 1988 tour, Karen Grylls took over as Music Director and, since 1993, the NZ Youth Choir has undertaken overseas tours roughly every three years to coincide with its audition cycle. The international tour is for many Choir alumni a rallying point in their NZYC experience and members of touring parties still communicate and gather through lifelong friendships.

Singapore Victoria Concert Hall

Apart from being an ideal stop-over destination for a group travelling to Europe, the NZ Youth Choir has developed a warm relationship over 33 years with the Singapore Youth Choir and 2016 will see the fifth collaboration between these organisations. This time the venue will be the Victoria Concert Hall recently reopened after a major refurbishment. NZYC's concert will be on the evening of 28 June 2016.

International Festival of Academic Choirs

About 100kms east of Prague is the small city

of Pardubice lying on the river Elbe. The city is famous for an annual cross-country steeplechase called 'Velká pardubická' and for its gingerbread. The International Festival of Academic Choirs started in 1968 and has been held every other year since 1980. The Festival has hosted choirs from all around the world including Australia, United Kingdom, China, South Africa, the USA and Venezuela. The NZ Youth Choir will be the first ensemble to attend from New Zealand.

Le Quesnoy

There have been many articles written about Le Quesnoy and the daring exploits of the NZ Division in capturing the town just four days before the end of World War I. The decision to capture the town by stealth, rather than the usual WWI method of crushing it with artillery, has been long remembered by the townspeople and visitors will find many references to the bond between Le Quesnoy and a country on the other side of the world. From the main town square, we see the plaque 'Place des All Blacks' and 'Avenue des Néo-Zélandais' which leads to the 'Jardin du Souvenir' (Garden of Remembrance). A path leads to the NZ Memorial where the Youth Choir will sing at a memorial service on the morning of 7 July prior to its 7.30pm concert in Eglise de Le Quesnoy.

Notre-Dame de Paris

Standing in front of the west façade of Notre-Dame de Paris', the clamour of bells before

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VOICES
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Celestial Spheres

by Catrin Johnsson

On 6 November, 24 sopranos and altos from Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir with conductor Karen Grylls, gave a concert for women's choir, harp and horns in St Michael and All Angels Church, Christchurch, hosted by Christopher Marshall in his 'Christopher's Classics' Series. With its strong tradition of women's choirs, Christchurch was an ideal place for this constellation of Voices New Zealand to present the programme 'Celestial Spheres'.

The programme began with Brahms' Op.17, Four Songs for Women's Choir, Harp and two Horns. This is the young Brahms, speaking unapologetically of love, longing, love sickness and death, through romantic poetry and musical language deeply rooted in German folk song. This work was wonderfully contrasted by the song cycle *Petites Voix* by Poulenc, in which we listened to children's observations of life; thoughts about the distant evening star, the lost dog, the owl's flight, a sick boy, a shy hedgehog. This was followed by David Hamilton's stirring *Prayer of a Woman*, originally written as a partner piece to Brahms Op.17, with words by New Zealand poet Robin Hyde. A dark piece and mostly introverted,

restlessly murmuring throughout and at one point arriving at a clustered, mumbled prayer with the words "Father, Master, free me, from necessity of words". This was beautifully and sensitively accompanied by the two horn players, David Cox and Julian Weir, and harpist Helen Webby.

After the interval, Helen presented the recently discovered Douglas Lilburn *Poco Lento* and *Study for Solo Harp*, which is his only piece for solo harp. This was played with beautiful elegance, imagination and had the breath and space in the music making of such a truly experienced stage performer. Then followed two Choral Hymns from the *Rig Veda*; *To the Waters* and *To Vena*, by Gustav Holst. Through mysterious poetry and harmonies, we were introduced to Indian gods, such as Indra, Varuna and Vena. Voices continued with Holst's well-known, a cappella eight-part piece *Ave Maria*.

The concert finished with a world premiere performance of Leonie Holmes' song cycle *Land Pictures*. This work is a setting of five poems by Anne Powell, composed for women's choir and harp, and was commissioned by Choirs Aotearoa for Karen Grylls and the Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir. The tonal language in the cycle varies with great playfulness; from contemporary, ballad-style writing to octatonic scales and funky parallel fifths, greatly supporting and enhancing the beautiful, honest poetry of Powell. The audience clearly delighted in hearing these powerful, graphic descriptions

of landscapes continuously mixed with detailed observations of the little things in life which give us comfort and safety. This is surely the first time any of us had heard a sung version of words such as "plains as open as pikelets" and "mugs of milo". The cycle finished with the breathtakingly beautiful piece *Blessing*, leaving us with the words "May the Maker of water and air and fire heal you who walk the earth."

This concert was very well attended and the warm, standing ovation at the end was truly deserved by all performers. Karen Grylls conducted the concert with fantastic intensity and flair, in both tragedy and comedy, bringing out wonderful storytelling, colours and vibrancy in the music. This was singing of highest international standard by the women of Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir.

