

*Life membership may be granted to a person as due **recognition for meritorious service in fostering the aims of the NZCF...***

Nomination of Michael Littlewood as a Life Member of the New Zealand Choral Federation

Michael Littlewood is nothing short of an NZCF Hero!

Some will remember a time in the mid-noughties when the NZCF had its recurrent funding withdrawn by Creative New Zealand. This severely reduced the organisation's ability to manage itself in a professional way and in fact threatened its survival. Michael and his choir conductor Leonie Lawson decided to take the bull by the horns and asked CNZ directly if there was any way back into the fold. Whether a national governing structure was CNZ's answer or Michael's suggestion I don't think I've ever known – and for once I couldn't ring him to check! – but Michael proceeded to write a new constitution and in early 2007 the NZCF Governance Board had its first meeting.

Fortunately for us, he didn't stop there. He joined the first Board only, he insisted, to ensure it got going and for some reason thought nominating me as Chair might achieve that. I took sweet revenge by insisting he become Vice-Chair... and from there, there was no escape. To his credit, he used his imprisonment gainfully. He managed, after some trying, to unlock the NZCF database that was housed on an ancient DOS platform (remember DOS?!) and succeeded in translating it for modern human use. That was quite useful, because it meant we now knew who had belonged to the Federation in the past and thus who might be persuaded to again!

He also delved into the NZCF accounts – the rest of us, being conductors, were next to useless – and managed to find some pools of money here and there... enough, he suggested, to 'fund someone'. His fellow Board members were great at articulating our wish-lists – national festivals, international visits, a conductors' association and so on – but didn't have the time to make them happen. And to be fair that wasn't our role. Michael's 'fund' allowed us to hire a half-time executive officer in 2008 to do some of it for us. CNZ seemed to like that idea as much as we did and assisted us to make Grant Hutchinson full-time in 2009, with our three-yearly funding restored the following year. All because Michael could read a balance sheet!

I have loved working with Michael. He's never injected himself where he didn't feel he was needed, but I don't remember him ever turning down a request for help or guidance. He gives sage, considered advice; he's calm, supportive and unfailingly cheerful. Even when he disagrees, it still feels as if he's on your side. He's also a stickler for accuracy and a fellow pedant: I've used 'the' NZCF throughout this tribute because I know he prefers it. (I don't.)

After four years his sentence was over and we released him in 2011, before partially revoking his parole soon after to help us reshape the Board-Regional Chairs relationship, a move that led to the National Advisory Committee we have today. Little did he know, however, that he would soon end up back inside.

Michael's replacement as our Board legal/financial expert and later as Vice-Chair, Kevin Simpkins, died suddenly in late 2015, leaving us all devastated. As Chair again by then, I begged Michael to return for a few months just to hold the fort. He gave me the very best consolation I received at the time by agreeing without hesitation... although he did need to get his wife's OK first (thank you, Vivien!). "Just until I'm not needed anymore," he said, and now, five years later, he's finally out again. Until the next time.

Michael and I have shared many challenges and triumphs over the past 14 years. He helped enormously with our tricky negotiations over the World Cup 2011 Anthems project, and was a rock throughout our massive effort back in 2016 to win the World Symposium for NZ. He was one of just three board directors through our whole WSCM2020 odyssey and felt the Covid-cancellation heartbreak as keenly as anyone. He has kept a very watchful brief over the World Choir Games negotiations and has offered himself as a candidate for the board of this massive new venture. He is a glutton for punishment!

Michael is not a choral conductor, administrator, composer, clinician or accompanist... that I know of. He probably doesn't even consider himself a high-level chorister. He's never once in my hearing sought thanks or acknowledgement for all that he's done and all the active encouragement he's given. Yet he's undoubtedly one of the finest servants the NZCF has ever had, and a thoroughly worthy recipient of the honour of Life Membership.

- *John Rosser, inaugural Chair of the New Zealand Choral Federation*
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