
STAYING IN TUNE: CHAMBER MUSIC NEW ZEALAND AT 60

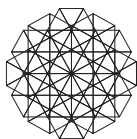
Jane Dawson



STAYING IN TUNE: CHAMBER MUSIC NEW ZEALAND AT 60

Jane Dawson

Published by



Chamber Music
New Zealand

This book is dedicated to the memory of Kate, my first chamber music partner. Our rendition of ‘There is a Tavern in the Town’ at the primary school talent quest led us on to other levels of music-making.

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PREFACE

The celebration in 2010 of sixty years of vibrant existence of Chamber Music New Zealand in communities throughout New Zealand has been a good reason to remember and document many of the events and the people who have shaped the organisation. Since 1985, John Thomson's publication *Into A New Key* has been visited on many occasions, to verify early happenings, and to refresh memories of the first thirty three years.

Jane Dawson, in researching the period from 1983 to today, has continued the story through interviews with performers, present and former staff, and volunteer committee members, as well as an exhaustive scrutiny of the minutes of Board meetings and also programmes. Her integrity, and her close interest as a part time staff member, in the presentation of the history, has been an intrinsic and valuable contribution to the final book. To Jane, on behalf of the Board and Staff, I extend congratulations. Our thanks too, for providing future generations with a picture of the many facets of the present organisation, and the changes which have been bravely undertaken to reach this milestone.

The support of the Stout Trust has enabled Chamber Music New Zealand to commission Jane Dawson to write the book, and their ongoing generosity to our organisation is much appreciated.

A cover picture by Piera McArthur is her generous gift for the many wonderful concert experiences she and her late husband John have enjoyed.

Generous contributions towards the printing of the book were received from Ann Wylie, Rick and Lorraine Christie, Les and Patricia Holborow, Peter and Carolyn Diessl, and Paul and Sheryl Baines.

Rick Christie, responding to a request for reminiscences, wrote:

"My introduction to Chamber Music dates from my first meeting with

my wife Lorraine, as her father, Don Irwin, was one of the original NZ Chamber Music Federation identities.

My involvement with the Executive, eventually as President, was all Arthur Hilton's doing. Using his considerable charm, Arthur persuaded me to help him with Marketing and Finance, and one thing led to another, with the result that I found myself on the Executive in 1973.

I became President, somewhat unwillingly, in 1985, following the unexpected death of David Wylie, and continued till 1989. A lot changed during my time as President, and I look back on it with considerable satisfaction. In particular, with a supportive committee and the strong management of Elisabeth Airey, we created a new Federation structure, which has pretty much endured till this day."

Rick's comments highlight the strength of commitment that staff, and many people from all walks of life, have made to the ongoing breadth of development of this amazing entity. Throughout these momentous sixty years we have enjoyed a very special partnership with our sister organisation, Musica Viva Australia, and the ongoing investment which Creative New Zealand makes as our core funder has been pivotal in our successful journey.

The joy of playing, composing and listening to live chamber music has enriched so many lives in New Zealand, and will, I hope, continue to do so into the distant future.

June Clifford

Chair, Chamber Music New Zealand Trust Board

August 2010

“In a sense, every act of connection with the past is an act of imagination, simply because we are not there and must at some level imagine what we are talking about. At the risk of being tautological, this is why history can continue to be written even though the events it describes have been exhaustively recounted and, of course, do not change. Different generations re-imagine such events – perhaps thanks to new data or research – and re-invent (hi)stories.”

*Paul Little, Heritage New Zealand,
Issue 112, Autumn 2009 page 3;
reprinted courtesy of
New Zealand Historic Places Trust*

SETTING THE STAGE: AN INTRODUCTION

Significant birthdays are a time to celebrate and to share memories, for organisations as much as for individuals. Turning 60 used to signal retirement and a time to wind down, but that milestone now marks the start of a new phase of activity for many people. In its diamond anniversary year, Chamber Music New Zealand is lucky, facing the 21st century in good health, with plenty of friends and self-confidence. Life has not been entirely easy, though, and this book documents some of the highs and lows the organisation has been through.

