

Sing New Zealand

The story of choral music in Aotearoa

GUY E. JANSEN



\$59.99

CATEGORY: Non-fiction

ISBN: 978-0-9951001-5-2

THEMA: AVLC1MBN, AVM1MBN

BIC: AVGC81MBN

BISAC: MUS051000, MUS020000

PUBLISHER: Massey University Press

IMPRINT: Massey University Press

PUBLISHED: November 2019

PAGE EXTENT: 376

FORMAT: Flexibind

SIZE: 240mm x 168mm

PRINTABLE A3 POSTER

AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

HOW GROUP SINGING EVOLVED FROM ITS COLONIAL ORIGINS TO TODAY'S AWARD-WINNING INTERNATIONAL CHOIRS

New Zealanders love to sing together. Thousands of us sing in hundreds of choirs throughout the country, making it our most popular and participated in performing art. Most of us have sung in school choirs, or participated in national competitions such as the Big Sing, and increasingly people are joining choirs as adults, recognising the benefits to wellbeing and the sheer pleasure of making music together.

But the story of choirs in New Zealand is not just one of enthusiastic participation, it is also about striving for excellence, and achieving it. And it's not just about our great soloists finding international acclaim; national choirs such the Voices New Zealand Chamber Choir and the New Zealand Youth Choir have won international awards, and many others tour overseas.

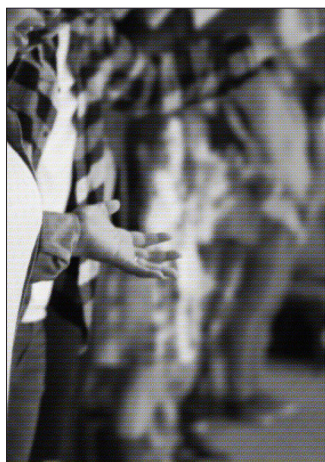
This didn't happen by chance. So what was needed for New Zealanders to succeed at this demanding, precision art form, and who were the key people involved? Author Guy Jansen was one of them; the world's first national youth choir, the National Youth Choir of New Zealand, was just one of his initiatives. In *Sing New Zealand* he describes choral music's trajectory from the enthusiastic amateur efforts of the nineteenth-century to today's internationally renowned national choirs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The late **Guy Jansen ONZM** (1935–2019) had a lifetime's involvement in music, music education and choral music development in New Zealand. A recipient of the Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship, Arts Council, Fulbright and other awards, he was the first New Zealander to study conducting at the prestigious School of Music at the University of Southern California, and he introduced the teaching of conducting to New Zealand via summer schools and workshops. From 1975–89, Jansen was the National Officer for Music in the New Zealand Department of Education, responsible for primary and secondary school music. In 1979 he founded the New Zealand Youth Choir, reputed to be the first national youth choir in the world, and in 1986 the New Zealand Secondary Students' Choir.

SALES POINTS

- The first book to examine a significant part of New Zealand's cultural history.
- The book looks at the elements needed to create singers and choirs of international standards.
- Written by a leader and innovator in choral music. Dr Jansen's musical knowledge adds depth to the book and provides practical information for conductors and singers.
- A lively historical account, covering early choral societies, the excitement created by visiting choirs and conductors, and the incredible diversity of choirs.
- Over 120 photographs.



1

The heritage of Māori song and the birth of a new tradition

However, a tradition of singing in groups had developed. This was because a chant required a continuous sound from beginning to end. While a solo singer would need to stop regularly to take breath, members of a group could stand at different places to keep the sound going. It was because a group was always needed that a Māori solo singing tradition didn't develop. As Koro Poroa says, 'a solo singer would never have been able to satisfy the demands of the ear'.

The pre-eminence of chant singing before the arrival of Europeans is clear, and it must have required a very disciplined approach, because each category of traditional chant had its own distinctive melodies and tempo. Some chants were microtonal (microtones being an interval smaller than a semitone) and these chants must have required intensive listening and practice. Witnesses tend to find quarters or other microtones difficult even to hear, let alone sing.

A Māori group singing a chant would have been heard by the crew of James Cook's Endeavour in 1769 when they were ashore in Poverty Bay on the North Island's east coast. Cook was the second significant European explorer to arrive in New Zealand, the first being Dutchman Abel Tasman in 1642, who did not venture ashore. Cook himself found the music 'very different to a European ear', and thought that they sang 'in unison', while his officers were dismissive of the musical ability of 'the natives'. On a later voyage, Cook had no better a young James Burney, son of Charles Burney, the famous English music historian, and Burney thought that there was 'no great variety in the Music'. There were other remarks in a similar vein.

