

Cellists of Otago

Director's Report

AGM 29 Feb 2020

2019 was a productive and successful year for Cellists of Otago. We performed 2 programmes, and presented a Cello retreat which received good publicity, large audiences and positive reviews. Above all we had a lot of fun and improved in our level of musicianship.

Bach In the Subways, 23 March 2019

Bach in the Subways is an international movement, founded by cellist Dale Henderson of NYC. Musicians around the world celebrate Bach in the Subways by offering performances in public spaces and concerts open to all to celebrate Johann Sebastian Bach's birthday. Celebrating his 334th birthday, Cellists of Otago performed a 30-minute programme of works by Bach in the Toitū Otago Settlers Museum and Meridian Mall Food Court. We dedicated our performance to the victims and families of the Christchurch tragedy as a gesture of standing together in unity as members of one human family. It was attended by large and supportive crowds and although we are unable to earn any money for these performances, it served the purpose of bringing music to a larger audience and making it more accessible.

CellOtago retreat 2019 (6-8 October)

CellOtago Retreat is a mini concert festival and intensive training course presented by the Director of Cellists of Otago, Dr Heleen du Plessis, to enhance the technical and musicianship skills of cellists and provide a platform for cellists from all over NZ to interact and perform together.

The first CellOtago retreat, October 2019, presented by Cellists of Otago with the support of the University of Otago School of Performing Arts included a 4 day intensive course with master classes, workshops, cello ensemble coaching and rehearsals. It culminated in a large-scale concert with 16 cellos, organ and the City Choir of Dunedin in the Dunedin Town Hall where more than 750 people attended.

Apart from local cellists and students, High School pupils from all over NZ were invited to take part for free and offered travel grants and billeting. Seven visiting cellist from Wellington, Whangarei, Christchurch and Nelson participated.

Norma's Big Birthday Bash 6 October, Dunedin Town Hall

Cellists of Otago joined with City Choir Dunedin conducted by David Burchell and Mark Anderson in a concert in celebration of the 100th birthday of the Town Hall's magnificent organ, Norma, played by City Organist David Burchell, and Simon Mace. Highlights of works for cello ensemble choir and organ included the Adagio from Saint-Saëns' 'Organ' Symphony, the 'Pilgrim's Chorus' from Wagner's Tannhäuser, Albinoni's Adagio, and excerpts from Fauré's Requiem and Elgar's Enigma Variations.

With altogether 16 players from Cellists of Otago and visiting guest cellists from the rest of NZ the concert was an absolute highlight and our best with refined ensemble playing and quality of sound blend! We were also delighted that the Dunedin Town Hall could host the over 750 people who queued in long lines to get tickets!

Reviews:

- **'Delightful Afternoon of Celebration and Music'**, Brenda Harwood, *The Star*, 10 October 2019
-

"A collaboration between the Dunedin Town hall Organ Trust and Cellists of Otago, with special guests City Choir Dunedin, the concert showcased not only the 100-year organ, but also some wonderful Dunedin talent"

"Directed and led by Heleen du Plessis, Cellists of Otago were enhanced by visiting players, making a cello choir of 16 members. The group played superbly together"

"Du Plessis and Burchell showed virtuosic skills in a duet performance of Cassadó's Frescobaldi Toccata"

"Norma's big birthday bash was a delightful afternoon of celebration of music. Bravo!"

- **'Norma's Birthday Celebrated in Style'**, Elizabeth Bouman, *Otago Daily Times*, 7 October 2019
-

"Both calm and beautiful lyrical themes from 16 cellos"

Articles:

- **'Happy Birthday Norma'**, *Otago Daily Times*, 30 September 2019
 - **Cellists to Play for Norma's 100th**, *The Star*, 3 October 2019
-

Cello for Africa, November 2019

Ten cellists from Dunedin, including 7 University of Otago students, all members of Cellists of Otago, travelled to Wellington to perform as part of “Cello for Africa” – a large scale concert that brought together musicians from Africa and New Zealand. Taking place at Te Raupahara Arena, Wellington, on November 24th the concert fundraised for the Tamariki Education Centre, a primary school in the slums of Nairobi, to provide them with access to an education and basic needs of water and electricity.

The cellists joined an outstanding line up of musicians performing an extravaganza of music from Africa and New Zealand — including Congo Drumming and Kapa Haka. At the centre of the programme was the NZ premiere of South African composer Hans Huyssen’s *‘Concerto for and African Cellist’* commissioned by, and written for Heleen du Plessis’s and her project ‘Cello for Africa’. Heleen appeared as soloist with Sinfonia for Hope, comprising members of the NZSO and Orchestra Wellington, and led by Amalia Hall, conducted by Huyssen, and included Zimbabwean singer and mbira player, Tinashe Chidanyika. The cellists, whose travel costs have been sponsored by OUSA, joined cellists from all over NZ to perform the world premiere of Anthony Ritchie’s *‘Kia Kaha Tamariki’* for a cello orchestra of over 40 cellists, African instruments and taonga puoro with solo cello and violin, especially commissioned for the concert.

The event, sponsored by the University of Otago and Creative New Zealand aimed at creating a trans-cultural exchange with the vision of ongoing relationships at multiple levels that this event set in motion. While representing our region at this multi institutional, international, collaborative concert, it gave the cellists a valuable musical and cultural experience. Their involvement directly supported the children at Tamariki School.

Article:

- **‘Cellists to Join ‘Cello for Africa’**, Brenda Harwood, *The Star* 14 November 2019

Review:

- **‘Cello for Africa At Porirua a Spectacular and Moving Multi-Cultural Collaborative Event’**, Peter Mechen, *Middle C, Classical Music Reviews*, Wellington, 24 November 2019.

<https://middle-c.org/2019/11/cello-for-africa-at-porirua-city-a-spectacular-and-moving-multi-cultural-collaborative-event/>

Cellists of Otago 2020 Concerts

Arrowtown and Wanaka tour 2020, 28 & 29 March.

Cellists of Otago will be joined by award winning, internationally experienced New Zealand soprano, Rebecca Ryan, in a programme packed with much-loved works for cello ensemble and voice as part of the concert societies of Arrow Town and Wanaka' concert series. Promising to sing our way to your hearts the programme will include songs from famous operas, musicals, and the cello repertoire – from Lloyd Webber to Lilburn, traditional to Māori, Wagner to Rossini and featuring Villa-Lobos' magnificent *Bachianas Brasilieras no. 5*.

CellOtago retreat 2020

Expanding on the idea of the 1st retreat, the aim is to apart from high school pupils from the rest of NZ, also include diverse learners and performers, in terms of social economic and ethnic backgrounds background, e.g. beginners, children and adults, and performers of all levels from Dunedin and Otago region.

The project will include several workshops during the year to prepare and coach groups for a mass cello ensemble concert in October 2020.

The concert theme will be based on the project 'Cellists Aotearoa' and include music by NZ composers and performance groups from diverse backgrounds.

Purpose:

To enhance diversity and inclusion.

To establish collaborations, ties and connections, build bridges, and community.

To reach out to a larger more diverse audience.

To raise funds for assisting disadvantaged local people to afford instruments and tuition.

To create scholarships to assist disadvantaged NZ students from outside Dunedin to study at the University of Otago.

To create international scholarships to enable disadvantaged students from countries where opportunities are restricted.

To give national and international exposure to Dunedin