Chamber Music New Zealand has many facets. It is a national agency and a professional concert promoter, but relies on the work of supporter groups in the cities, and supports the volunteer committees who present concerts in small towns. The artists engaged range from top international 'names' to young New Zealanders who are still studying, and from mediaevalists to all-contemporary music specialists. Most are pianists or string players, but there are a few wind players, percussionists and singers. Subscribers want to hear traditional chamber music and the organisation wants more people to appreciate that genre. At the same time, Chamber Music New Zealand seeks to broaden the experience of its audiences by extending the definition of chamber music and by expanding the repertoire into the 21st century. Chamber Music New Zealand is also a 'development agency', educating a new generation of audience members, inspiring students, and nurturing young artists-in-the-making.

These strands of activity have been separated in this book to make the various developments easier to follow, but in reality they are intermingled. The balance between them has been a source of friction at times: when budgets are tight not everyone agrees that education, or subsidising

small centres, or expanding the repertoire, should remain a priority. Board members and staff have been charged with ensuring the long term well-being of the national organisation, though, and their decisions should be viewed in that light. The current Chair of the Board, June Clifford, has been involved at local and national levels since 1956 and has seen the organisation wrestle with different models of decision-making. “It is very hard for people to come to a national body and leave behind all their local issues. Often that is quite useful to feed in, but you have to be careful that you are looking at things for the good of the whole organisation.”

Many other perspectives on the performance of chamber music in New Zealand could – and hopefully will – be recorded. In particular, many local societies have their own histories to write and a few have done so in a small way. They are outside the scope of this book, however, which has been tasked with recording the story of the national body, Chamber Music New Zealand.

In 1982, the death of one of the most influential figures in the organisation, Arthur Hilton, prompted the then Music Federation (now Chamber Music New Zealand) to ask historian John Thomson for an account of the path taken to that date. His book *Into A New Key* has provided a valuable record of the people involved, their activities, and their motivations.

Nearly 30 years have passed – a good span for memories – and it seems appropriate to repeat the exercise. Much has happened in that time, both within Chamber Music New Zealand and in the wider world. In particular, the organisation has changed from being essentially a club, largely run by volunteers, to a business with paid staff doing most of the day-to-day work. The shift started in 1987 but happened gradually, and Chamber Music New Zealand sat somewhat uneasily between the two states until 2005, when the governance structure caught up with the way of working. This book records that evolution, and seeks to capture the views – or at least recollections – of some of those involved.

My starting date is the half-way point of 1980, for reasons of mathematical symmetry, but also in recognition of the fact that it is difficult to have

a perspective on events which have happened in very recent times and that an overlap with the earlier book is therefore worthwhile. Today's assessment of the early 1980s looks very different from that of the time. When John Thomson finished writing in 1984 he was upbeat: "the Music Federation is today seemingly indestructible". He could not have foreseen that economic circumstances would get worse and the organisation would, in the words of former General Manager Elisabeth Airey, come "close to going out of business". Similarly, this history must finish on an optimistic note and leave future commentators to put the latest events into context.

I have taken the earlier work as read. A backwards look has been provided in Chapter 10 not as a recapitulation, but as a review in the light of later developments. Some new perspectives on people and events covered by John Thomson emerged during my research, and are recorded where appropriate.

Into A New Key introduced some of the people who also appear in this story: Fred Turnovsky, a founder and an early leader, who went on to become one of New Zealand's most significant arts patrons; Arthur Hilton, President for 20 years until his death in 1982, and effectively an unpaid Chief Executive; and Elisabeth Airey, who was the Manager under Arthur Hilton and then promoted to the equivalent of today's Chief Executive position in recognition of the role she took on after his death. With the exception of Elisabeth, who remained in her job until 1997, the continuation of Chamber Music New Zealand's story is not dominated by individual names. Several people, in fact, have mentioned an 'unwritten rule' that Presidents did not stay for more than about three years, in order to avoid duplicating the reign of Arthur Hilton.