• *Catrin Johnsson, mezzo soprano, is an international guest tutor of the New Zealand Singing School and Artist Teacher at the University of Auckland, vocal consultant and language coach.*



Catrin Johnsson.

PHOTO: FIONA WILSON



Left to right, Helen Webby, Karen Grylls, Anne Powell and Leonie Holme.



Voices NZ Chamber Choir and horns in performance.

PHOTO: JOHNATHAN KINGSTON-SMITH

Message from Christopher Marshall

Christopher's Classics in Christchurch finished a successful season of concerts with the sopranos and altos of Voices NZ Chamber Choir. A programme designed for colour and interest particularly appealed to our chamber music audience. Two horns and a harp were an integral part of the music presented and gave it the richness which was most appreciated by a large audience in St Michael's and All Angels Church.

The skills of Karen Grylls, Music Director, were evident in the careful selection and placement of the works throughout the programme with

the New Zealand composers (Leonie Holmes and David Hamilton) boldly holding their ground with appealing and deeply satisfying music. The solo piece for harp by Douglas Lilburn, paying tribute to him in his centenary year, Helen Webby carried off with her usual sensitivity and natural musicality. The only disadvantage was an ambulance or police siren that chose that moment in the concert to pass the church.

The piece by Leonie Holmes, *Land Pictures* in five movements was for me a revelation as I had not heard her music until that evening. Leonie's work was sensitive, satisfying and structured

so that it was an excellent choice to allow the audience to take home in their heads and hearts and to nourish their enjoyment for some time after the concert. The post-concert celebration, as the choir suggested, was at a pub and modern pubs in Christchurch are dark and noisy with disco and no doubt some background fridge humming – such a contrast to the riches of the evening's concert. But, in retrospect, the evening was a truly wonderful and marvellous concert where skill and professionalism seamlessly gave us delight.

Christopher Marshall

Europa 2016

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Mass is an unforgettable experience, as is the massive sound of the organ being played inside. In July, Paris is full to the brim with visitors but inside the Cathedral the celebration of Mass, uninterrupted by tourists, is a sacred and solemn occasion. The choral contribution is an integral component of the ceremony and being given the responsibility to participate is an honour.

We have proposed to the Cathedral a wholly New Zealand programme including David Griffiths' Beata Virgo, Andrew Baldwin's Kyrie and Agnus Dei from his Petite Mass, and have specially commissioned a Communion motet from David Hamilton, a setting of Ave verum corpus. The NZ Youth Choir may not be the first New Zealand choir to have the privilege of singing in Notre-Dame but this is probably the first all-Kiwi programme presented in this astounding building. Admission to the 6.30pm Mass on 9 July is open to all.

Oxford University Church

University Church of St Mary the Virgin sits on the north side of Oxford's High Street. There has been a church on this spot since Anglo-Saxon times and, being at the centre from which the University of Oxford grew, its parish consists almost exclusively of university and college buildings.

Its history includes the trial for heresy of the Oxford martyrs in 1555 including the execution of Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. There have been famous sermons from its pulpit by John Wesley, and it was involved in the foundation of the Oxford movement by John Henry Newman and John Keble. The St Mary's of today is a lively Church of England parish church which plays host to university services and events. It is a major tourist attraction welcoming over 300,000 visitors a year. Most importantly for us, it is a popular venue for events and concerts. Tickets for the 10 July concert at 7.30pm are available from Tickets Oxford www.oxfordplayhouse.com/ticketsoxford/#day=2016-7-10

Windsor

Windsor Castle is a royal residence that really looks the part! Emerging from a shopping street, typical of any prosperous south-of-England town, the fairy-tale-looking building dominates the scene and it's only the need to dodge the tour buses when crossing the road that brings you back to 21st-century reality.

The castle's stage door and security desk is appropriately called the Henry VIII gate. Passing by medieval-looking buildings, the accommodation block for the living-in choir, NZYC will go to the green room called 'The Dungeon'. Belying its name, it's a light, airy



Oxford University Church of St Mary the Virgin.

modernised space. From there it is just a few steps into the magnificent St George's Chapel. The NZ Youth Choir will perform its lunchtime concert at the head of the Nave in front of the entrance to the Quire and the Organ screen. The concert on 11 July at 1.10pm is open to everyone in Windsor Castle grounds with tickets purchased at the admission centre or in advance on Tel: +44 20 7766 7304 or Email bookinginfo@royalcollection.org.uk

NZ Memorial, Hyde Park Corner

The New Zealand War Memorial in London, officially named 'Southern Stand', is a memorial to the war dead of New Zealand in the First and Second World Wars. Unveiled in 2006, it is on the Piccadilly side of Hyde Park Corner, northeast of the Wellington Arch, and diagonally opposite the Australian War Memorial. The NZ Youth Choir will hold a service there on the morning of 12 July.

St John's Smith Square

St John's Smith Square is a short walk from Westminster Square: the St John the Evangelist church built by Thomas Archer was completed in 1728. Its nickname, 'Queen Anne's Footstool', came about when Archer asked the Queen what she wanted it to look like. She kicked over her footstool and said, "Like that!" The four corner towers were, in fact, added to stabilise the building against subsidence so the tale is probably apocryphal.

