



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S ANNUAL REPORT – 1 January to 31 December 2023

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1. OUR PEOPLE

We were delighted to see three choral leaders acknowledged in the 2023 Honours lists: NZCF Board member Karen Grylls was awarded a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CMNZ) for services to choral music; Mary Cornish (co-author of NZCF's publication *Hear Our Voices* and one of our Children's Outreach mentors), was awarded a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for her services to the performing arts; and Dunedin-based conductor and educationalist Karen Knudson was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for her services to choral music.

2023 also saw the passing of two people who played key roles in the establishment and initial governance of NZCF: David Wood and Nan Anderson. David was part of the steering committee formed to create the Federation and took a leading role in drafting the first NZCF Constitution. He also played an important part in the establishment of the NZ National Youth Choir. Nan Anderson was the inaugural Vice President of NZCF, serving alongside President Peter Godfrey from 1985 to 2002. At a local level, she was a founding member of the NZCF Canterbury-West Coast branch and Chair of the Canterbury region from 2007 to 2011.

In July 2023 our choral community was devastated by the unexpected death of Helen Acheson. Helen made an indelible impact on NZCF as our first Children's Outreach Coordinator, and her contribution endures through the tremendous body of resources for teachers that she assembled on the NZCF website. Helen was also an active member of the NZCF Canterbury-West Coast committee and her loss has been deeply felt in the region.

a) Patron

We have been without a patron for NZCF since Dame Patsy Reddy's term as Governor-General came to an end in late September 2021.

b) Officers and staff

Governance Board

In May 2023, David Squire's third 3-year term ended and Robin Randall and Raymond Tan were welcomed to the Board. Melissa Absolum (co-opted in 2022) was formally elected to the Board and Pete Rainey was re-elected unopposed for a second term.

My sincere thanks go to the members of the Governance Board for the crucial role they play in guiding the organisation's direction and vision for the future. Special thanks to Chair Warwick Harvey for his tireless dedication to this voluntary role.

Warwick Harvey	Chair; Strategic & Governance
Pete Rainey MNZM	Vice Chair; The Big Sing (Chair)
Melissa Absolum	The Kids Sing; Diversity & Reach
Kim Cunningham	Finance & Legal
Igelese Ete	Sing Aotearoa; Diversity & Reach
Karen Grylls CNZM	Association of Choral Directors
Robin Randall	Regional Reach
Raymond Tan	Diversity & Reach

Staff in 2023

Christine Argyle	Chief Executive
Emma Billings	Events Manager
Ann Gibbard	Finance & Membership Manager
Lisa Bates MNZM	Development Manager
Helen Acheson	Children's Outreach Coordinator (Mar – July)
Maria Winder	Children's Outreach Coordinator (Aug – Dec)
Diana Cable	Youth Outreach Coordinator

NZCF National Advisory Committee

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) comprises the NZCF Board Chair and the Chairs of each NZCF region. The chairs and committee members from the ten regions are vital to the Federation delivering its activities and services. Julia McIntyre stepped down as Chair of Waikato-BOP in mid-2023 and was replaced by Jenny Lewy. Helen Charlton stepped down as Chair of Canterbury-West Coast at the end of 2023.

2023 NZCF Regional Chairs

Penny Christiansen (Auckland)
 Julia McIntyre / Jenny Lewy (Waikato-Bay of Plenty)
 Alison Thomson JP (East Coast)
 Roy Tankersley MNZM (Manawatu-Whanganui)
 Christopher Luke (Taranaki)
 Shawn Condon (Wellington)
 Lucy Rainey (Nelson-Marlborough)
 Helen Charlton (Canterbury-West Coast)
 Carole Randall (Otago)
 Christine McLeod (Southland)

Regional Committees

The NZCF Board and National office greatly appreciates the time and effort generously offered by all the dedicated volunteers around the country who serve on regional committees, Big Sing committees and Kids Sing committees. Special thanks go to the treasurers of each region, who often spend a significant amount of time completing funding applications and managing the regional accounts.

2. MEMBERSHIP

Total choir membership increased to 211 in 2023 (compared with 193 in 2022) This is the highest number of Member Choirs since 2017 (when the number of Member Choirs peaked at 217).

Total individual memberships decreased by 38 from 2022 to 2023, largely due to fewer Big Sing and Kids Sing directors taking up the offer of complimentary ACD membership. Personal Memberships held reasonably stable at 199 (vs 205 in 2022).

