

Risingholme Orchestra

25 years of Music for Pleasure
1992 - 2017



Registered Charity cc 24083



Conductors

Above:

Robert Field-Dodgson 1992-93

Francis Dennis 1993-2003

Benjamin Le Heux 2001

Left and Right:

John Emeleus 2003-2007

Luke Di Somma 2008

Below:

Anthony Ferner 2008-2015

Philip Norman 2016 -



The First Twentyfive Years

The Orchestra was the brain-child of Bernice (“Bunny”) Thompson, who in 1991 saw the need for an amateur orchestra which rehearsed on weekday mornings. With the enthusiastic support of music teacher Mary Dew, they enquired about the availability of the Risingholme Theatre in Opawa and were welcomed by the Risingholme director who offered the facility. Bunny and Mary publicised their idea through the Christchurch Star, The Press and Plains Radio and asked interested people to contact them. Robert (Bob) Field-Dodgson was invited to consider being the conductor. Bob had recently retired from conducting the Royal Christchurch Musical Society’s choir and he agreed to conduct for as long as he felt able. Music was made available by the Orchestral Society and the Civic Music Council. Thursday morning was chosen as the most suitable rehearsal time for all and the first meeting was on the 28th May 1992.

The Orchestra’s first performance was as a guest item with the Christchurch Community Choirs on the 4th October 1992, with Bob Field-Dodgson as conductor and Shirley Schmidli leading the players. They also accompanied the Choirs under Frank Dennis, who in the following year became the orchestra’s conductor. The first concert without choirs was in the Cashmere High School Hall on 15th August 1993, which included a performance of Bruch’s *Kol Nidrei* with their lead cellist, Jerome de Bouter as soloist. Alison Edgar, a member of the orchestra, had composed *Ballade for Orchestra 84* which was also performed at this concert.

In the early years, while orchestra numbers were small, Lorna Selby, an accomplished pianist, played the hall piano to fill in missing parts. From time to time, when neither Frank nor Bob was available to conduct rehearsals, Nick Wogan, who usually played in the viola section took up the baton. In 1994 Bunny recruited some brass players from the Recycled Brass band to help with the brass section of the orchestra. As a consequence, the current brass section of the orchestra has an average age of about 90 years. Doug Kelly, a foundation member of the orchestra, still plays trumpet and his original compositions and arrangements of popular songs are always a pleasure to play.

In June 1994 the orchestra played a significant part in the Risingholme Community's Jubilee. Frank Dennis, friendly and enthusiastic, was the conductor at that time and he continued until 2001 when Ben Le Heux took over the baton for a year bringing much youthful enthusiasm. He left to further his studies overseas and Frank Dennis returned briefly before John Emeleus joined the orchestra as conductor. His gentle and personable approach to conducting lasted until 2007 when ill-health forced him to retire. John introduced much new music as well as some of his own arrangements and compositions. Another budding young conductor, Luke Di Somma held the baton in 2008 before he too departed for further studies in New York.

Once again the orchestra was without a conductor and Tony Ferner accepted the position which he held until 2015. Tony brought with him professional standards, set up regular sectionals and formed chamber music groups as a means to help the orchestra reach them. He was a very generous coach for these. When Tony was unavailable for rehearsals Philip Norman was called in to conduct and on Tony's retirement in 2015, Philip accepted the post of musical director. His patient coaching and wide musical knowledge have been very much appreciated and enjoyed by the players. New members have been attracted by the regular 'Open Home' rehearsals.

The current orchestra has almost 60 players including foundation members Anne Godfrey (oboe), Naomi Roberts (cello), Diederik Ruarus (cello) and Sheila Vance (viola). While some of the players are retired, a number are employed in either part-time or full time positions with flexible hours. That there are so many long-standing members is testament to the fact that the players enjoy making music together. Risingholme Orchestra has earned a reputation for being friendly and caring so that rehearsals are social occasions as well as a valued musical learning experience.

The orchestra has been led in recent years by Amandine Guerin, first violin in the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra. Along with the support of several other CSO players including Milana Kornienko, Bruce Roberts, Karl Margevka, and Selena Orwin as tutors for special sectional rehearsals, this has given added impetus to the orchestra's development.