Individuals involved in Chamber Music New Zealand activities are passionate about chamber music, and their enthusiasms affect the path taken. Not everyone's desires lead them in the same direction, but those passions have moved the organisation forward, and in most cases have led to a workable compromise being found. One of the most frequent comments from the people I talked to, even those who had been in the thick of controversy, was that in the end, everyone just wanted the same outcome – good concerts of wonderful chamber music.

Events are inevitably recalled differently by the various participants, and memories are filtered through subsequent experiences and conversations. As a result, not all versions of events match the recorded details, but since peoples' feelings help to explain their reaction to change, I have tried to convey the essence of what they thought and why. Many of the bumps have been smoothed out in the re-telling of stories, though comments such as "board meetings could be fiery" or "there were tensions around paid staff versus volunteers" suggest that a rather less polite version of the same story is hidden away. Unless they appear to have affected the outcome for the organisation, I have allowed such anecdotes to lie below the horizon.

Many of the participants are still alive and actively committed to the future of chamber music in New Zealand, and the intent of this book is to provide a sympathetic (though hopefully representational) portrait. Character references indicate some colourful episodes but now have little more than gossip value for those who were not there: "had ants in his pants", "autocratic style", "used to nod off after lunch in meetings", "you needed a degree of tact", "was a tyrant", "a very quiet man to speak to but when he got het up about something", "used to 'do' Courtenay Place after meetings", "most of the drama was engineered by him", "he walked out and had to be persuaded to come back".

I am humbled by the sense of commitment to Chamber Music New Zealand that so many people have shown over a long time. The organisation would not exist in its current format without the long hours of work put in behind-the-scenes by both current and past workers, whether paid or not. Some of those un-sung heroes appear on the following pages, but there are many others. I hope their communities recognise and treasure them.

Of necessity, I have only interviewed a few of those involved over the past 30 years and included a fraction of the material I collected. The stories of selected individuals and societies have been used as examples, to illuminate the wider experience. They should not be considered more pivotal than the many others doing similar work – the only real winner I have picked is chamber music.

Like John Thomson's book, this volume is another chapter in the history of Chamber Music New Zealand, and follows his lead in being a "celebration of its origins, development and destiny". It is neither the complete story nor the only story, and will hopefully spur others on to record their versions. I look forward to reading the next episode.

Jane Dawson, July 2010

Acknowledgements

I am enormously grateful to the many people who have helped with the writing of this history. First on the list must be Arnold Solomons, a current Board member and former Chair, who had the vision of a follow-up volume to *Into a New Key*, and who has provided enthusiasm and practical support throughout. This book would truly not exist without him, nor without the equally focussed assistance of June Clifford.

Interviewing people involved has been fascinating and rewarding, and I thank all of those who have taken the trouble to share their thoughts with me. In particular, I acknowledge the input of Allan Chisholm, Amichai Grosz, Andrea Oliver, Andrew Sykes, Ann Wylie, Anne Bonning, Barry Ward, Basil Stanton, Berys Cuncannon, Brian Budd, Catherine McKay, Christine Yard, Colin McLachlan, Debbie Rawson, Dorothy Marshall, Dot Duthie, Elisabeth Airey, Euan Murdoch, Gareth Farr, Gary Hawke, Gillian Ansell, Graeme Edwards, Greg Cotmore, Harry Bonning, Heather Martin, Jenny Grieve, John Sinclair, Julie Sperring, Liz Ross, Margery Charlton, Mary Smit, Maureen Revell, Maurice Till, Michael Houston, Miles Rogers, Rae de Lisle, Reka Solomons, Richard Hardie, Robert Oliver, Rod Smith, Roger Moses, Russell Armitage, Shona Thomson, Susan Case, members of the Takács Quartet, and Wilma Smith.