	As at 31 Dec 2023	As at 31 Dec 2022	As at 31 Dec 2021	As at 31 Dec 2020	As at 30 Dec 2019
Personal	199*	205**	153	162	168
ACD total	249	281	323	384	335
<i>Paid</i>	112	120	142	124	121
<i>Free via TKS/TBS</i>	137	161	181	260	214
Life	17	17	16	14	14
Total Individual	465	503	492	560	517
Choirs	211	193	207	204	203

* This number includes 47 complimentary memberships for members of NZ Youth Choir.

**This number includes 30 free Youth memberships for members of NZ Youth Choir.

3. FINANCES

In 2023 NZCF had a consolidated surplus of \$81,101. This comprises a surplus of \$41,943 from NZCF National, a surplus of \$17,834 from NZCF Regional branches and a surplus of \$21,324 by Chor 2024 Ltd. Consolidated accumulated funds at 31 December 2023 were \$1,020,090 (\$390,532 NZCF National; \$245,505 NZCF Regional branches; \$384,052 Chor 2024 Ltd).

Our sincere thanks to NZCF Finance Manager Ann Gibbard, and to all our regional treasurers, for their conscientious management of NZCF's financial accounts.

4. FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP

a) Creative New Zealand funding

2023 was the fourth year of NZCF's 6-year funding agreement under CNZ's Tōtara Investment Programme. We were delighted that CNZ's feedback on our December 2023 report assessed that NZCF had exceeded expectations overall in 2023, with "Very Good" ratings for *Alignment to CNZ's Strategies* and *Organisational Health*. These ratings are an overall improvement on our already positive ratings from 2022.

b) Ministry of Youth Development funding

We had anticipated reduced Ministry of Youth Development funding in 2023 and that our Big Sing contract with MYD would end altogether mid-year (given that The Big Sing no longer aligned as closely with MYD's new Youth Strategy specifically targeting under-served communities). However, we were thrilled to be approached in May with an offer of funding for The Big Sing via the MYD Partnership Fund, and signed a new agreement for \$65,000 per annum through to the end of June 2025.

c) Ministry for Culture and Heritage

NZCF is enormously grateful for substantial support from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage to enable us to deliver our *Singing for Lifelong Wellbeing* outreach programme. See Section 11 for further details.

d) Sponsorship and Partnerships

Our thanks go to both Tour Time and Trinity College London (NZ) for their renewed support of The Big Sing in 2023, and we also appreciated the support of Alpine Energy (South Island Cadenza) and Crombie Lockwood (The Big Sing Finale) in 2023.

e) Community Grants

We were hugely appreciative of the many grants we received both nationally and regionally in 2023 from community trusts, foundations, regional councils and the US State Department (for Sing Aotearoa). These included Air Rescue, Aotearoa Gaming Trust, Auckland Council, Bendigo Valley Foundation, Chisholm Whitney Charitable Trust, Due Drop Foundation, Dunedin City Council, Elisabeth Ball Charitable Trust, First Light Foundation, Foundation North, Four Winds Foundation, Freemasons Foundation, Fulton Foundation, Grassroots Trust, Lion Foundation, Margaret Watt Children's Trust, Pelorus Trust, Pub Charity, Rotorua Energy Community Trust, Tasman District Council, Te Korowhai Whetū Social Cohesion Trust, The Trusts Community Foundation, Trillian Trust, Trust Aoraki, Venues Wellington, and the Whanganui Community Foundation. A huge thank you to Lisa Bates (Development Manager) and all those in the regions who managed these applications for NZCF.

5. THE BIG SING (TBS)

The Big Sing Regionals

150 schools registered for the Big Sing Regionals in 2023, which marked a return to pre-Covid numbers. (For comparison, 149 schools participated in 2019.) While overall student participant numbers were not yet back to pre-Covid levels (6475 students in 2023 vs 8373 in 2019), it was heartening to see a marked increase from 2022 (5224 students).

The revision of the categories for the competitive element of The Big Sing, namely broadening the 'art music' category so that it no longer favours Western choral styles, led to enrolments from schools that have either never participated in The Big Sing, or not for a number of years. 2023 was the first year in which each region presented a te reo Māori award, which resulted in many more choirs than usual performing pieces in te reo.

Heartfelt thanks go to our 2023 TBS Coordinators: Jono Palmer (Auckland), Jeremy Whimster (Waikato-Bay of Plenty), Andrea Wilson (East Coast), Jeff Grange (Taranaki), Karen Hall (Manawatu-Whanganui), Patrick Barnes (Wellington), Christianna Morgan (Nelson-Marlborough), Caitlin Godfrey (Canterbury-West Coast), Rosemary Tarbotton (Otago), Alan Menzies (Southland).

