

Story: Classical musicians

## Page 4. Operatic superstars

### Donald McIntyre

Donald McIntyre was headed for a career as a primary school teacher when, at the insistence of James Robertson (then principal conductor of New Zealand's National Orchestra), he set off for study in London in 1958. Before he had completed two years at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, he had been asked to sing the role of Zaccaria in Verdi's *Nabucco* for the Welsh National Opera. In the course of his career McIntyre sang an extraordinary range of principal roles in all the great opera houses of the world. It is as a Wagner interpreter, however, that he became especially famous. He sang at numerous Bayreuth Festivals in Germany (continuously between 1967 and 1981, and frequently thereafter), which exclusively feature Wagner's operas.

### The sport of singing

Excelling at rugby while a pupil at Mount Albert Grammar School in Auckland from 1947 to 1952, Donald McIntyre later credited the sport with giving him the physical and mental strength to cope with the demands of a stellar operatic career.

McIntyre coached and mentored younger New Zealand singers – notably Simon O'Neill and Paul Whelan. The staging of Wagner's *Parsifal* in the 2006 New Zealand International Arts Festival in Wellington came about because of McIntyre's wish that his two protégés should be heard in major roles in their own country. A distinguished all-New Zealand cast was assembled, with O'Neill as Parsifal, Whelan as Amfortas, Martin Snell as Klingsor, Margaret Medlyn as Kundry, and McIntyre himself singing Gurnemanz. McIntyre sang as Hans Sachs in the remarkable 1990 New Zealand International Festival production of *Die meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

### Kiri Te Kanawa

On 1 December 1971 the young Kiri Te Kanawa took the operatic world by storm when she made her debut as the Countess in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at Covent Garden. On stage with her that night were fellow New Zealanders Noel Mangin (in the role of Bartolo) and Heather Begg (as Marcellina).

Her progress to that point was a very New Zealand story: a childhood in Gisborne, a move to Auckland to study with singing teacher Sister Mary Leo, success in the Mobil Song Quest and the Melbourne *Sun* Aria competitions, and farewell concerts in New Zealand before study at the London Opera Centre under the caring eye of James Robertson.

Te Kanawa graced the stages of the most illustrious opera houses in the world for over four decades. She chose to sing the role of the Marschallin in Richard Strauss's *Der rosenkavalier* in Cologne in 2009 to mark her retirement from opera – though she continued to give concerts subsequently.

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