For 213 years, the church served the surrounding parish but does seem to have been somewhat accident-prone. In 1742, its interior was damaged by fire and, in 1773, it was struck by lightning. On 10 May 1941, the final night of the Blitz, the church was directly hit by an incendiary bomb and was gutted by fire. It stood in ruins for over 20 years and was rescued from becoming a car park when the Friends of St John's started to raise money to restore the building to its former splendour for use as a concert hall. The inaugural recital was given on 6 October, 1969 by Dame Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyng.

Since then, it has come to be regarded as one of the city's major concert halls for a wide range of musical performances. In its 2015/16 season it is playing host to the Tallis Scholars, London

Mozart Players, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, pianist Imogen Cooper and, on 12 July, the New Zealand Youth Choir at 7.30pm. Advance tickets Tel: +44 20 7222 1061 and www.sjss.org.uk

Ely Cathedral

Ely Abbey was founded in 672 and the present building dates back to 1083 with its cathedral status granted in 1109. Ely is built on a 23-square-mile island which, at 85 feet, is the highest land in the fens. Major rivers feed into the fens and, until draining commenced in the 17th century, the surrounding countryside was freshwater marshes and meres. The great cathedral of Ely, which still appears to float high above the flat surrounding landscape, has long been known as 'The Ship of the Fens.'

In 1321, work began on a large free-standing Lady Chapel, linked to the north aisle of the chancel by a covered walkway. The Chapel is 100 feet long and 46 feet wide, and was built in an exuberant 'decorated' Gothic style over the course of the next 30 years. The NZ Youth Choir's concert in the Lady Chapel on 14 July is at 1.00pm. Admission free.

Cambridge Summer Music Festival

The Cambridge Summer Music Festival is that city's major annual festival of classical music in some of the city's most historic buildings. In the case of the NZ Youth Choir this will be the Chapel of St John's College. St John's was founded in 1511 as a college for students in the liberal arts and theology. Positioned on the banks of the River Cam, its main attraction is its Bridge of Sighs, said to be Queen Victoria's favourite place in Cambridge.

St John's has a distinguished tradition of religious music and, since the 1670s, has possessed a world-famous College Choir whose main duty is singing the daily services in the College Chapel during the University Term. The Cambridge Summer Music Festival hopes to have tickets on sale from the end of January. Information about the NZYC's Cambridge concert on 16 July at 8.00pm will be announced on the Festival's website www.cambridgesummertime.com

DONATIONS FORM

THE COST OF NZYC'S EUROPEAN TOUR is over \$400,000 and the choir members have been asked to contribute \$5,000 each towards this. This leaves a \$150,000 shortfall for Choirs Aotearoa NZ Trust to find from its grants and through fund-raising and sponsorship. Every contribution will help us to showcase our music and youth as New Zealand's cultural ambassadors. On the panel below please make a contribution to the Trust for the tour or go to www.choirsnz.co.nz/youth/tours/2016/venue-donations to donate online.

MY DONATION to the Choirs Aotearoa NZ Trust for the NZYC's 2016 Landmark European Tour

I wish to contribute a Travel Donation to the New Zealand Youth Choir's tour in 2016. I will pay \$ _____

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Donations over \$50 will be acknowledged on the website and all gifts in a Choirs Aotearoa publication.
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Thank you for your donation to
CHOIRS AOTEAROA NZ TRUST

Go to our website to take part in the **Prize Draw!**

Music Director, David Squire, will lead the members of the NZ Youth Choir at Christmas on the Beach in Orewa.

Christmas on the Beach

Several Auckland members of the NZYC are singing carols and some of the European tour repertoire in a feature slot at the Orewa Christmas on the Beach on the evening of Sunday, 20 December. The choir is one of three headline acts, the others being Phil Madsen and The Warratahs. This annual event is a highlight of the Hibiscus Coast calendar, with lots of local musicians contributing, an audience of several thousand and a huge fireworks display to finish the evening. Every year a different charity is chosen to receive the funds raised from the event, and this year it is the local Hospice. However, the NZYC singers will also receive a small contribution towards their tour accounts.

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NEW ZEALAND FESTIVAL

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa has one of the world's great and beloved voices. Her career has spanned more than 40 years and she's one of the most honoured sopranos of all time. This one-off New Zealand Festival recital, featuring Schubert, Strauss and Brahms among other composers, allows you to hear Dame Kiri solo and alongside the 'supreme polish and breath-taking accuracy' (*The Dominion Post*) of Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir, whose members are drawn from the country's best singers and are conducted by Music Director, Karen Grylls.

The combination – together with Dame Kiri's long time piano accompanist, the internationally renowned, Terence Dennis – promises to be very special indeed.

For booking information about this New Zealand Festival event go to:
www.festival.co.nz/2016/events/dame-kiri-te-kanawa/

Sunday 13 March,
6pm, Michael
Fowler Centre