



**Orpheus
Choir**
Wellington

A BRIEF HISTORY



Seven decades of entertaining New Zealanders

Orpheus had its genesis in the founding of The Hutt Valley Music Society in 1947, and under the direction of Malcolm Rickard was officially named The Hutt Valley Orpheus Society in 1952. The first concerts took place in the Hutt Valley High School Hall, with a mainly English repertoire. Performances of the *Messiah* became an annual event and the Alex Lindsay String Orchestra accompanied the concerts in a relationship which was to last until the early 70s.

In 1958, concerts with the National Orchestra (now NZSO) under the baton of John Hopkins, became a regular part of the Choir's schedule. 1959 saw Orpheus record the Berlioz *Childhood of Christ*, and perform Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*, followed by Verdi's *Requiem* in 1965, and Beethoven's *9th Symphony* in 1967.

The words 'Lower Hutt' were dropped from our name in 1962 as more and more concerts were performed in the city. In 1985, we became known as the Orpheus Choir of Wellington.

Peter Godfrey ONZ took over leadership of the Choir following Malcolm Rickard's retirement in 1983. He continued to broaden our repertoire. Major works introduced during Peter's tenure included Elgar's *The Music Makers*, *Hymnus Paradisi* by Howells, Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, and the Berlioz *Requiem*.

Orpheus has regularly staged several of its own concerts annually, it has also enjoyed engagements with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Orchestra Wellington.

Our Music Directors

Since 1992, the Choir has enjoyed six Music Directors, who have all opened up new horizons for the Choir.

The following list includes some of the highlights from their time with Orpheus:

Philip Walsh 1992 – 1999

Rachmaninov's *Vespers*; Stravinsky's *Les Noces* in conjunction with ballet; whole programme of *Lullabies of Broadway* with orchestra and jazz trio.

Andrew Cantrill 1999 – 2004

Durufle's *Requiem*; the Monteverdi *Vespers*; Finzi's *Intimations of Immortality*. In 2002, to mark its 50th anniversary, the Choir commissioned a special work, *Orpheus in Rarohenga* composed by John Psathas to a libretto by Robert Sullivan.

Michael Fulcher 2004 – 2012

Gareth Farr *Terra Incognita*; Panufnik's *Westminster Mass*; Karl Jenkins' *Armed Man*; Taverner's *Lament for Jerusalem*.

Mark Dorrell 2012 – 2014

Mark's broad experience in music theatre contrasted with the church music background of his predecessors. Notable among his many performances was an exciting semi-staged version of Bernstein's *Candide* and a moving performance of Mozart's *Mass in C minor*.

Brent Stewart 2014 – present

Brent's first major concert as Music Director of the Choir was a semi-staged performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on 23 May. Additions to our repertoire include Vaughan Williams *Sea Symphony*; Bernstein *Chichester Psalms*; McMillan *Seven Last Words from the Cross*; Whitacre *Cloudburst and Lux Arumque*; Handel's *The Seasons*; Leek *Kondilla*.

Other new horizons under Brent — flashmobs at the Bucket Fountain singing anything from the Hallelujah Chorus to *Dies Irae* from Verdi's *Requiem*, taking part in the annual Wellington City Council waterfront celebration as part of the Matariki Festival, performing at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in Wellington and at Cuba Dupa, and recording Dave Dobbyn's *Welcome Home* in the wake of the Christchurch mosque massacre to offer support to the victims and their families.