There is a caveat, however, about what was meant by a comment by James Burney in 1773 after he had heard a performance by a young warrior, Ihaka Te Rangahaua, and his party: 'Sometimes they sing an undertone which is a third lower, except by the last 4 notes which are the same.' Chant expert Dr Karu Grylls and others interpret the comment as demonstrating 'singing in harmony'. It could be argued, however, that the undertone was a harmonic variant of the chant, not several notes down or harmony. There are no triads (three-note chords) involved, therefore there is no 'harmony' as traditionally understood; it is made up solely of intervals, which, by definition, consist of two notes only.

Understandably, Burney's witnesses may well have perceived the undertone harmonically, not realising that the indigenous people didn't employ harmony, but the aural impression of harmony which 'Te Rangahaua and his companions could have given was real enough. But the motivation of the singers could have had a much different aim to give variety to the chant and to respect the status of the chant by coming back to it every now and again with unisons.



Top: Māori warriors and women performing a haka in the 19th century. Bottom: Māori women performing a haka in the 21st century.

Māori had sung corporately (gathering 'in the bonds of love') for several centuries before Uta. Equally, the Europeans present shared a long history of corporate singing. 'Two very different traditions came together on that sunny Northland beach. In old Christmas Day 1844 witness the birth of a distinctively new choral tradition in New Zealand, one that would eventually blend Māori and Pākehā. Or is it claim too audacious?

In time, the new choral art form being established in New Zealand would feature indigenous and introduced elements, high art and popular art, many musical genres and styles, fabulously deep performances as well as fads and fashions. Choral music would become an essential part of life and widely accepted everywhere.

The basic fabric of Māori corporate singing was already in place. The foundations of a European-influenced choral edifice were, however, to be laid slowly, for a long time they would lack a fully 'in place' quality. To understand the beginnings of the Pākehā culture in New Zealand it is to the musical scene in England of the time that we now must turn.



"BEHOLD I BRING YOU GOOD THINGS OF GREAT JOY" - The choir of the St. Paul's Church, London, 1844.

Centennial music festival was proposed to the government by a 1996 delegation led by Stanley Oliver, a respected conductor recently arrived from Canada, and members of the Royal Wellingborough Choral Society. They had sought advice from Malcolm Simpson, the eminent English musician who was at the time conducting orchestral concerts in New Zealand.

The official Centennial celebrations were launched on 8 November 1996 by a massed choir of 450 in front of an audience of almost 60,000 at the Centropark in Wellington. Stanley Oliver was the conductor of the historic event which had led to impressive and inspiring proposals: "Pioneers speeches, the choir, accompanied by bands, using hymns 'Oh Handmaids', 'God Defend New Zealand' and 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

In June-July 1998, the Centennial Music Festival featured competitions for choral, song quartet and composition, as well as major choral works presented with celebrity soloists and the country's first national orchestra conducted by Englishman Anderson Tyer. The hope had been that concerts of choral or orchestral music would be presented in the four main centres and, if possible, in smaller cities and towns, with excellent taste in being people from outside places. The hope was a simple fulfilled.

Evidence of the strong growth of choral singing in the four main centres was provided by several performances of Charles Cooke's *Faust* in each of them, involving local choirs. These performances proved to be the highlight of the festival, the New Zealand *Listener* reporting that the name of *Faust* had certainly been put into the musical vocabulary, large and small, of nearly all New Zealanders."

The response to the song quartet and choir competitions disappointed the organisers. Chalmers, particularly in Otago and Auckland, expressed a desire to take the risk of having their choir placed anywhere but first. "There were no such realisations from conductors of some prominent choirs. The adjudicators placed Christchurch's *Waiwaka* Choir first, Wellington's *Schola Cantorum* second, and Auckland's *Dorian Singers* third.

However, it was the success of a young New Zealand composer, Douglas Libbert, in the composition competition that really caught the public's imagination and became a topic of nationwide interest. The recognition of the musical voice was seen to be on a par with other major New Zealand events. The *Listener* wrote: "The Making of a New Zealander". Libbert gained first prize for a 1999 choral/orchestral/soloist work, *Phallos Country*, which captured his sense of himself as a New Zealand. Anderson Tyer, chief adjudicator, pronounced that it was an excellent



Douglas Libbert in the electronic music studio at the University of Waikato. Program was taken around 20 August 1999 by an independent Energy Trust photographer. ALLAN ANDERSON NATIONAL LIBRARY, 2007/08/15

made. William Hill Walden-Mills, director of music at King Edward Technical College, Dunedin, moved to Wellington to take up the position in 1936. He brought with him experience of music advisory work in Newark, England and six years of teaching in Dunedin since emigrating to New Zealand in 1913. There is a question as to why a New Zealand born person wasn't appointed instead, an answer might well be that there was no well-trained, experienced and qualified primary or secondary music teacher available. The specifically secondary school music training existed at the time.