The Big Sing Cadenza

2023 saw 36 choirs participating across three Cadenza festivals in Timaru, Whanganui and Rotorua. We introduced awards at the 2023 Cadenza festivals for the best performance of a piece in te reo Māori, which resulted in a total of 17 pieces being sung in te reo across the three festivals.

Our sincere thanks go to our Cadenza Coordinators –Jenny Lewy (Upper North Island), Edwyna McDonald (Lower North Island), Wayne Pahl (South Island) and their committees for their highly successful management of these festivals.

The Big Sing National Finale

The Big Sing Finale 2023 was held in the Auckland Town Hall at the end of August. 24 choirs from Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Invercargill took part in the three-day event. Eight competitive sessions culminated in a gala concert which was compèred by Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand CNZM. The concert was livestreamed on Facebook, Face TV, the Radio NZ website and on the NZCF website. The organic reach on Facebook was 61,354 over the three days, with our website livestream garnering 7938 views from 40 countries.

Our warmest thanks go to Jono Palmer and his Auckland committee for the considerable work they put into ensuring Finale was such a success. Special thanks also go to our Events Manager Emma Billings and the **TBS National Committee** which in 2023 comprised Pete Rainey (Chair), Melissa Absolum (GB), Siliva Gaugatao, Katie Macfarlane, Peter Watts, Emma Billings (Events Manager) and Christine Argyle (CE).

6. NZCF/SOUNZ AWARD

Since 2021, we have run two student composition competitions in collaboration with SOUNZ. 2023 saw a record number of entries, with 24 in the open category, though there were only two entries in the category of compositions with texts in te reo Māori. Dame Gillian Karawe Whitehead adjudicated both the Open category and the Te Reo Māori category and commented favourably on the standard, saying: "*The standard of entries was in my opinion very high. Everyone showed merit and an understanding of how to write for voice. The variety of subject matter and style was wonderfully wide-ranging.*"

The winner of the open category was Matilda Faamausili, with 'Dover Beach', and the winner of the te reo category was Bella Allan-Moetaua, with 'Ko tangi o rū pōua'. Both winning compositions were performed at The Big Sing National Finale at the Auckland Town Hall.

7. THE KIDS SING

The Kids Sing was held in seven centres in 2023: Auckland, Hamilton, Hastings, New Plymouth, Whanganui, Wellington and Motueka. A total of 3230 primary and intermediate students participated nationally. At each event, school choirs presented up to three songs before joining together as a massed choir.

Many thanks to our 2023 regional TKS Coordinators: Penny Christiansen (Auckland), Julia McIntyre (Waikato-Bay of Plenty), Georgina Cole (East Coast), Jeff Grange (Taranaki), Roy Tankersley (Manawatu-Whanganui), Jenny Gould (Wellington) and Lucy Rainey (Nelson-Marlborough).

8. SING AOTEAROA

In September we held Sing Aotearoa for the first time in seven years – and for the first time in South Auckland. The theme was *We Are One Voice*, and the diversity of performers, workshops, repertoire and participants made it a watershed event with far greater cultural diversity—and a younger demographic—than we have previously seen at an NZCF adult community event. To celebrate the theme, a new choral work by Igelese Ete titled *O Tatou O Le Leo e Tasi – We Are One Voice* was performed by a massed choir of well over 100 singers at the closing concert of Sing Aotearoa.

Having African American choral composer, conductor and pedagogue Rollo Dilworth as the keynote presenter/conductor at Sing Aotearoa was especially inspiring. Choral streams were led by Igelese Ete, Karen Grylls and Tim Wayne-Wright, and a rich array of workshop topics – ranging from African American gospel music through to pop a cappella, barbershop and aspects of Māori and Pasifika music – was presented by Rollo Dilworth, Tim Wayne-Wright, Igelese Ete, Melissa Absolum & Kriss Rapana, Rob Thorne, Catrin Johnsson, Henrietta Hunkin, Julian Hay and Simon Matāfai.

We were delighted that the Aotearoa NZ Academy Choir registered as participants as well as performers. They brought not only youth, but also considerable musical skills to the choir streams they sang in. Though paying registration numbers were lower than we had hoped for across the two events, funding from Foundation North enabled us to provide a number of free registrations to delegates who were either on a low income or from under-represented Auckland and Northland communities, which boosted participant numbers to a pleasing level.

