

Kowhai Singers and Pohutukawa Singers present

Mendelssohn's



Elijah

Saturday 3 May 2014 at Warkworth

Sunday 4 May 2014 at Orewa



Kowhai Singers

celebrate 30 years of joyous music-making

Kowhai Singers came into being with an advertisement placed in the local paper by Basil Kirker, in August of 1984, calling on singers interested in performing in a carol concert. He had ascertained that a good number of singers may be keen as he and his wife Jennifer, having recently moved into the district, had taken part in a combined Wellsford/Warkworth choirs' performance of Haydn's *The Creation*, directed by Maurice Gorbey.

The carol concert took place in the Methodist Church hall Warkworth on December 15, 1984, with about 30 in the choir. The following year another combined choirs event, this time for performances of *Elijah*, was staged. In the Warkworth performance, Beverley Hicks and Jennifer Kirker were soloists. Both are still members of Kowhai Singers.

Following the *Elijah* performances, the idea of forming a permanent district choir took hold and in September, 1985, the choir, now known as Kowhai Singers, under the directorship of Basil Kirker, was truly launched, with Moira Atkinson as accompanist. Another carol concert was presented and these Christmas concerts have been a feature ever since. The 2014 carol concert will be the choir's 30th.

Basil Kirker continued as Musical Director for 10 years, until December 1994. A feature of his leadership was the performance of large oratorios, such as *Elijah*, *Messiah* and *The Creation*. *Elijah* was performed again in 1989.

With Basil's retirement, Peter Cammell's services were sought and he has remained the Musical Director ever since. It says something for the stability of the group and the enthusiasm for singing in the district that it has had only two Musical Directors in its 30 years.

Apart from the 79 major concerts the choir has performed, it has also taken part in street singing and performing in rest homes. It has joined forces with other choirs such as Bay of Islands Singers, Hibiscus Coast Singers, Auckland Choral Society and last year, Edgecumbe Singers. For this performance of *Elijah*, Kowhai Singers will be joined by Pohutukawa Singers.

A number of accompanists have been employed over the years, with the late Joye Reeves being perhaps one of the longest serving. Riette Ferriera is the current accompanist.

An all-comers mixed voice choir, largely made up of enthusiastic amateurs, the group performs three concerts most years and attempts a wide range of musical styles and genres. Numbers have varied from 35 to 60 depending on the time of year and the works being prepared. With rehearsals filled with fun, laughter and learning, it is to be hoped that this choir will continue to serve its community for many years to come.

The combined voices of
Kowhai Singers and Pohutukawa Singers

conducted by

Peter Cammell

with soloists

Bernice Austin (soprano)

Beverley Hicks (alto)

Iain Tetley (tenor)

Crispin Caldicott (bass)

Michael Bell (organ)

present

Elijah

an oratorio in two parts by

Felix Mendelssohn

When Mendelssohn came to England in the autumn of 1837 he stayed with his friend Karl Klingemann and the two men spent some time working on a sketch for an oratorio on the biblical story of the prophet Elijah. The project did not get very far and a year later he turned to his friend, the Revd Julius Schubring to work on the texts for choruses and airs. But Mendelssohn's concept of a work in which the dramatic element should predominate was at odds with Schubring's desire to emphasise the sacred element, the latter eventually suggesting that the composer might have to supply the principal part of the text himself.

Nothing more was done until the summer of 1842 when, in Switzerland on a walking and painting holiday, Mendelssohn filled an entire notebook with sketches for *Elijah*. These were then set aside and his enthusiasm for the project was only rekindled when two years later he met the celebrated singer Jenny Lind in London. The unearthly purity of Lind's voice directly inspired the soprano writing, in particular 'Hear ye Israel'.

In 1845 Mendelssohn was offered the post of director of the Birmingham Festival and he began to work feverishly to complete *Elijah* so it could be presented as the chief attraction the following year. The world premiere on 26 August 1846 was a triumphant success: the 2000 strong audience lost all sense of decorum and, breaking with custom regarding religious works, roared their approval.

Synopsis

Instead of opening with an overture, the work begins with an imposing preface in which the prophet Elijah foretells the famine that is to come. Mendelssohn thereby commands our immediate attention and signals that we are about to hear a dramatic story. A stormy overture follows, hurtling headlong into an impassioned plea from the choir for mercy – 'Wilt thou quite destroy us?'. Even the gentle imploring of the solo soprano and alto goes unheeded for, according to Obadiah, Elijah 'hath sealed the Heavens' against those who worship false deities. The chorus 'Yet doth the Lord' gives vent to Mankind's feelings of despair and apprehension.