Other former professional musicians who have joined over the years include Jack Goldsmith (oboe), Trevor Hutton (flute), Ron Newton and Stan Raymond (violin) as well as Sheila Vance and Neroli Boschetti (viola).

The Christchurch earthquakes had a huge impact on the orchestra. The rehearsal space at the Risingholme Community Centre was badly damaged in February 2011 but nine days after, those who were able, met in the church hall at St Paul's in Papanui. Rehearsals continued there for one term until a new home was found at the St Martins Presbyterian church hall. When this was deemed unsafe after some months, rehearsals moved to the church itself until that too was closed. The current large rehearsal space at the Woolston Club has provided a settled home. Through all of this, the efforts of Tony Ferner and the chairperson at the time, Helen Reddecliffe, enabled the rehearsals to continue and ensured a refuge, once a week, from the difficulties players were facing in their own lives.

Throughout the 25 years, public concerts have been held twice each year in a variety of venues from the Risingholme Theatre itself to halls at many Christchurch schools. New Zealand composers represented in the repertoire chosen for the concerts include: Eric Biddington, Malcolm Monteith, Ian Bolton, Alex van den Broek, Gillian Whitehead as well as Philip Norman, John Emeleus and Doug Kelly. In recent years most concerts have featured one or more items with soloists, frequently giving promising young musicians a chance to perform with a symphony orchestra. Through his university teaching, Tony Ferner encouraged many outstanding performers including Todd Gibson-Cornish (bassoon), Benedict Lim (violin), Naomi Deacon (cello), Han Sol Jeong (piano), Catherine Kwak (cello), Hugh Roberts and Justin Standring (flute), and Anna Maksymova (piano). In addition, professional musicians including Mark Walton (clarinet), Helen Webby (harp) and Juliet Reynolds-Midgley (soprano) have performed with the orchestra.

Outreach into the community has involved visiting primary schools and retirement homes in the city. For both of these audiences, the chance to hear a symphony orchestra perform is a rare event and the concerts were very much appreciated. During Tony's tenure, University of Canterbury

music students used the orchestra to gain genuine conducting experience, another contribution by the orchestra to music making in Christchurch.

The orchestra has been the recipient of grants from many organisations as well as individuals within the orchestra or connected to it. In the early days a very generous donation was made by orchestra member Len Pitchford towards the purchase of a set of timpani which continue to be used today.

The Trust Bank and Southern Regional Arts Council also contributed to this purchase. The Federation of Graduate Women made donations and regular grants from the Rata Foundation and the Christchurch City Creative NZ Communities have been very welcome. More recently, support from the Oxford Women's Health and the Sadler Jones Family Trust, have helped with hiring, purchasing and commissioning of music as well as covering the costs of concert venues. This help with finances has been much appreciated so that the members' subscriptions have been kept at a reasonable level.

Over the years the management committees have served the orchestra well, behind the scenes to keep everything working. The warm and enthusiastic support shown by friends and the wider community in the Jubilee indicates that Risingholme Orchestra can confidently continue to make Music for Pleasure.

Acknowledgements

The family of the late Ray Shave for their donation towards the colour printing of photographs in this booklet in memory of Ray's involvement as a foundation member and playing clarinet with the orchestra for 21 years.

The work of a team of players including Ross Gurney, John Caughley, Leane Gurney and Lyndsay Fenwick for the compilation of this historical account.

Orchestra Leaders

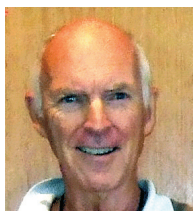
Top: Shirley Schmidli 1992-1993, Stan Raymond 2004-2010,

Below: Trevor Dimmock, 1994-2001 Pauline Sewell 2010-2014,
Amandine Guerin 2014-.



Foundation Members still active in the orchestra

L-R: Anne Godfrey; Diederick Ruarus; Naomi Roberts; Sheila Vance





Committee Chairpersons

Above:

Mary Dew 1992-1994

Murray McGregor 1994-1996

Graham Carrington 1997-2003

Right:

Pauline Yates 2003-2006



Below:

Diederik Ruarus 2007-2008

Helen Reddecliffe 2009-2015

Leane Gurney 2016 -