Our thanks to Artistic Directors Igelese Ete and Jono Palmer, and to members of the Sing Aotearoa Advisory Council: Igelese Ete (Chair), Iris Cheng, Simon Matāfai, Jono Palmer, Reuben Rameka, Steven Rapana, Tim Wayne-Wright, Christine Argyle (Chief Executive), Emma Billings (Events Manager).

9. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

SingFest

Our regional NZCF committees delivered a total of seven local SingFests in Hastings, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Nelson, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill. Nelson's Summer SingFest was an outdoor event showcasing a vibrant array of multicultural choirs who performed alongside the region's community choirs in an inclusive and supportive environment. The Christchurch SingFests featured pop-up choirs in public outdoor locations, allowing them to engage audiences beyond those who would typically attend a choral concert. Additionally, NZCF Wellington held its popular annual May Workshop, with 174 singers performing the Mozart Requiem under Brent Stewart.

Regional Workshops

Workshops for both adult and school-aged choral singers were presented in Palmerston North, Christchurch and Auckland. The Auckland workshop was presented by Vanessa Kay and focused on leadership of children's choirs.

10. THE ASSOCIATION OF CHORAL DIRECTORS (ACD)

a) Choral Connect

Our Choral Connect biennial conference for choir directors ran from 27-29 September at King's College in Ōtāhuhu. The final gala concert was held at the BNZ Theatre at the Due Drop Centre in Manukau. Dr Karen Grylls returned as Artistic Director for Choral Connect '23, assisted by Jono Palmer as Artistic Programme Coordinator, and renowned American choral conductor and composer Dr Rollo Dilworth was inspirational as our Guest International Presenter.

A total of 81 delegates benefitted from conducting classes led by Karen Grylls, Jono Palmer, David Squire and Andrew Withington. As well as sessions delivered by in-person presenters, Zoom sessions enabled us to beam in three internationally-respected choral practitioners to give their keynote speeches from the 2023 World Symposium on Choral Music, held in Istanbul in April. Those Zoom presenters were Maria Guinand (Venezuela), Anthony Trecek-King (USA) and Shireen Abu-Khader (Palestine/Canada).

The recently established New Zealand Children's Choral Academy ran a course in parallel to Choral Connect, led by Elise Bradley and Amelia Giles, and delegates had the opportunity to observe rehearsals and to gain insights into directing children's choirs. We were also delighted to host Gondwana Chorale (Australia's national youth choir) and the New Zealand Youth Choir, as our Guest Choirs in Residence and to feature the Auckland Chamber Choir and Luminata Voices in evening recitals.

Sincere thanks to Artistic Director Karen Grylls, Artistic Programme Coordinator Jono Palmer, NZCF Events Manager Emma Billings and to Steven Rapana (King's College) for all the work they put in to ensure the conference was such a success.

a) Fine Tuning

Fine Tuning workshops were planned for Gisborne and Whangārei in the first quarter of 2023 but had to be cancelled due to the effects of flooding in both areas. Other scheduled Fine Tuning workshops went ahead in Dunedin, with Elise Bradley working with three high school choirs, and in Porirua, where Igelese Ete worked with a choir at Porirua College.

b) Giving Direction

Rowan Johnston led 10 online Giving Direction workshops in late 2023. These were scheduled to take place after Choral Connect so as to not impact on attendance at the conference.

c) Singing Matters

Five Singing Matters workshops took place online in November and December, led by Maria Winder. For the same reasons as above, these workshops were scheduled for after the conclusion of Choral Connect.

d) ACD Facebook group

Membership of this closed Facebook group increased over the course of 2023 from 228 to 243. The group continues to function as a useful forum for seeking advice on choral issues, celebrating other members' successes, discussing repertoire, and sharing events and courses of interests.

Our thanks go to 2023 **ACD Advisory Committee**: David Squire (Chair), Karen Grylls, Helen Charlton, Sue Densem, Megan Flint, Brent Stewart, Mark Stamper, Christine Argyle and Emma Billings (Events Manager).

11. MCH OUTREACH PROGRAMME

In 2023, we began rolling out our outreach initiative, *Singing for Lifelong Wellbeing*, funded by the MCH Regeneration Fund. The goal of this initiative is to get more children singing—and to keep them singing after they leave school—through the delivery of training and resources to primary and intermediate teachers.

Over the course of 2023, these outreach activities took place in Whangārei, Auckland, Cambridge, Waihi, Tokoroa, Ōpōtiki, Rotorua, Palmerston North, Porirua, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch, with 92 teachers from over 70 schools attending *Let's Get Singing* workshops, and 16 teachers receiving one-to-one mentoring in their schools, to support them in leading classroom singing.