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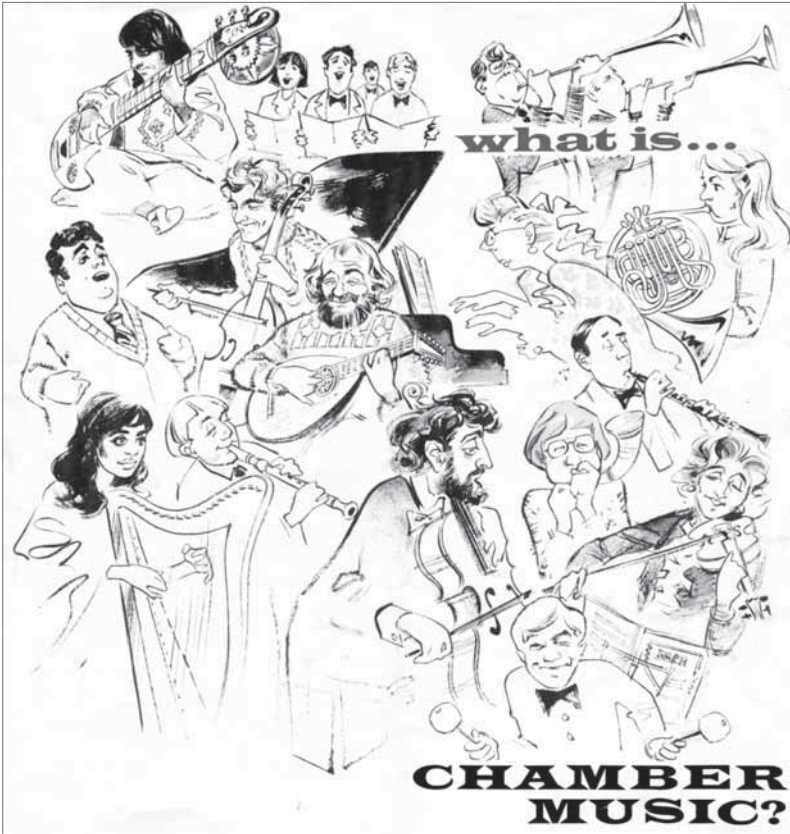
infinitely more readable, and have turned the process of writing into an enjoyable learning experience.

The current staff of CMNZ have been extraordinarily tolerant of my researching questions, and unfailingly helpful. I also acknowledge the role of past staff members, who preserved the source documents that are now stored in an accessible form in that national treasure, the Alexander Turnbull Library.

Finally, a ‘thank you’ from the bottom of my heart to my partner, Robert, for his practical and emotional support. I owe him a dinner or two.

About the author

Jane Dawson grew up in a music-loving household in Dunedin, trained as a performer at Otago University and studied music analysis at King’s College, London. She now lives in Wellington and enjoys varied life as a music writer, accounts clerk, volunteer guide at Zealandia wildlife sanctuary, and advocate for safer cycling.



A promotional brochure from the mid-1980s featured drawings by Paul Hunt of some well-known musicians, with text by Joy Aberdein, and was aimed at new audience members.

What's in a name?

When **The New Zealand Federation of Chamber Music Societies** was formed in 1950, the name reflected the fact that the new body was a coalition of existing organisations. In the early 1960s it was altered to **The Chamber Music Federation of New Zealand**.

The name was one of the issues addressed at the time of a major review in the late 1960s, according to the then General Manager Elisabeth Airey. “They decided that the word ‘chamber’ was working against the development of audiences. It was felt that the image of the organisation was of one presenting an art-form for a small elite, an intellectual elite.”

When the name eventually became **The Music Federation of New Zealand** in 1972, the organisation was expanding into jazz, music theatre and chamber orchestras, so the earlier name was considered out of date. It was also “too much of a mouthful”, according to National Committee member Basil Stanton, though he considered that the new name was not much better. “The change to ‘Music Federation’ was a big fight, but it was the wrong name: music cannot federate!”

Too many important issues were being dealt with in the restructuring in 1987 and the Executive decided that the name should not, at that time, be changed. But the organisation had become centrally-run, so was no longer a ‘Federation’ of autonomous societies, and programming had returned to ‘core chamber music’ repertoire and groups.

In 1992, after much debate and some opposition to yet another change, particularly from the smaller societies, **Chamber Music New Zealand** was chosen. The new name had the advantage of explaining what the organisation was there for – a useful attribute in an era when branding and market position were increasingly important.

Names used in this book are generally those that were in use at the time. For the period up to 1992, the organisation is referred to as the Music Federation, or simply the Federation, and for subsequent years as Chamber Music New Zealand. In order to conserve ink, this has been abbreviated to ‘CMNZ’ throughout the main text.