An Angel then appears instructing Elijah to make his way to the desert where food and water will be provided and a chorus of angels will watch over him. When the water eventually dries up the Angel reappears and commands Elijah to travel to Zarepath where a widow will care for him. It transpires that the widow's son is mortally ill and in desperation Elijah prays for God's mercy. His prayers are answered, the boy recovers and the doubting widow becomes converted as she sings with Elijah, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart', a touching passage further enhanced by the radiant chorus 'Blessed are the men who fear Him'.

The drought continues for a further three years after which Elijah returns and informs King Ahab that the end is finally in sight. Ahab blames the prophet for bringing death and famine upon them but Elijah retorts that they have brought it upon themselves by worshipping the false god, Baal. He then commands Ahab to assemble Israel's people on Mount Carmel where the one true God will reveal himself by raining fire down upon the altar of sacrifice. Baal's followers call upon their lord to demonstrate his powers, but despite intensifying their pleas in an agitated chorus, nothing happens. Now it is Elijah's turn and in one of Mendelssohn's most affecting arias he beseeches the Lord to show the assembled gathering his power. A tongue of flame shoots down consuming the sacrifice and leaving all onlookers in no doubt as to the one true God. The first Part ends with the people of Israel unanimously praising God for the rain's return.

As Part Two opens all seems well until Elijah prophesies that God is to punish King Ahab for misleading the Israelites. Seizing her opportunity, Ahab's wife, Jezebel, incites the gathering to turn on Elijah as the true source of their woes. Obadiah warns Elijah of the impending threat in the nick of time. Having pleaded with God to take his life and release him, the prophet is hidden by an Angel to undertake the arduous journey to Mount Horeb (40 days and 40 nights) and place his complete trust in the Lord. Accordingly, Elijah arrives at the mountain's summit where he is welcomed by God himself. Transformed and spiritually strengthened by this awesome experience, Elijah, as the chorus tells us, subsequently spread the word throughout the Earth before being finally taken to Heaven in a blazing chariot with fiery horses. *Elijah* ends with an uplifting chorus in celebration of the Lord and all his wonders.

First Part

Bass (*Elijah*) 'As God the Lord of Israel liveth '
Overture
Chorus (*The People*) 'Help Lord! Wilt thou quite destroy us?'
Duet & Chorus 'Lord! bow Thine ear to our prayer'
Tenor (*Obadiah*) 'Ye people, rend your hearts'
Chorus (*The People*) 'Yet doth the Lord see it not'
Alto (*Angel*) 'Elijah! get thee hence'
Chorus (*Angels*) 'For He shall give His angels'
Alto (*Angel*) 'Now Cherith's brook is dried up'
Sop. & Bass (*The Widow & Elijah*) 'What have I to do with thee'
Chorus 'Blessed are the men who fear him'
Bass, Tenor & Chorus (*Elijah, Ahab & The People*) 'As God the Lord of Sabaoth liveth'
Chorus (*Priests of Baal*) 'Baal, we cry to thee'
Bass (*Elijah*) 'Call him louder'
Chorus (*Priests of Baal*) 'Hear and answer'
Bass (*Elijah*) 'Draw near all ye people...Lord God of Abraham...'
Sop., Alto, Ten. & Bass 'Cast thy burden'
Bass & Chorus (*Elijah & The People*) 'Oh Thou...The fire descends from Heaven'
Bass (*Elijah*) 'Is not his word like a fire'
Alto 'Woe unto them who forsake Him!'
Soprano, Tenor, Bass & Chorus (*The Youth, Obadiah, Elijah, The People*)
'O man of God...Thou hast overthrown...There is nothing...'
Chorus 'Thanks be to God'

