

John Cameron



We get a lot of people at the concerts who say to me that the music has connected with them and brought up memories of long ago, transporting them many years back in time to when they heard a particular song for the first time. For me, music has certainly been a big part of my journey through life, and like a lot of people it was my parents who instilled a love of “good” music in me. Both my parents had a great love of music: my mother had a good voice and sung some solo work at The Playhouse Theatre (later The Mercury) before joining The Auckland Choral Society, remaining a member for 25 years. Dad on the other hand had no voice whatsoever but a very deep love of music, kindled like a lot of soldiers by his posting in Italy at the end of the war. They loved Richard Tauber, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Joseph Schmidt, Rita Streich, Jussi Björling and so many more.

The first formal singing that I took part in was at Kings School where, at 10 years old, I was encouraged by Mum to audition for the Chapel Choir. What followed were many years of wonderful experiences in the choir, singing new music every Sunday.



I disliked Kings as a whole. I was not into sports and but was required to play so it was the music that kept me happy. When I left Kings I went to Selwyn College, but I was again a square peg in a round hole. This time there was very little music to be found. There was a girl's choir but no chance for the boys so I set about persuading the music teacher to make it a combined effort. Auditions were duly posted on the notice board but alas when the day came not one other boy turned up. So from then onwards the "Combined Choir" had 34 girls and ONE boy – ha ha, as an adolescent boy, who was the silly one now?

When I left school I joined many of the amateur operatic societies around Auckland, as well as worked with Perkel Opera, Mercury Opera and New Zealand Opera. Gilbert and Sullivan was a favourite of mine, such clever words as well as wonderful tunes. I did shows all the time and one year I did 6 different shows with chorus work growing into leads. I really lived for my shows and the camaraderie that came with them.

I meet Sue at a final night party of a production on the North Shore – I wasn't in her show but had turned up with a few friends for the party as I knew a lot of them. I was in another show on the other side of Auckland. It was a match made in heaven, for when I'm shy I don't talk much and when Sue's shy she talks a lot. We hit it off from the first night and have had so many happy times since then with our love of music, and each other, being such a bond.



When I left school I went into the family business – Diamond and Precious Stone Wholesalers. My parents' business was the largest diamond importers in the country and it was a trade that I had long been interested in and I enjoyed it greatly over the years. The frequent travel overseas to exotic destinations like Ceylon, India, Germany, Italy, Thailand, and many others was later to prove a factor behind us starting our travel club.

The first ideas for a daytime series of concerts came from my only brother Stewart, who lives in Brisbane, a singer himself. He had started a daytime series a few years before us and was enjoying the variety of music and the pleasure that it gave to people. He and his wife Jenny, a soprano, were very forthcoming with ideas and they still present many concerts around Australia. They certainly sowed the first seeds of this idea of daytime concerts. We evolved a style of our own, adding in lunch and the rest as they say is history, 25 venues, concerts and thousands of sandwiches every month! We started with 4 venues and added others slowly as we saw a demand; we made the sandwiches ourselves and did all the paperwork in the evenings. For the first 6 years the bookings' phone line was simply our home line and our kids grew to avoid answering the phone which would ring day and night at all hours starting at 6 in the morning until late in the night. On days when we had concerts we would come home to 60 messages that we returned while cooking dinner (and into the night) and this was how we got to know so many of you personally over the years.

When we started Operatunity, we all had other jobs that we moved around to make room for a few concerts. Very soon it was the other jobs that were being moved to make room for more and more concerts, but it was not full time by any means for the first 5 years and we all had a mixture of flexible incomes that came and went around the concerts.

Now that we have office staff we thought things would slow down a bit, but quite the opposite. Geoff, Sue and I still have an enormous amount of passion and ideas, and even though we find it hard to free up time in our lives, it gives us enormous joy to spread our love

of music far and wide as we travel around this country. Someone once said to me that we have a business of good Karma, and I think that's it exactly. We have thousands of friends that we catch up with every month and they, likewise, meet up with their friends and share a love of music. It's something that's hard to do in this busy world sometimes - take the time to enjoy the company of friends and "good" music.