The same principle of using the contemporary name has been applied to elements of the structure, including the names of various governance committees as noted on page 92.

People are generally described by the role they held at the time in question, with the exception of the head staff members, who are described by their last job title. Thus Elisabeth Airey is known as General Manager, although she began as Administrator and was Manager in the interim, and Brian Budd is called Chief Executive, although he began as General Manager.

Other organisations have also changed their appearance over the years, the most obvious being the government arts funding body. In 1960 the **Arts Advisory Council** was set up to assist the Minister of Internal Affairs in the allocation of grants, and in 1964 that developed into the **Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council** (abbreviated to QEII Arts Council). Thirty years later the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa was set up, and given the 'trading name' **Creative New Zealand** (abbreviated to Creative NZ). That 1994 legislation also established two Boards which make funding decisions that are implemented by Creative NZ: Te Waka Toi (responsible for funding for Maori arts), and the Arts Board (for all other arts funding).

The **New Zealand Symphony Orchestra** has not always had that name, beginning as the **National Orchestra** in 1946, and being called the **New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation Symphony Orchestra** between 1964 and 1975.

Radio was also part of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (originally Service), and classical music was broadcast on its 'YC network' of stations. That network became known as the '**Concert Programme**' of Radio New Zealand when radio and television broadcasting were separated in 1975. During the 1980s 'frequency modulation' broadcasting developed in New Zealand, and in 1991 the classical music programme moved to the new transmission method and was renamed **Concert FM**. A re-branding exercise in January 2007 produced the name **Radio New Zealand Concert**.

What Is Chamber Music?

Finding two people who agree on a definition of ‘chamber music’ is notoriously difficult, and the subject has generated debate during the past 60 years over what should be ‘in’ and what should not. Initially, Federation concerts were given almost entirely by instrumental groups, with the occasional vocal recital added. In 1964 a vocal ensemble – the renowned Deller Consort – toured as part of the season. Not everyone appreciated their inclusion: the Auckland Chamber Music Society decided that consort singing was not chamber music, and had to be persuaded to present the group.

A gradual expansion of the musical boundaries within which the organisation operated led to the name being changed to the Music Federation, but economic pressures in the early 1980s forced a return to the small and portable chamber groups of the early days. The need to find new audiences in an expanding entertainment market also encouraged the organisation to explain what it did, and a promotional pamphlet was produced, giving a definition of chamber music based on history and group size.

“Traditionally instrumental, chamber music was composed to be played by friends at home or in similar surroundings and as such, it had its own character. There is generally one instrument to a ‘part’, and between two and nine parts in all, although today these numbers are more flexible and vocal music may be included.”

“The string quartet lies at the heart of chamber music, and some of the finest music ever written is in this category Two violins, a viola and a cello provide a perfect medium and produce harmony in four parts over a wide register of sound and texture. Add more instruments to a string quartet, and the musical colours change. When a piano is added, the balance changes totally due to the different timbre. Bring in wind instruments, and the spectrum changes again.”

“Since the aim of chamber music is for people to make music together, duos are generally considered the smallest unit. The most popular trio is the piano trio, comprising violin, cello and piano, and although it does not have the same sonority as a quartet, composers such as Schubert and Shostakovich use the contrasting instruments to produce imaginative and enjoyable musical colours.”

A different approach was taken in 2003 by CMNZ’s Artistic Manager, Berys Cuncannon.

“Chamber music has been called the music of friends, and it is rather like a conversation – each voice is important and adds something to the whole People define chamber music by where it came from – music for small groups originally played in chambers or rooms rather than concert halls. Maybe we should define it by what it is – a musical conversation, which has the capacity to enlighten, entertain, enthrall, perhaps even to disturb us at times.”

A notable feature of the prosperous first years of the 21st century is the expanded range of music presented, with vocal recitals and ensembles, early music and percussion reappearing in the programme, and forays into jazz and ethnic music.

After weathering some difficult times in the 1990s, a political shift towards recognising the economic and social value of the arts is perhaps giving CMNZ the confidence to add spice to the core repertoire again.