



NZSSC
FAREWELL TOUR
REPORT

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In 2020, change seemed to be the only constant. Unfortunately, not all change was welcome as the 2019-20 cycle of the New Zealand Secondary Students' Choir (NZSSC) were forced to watch the opportunity to represent their nation at an international festival in Dresden, Germany slowly disintegrate in the wake of a global pandemic. All of a sudden, almost two years' worth of preparation culminating in a rousing final home performance in Palmerston North lacked the promised, climactic finale. Thus, after much patience and deliberation, the directors penned a farewell tour of Auckland and Wellington for December 2020 despite the uncertainties posed by the possibilities of future lockdowns. These concerts would substitute the international tour and act as a fitting way to showcase two years' worth of hard work. However, the sudden stoppage stalled any momentum that the group had built so far. As a result, everyone feared that any new performances would lack the quality of those before. After all, nobody wanted to part ways with the group on a sour note after a set of lacklustre concerts. Therefore, the group planned two regional workshops across New Zealand in October and November to 'dust off the cobwebs' before beginning their final week as members of the choir.

Sunday, December 13 saw the NZSSC gather in Auckland to begin their much-anticipated final stretch and made the Pitt Street Cathedral their rehearsal venue. Unfortunately, the long hiatus meant everyone almost had to re-learn how to mesh as a unit to deliver a blended sound which had previously become a signature of the group. The earlier regional workshops had proven that we still had the potential to perform to a high standard. The emphasis was now on fine-tuning to avoid what we termed as 'beautiful, yet meaningless sound'. Furthermore, a revamp to the original repertoire saw the inclusion of new festive choral music such as 'O Holy Night' and 'Po Marie' (a Maori translation to the carol 'Silent Night'). These additions brought a much-needed boost of optimism and festive spirit amongst everyone, which was more than welcome after 2020's multiple disappointments. After three days of intense rehearsals, a warm Auckland evening welcomed the beginning of the 2019-20 NZSSC's final concerts. At St Matthews in the heart of Auckland's city centre, the group delivered an energised performance reinforced by a very supportive audience filled with friends, family, and renowned alumni.

Unfortunately, the euphoria of a beautiful concert wasn't set to last as the NZSSC had to quickly refocus and get ready for an early departure to Wellington the following day. Everyone found this quite amusing as they would be getting the travel experience despite the lack of an international tour. In a sudden stroke of luck, some of us were fortunate enough to perform 'Po Marie' to Dr Ashley Bloomfield at Auckland airport before departing. Furthermore, a special mention on Dr Bloomfield's Twitter made some extra publicity for the Wellington concerts. This exhilarating impromptu performance was only the start of an extremely eventful day as the group began their preparations for a private concert to the Governor-General of New Zealand, Dame Patsy Reddy the following afternoon. We were also very fortunate to have one of New

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Zealand's premier tenors in Simon O'Neill join us for a special combined performance of 'Nessun Dorma'. Touring Government House and conversing with the Governor-General and her esteemed guests was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the tour.

The Wellington tour's hustle and bustle continued the following day with an early afternoon public concert at Te Papa, which attracted and entertained a surprisingly large crowd. This performance's conclusion saw us travel to the Lower Hutt Town Hall for our last concert, which was to be recorded by Radio New Zealand (RNZ). Everyone was quietly excited to provide an electrifying final performance which we could all look back on in the future. Emotions indeed ran high during the pieces, and the audience was entirely able to witness the culmination of two years' worth of hard work and dedication. I genuinely want to emphasise how grateful I was to be a part of this group and contribute to the growth of youth choral singing across New Zealand. Of course, a large amount of this was made possible by the Jaycee Trust board, which enabled me to accomplish this goal. The knowledge, experiences, and newfound friends turned family I gained through my journey with the 2019-20 NZSSC will undoubtedly remain with me for years to come. Additionally, I am looking forward to paying it on to aspiring secondary students in the ever-growing Palmerston North choral community and across the country.