

In his own voice

Bay-raised lecturer, musician and NZ Singing School deputy director Robert Wiremū shares his story with Tania McCauley

ALL EARS: NZ Singing School's Robert Wiremū and Jill Tobin go through 83 audition DVDs in Hastings.

PICTURE / GLENN TAYLOR



ROBERT WIREMŪ was a voice student at Auckland University with Beatrice Webster when he first encountered the New Zealand Singing School, Te Wānanga Toi Waiata. The founder of the school in the hope that it would develop the singing culture of enthusiastic Hawke's Bay locals — these days it attracts potential students and internationally. The 25th biennial school will be based at the EIT campus from January 5-15 next year. Wiremū, who has been involved with the school since 1997 as an accompanist and is now deputy director, was recently in Hawke's Bay to decide in which classes the 80 singers who auditioned via DVD should be placed. A former singing school student himself, Wiremū recalls a survey commissioned by the Dame

Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation of its former students pursuing graduate studies in Britain, run by one of the school tutors, Jenny Wollerman. It found that they were as prepared for graduate study as their UK counterparts. "We need to acknowledge that we're good at this," says Wiremū. Wiremū is the last of Webster's students involved with the school. "Growth and development are crucial to the survival of this industry, and it's important to stay up to date with techniques, concepts, and even with technologies," he says. "The NZ Singing School is a brilliant way to centralise all this information and to see it in use." Wiremū has a long list of people to thank for guiding him towards and through his music career. Among them were his grandparents, Nanny and Papa Henderson, who sent him to piano lessons with the late Dorothy

Pimm, as well as music teachers Robin Fazakerly, Marian Stornarch, Edwina Ellison, Roger Stevenson, and his first singing teacher, Emily Mair, at Victoria University. There was also Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, the LDS Hastings Stake Choir, Alberta, Ruth and Trai Tumaseve for believing he could be a musician, and his own parents, Nuku and Robbie, who taught him that every occasion was a chance to make music. Flaxmere did not have a secondary school when Wiremū was growing up, so he attended Karamu High School, which had an amazing underground culture in classical music at the time.

INFO
For more about next year's NZ Singing School, visit www.singsingschool.org.nz

"I was inspired by the three Mrs Es: Mrs Ellison, Mrs Earl and Mrs Edmundson. They were part-time teachers who took separate aspects of our study programmes. They were an amazing gift as teachers: passionate and expert." Wiremū has been an Auckland University Music Studies senior tutor since 1998, spending half his week on campus and the other half on other musical activities, both professional and educational. Over the years, he has been a coach with New Zealand Opera, Opera Factory, the NZ Secondary Students' Choir, the NZ Youth Choir, and held voice and performance clinics. He has also been involved in developing the university's voice and choral programmes, and in researching vocal pedagogy, or teaching methods. "I get to work with amazingly talented students and colleagues every day, which is an amazing privilege," he says.