

Our Story

In 2021 we will welcome students and faculty to the 30th Singing School. What started as a few singers at a workshop has grown into a national school with 70 to 80 students.

Hawke's Bay Beginnings

Singing School New Zealand had simple beginnings as a workshop in 1976. Peter Williams, at the time the music tutor at the Community College, organised a singing workshop with Auckland tutor Beatrice Webster. She was impressed with the local singers and for many years travelled from Auckland every few months to give lessons.

The first summer school was in 1977 under the auspices of the Hawke's Bay Song and Opera Workshop. In 1980 the New Zealand Singing School was formally established, as it was clear there was a continued demand for vocal development and performance opportunities. The 1980 school attracted singers from all over the country and national and international tutors of a high standard. Beatrice was the Director, Janice Light led Music Theatre and John Thompson, opera tutor, came from Australia. The School prepared a concert of excerpts from *St Matthew Passion*, *Liederkreis* and Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*.

The school was held annually in January until 1988, and since then it has been held every two years. The school campus is still at the same site, now the Eastern Institute of Technology in Taradale.



Singers at a workshop, c 1983

Beatrice Webster's Legacy

The School would not have happened without Beatrice Webster MBE. She died in September 2000 leaving an impressive and influential legacy. As one of her workshop singers commented: "The biggest thing that Beatrice did was to make singers enjoy singing together, and not compete against each other". She is recognised at the Singing School NZ through the Beatrice Webster Award, presented for 'pursuit of excellence' to classical singing students.



Ready for a concert 2013

Highlights

Highlights are always the superb teaching from a talented faculty of tutors and accompanists. Our patrons Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Dame Malvina Major have imparted their knowledge to classical students in public masterclasses. We've been fortunate to have had Composers in Residence David Hamilton and Philip Norman create music for our students, and in 2019 our Artist in Residence was Geoff Sewell. Our students also performed in Parliament House, Wellington.

Student Success

Many of our students have gone into successful professional careers in music and theatre, while others use their talents and skills to enhance the New Zealand arts scene through performances, directing shows, singing in local choirs, and teaching. They are truly fulfilling our vision for New Zealand's 'Voices of the Future'.

Reference: Beatrice's Legacy: The History of the NZ Singing School 1978 – 2011