Interval

Second Part

Soprano 'Hear ye, Israel'
Chorus 'Be not afraid'
Bass, Alto & Chorus (*Elijah, The Queen & The People*)
'The Lord hath exhalted thee...Have ye not heard...Woe to him...'
Tenor & Bass (*Obadiah & Elijah*) 'Man of God'
Bass (*Elijah*) 'It is enough, O Lord' **Tenor** 'See, now he sleepeth'
Sop.1, Sop.2 & Alto (*Angels*) 'Lift thine eyes to the mountains'
Chorus 'He, watching over Israel'
Alto & Bass (*Angel & Elijah*) 'Arise Elijah'
Alto (*Angel*) 'O rest in the Lord'
Chorus 'He that shall endure to the end'
Bass & Soprano (*Elijah & Angel*) 'Night falleth round me'
Chorus 'Behold! God the Lord passed by'
Bass (*Elijah*) 'For the mountains shall depart'
Chorus 'Then did Elijah the prophet'
Tenor 'Then shall the righteous shine forth'
Sop., Alto, Ten. & Bass 'O come everyone that thirsteth'
Chorus 'And then shall your light'



Peter Cammell (BA, Post Grad. Dip. Mus.) has conducted the Kowhai Singers since 1995 and the Pohutukawa Singers since 2012. After studying music at Auckland and Otago Universities Peter taught in various schools and colleges in London and Auckland. Although a violinist and recorder player his main interest has always been choral singing and conducting. He has sung at various times in the Dorian Choir, Auckland Anglican Cathedral Choir, Cantus Firmus, The Graduate Choir and Musica Sacra and currently sings with Calico Jam.

Bernice Austin (BA, BMus) began her musical training with the Mt Roskill children's choir at age 6. She made her amateur operatic debut as Diana in *Orpheus in the Underworld* with Opera Factory and performs with them frequently, most recently as Solange in Offenbach's *Not in front of the Waiter*. A finalist in the 2012 Becroft Grand Opera Aria Competition she was awarded the John Bond award for the most promising voice in the 2013 New Zealand Aria Competition. Bernice completed her Bachelor of Music with first class honours at the University of Auckland under the tutelage of Dr Te Oti Rakena and Rosemary Barnes in 2012. In 2011 she toured with the University of Auckland Chamber Choir which performed in Singapore and England to much acclaim.



Beverley Hicks (BA, ATCL) lives in Warkworth and has been a member of Kowhai Singers since its inception, frequently performing with them as soloist. She has sung with a number of choral societies in the North from Whangarei to Tauranga and often performs as soloist with Auckland groups Bach Musica and Handel Consort and Quire. She worked extensively with NZ composer, the late Dorothea Franchi, on her own works for house recitals, local concerts and the Auckland Lieder Society. As a teacher of English for many years her love of language has led to a particular interest in early 20th century art song. Upon retiring from teaching she studied for and gained the ACTL (Performance) qualification with Distinction in 2004.

Iain Tetley (BA) studied with opera singer John York Skinner in England and gained his Bachelor of Arts at the University of East Anglia, specialising in conducting. Since coming to live in New Zealand in 1997 he has performed as a tenor, baritone and bass soloist with Auckland's leading choirs and has sung in specialist choir Musica Sacra since its formation. His proudest appearance was with world-renowned countertenor Andreas Scholl in the Auckland Town Hall in 2011. Iain directed the Auckland Youth Choir from 2003 to 2004, and Sing Waiheke from 2002 to 2010. In 2008 he combined three choirs, a full orchestra and eight soloists to perform the Auckland premiere of Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace* in the Auckland Town Hall.





Crispin Caldicott was born in Scotland and won a scholarship to the Opera School at the Royal College of Music in London, where he was active as a singer for several years. With Court Opera at Holland Park Theatre he sang the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Count Almaviva in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Ford in *Falstaff* with Harry Legge's rehearsal orchestra, plus numerous oratorios. He has always been a great advocate of Mendelssohn and singing *Elijah* has been a lifelong ambition.

Michael CW Bell (BMus, DipTchg) is presently resident organist and composer at St Matthews in the City and a music teacher at King's School, Auckland. He has performed with many choirs and orchestras around the Auckland region including NZ Opera Chorus and Bach Musica. He has a passion for the music of J.S. Bach and improvises with his own blend of classical and Baroque elements. As a composer he is currently working on twenty-four preludes and fugues for keyboard and works for orchestra and voice. In 2013 St Matthews in the City premiered Bell's *Puriri Mass*, his second mass written to expose the recently installed Willis organ. Bell is represented on the SOUNZ composers' website.



Continuo: **Michelle Caldicott** (cello)

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