The first three in a series of 12 song-teaching videos for use in primary and intermediate classrooms were recorded in October, and all 12 of these videos will be uploaded to the NZCF website over the first half of 2024. Our thanks go to Megan Flint (Artistic Advisor) and Juliet Dreaver (Producer) for their outstanding work to date on this video series.

This funding from MCH has also allowed us to run young conductor training for 18-25-year-olds. In 2023, 24 young choral conductors received training in workshops in Auckland and Wellington with tutors Elise Bradley and Andrew Withington, as well as one-to-one Zoom sessions. Additionally, all the young conductors were offered a free place at Choral Connect. Six young conductors were also placed in internships with choirs in Auckland, Christchurch and Kaitia.

Practical support was offered to people considering starting regional youth choirs in Hamilton, New Plymouth, Palmerston North and Invercargill, and work began on a resource compiling administrative and artistic advice on how to start a choir, which will go live on the NZCF website in mid-2024.

Thanks go to our dedicated and passionate Outreach Coordinators Diana Cable, Maria Winder and the late Helen Acheson.

12. WORLD CHOIR GAMES 2024

Kylie Sealy (Executive Director) and John Rosser (Artistic & Games Director) made tremendous progress throughout 2023 in preparation for hosting the World Choir Games 2024.

As of the end of 2023, over 11,000 singers from 250 choirs had registered to take part, with at least 40 choirs from New Zealand. Additionally, by the end of December 88 singers from across New Zealand and Australia had signed up for the Single Singers (an opportunity for individuals to sing as part of the Festival Stage Choir with the Auckland Philharmonia at the Closing Ceremony).

Artistic planning progressed well in 2023 on the opening and closing ceremonies, Māori and Pasifika showcases, and a Matariki-inspired centrepiece involving multiple NZ composers and choirs, as well as an anthem for the Games, to be composed by a leading NZ songwriter.

Our thanks to the **WCG 2024 directors** John Rosser (Artistic & Games Director) and Kylie Sealy (Executive Director), their staff, and the members of the **Chor24 Board**: Warwick Webb (Chair), Jane Blackmore, Jason Cooper, Juliet Dreaver, Michael Littlewood, Peter Walls, Seiuli Terri Leo-Mauu.

13. ATTENDANCE AT INTERNATIONAL CHORAL EVENTS

I was fortunate to attend two large-scale international choral events in 2023: the IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music, held in Istanbul in April, and the 12th World Choir Games in Korea in July. These opportunities enabled me to bring an international perspective to my work with NZCF.

IFCM World Symposium on Choral Music 25-30 April 2023

I am grateful to the NZCF Board for the opportunity to attend the World Symposium in Istanbul. Many of the thought-provoking presentations and discussions on the theme *Changing Horizons* encouraged delegates “to embrace a new and broader understanding of our art form that includes styles and traditions of ensemble singing which may have been excluded previously from the conventional definition of choral music”.

A sizeable NZ contingent attended the Symposium, including NZCF Board member Karen Grylls, former NZCF Chair and current IFCM Board member John Rosser, Elise Bradley, Jono Palmer, Fiona Wilson, Louise Jakeway (Choirs Aotearoa) and Brydon Sundgren (YOUNG programme).

To quote the WSCM organisers: *During our six days together, our community experienced, celebrated, and interrogated the choral landscape around the world. What does it look like at the present and what might/could it look like in the future? Together, we opened ourselves to experiencing and valuing a different aesthetic in group singing.*

12th World Choir Games, Gangneung Korea, 3-13 July 2023

It was an honour to serve as a juror at the World Choir Games in Korea, and hugely valuable to gain an inside view of the Games, ahead of NZCF hosting the 13th World Choir Games in July 2024. John Rosser (Artistic & Games Director for WCG2024) also served on the jury and he and Kylie Sealy (Executive Director of WCG2024) participated in multiple meetings with the Games rights holders INTERKULTUR.

Attending the World Choir Games meant that I was also able to attend a meeting of the World Choir Council and to make the most of numerous conversations with jurors from around the world who are each playing an influential role in the choral landscape of their country.

14. IN CONCLUSION

Finally, my deepest thanks to everyone who contributed in 2023 to furthering NZCF’s vision of New Zealand as a singing nation. With this shared vision, we will strengthen our singing communities within Aotearoa and can continue make our mark on the international choral scene.

Ngā mihi nui



Christine Argyle

Chief Executive

New Zealand Choral Federation

Te Kotahitanga Manu Reo o Aotearoa