What Wellington received in late 1936 was a slight, unassuming figure with a rather military manner and sometimes controversial ways, who had come from a traditional English background. But as an amenable 30-year-old with endearing energy and a warm sense of humour, he was willing to fit in and accept what departmental inspectors were wanting him to comment on. The *Evening News* (Gifford) had been acceptable to the Department of Education, but Walden-Mills was.

Once in his new position, Walden-Mills was surprised to find himself immediately assisting in the selection of members for the first National Youth Orchestra. This bold concept, of an orchestra for the best of the emerging orchestral players nationally, had been discussed by James Behrens in 1935 and 1936 and a year later was formally established by new National Orchestra conductor, John Hogkiss. 1939 also saw Walden-Mills conducting a first national secondary schools orchestral holiday concert in Auckland. With choirs in his first two he had been very popular with the Dunedin Choral Society and had already formed a small adult chamber choir, the *Resonance Singers*, in Wellington. It is not surprising that Walden-Mills came up with the idea of a choral singing course similar to the orchestral course he had already been involved in. He invited Spowage College, New Plymouth to host the first course in August 1940.

The important and wide-ranging ramifications of this initiative will be made clear in the next chapter. But a national youth choir to match the National Youth Orchestra would have to wait another quarter of a century.

Along with the growth and expansion of music-making and singing nationally, there was now development in the already strong music of the tangata whenua. As a result of a new focus on the nurturing of Māori song and dance, choral singing in the 1960s became one of the features of kapa haka competitions. "A national festival, the *Māoriata*, emerged in the late 1960s, and became a one-day historical festival and competition in 1972". Its disciplines included whakairo (carved wood, whakaitera (carved contemporary chert), waiata (songs, poi, haka and whakaitera text: song)" National respect, recognition and international acclaim developed for these



First National Polynesian Festival Competition, February 1972. Māoriata was held at the University of Waikato, Hamilton. ALLAN ANDERSON NATIONAL LIBRARY, 2007/08/15

Teowyn Evans

Teowyn Evans, 2018

With a year of the slow being introduced, Geoffrey had taken up an appointment as director of music at the Wellington Cathedral of St Paul and was unable to continue the work he had begun. Other degree subjects in conducting and choral music were added after Karu Grylls had returned from overseas graduate study and obtained a part-time lecturing position at Auckland University. Later, Associate Professor Grylls was to engineer a useful choral music pathway through Auckland's Bachelor of Music course. The new idea to win recognition for choral studies offered through a postgraduate diploma and master's degree covers as well as provision for the award of a Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Music. Senior students in these programs undertake practical work with university and other choirs and observe the work of many Auckland, South Island specialist and senior Christchurch, Robert Winters and other vocal coaches.

Some other universities and polytechnic institutions began to teach conducting. Martin Sichel at Canterbury University, Simon Tipping at Wellington Polytechnic and Jack Spies at Otago University were others who taught the subject. However, Auckland remained the focus, not least because of the most influential. Attempts to set up substantial courses at other universities have proved unsuccessful. It could be that New Zealand is too large to support more than one fully functioning teaching programme in choral music. And because of Auckland's culture where students of conducting know each other and do a large extent support each other year round, it is no accident that so many Big Sing Finalists come from the City of Sails and receive the top awards. The result of the concentration of intensive training in one city has meant that other centres can feel deprived of regular stimulation to achieve higher and higher standards. While replication of the Auckland system is not necessary, there will likely come a point when Christchurch or Wellington will feel compelled to provide a through-going programme in all aspects of choral music.

The story of how Jack Spies came to have an impact on conducting education is particularly interesting. Peter Platt, Blair Professor of Music at the University of Otago from 1992 to 1994 and himself a skilled choral trainer, appointed Spies from Yorkshire in 1966. Spies had studied at Edinburgh University and at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, and initially his specialities in teaching were composition, instrumentation, analysis and research-orientated music studies. However, he also became principal conductor of the Dunedin Sinfonia for 13 years and musical director of the Southern Cross Festival for about 20 years. Spies gave the overall number of